

# the STATE of HUNGER in NEW HAVEN

Report on Food Insecurity &  
Recommendations for Action  
2017-2018



# Let's be clear: people in New Haven are hungry.

New Haven is a diverse city with deep and enduring economic and social disparities. Approximately 25% of residents live in poverty, compared to 10% statewide.<sup>1,2</sup> An additional 40% struggle to afford basic necessities like housing and food.<sup>2</sup> While intricately tied, poverty is just one of several issues that drives hunger. Unemployment, low-wage jobs, transportation, and family resources also make it difficult for people to access the food they need to thrive.

Across New Haven, 22% of the city's residents are food insecure – with not enough food or money to buy food\* – much higher than the Connecticut rate of 12% and national rates of 13%.<sup>1,3</sup> Food insecurity varies widely in New Haven, affecting low-income people of color at higher rates. In two recent studies in New Haven – DataHaven's Wellbeing Survey and CARE's New Haven Health Survey, both conducted in 2015 – food insecurity impacts 1 in 3 adults in the city's lowest income neighborhoods.<sup>1,4</sup>

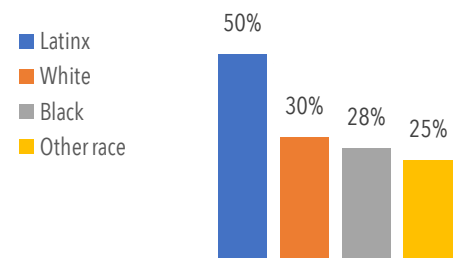
Within these neighborhoods, food insecurity is notably high among those not employed at 41.3% and underemployed (working part-time but wanting full-time employment) at 53.9% compared to 18.9% among those employed with a full-time job.<sup>5</sup> Hispanic and Latinx communities in New Haven bear the greatest burden of food insecurity. Compared to other demographic groups, both DataHaven and CARE reported higher food insecurity among Latinx residents: across New Haven at 34% and among those in the six lowest-income neighborhoods at 50.1%.<sup>1,4</sup> Rates of hunger are highest in neighborhoods with larger Latinx populations, like Fair Haven.<sup>4</sup>

Future data collection efforts should better capture food insecurity among undocumented residents. Undocumented residents may be particularly vulnerable, because they often work in low-paying jobs, are ineligible for government assistance programs, and may be afraid to go to emergency food providers due to anti-immigration policies.

*"But my thing is that we have to change...the face of hunger .... and it is not...the people in the third world countries. You know it's right here. It is right here in our backyard, and we can't keep being like ostriches with our heads stuck in the stand." – Kim, 53*



prevalence of food insecurity in 6 low-income New Haven neighborhoods by race/ethnicity



\* CARE food insecurity question: During the past 30 days, was there any time that you and/or your family did not have enough food or money to buy food?

Data Haven food insecurity question: Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?

## Our children are hungry.

Many households with children live in poverty, disproportionately affecting children of color, and often do not have sufficient access to social services to help them meet all their needs. Food is scarce in these homes.

Over 56% of New Haven children live in households that receive the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).<sup>6</sup> In New Haven Public Schools (NHPS), 93.7% of children were eligible for free meals during the 2016-17 school year – an increase from 83.8% in 2014-15<sup>†</sup> – demonstrating growing hunger among our children.<sup>6</sup> In another CARE study, eighth graders were surveyed in 12 randomly selected New Haven Public Schools. Results revealed that more than 1 in 4 children reported some aspect of food insecurity: either they were worried that food would run out at home, ate less than they wanted, or were hungry but did not eat.<sup>7</sup>

### Chronic hunger

Most people who cannot afford food do not go hungry for just a day or a week – rather, they experience food insecurity over long periods of time. Among all adults who reported food insecurity, 63% reported that they experienced it at least several months throughout the year, skyrocketing to 72% among households with children.<sup>1</sup>

### Food insecurity harms health

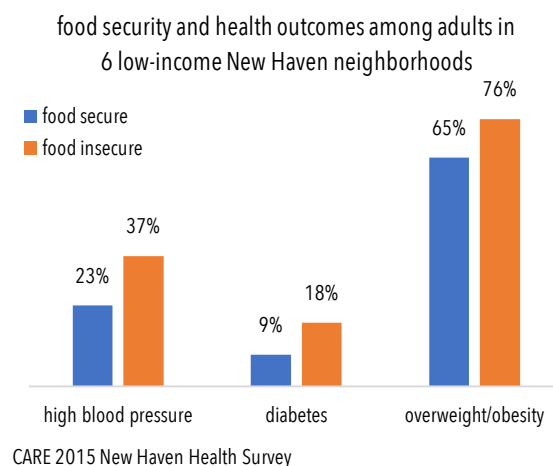
Hunger takes an enormous toll on health. Food-insecure residents in New Haven's low-income neighborhoods are more likely to report high blood pressure, diabetes, and being overweight or obese.<sup>5</sup> In the survey of eighth graders, food-insecure children were more likely have diabetes and asthma.<sup>7</sup>

### Limited access to healthy food

When families are forced to make difficult decisions like choosing between paying for food or utilities, healthy food – which is often more expensive – cannot always be prioritized. In 2016, CARE conducted in-depth interviews with residents who reported food insecurity in the 2015 survey. Residents expressed a desire to eat healthy but found it difficult due to cost.<sup>8</sup> This was reiterated in the 2016 City of New Haven Food Insecurity and Access Survey of 651 residents. Three out of 4 food-insecure residents report difficulty eating healthy meals compared to only 1 in 10 of food secure residents.<sup>9</sup> In both of these studies, residents reported the importance of access to healthy foods at food pantries.

*"Yeah, I noticed that when the food is not available like that they struggle going to school in the mornings or being able to focus in school or even being able to get out of the house in the morning to catch their bus. It's difficult to send kids to school on an empty stomach."*

– Jo-Ann, 55



<sup>†</sup> New Haven Public Schools uses the USDA Community Eligibility Provision to estimate the percent of students eligible for free lunches: # of families receiving SNAP x 1.6.

# The community response to hunger.

The federal government's anti-hunger safety net programs offer relief from the hunger that families face on a daily basis. These programs have worked to alleviate hunger for years, and without them, the situation would be even more dire. SNAP provides monetary benefits to low-income individuals and families, which they can use at stores throughout the community. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides an additional food supplement to low-income families. The Commodity Supplemental Food Program provided staples to 406 seniors in New Haven during 2016. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service provides funds for New Haven Public Schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all children and to run a summer meals program to fill the gap when children are out of school. New Haven Public Schools is the largest provider of food for our city's children, serving over 5 million meals in 2016-17. Government programs help chip away at hunger, but they do not fully resolve food insecurity. Local community-based programs step up to provide food when these programs are not enough.

*"At least two weeks out of the end of the month is the hardest for us because that's when our food stamps run out. I've turned into local food banks and pantries and everything to kind of get us through the last two weeks of the month, but the food stamps program that we do receive helps us out a great deal." – Dara, 29*

## New Haven's Food Programs help to fill gaps.

The New Haven community has a long history of responding to the hunger crisis. Dozens of dedicated community organizations and volunteers scramble with limited resources to feed our hungry families. New Haven has a vast network of programs and services that feed our residents. This includes nearly 70 soup kitchens and food pantries that feed residents when they cannot buy food. Many food programs in New Haven receive food from the Connecticut Food Bank. Between June 2016 and July 2017, the CT Food Bank distributed 3.2 million pounds of food to 18,362 people through programs in New Haven.<sup>10</sup>

Since government programs are often not enough, clients of food programs describe being dependent on these programs so they have enough food to last through the month. They are often forced to prioritize other expenses, like housing and electric bills, before purchasing food.<sup>8</sup> New Haven's 2016 Food Insecurity and Access Survey found that 75% of respondents reported using food programs – and 93% who use these programs report going at least monthly.<sup>9</sup>

Myriad other local programs help to feed families. Mobile pantries travel to different neighborhoods to serve isolated and hard-to-reach populations (seniors, disabled, and others who lack transportation). For example, the Connecticut Food Bank's five mobile pantries distributed 151,063 pounds of food to more than 1,910 people per month.<sup>10</sup> Backpack programs are based in public schools, sending children home with food for weekends to make up for the meals they normally get at school. In 2016-17, this program served 600 children per month. Food Rescue US picks up food that may otherwise go to waste from restaurants and grocery stores, delivering over 500,000 pounds in 2016 to area food programs.

## Accessing affordable and fresh food

Residents want healthy foods. SNAP, school meals, food programs, and the Connecticut Food Bank all fill an enormous gap by concentrating efforts on securing fresh produce for families, including from local farms that donate food directly to these organizations. In 2016-17, 25% of the food distributed by Connecticut Food Bank was fresh produce.<sup>10</sup> Adding to this, CitySeed, which operates New Haven's Farmers' Market system, offers double value for SNAP benefits at their markets. SNAP recipients can redeem up to \$10, for a total of \$20 of fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2016, CitySeed redeemed \$10,820 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables for SNAP benefits. Recognizing transportation as a major barrier to food access, CitySeed also operates a Mobile Market, driving to food-insecure areas. Over 50% of Mobile Market sales are through people using SNAP and senior nutrition coupon redemption. Since CitySeed started, a total of over \$95,000 in SNAP benefits have been redeemed.

Residents depend on this network of food programs and are using them as a long-term strategy to supplement food – rather than in emergency situations. While food programs greatly help to meet the needs of residents, many of these organizations struggle with resources. They are run on a shoestring budget with limited human resources, many of whom are volunteers. They often can't get the word out about their services to the community efficiently. Compounding this issue, variation between emergency food programs (e.g., irregular days/hours of operation, neighborhood restrictions, limitations on the number of visits per month) results in a fragmented, piecemeal system that confuses residents. In CARE's follow-up interviews, both residents and providers cite these as barriers to accessing available food.<sup>8</sup>

## Community Collaboration: Leveraging Resources to Feed Our Children

New Haven has many resources at its disposal in schools to help combat childhood hunger through government-funded programs, such as school meals, the biggest food provider for hungry children. Often times, these programs are underutilized because they require a high-level of coordination within resource-strapped schools.

The Summer Meals Program, a federally funded, free meals program offered to children under 18 at sites throughout the city by New Haven Public Schools, is one resource that has been successfully leveraged. Recognizing underutilization, a wide array of community partners led by the New Haven Food Policy Council have come together to help coordinate the program to increase participation. Partners help to select high-impact sites to serve meals and provide additional on-site services. Bringing a vital component, the Connecticut Food Bank began offering its mobile pantry at five sites, so that families (adults are not eligible for Summer Meals) could receive groceries while their children enjoy a meal. The pantry served 4,514 residents at Summer Meals' locations in 2017, 48% of whom were children.

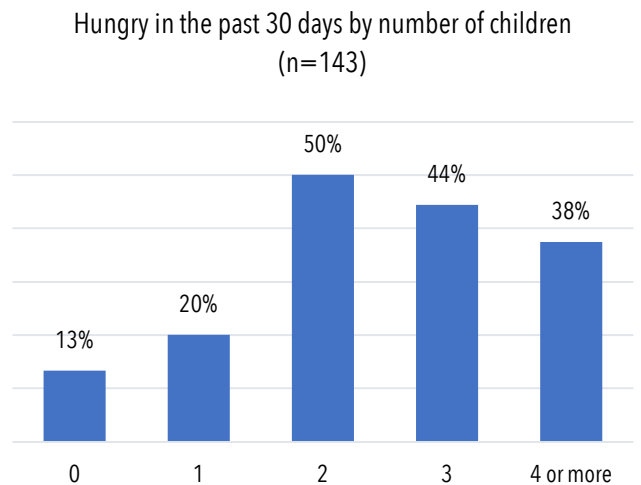
Also through this partnership, extensive outreach is conducted to advertise the program. Over 100 residents participate in an annual outreach blitz announcing the program, and New Haven police officers distribute information cards while walking their beats. **As a result, between 2013 and 2015, participation by children in summer meals increased by 30%. Since 2014, the Summer Meals program has served nearly 800,000 meals over three years at approximately 80 annual sites throughout the city.**

*"I feel [fresh produce is] essential to making people feel they're living a normal life. They should not be excluded from certain fresh produce. But I have a problem with fresh produce because I don't have the storage space." – Emergency Food Provider*

## Food programs help, but aren't enough.

Local and government food programs keep many people from going hungry, but our patchwork system of feeding hungry families is not sufficient for guaranteeing food security for all. In New Haven's six low-income neighborhoods, nearly half of residents (44.0%) who reported food security received SNAP benefits. Yet, 73.6% of residents who reported food insecurity receive SNAP – demonstrating that SNAP benefits are not always enough to keep hunger at bay.<sup>5</sup> This was found in New Haven's 2016 Food Insecurity and Access Survey, where food-insecure residents were more likely to report that SNAP benefits did not cover their needs.<sup>9</sup> Also troubling, over 25% of food-insecure residents in CARE's survey **did not** receive SNAP benefits. In follow-up interviews, residents report losing SNAP benefits because they found a job, but because the new jobs were low-wage they were still struggling with food insecurity.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, a 2016 survey from Southern Connecticut State University asked New Haven residents who used the Connecticut Food Bank Mobile Pantry and the Summer Meals Mobile Bus about food assistance needs. More than one-third (35%) report being hungry in the past 30 days. Families with children are particularly vulnerable, with 40% experiencing hunger in the past month. The prevalence of hunger is greatest for families with 2 or more children.<sup>11</sup>



*"We have a choice, I mean to be realistic between paying your bills or getting food, because you don't make enough money per hour to do both."*

# New Haven must do more.

While the work in New Haven is of vital importance, we must create a food system in which New Haven residents can support and feed themselves. Policies that reduce poverty and improve access to food are of vital importance.

Federal and state cuts to important food programs threaten that the severity of hunger will deepen even more. In recent years, funding cuts to SNAP have created a bigger burden on local and state food programs, many of which lack the capacity to deal with increasing community needs. Simultaneously, families are further strapped by state budget cuts to other programs like childcare subsidies, creating even greater strain on the already maxed-out food programs. Yet, with clear leadership and better coordination from the City of New Haven, we can feed even more hungry families. [We must act now.](#)

In 2013, the New Haven Food Policy Council released its Food Action Plan, a series of food system strategies, which was adopted by the Board of Alders. A key recommendation included the creation of a Food System Policy Director “to build, improve and sustain citywide efforts on food security.” After successful advocacy, this position was created in 2016, and the city hired Joy Johannes to lead the city’s efforts. The City is well-positioned to take additional steps to build capacity and fight hunger. The New Haven Food Policy Council outlines the following policy goals to bring more food to our residents. Please see its 2017-18 policy agenda for more information.

## 1) Mitigate hunger for children and other vulnerable populations.

- The NHFPC will concentrate efforts on advancing policies that mitigate childhood hunger and hunger in vulnerable populations. More specifically, the NHFPC has recommended to the City of New Haven that the City and New Haven Public Schools prioritize the expansion of school meals programs with special attention to serving suppers – with a goal of serving three meals a day, every day.

## 2) Streamline the emergency food system.

- The NHFPC will advocate for a streamlined emergency food system and press the City of New Haven to collaborate with partners to develop systems that allow for greater coordination among emergency food providers and enable the sharing of data, resources, and costs.
- The NHFPC will advocate for a stronger social safety net and programs like SNAP, WIC, and CSFP that will alleviate the burden on the emergency food system in the long-term.

## 3) Protect food system workers.

- The NHFPC will work with the City of New Haven to advance policies that protect workers in the city from wage theft and other forms of abuse.

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