

HUNGER

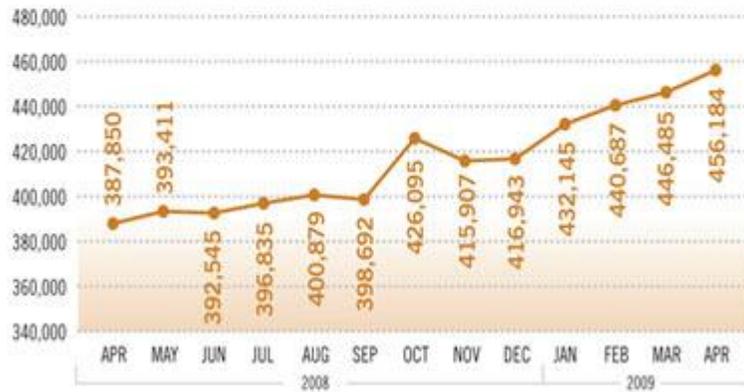
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July, 2009



JUNE 2009

Food Stamp Utilization by Household in Metropolitan Chicago



Data from the Illinois Department of Human Services, Net EBT Food Stamps Issuances.
Analysis by and data on file with the Heartland Alliance Mid-America Institute on Poverty

The Hunger report was developed by the **Greater Chicago Food Depository and the Northern Illinois Food Bank** in collaboration with an advisory committee.

The report is commissioned by The Chicago Community Trust to support the 2040 comprehensive regional planning effort led by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

INTRODUCTION

In the severe economic crisis of 2009, Chicago-area anti-hunger organizations are frequently asked, “Will we see soup lines like we did in the 1930s?” The reality is that in some communities – the East Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago, Ford Heights, Joliet and Zion, to name but a few – the lines of people waiting for food outside food pantries and soup kitchens have been long for years.

But there are important differences between the Great Depression and 2009. A portfolio of Federal hunger relief programs – including the Food Stamp Program (recently renamed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP), the Women, Infants and Children program, National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program – serves millions of Americans annually.

In Illinois, anti-hunger initiatives ranging from emergency food boxes to fresh produce and hot meal programs are operated by state and local governments and/or community-based organizations throughout the region. Additionally, a network of more than 960 non-profit food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and child feeding programs supported by local food banks and private donations feed an estimated 687,000 individuals annually in the seven-county region of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

Because of this array of private and public programs, hunger in northern Illinois in 2009 is less a story of starvation and more one of hunger and access – of individuals and families simply not having access to enough healthful, nutritious food.

Hunger is still pervasive in the Chicago area. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy life,” estimates that between 2005 and 2007, 9.5 percent of Illinois households experienced food insecurity. Nearly a third of those households were considered very food insecure. Additionally, the number of families facing food emergencies is growing; requests for emergency food assistance grew by an estimated 30 percent nationally in 2009 alone.

But participation in food assistance programs in the region is relatively low compared to demonstrated need. It is estimated that only 79 percent of Illinoisans eligible for Food Stamps/SNAP were enrolled as of 2006. Two child-focused programs are particularly underutilized: the School Breakfast Program and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), with Illinois currently ranking last in the nation in school breakfast enrollment. Many factors contribute to lower participation in programs such as Food Stamps/SNAP and the SFSP:

- Locations and hours of government offices that are not convenient for working households and others;
- Time-consuming application and renewal processes;

- Lack of understanding of eligibility criteria and stigma;
- Citizenship status and language barriers;
- Non-citizens who fear their citizenship status may be jeopardized by accessing benefits such as nutrition programs.

There are other challenges as well:

- Some people live in so-called “food deserts,” where high-calorie, high-fat fast foods are more readily available than grocery stores with fresh fruit, vegetables and other healthy food options;
- In recent years, food costs have increased, making it harder for families to make ends meet (although in 2009 food prices stabilized and in some cases decreased slightly);
- As demands and the nature of the food industry have shifted in recent years, there have been decreases in donated food, forcing major area food programs to purchase food to distribute;
- Poverty is expanding and dispersing throughout the region, shifting the areas of need from a concentrated inner-city population to an increasingly disparate suburban and ex-urban population;
- The fixed income senior population – which historically has lower participation in some nutrition programs – is growing.

The consequences of food insecurity are significant. According to a recent report on hunger by the Chicago Community Trust:

Research is beginning to show that the mental and physical changes that result from food insecurity have harmful effects on learning, development, productivity and psychological health, and family life. Food insecurity has been linked to impaired health status in children, resulting in higher illness rates. In addition, malnutrition, even at levels experienced in the United States, is related to impaired cognitive ability, lower test scores among students and psychological problems among teenagers.

The repercussions of hunger, food insecurity and poor nutrition limit the ability of a household to seize opportunities and move to exit poverty. And the health consequences of eating patterns are apparent as well, with a rising obesity rate among low-income individuals, where kindergarten-aged children are overweight at more than twice the national rate. Among the likely impacts of a child being overweight are early high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

A vibrant economy is dependent upon a healthy workforce and a strong educational system, which requires people who are physically capable of learning, working and creating. Thus, increasing access to quality food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, grains and protein, is essential for the health of individuals and of the community.

Unfortunately, hunger is not always recognized as a pervasive problem in Illinois and the Chicago area by legislators and other community leaders alike. But the array of

institutions, agencies, programs, and advocates in the region who are invested as active stakeholders represent considerable resources and opportunities to overcome the challenges.

The challenges to progress stem from the lack of a coordinated vision and commitment; lack of coordination among governmental and private entities administering income supports and food assistance programs; the changing landscape of food assistance; changing demographics in the region, and a dearth of information regarding food insecurity in local communities in Illinois.

While hunger, as a symptom of poverty, is unlikely to be entirely eradicated by 2040, an enhanced, streamlined system can ensure that everyone in the region has access to quality, nutritious food delivered in a dignified manner.

VISION STATEMENT

- Every person in the seven-county Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning region will have access to quality, nutritious food.
- No man, woman or child will be hungry.
- Supplemental and emergency food systems will be customer focused and provide service with dignity.
- There will be “no wrong door” for individuals and families in need of food assistance – meaning there will be multiple entry points for programs and services that will be client-centered as opposed to program-centered.
- Nutrition programs and services will be delivered collaboratively, in a streamlined, seamless fashion, regardless of whether they are federal, state, municipal or private in nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This vision can be achieved if the following recommendations are implemented:

PARTICIPATION

Increase participation in and access to federal nutrition assistance programs:

1. Establish Universal School Breakfast programs across the region.
2. Establish a pilot program to increase older adults’ participation in SNAP.
3. Increase availability of after-school, summer, and weekend nutrition sites and programs for children.
4. Increase public-private partnerships around benefits screening and enrollment.
5. Allow all legal immigrants and all children to receive benefits through all food assistance programs.

ACTION FRAMEWORK

Establish a framework to ensure recommendations are acted upon and achieved by 2040:

6. Establish a statewide Anti-Hunger Commission to review progress and ensure cross-collaboration among government entities and community partners – this will be essential to maintain momentum and ensure accountability in this endeavor.
7. Appoint a high-level statewide official (ideally a member of the Governor’s leadership team) to oversee anti-hunger efforts.
8. Convene key stakeholders annually, with quarterly updates as needed, to identify more detailed solutions.

STATEWIDE SYSTEM

Transform the human services system to develop a statewide system that builds programs and their delivery around the needs of individuals and families:

9. Support the Health and Human Services Framework project.
10. Create better alignment of government entities providing nutrition programs and services.
11. Establish a universal ID/smart card to help streamline delivery of both government and private programs.
12. Maximize the use of technology by agencies delivering nutrition programs and services.
13. Create opportunities to meet customers where they naturally gather.
14. Establish equality of program services and delivery across the region and the state.
15. Reduce face-to-face meetings and interviews to apply and maintain participation in programs.
16. Expand flexibility of how services are provided.
17. Provide quality language assistance.
18. Develop simplified application and renewal processes.
19. Align government data systems and replace paper-based documentation systems with electronic.
20. Stagger the distribution of SNAP benefits to better serve consumers.

CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

Strengthen the charitable food distribution network and develop alternate methods of delivering food assistance in underserved areas:

21. Develop food pantries or food assistance programs where families and individuals naturally gather.
22. Develop “super pantries” that connect people with comprehensive services.
23. Expand mobile food pantry programs.

24. Develop delivery systems to reach all those in need.

FUNDING

25. Maintain and increase funding for vital hunger relief programs through federal, state, and private funding.

METRICS

26. Create a regional food security measurement to track presence of hunger in the region.

OUTREACH

27. Develop a comprehensive public outreach plan that educates consumers about the full range of nutrition programs available.

28. Employ strategic social marketing to reframe anti-hunger and nutrition programs to overcome any associated stigma.

RETAILERS

29. Increase access to food retailers that offer quality, nutritious food in underserved areas.

PARTNERSHIPS

30. Increase partnerships between hunger-relief and local/urban agriculture efforts.

HUNGER

LEAD AGENCY

- Greater Chicago Food Depository
- Northern Illinois Food Bank

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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- Diane Fager, Chicago Public Schools
- Alicia Huguelet, Greater Chicago Food Depository
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- Jim Lewis, Chicago Community Trust
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- Nicole Robinson, Kraft Foods
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