

The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RELEASED MAY 2020



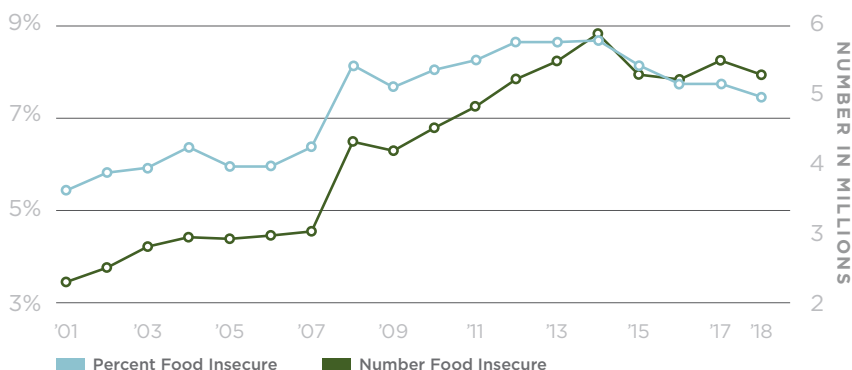
As of 2018, more than 37 million people were food insecure, which means having limited access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy lifestyle.¹ Food insecurity has negative effects for individuals across the lifespan. For seniors, these effects can be particularly problematic given the unique health, economic, and nutritional challenges that can come with aging. An estimated 7.3% of seniors age 60 and older, or 5.3 million seniors overall, were food insecure in 2018. The rate and number of food insecure seniors is essentially unchanged from 2017.

However, the current rate of food insecurity among seniors remains significantly elevated above the rate before the Great Recession (6.3% in 2007), and the current number of seniors who are food insecure is still more than double the number in 2001 (2.3 million).

In 2020, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic threatens the lives and livelihoods of people across the country. Seniors are at higher risk for illness and may face challenges accessing food amidst closures and social distancing orders.² The long-term effects of COVID-19 on food insecurity remain to be seen, but due to the projected growth of the senior population in the coming decades, senior food insecurity is likely to remain a public health challenge for years to come.

For the fourth consecutive year, Feeding America has produced *The State of Senior Hunger in America*, an annual report series authored by Dr. James P. Ziliak and Dr. Craig Gundersen, in order to better understand food insecurity among seniors, how it varies by different geographies, and the circumstances and characteristics that may influence or be influenced by the experience of food insecurity.

TRENDS IN SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY

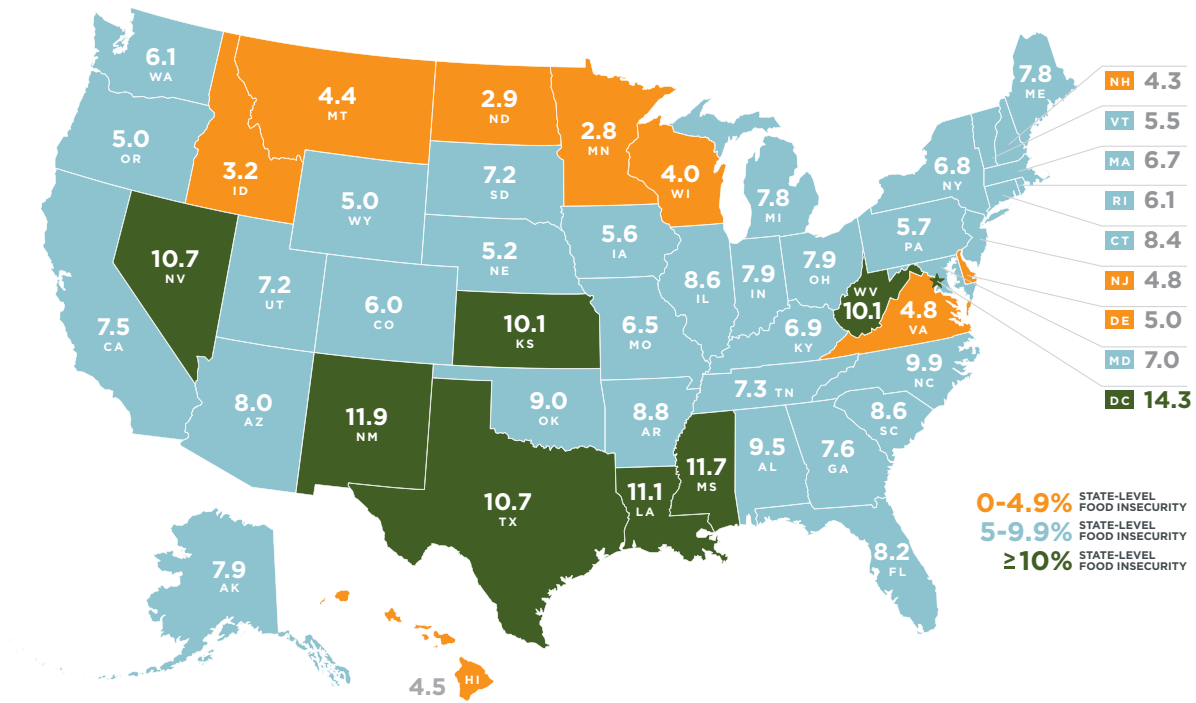


5.3
MILLION

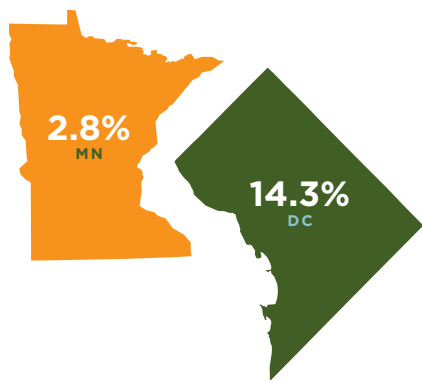
seniors are food insecure

Senior Food Insecurity Varies by Geography

STATE-LEVEL SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY RATES IN 2018

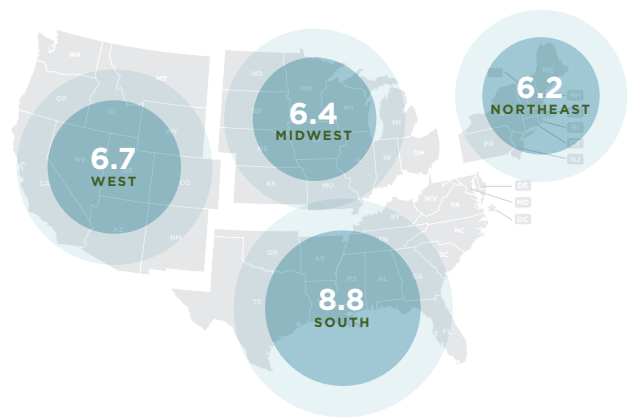


Every state is home to seniors who experience food insecurity.



LOWEST/HIGHEST STATE SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY RATES

Senior food insecurity rates at the state level range from 2.8% in Minnesota to 14.3% in Washington D.C.

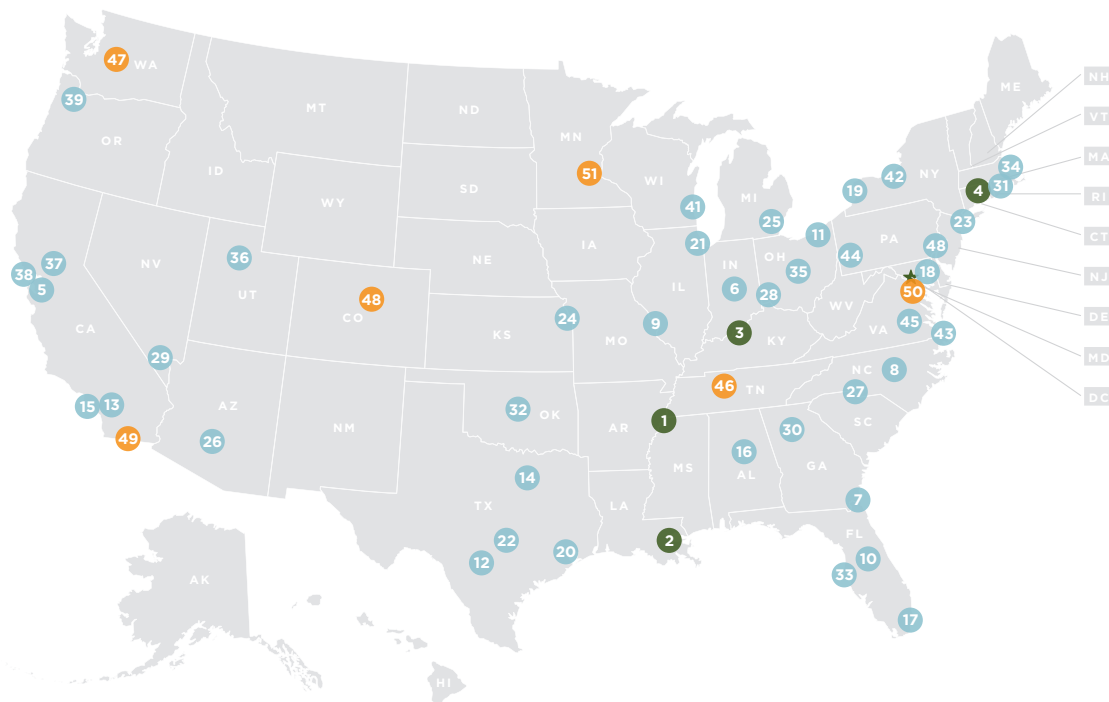


REGIONAL SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY RATES

Seniors who live in states in the southern United States are more likely to experience food insecurity: the average senior food insecurity rate in the South is 8.8%, compared to 6.7% for the next highest region, the West.

Nationally, millions of seniors face food insecurity. One way to better understand the need is through exploration of senior food insecurity rates across different geographies. To this end, *The State of Senior Hunger in America* explores senior food insecurity for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Additionally, the report examines senior food insecurity rates for the 51 metropolitan areas that have a population of more than 1 million people.

METRO-LEVEL SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY RATES IN 2018



Every metro area is home to seniors who experience food insecurity.

≥10% METRO AREA FOOD INSECURITY

- 1 **15.6%** TN / MS / AR Memphis
- 2 **12.7%** LA New Orleans / Metairie / Kenner
- 3 **10.3%** KY / IN Louisville
- 4 **10.0%** CT Hartford / West Hartford / East Hartford

5-9.9% METRO AREA FOOD INSECURITY

- 5 **9.9%** CA San Jose / Sunnyvale / Santa Clara
- 6 **9.9%** IN Indianapolis
- 7 **9.8%** FL Jacksonville
- 8 **9.5%** NC Raleigh
- 9 **9.5%** MO / IL St Louis
- 10 **9.5%** FL Orlando
- 11 **9.5%** OH Cleveland / Elyria / Mentor
- 12 **9.4%** TX San Antonio
- 13 **9.3%** CA Riverside / San Bernardino
- 14 **9.0%** TX Dallas / Fort Worth / Arlington
- 15 **8.9%** CA Los Angeles / Long Beach / Santa Ana
- 16 **8.9%** AL Birmingham / Hoover
- 17 **8.6%** FL Miami / Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach
- 18 **8.6%** MD Baltimore / Towson
- 19 **8.5%** NY Buffalo / Niagara Falls
- 20 **8.4%** TX Houston / Baytown / Sugar Land
- 21 **8.2%** IN / IL / WI Chicago / Naperville / Joliet
- 22 **8.0%** TX Austin / Round Rock
- 23 **7.8%** NY New York / Northern New Jersey / Long Island
- 24 **7.7%** MO / KS Kansas City
- 25 **7.7%** MI Detroit / Warren / Livonia
- 26 **7.5%** AZ Phoenix / Mesa / Scottsdale
- 27 **7.5%** NC / SC Charlotte / Gastonia / Concord
- 28 **7.4%** OH / KY / IN Cincinnati / Middletown
- 29 **7.3%** NV Las Vegas / Paradise
- 30 **7.1%** GA Atlanta / Sandy Springs / Marietta
- 31 **7.2%** MA / RI Providence / Fall River / Warwick
- 32 **7.0%** OK Oklahoma City
- 33 **6.9%** FL Tampa / St. Petersburg / Clearwater
- 34 **6.9%** MA / NH Boston / Cambridge / Quincy
- 35 **6.6%** OH Columbus
- 36 **6.4%** UT Salt Lake City
- 37 **6.4%** CA Sacramento / Arden / Arcade / Roseville
- 38 **6.1%** CA San Francisco / Oakland / Fremont
- 39 **6.1%** OR / WA Portland / Vancouver / Beaverton
- 40 **5.9%** PA / NJ / DE Philadelphia / Camden / Wilmington
- 41 **5.8%** WI Milwaukee / Waukesha / West Allis
- 42 **5.6%** NY Rochester
- 43 **5.5%** VA Virginia Beach / Norfolk / Newport News
- 44 **5.4%** PA Pittsburgh
- 45 **5.2%** VA Richmond

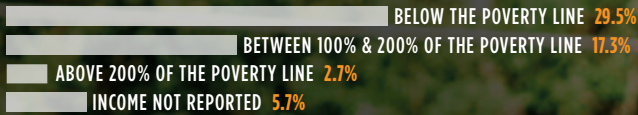
0-4.9% METRO AREA FOOD INSECURITY

- 46 **4.8%** TN Nashville / Davidson / Murfreesboro
- 47 **4.7%** WA Seattle / Tacoma / Bellevue
- 48 **4.7%** CO Denver / Aurora
- 49 **4.2%** CA San Diego / Carlsbad / San Marcos
- 50 **4.1%** DC / VA / MD Washington / Arlington / Alexandria
- 51 **2.5%** MN / WI Minneapolis / St Paul / Bloomington

FOOD INSECURITY RATES AMONG SENIORS ALSO VARY ACCORDING TO DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CATEGORIES.

Percentages represent senior food insecurity rates by category.

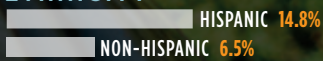
INCOME



RACE



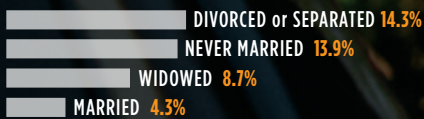
ETHNICITY



DISABILITY



MARITAL STATUS



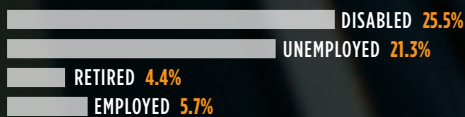
METRO LOCATION



AGE



EMPLOYMENT STATUS



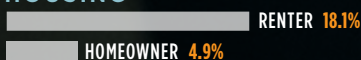
GENDER



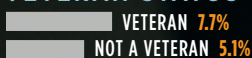
MULTI-GENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS



HOUSING



VETERAN STATUS



INCOME

As they age, many seniors experience decreased earnings and must rely on fixed incomes. For many seniors, this income stability can protect against food insecurity, but for others, having limited income can make it difficult to make ends meet. For instance, the average monthly Social Security benefit (\$1,461.31 for retired workers) results in an annual income (\$17,535) that is only somewhat higher than the federal poverty line (\$12,140 for a single person in 2018).^{3,4}

DISABILITY

Seniors living with disabilities face unique challenges. As seniors age, they are likely to develop health problems and disabilities which can make traveling to stores, carrying groceries, and cooking more difficult.⁵ Seniors with disabilities are more likely to be food insecure than those without disabilities due to higher medical costs,⁶ and food insecurity can cause disabilities and chronic health conditions to worsen.

HOUSING

Housing is one of many costs that can be a strain for seniors with limited financial resources. Senior renters are more likely to be cost burdened—spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing—than seniors who are homeowners.⁷ For these seniors with limited funds remaining after rent is paid, the risk for food insecurity is high—senior renters are nearly four times more likely to be food insecure than senior homeowners.

RACE/ETHNICITY

Seniors of racial or ethnic minority status tend to be at higher risk for experiencing food insecurity. Because of population size, the majority of the food-insecure senior population is White, but minority groups are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. Food insecurity among African American seniors is more than double the rate among White seniors, and food insecurity among Hispanic seniors is more than double the rate among non-Hispanic seniors.

MULTI-GENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS

The number of multi-generational households in the U.S. has increased in recent decades, and today one in five Americans live in a multi-generational household.⁸ While this type of household structure can yield many positive benefits, seniors who reside with a grandchild experience food insecurity at more than twice the rate of seniors in households where there is no grandchild present. Children are typically shielded from food insecurity by adults in the household, so seniors may ensure the food security of their grandchildren at the expense of their own dietary needs as they deal with the stress of caregiving responsibilities and stretch already-limited financial resources.⁹



Implications

The State of Senior Hunger in America sheds light on the extent to which food insecurity affects seniors age 60 and older in the United States, offering deeper insights into the experience of food insecurity among the aging population. After a lifetime of working and raising families, 5.3 million seniors struggle to access enough food. Food-insecure seniors live in communities across the country, including all 50 states and Washington, D.C. *The State of Senior Hunger* also finds that food insecurity disproportionately affects certain seniors, including those who have lower incomes, who are disabled, who belong to racial or ethnic minority groups, who are younger, and who live with grandchildren.

Federal nutrition assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), serve as the first line of defense against hunger for people of all ages, including seniors. However, not every senior who is food insecure is eligible to receive these federal programs. Among seniors who do meet eligibility

requirements, participation rates are lower than the overall population, which may be due to misconceptions about eligibility, limited benefit amounts, the perceived difficulty of application or recertification, and attitudes towards government assistance.

As a result, the charitable sector is an important source of food for many individuals and families at risk of hunger across the country. Feeding America and its network of 200 food banks serve millions of seniors annually through a variety of programs that range from traditional pantry programs to specialized meal and grocery programs designed to address the unique needs of seniors. Given the scope and scale of the issue, along with the anticipated growth of the senior population in the coming decades, it is important that policymakers strengthen the existing safety net of public food programs as well as invest in public-private partnerships in order to reduce food insecurity and end hunger in America.



ABOUT THIS STUDY

The 2020 release of *The State of Senior Hunger* study includes two reports authored by Dr. James P. Ziliak and Dr. Craig Gundersen. This executive summary is based on analyses within the first report, *The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2018*, and a separate summary focuses on analyses within the second report, *Hunger Among Adults Age 50-59 in 2018*. All reports and references can be found at FeedingAmerica.org/StateOfSeniorHunger.

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Production of *The State of Senior Hunger in America* report and accompanying materials is generously underwritten by the Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation.