

# Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity



Texas Research-to-Policy  
— Collaboration Project —

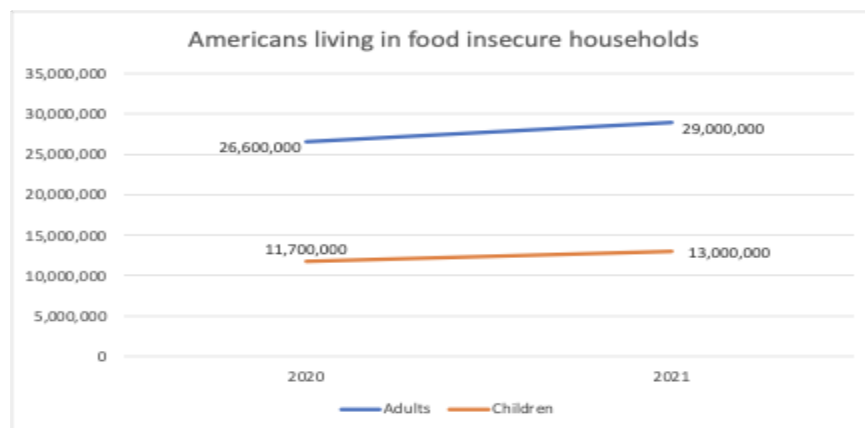
A Resource for Improving Measurable Impact

November 22, 2021

**Food insecurity** is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life.<sup>1</sup>

## Background:

- Food insecurity among adults and children has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic due to rising levels of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to school nutrition programs because of school closures.<sup>2-5</sup>
- An estimated 14.8% of U.S. households with children under the age of 18 experienced food insecurity in 2020, translating to around 38.3 million people, including 11.7 million children, living in food insecure households.<sup>2,3,6</sup>



- Similarly, models predict 42 million people (13%), including 13 million children (17%), will experience food insecurity in 2021 due to COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> These alarming numbers are a public health concern because those living in food insecure households are more likely to have unhealthy dietary behaviors, putting them at greater risk for other health issues.<sup>7</sup>
- Food insecurity disproportionately affects:<sup>4,5,8-13</sup>
  - Households with children
  - Low-income households
  - Black and Hispanic households
  - College students at 2- and 4-year institutions

- **Food insecurity is associated with serious health conditions, such as:**<sup>14-19</sup>
  - Anemia
  - Diabetes
  - Hypertension
  - Obesity
  - Mental Health Issues
  - Developmental delays among children

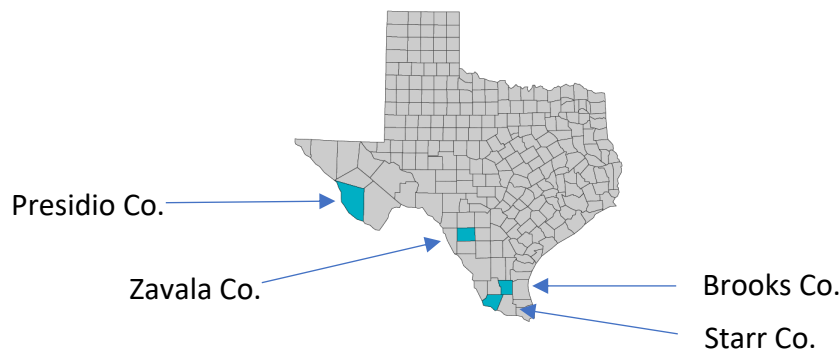


Texas Research-to-Policy  
— Collaboration Project —



## Key Texas Findings:

- Food insecurity among Texans nearly doubled from December 2018 (about 13%) to June 2021 (22%) and remains high as the pandemic continues.<sup>5</sup> Some studies have shown:
  - Food insecurity in Texas remains high, even 20 months into the pandemic, as stimulus checks and other major relief legislation expire.<sup>5,20-24</sup>
  - Low-income Texans, in particular, have experienced dramatic increases in food insecurity due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>25-28</sup>
  - When COVID-19 cases are high, unemployment rates increase, and the prevalence of food insecurity also increases.<sup>26</sup>
- During the early stages of the pandemic from February-September 2020:
  - More than 700,000 Texans became eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)<sup>29</sup>
  - Over 1.5 million Texas children were approved for Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT),<sup>29,30</sup> a program designed to provide school meals to families in the event schools are closed or operating virtually.
- Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) extended several meal services through June 30, 2022. Waivers included are committed to providing safe and healthy meals free of charge to children as the pandemic continues.<sup>31</sup>
- The average prevalence of food insecurity during COVID-19 is higher among Black (35.9%) and Hispanic (33.5%) Texans compared to non-Hispanic white (22.1%) Texans, and higher among Texan households with children (32.8%) compared to all Texas households (28.8%).<sup>5</sup>



- In 2021, Texas has the **highest** projected number of people (4.78 million) living in food-insecure households compared to all other states and will have the highest estimated number of food insecure children (1.75 million).<sup>2</sup>
- Two Texas counties are projected to have some of the largest food insecure populations in the nation in 2021:
  - Presidio is ranked #1
  - Zavala is ranked #8
- Additionally, Zavala County is projected to have the highest **child** food insecurity in the country in 2021 due to COVID-19. Other Texas counties ranking in the top 10 in the country include Presidio (#4), Starr (#9), and Brooks (#10).<sup>2</sup>

## Recommendations:

1. Support policies that facilitate increased enrollment and expansion of SNAP:<sup>5</sup>
  - a. There have historically been issues with SNAP enrollment for those who are eligible;<sup>32</sup> therefore, policies and funding are needed to increase enrollment in SNAP as more Texans become eligible.<sup>29,33</sup>
  - b. Increase the monthly SNAP benefit by 15% or approximately \$100 per month for a family of four.<sup>34</sup>
  - c. Continue to decrease food insecurity across the nation, while improving nutritional quality of food, which includes continuing COVID-19 waivers.<sup>34</sup>
2. Support and expand the P-EBT program to ensure the benefit of replacing school meals when schools are closed or operating virtually:
  - a. Expanding the P-EBT program, which was set up as a one-time benefit payment,<sup>18,26</sup> would allow for additional payments to eligible families as the pandemic continues.
  - b. Recommendations for expanding school meal plans include making temporary universal school meals permanent.<sup>34</sup>
3. Provide additional resources to:
  - a. Food banks and food pantries: Food banks need additional funding because of increased need due to the recession and job loss, as well as enhanced delivery methods to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission.<sup>3</sup>
  - b. School nutrition programs: School nutrition needs additional funding as these programs are critical resources that have continued to provide meals during the pandemic,<sup>19,35,36</sup> and will need further funds to address changes due to delivery methods, increased use of personal protective equipment, and loss of revenue because of the delay of in-person school openings.

## Summary:

Food insecurity, a significant public health issue that has affected millions of Texans due to the COVID-19 pandemic, is estimated to have resulted in \$6 billion in associated health care costs in Texas in 2020, and disproportionately impacts Black and Hispanic Texans.<sup>2-5,28</sup> In Texas, for every 1% increase in food insecurity, annual healthcare costs increase by \$400 million dollars.<sup>28</sup> Texas policymakers can reduce food insecurity in Texas by supporting: SNAP expansion and enrollment, expansion of P-EBT, increased funding for food access programs (food banks, food pantries, school meal programs, etc.), and funding for coordinated food assistance efforts across the state.

### TX RPC Network Member Content Experts

**Kathryn Janda, PhD MPH**

Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth) – NCI Cancer Control Research Training Program

**Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH**

University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth) School of Public Health in Austin

**Lesli Biediger-Friedman, PhD**

Texas State University, Nutrition and Foods Program in the School of Family and Consumer Sciences

**Sarah Crulcich, MPH, RD, LD**

Houston Food Bank

**Deanna M. Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LD, CNS, FISBNPA**

University of Texas Health Science Center (UTHealth) School of Public Health in Austin

## References:

1. Nord M, Andrews MS, Carlson S. *Household Food Security in the United States, 2005*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture; November 2006.
2. Feeding America. *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Local Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021*. 2021.
3. Feeding America. *The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity in 2020 & 2021*. 2021.
4. Schanzenbach D, Pitts A. *How Much Has Food Insecurity Risen? Evidence from the Census Household Pulse Survey* Institute for Policy Research; June 10, 2020.
5. Schanzenbach D, Tomeh N. *State Levels of Food Insecurity During the COVID-19 Crisis*. Institute for Policy Research July 14, 2020 2020.
6. Coleman-Jensen A, Rabbit, M., Gregory, C., & Singh, A. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2020*. 2021
7. Ranjit N, Macias S, Hoelscher D. Factors related to poor diet quality in food insecure populations. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*. 2020;In Press
8. Gregory CA, Coleman-Jensen A. *Food insecurity, chronic disease, and health among working-age adults*. 2017.
9. Vaccaro JA, Huffman FG. Sex and race/ethnic disparities in food security and chronic diseases in US older adults. *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine*. 2017;3:2333721417718344.
10. Seligman HK, Schillinger D. Hunger and socioeconomic disparities in chronic disease. *N Engl J Med*. 2010;363(1):6-9.
11. Odoms-Young AM. Examining the impact of structural racism on food insecurity: implications for addressing racial/ethnic disparities. *Family & community health*. 2018;41(Suppl 2 FOOD INSECURITY AND OBESITY):S3.
12. Chen Y. During COVID-19, 1 in 5 Latino and Black Households with Children are Food Insufficient. <https://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/research-resources/during-covid-19-1-in-5-latino-and-black-households-with-children-are-food-insufficient/>. Published 2020. Accessed November 9, 2020.
13. Goldrick-Rab S, Coca V, Kienzl G, Welton CR, Dahl S, Magnelia S. *Real College During the Pandemic: New Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity and Student Well-Being*. The Hope Center. 2020.
14. Seligman HK, Bindman AB, Vittinghoff E, Kanaya AM, Kushel MB. Food insecurity is associated with diabetes mellitus: results from the National Health Examination and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1999–2002. *Journal of general internal medicine*. 2007;22(7):1018-1023.
15. Seligman HK, Laraia BA, Kushel MB. Food insecurity is associated with chronic disease among low-income NHANES participants. *The Journal of nutrition*. 2009;140(2):304-310.
16. Gundersen C, Ziliak JP. Food insecurity and health outcomes. *Health affairs*. 2015;34(11):1830-1839.
17. Bhattacharya J, Currie J, Haider S. Poverty, food insecurity, and nutritional outcomes in children and adults. *Journal of health economics*. 2004;23(4):839-862.
18. Cook JT, Frank DA, Levenson SM, et al. Child food insecurity increases risks posed by household food insecurity to young children's health. *The Journal of nutrition*. 2006;136(4):1073-1076.
19. Dunn CG, Kenney E, Fleischhacker SE, Bleich SN. Feeding low-income children during the Covid-19 pandemic. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2020;382(18):e40.
20. Abrams SA, Avalos A, Gray M, Hawthorne KM. High Level of Food Insecurity among Families with Children Seeking Routine Care at Federally Qualified Health Centers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *The Journal of Pediatrics: X*. 2020:100044.
21. Abrams SA. *Food Insecurity Update July 2020*. 2020.
22. Waxman E, Gupta, P., Gonzalez, D. Food Insecurity Edged Back up after COVID-19 Relief Expired. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/food-insecurity-edged-back-after-covid-19-relief-expired>. Published 2020. Updated October 27, 2020. Accessed November 13, 2020.

23. Feeding America. *Feeding America Statement on the Latest Agreement for Emergency COVID Relief*. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/emergency-covid-relief>. Published 2020. Accessed December 22, 2020.
24. Feeding America. *Nine Months Later, Food Banks Continue Responding to Rising Need for Help*. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/nine-months-later-food-banks-continue-responding-rising-need-help>. Published 2020. Accessed December 22, 2020.
25. Sharma SV, Chuang R-J, Rushing M, et al. Social Determinants of Health-Related Needs During COVID-19 Among Low-Income Households With Children. *Preventing chronic disease*. 2020;17:E119.
26. Gray M, Avalos A, Hawthorne K, Hobbs B, Abrams A. Food Insecurity Variations in Central Texas are Related to COVID-19 Infection Rates. . *Under Review*. 2020.
27. Sharma SV, Haidar A, Noyola J, et al. Using a rapid assessment methodology to identify and address immediate needs among low-income households with children during COVID-19. *PLoS one*. 2020;15(10):e0240009.
28. Feeding America. The Health Care Costs of Food Insecurity <https://public.tableau.com/profile/feeding.america.research#!/vizhome/TheHealthcareCostsofFoodInsecurity/HealthcareCosts>. Published 2019. Accessed November 5, 2020, 2020.
29. Texas Health and Human Services. Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) Statistics. <https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/records-statistics/data-statistics/supplemental-nutritional-assistance-program-snap-statistics>. Published 2020. Accessed November 16, 2020.
30. Texas Health and Human Services. Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) Due to COVID-19. Published 2020. Accessed November 2, 2020.
31. United States Department of Agriculture. USDA Issues Pandemic Flexibilities for Schools and Day Care Facilities through June 2022 to Support Safe Reopening and Healthy, Nutritious Meals. <https://www.uth.edu/uthshare/>. Published 2021. Accessed November 22, 2021.
32. Evans A, Jennings R, Nikah K. *The SNAP GAP: Why income-eligible individuals are not enrolling in SNAP*. October 1, 2017
33. Gundersen C, Dewey A, Engelhard E, Strayer M, Lapinski L. *Map the Meal Gap 2020: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2018*.: Feeding America; 2020.
34. Trust for America's Health. *The State of Obesity 2020: Better Policies for a Healthier America*. <https://www.tfah.org/report-details/state-of-obesity-2020/>. Published 2020. Accessed December 22, 2020.
35. United States Department of Agriculture. School Breakfast Program. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-program>. Published 2020. Accessed September 10, 2020.
36. United States Department of Agriculture. National School Lunch Program. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/>. Published 2020. Accessed September 10, 2020.