

# Food Insecurity

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## Overview

Every year, over 48 million Americans go to bed and awaken hungry. The country's crippling economic crisis resulted in record high spikes in poverty, unemployment, hunger and homelessness. Even though food insecurity has declined by 0.9% since 2011, it is still above the 2007 pre-recessionary level of food insecurity, and millions of families live in fear of not being able to find food.

## Policy Recommendations

Congress has substantially cut the budget of the Emergency Good and Shelter Program, which serves homeless programs and food programs around the country. It plans to cut the budget yet again by over 16% (\$20 million) for 2017.

Food security is inherently intertwined with income. Numerous federal programs currently exist to diminish income inequality, including Earned Income Tax Credit; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children; school meal programs; and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Government support for work-related benefits is crucial to ensure that no one ever has to choose between food and medical care. Continued support for these initiatives is essential.

Finally, food insecurity is often geographically determined, as is the case with food deserts. As such, federal policies are not always ideal. Local and state governments must work together to do their own research and determine the best specific policies for their regions.

## Resources

1 Alisha Coleman-Jenson, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2015" United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, September 2016.

2 Feeding America, "Map the Meal Gap 2016: Highlights of Findings for Overall and Child Food Insecurity." Feedingamerica.org, 2016.

3 Feeding America, "Feeding America Releases New Findings from Landmark Hunger Report."

5 Why Hunger, "Hunger: Just the Facts." Whyhunger.org, 2016.

6 United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, "Investing in the End of Homelessness: The President's 2017 Budget." Usich.gov, 2016.

## Causes

- Unemployment: an increase of 1% in the unemployment rate in an area increases the food insecurity rate by 0.53%
- Low wages and poverty: an increase of 1% in the poverty rate in an area increases the food insecurity rate by 0.17%
- High housing costs
- Lack of access to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)
- Medical or health costs

## Consequences

- Hunger: 96% of households experiencing food insecurity are forced to skip and reduce meals. Over 46 million Americans experienced the effects of hunger such as irritability, anxiety, headaches, reduced strength, impaired concentration, reduced alertness, and depression.
- Health Care: Without health insurance, malnutrition can create astronomical health care bills. Feeding America reports that 66% of people using its services have to choose between paying for food or medical care.
- Harm to Children: In the United States, one in five children have lived in a household affected by food insecurity, affecting their education and health. 79% of households, in an effort to have enough food, purchase cheaper food even though it is usually less healthy. A child who experiences food insecurity between the ages of 6 and 11 is 81% more likely to develop obesity. Also, children that continually go hungry often develop behavioral or emotional problems and perform poorly on school assessments.