

The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MAY 2019



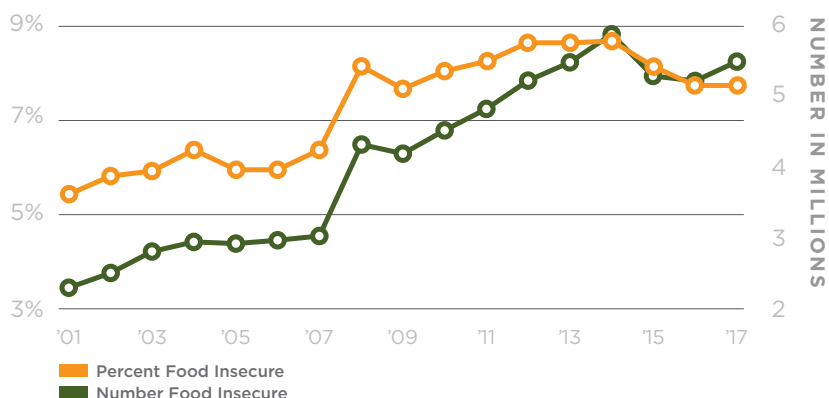
Across the United States, millions of people are food insecure, which means having limited access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy lifestyle. As of 2017, 7.7% of seniors age 60 and older, or 5.5 million seniors overall, are food insecure. The rate and number of food-insecure seniors is essentially unchanged from 2016. 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).

Food insecurity has negative effects for individuals across the age spectrum. For seniors, these effects can be particularly problematic given the unique health,

economic, and nutritional challenges that can come with aging. With the growth of the senior population that has been projected for the coming decades, senior food insecurity is likely to remain a personal and public health challenge in the years to come.

For the third 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.

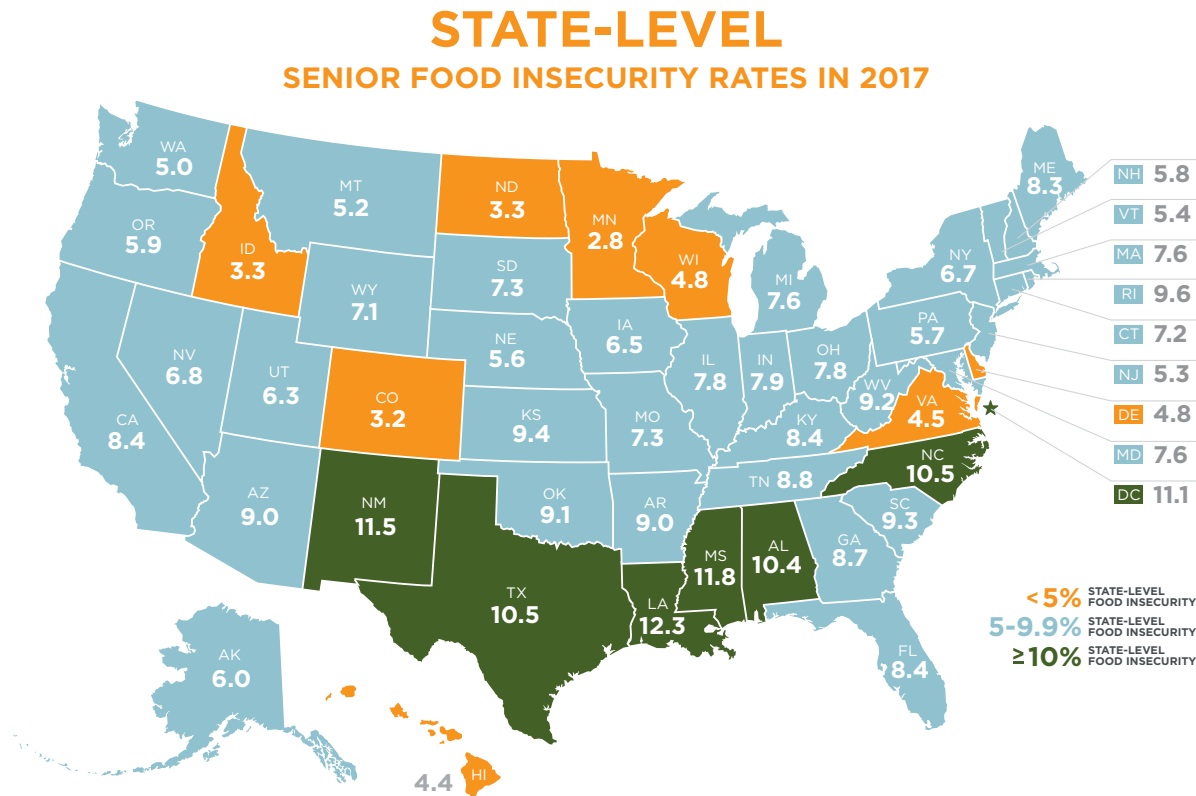
TRENDS IN SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY



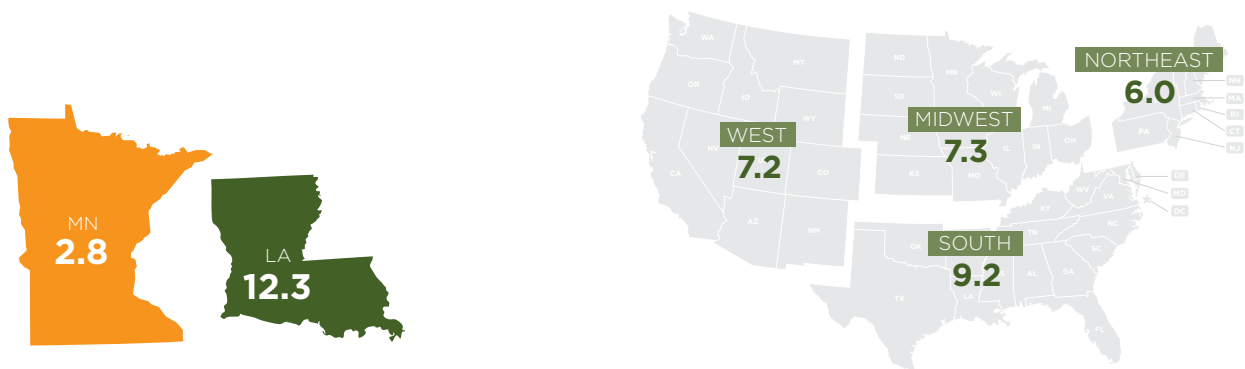
5.5
MILLION

seniors are food insecure as of 2017.

Senior Food Insecurity Varies by Geography



Every state is home to seniors who experience food insecurity.



LOWEST/HIGHEST STATE SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY RATES

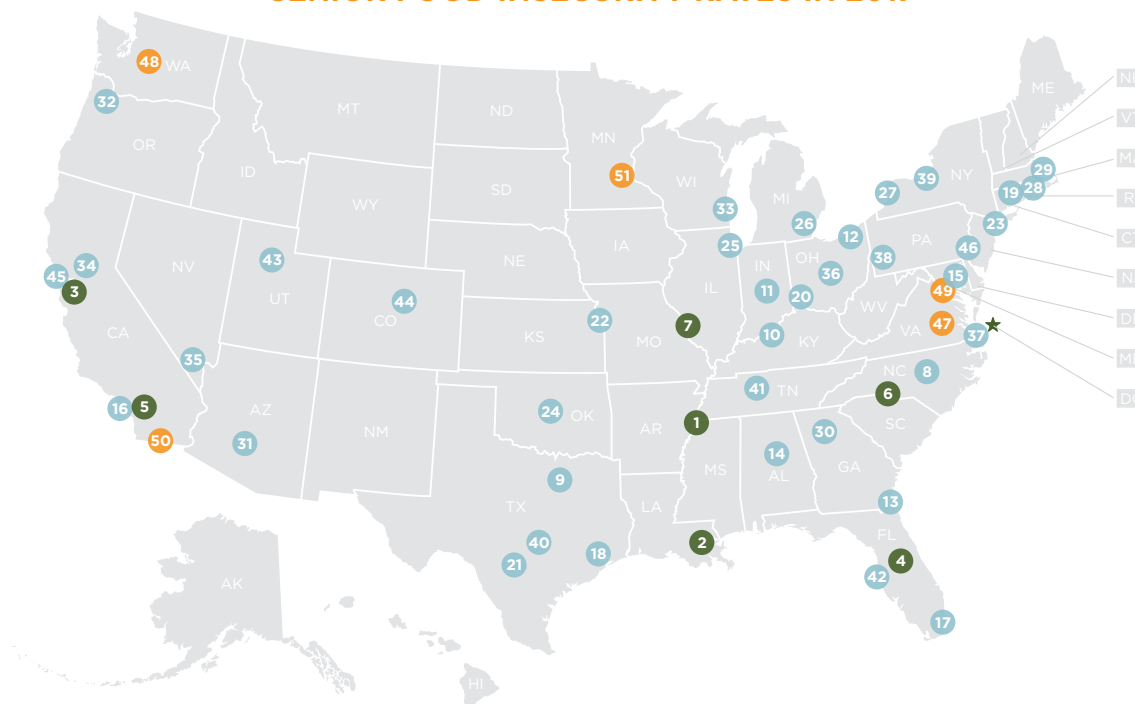
Senior food insecurity rates at the state level range from 2.8% in Minnesota to 12.3% in Louisiana.

REGIONAL SENIOR FOOD INSECURITY RATES

The food insecurity rate among seniors living in the South (9.2%) is higher than the rate among seniors living in the Midwest, West, and Northeast regions.

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 Washington D.C. Additionally, for the first time as part of the 2019 release, it also 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 2017



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

≥10% METRO AREA FOOD INSECURITY

- 1 **17.3%** TN / MS / AR Memphis
- 2 **12.8%** LA New Orleans / Metairie / Kenner
- 3 **11.5%** CA San Jose / Sunnyvale / Santa Clara
- 4 **11.1%** FL Orlando
- 5 **11.0%** CA Riverside / San Bernardino
- 6 **10.4%** NC / SC Charlotte / Gastonia / Concord
- 7 **10.1%** MO / IL St Louis

<5% METRO AREA FOOD INSECURITY

- 47 **4.8%** VA Richmond
- 48 **4.8%** WA Seattle / Tacoma / Bellevue
- 49 **4.5%** DC / VA / MD Washington / Arlington / Alexandria
- 50 **3.9%** CA San Diego / Carlsbad / San Marcos
- 51 **3.0%** MN / WI Minneapolis / St Paul / Bloomington

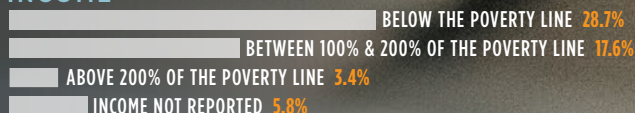
5-9.9% METRO AREA FOOD INSECURITY

- 8 **9.8%** NC Raleigh
- 9 **9.7%** TX Dallas / Fort Worth / Arlington
- 10 **9.6%** KY / IN Louisville
- 11 **9.5%** IN Indianapolis
- 12 **9.4%** OH Cleveland / Elyria / Mentor
- 13 **9.2%** FL Jacksonville
- 14 **9.0%** AL Birmingham / Hoover
- 15 **8.9%** MD Baltimore / Towson
- 16 **8.9%** CA Los Angeles / Long Beach / Santa Ana
- 17 **8.9%** FL Miami / Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach
- 18 **8.6%** TX Houston / Baytown / Sugar Land
- 19 **8.5%** CT Hartford / West Hartford / East Hartford
- 20 **8.4%** OH / KY / IN Cincinnati / Middletown
- 21 **8.4%** TX San Antonio
- 22 **8.2%** MO / KS Kansas City
- 23 **8.2%** NY New York / Northern New Jersey / Long Island
- 24 **8.2%** OK Oklahoma City
- 25 **8.1%** IN / IL / WI Chicago / Naperville / Joliet
- 26 **8.1%** MI Detroit / Warren / Livonia
- 27 **7.7%** NY Buffalo / Niagara Falls
- 28 **7.7%** MA / RI Providence / Fall River / Warwick
- 29 **7.4%** MA / NH Boston / Cambridge / Quincy
- 30 **7.4%** GA Atlanta / Sandy Springs / Marietta
- 31 **7.3%** AZ Phoenix / Mesa / Scottsdale
- 32 **7.3%** OR / WA Portland / Vancouver / Beaverton
- 33 **7.2%** WI Milwaukee / Waukesha / West Allis
- 34 **7.0%** CA Sacramento / Arden / Arcade / Roseville
- 35 **6.7%** NV Las Vegas / Paradise
- 36 **6.5%** OH Columbus
- 37 **6.5%** VA Virginia Beach / Norfolk / Newport News
- 38 **6.3%** PA Pittsburgh
- 39 **6.3%** NY Rochester
- 40 **6.1%** TX Austin / Round Rock
- 41 **5.9%** TN Nashville / Davidson / Murfreesboro
- 42 **5.8%** FL Tampa / St. Petersburg / Clearwater
- 43 **5.6%** UT Salt Lake City
- 44 **5.4%** CO Denver / Aurora
- 45 **5.2%** CA San Francisco / Oakland / Fremont
- 46 **5.1%** PA / NJ / DE Philadelphia / Camden / Wilmington

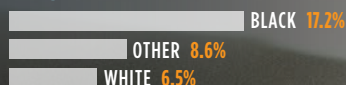
FOOD INSECURITY RATES AMONG SENIORS ALSO VARY ACCORDING TO DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CATEGORIES.

Percentages represent senior food insecurity rates by category.

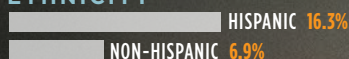
INCOME



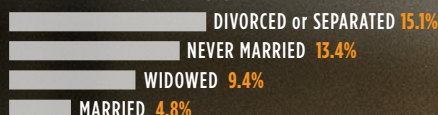
RACE



ETHNICITY



MARITAL STATUS



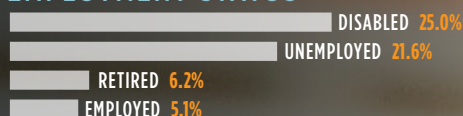
METRO LOCATION



AGE



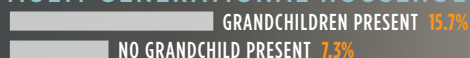
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



GENDER



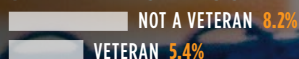
MULTI-GENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS



HOUSING



VETERAN STATUS



INCOME

As seniors age, many experience decreased earnings and must rely on fixed incomes. The income stability that many seniors enjoy can protect against food insecurity, but for others, having limited income can make it difficult to make ends meet. For instance, Social Security is a major source of income for most seniors, but the average monthly benefit (\$1,467 for retired workers) results in an annual income (\$17,606) that is only marginally higher than the federal poverty line (\$12,490 for a single person in 2019).^{1,2}

HOUSING

Housing represents one of many costs that can be a strain for seniors with limited financial resources. Renters face especially high constraints and are much more likely to be cost burdened—spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing—than seniors who are homeowners.³ For these seniors with limited funds remaining after rent is paid, the risk for food insecurity is high—senior renters are four times more likely to be food insecure than senior homeowners.

MULTI-GENERATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS

The number of multi-generational households in the U.S. has increased in recent decades, and today one in five Americans lives in a multi-generational household.⁴ While this type of household structure can yield many positive benefits, seniors who reside with a grandchild experience food insecurity at 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 be ensuring 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 to support other household members.⁵

AGE

The rate of food insecurity among seniors is lower compared to younger segments of the general population, and among seniors, food insecurity rates decrease with age. On the surface this might suggest seniors are at lower risk, but the inverse relationship between food insecurity and age may be the result of other factors. Further research is needed, but potential factors include:

Differential mortality: Individuals at greatest risk for food insecurity may not live as long, resulting in lower rates of food insecurity rates among older age cohorts.

Changes in satiety: Aging individuals can require less food to be satisfied.

Eligibility for safety net programs: Seniors are age-eligible for certain financial and nutritional assistance that may prevent some from experiencing food insecurity.



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, 5.5 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 rent versus own a home, 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 participate in 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 protect and 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 2019 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 2017*, and a separate summary focuses on analyses within the second report, *Hunger Among Adults Age 50-59 in 2017*. All reports and references can be found at feedingamerica.org/stateofseniorhunger.

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