



**GREATER  
CHICAGO**  
– **FOOD** –  
DEPOSITORY®

# HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY

## A SPRING 2021 STATUS REPORT

### THE ONGOING IMPACT OF COVID-19

In its 42-year history, the Greater Chicago Food Depository has never seen a hunger crisis like the current one caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Estimates of food insecurity rates are improving in 2021, according to Feeding America, but they remain significantly higher than pre-COVID times. A year of record unemployment, school closures, and other barriers continue to make it difficult for families across Cook County to afford food.

The combination of COVID-19 and rising food insecurity has hit communities of color the hardest.

### FOR GENERATIONS – LONG BEFORE THE PANDEMIC – SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES AND RACIAL INJUSTICE HAVE LED TO HIGHER RATES OF POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OUR BLACK AND LATINO NEIGHBORS.

This current crisis has only worsened these disparities, and households of color with children are often the most affected. From September 2020 to February 2021, more than 36% of Black households with children, nearly 28% of Latino households with children, and almost 17% of white households with children experienced food insecurity, according to an analysis by a Northwestern University economist.<sup>2-3</sup> Similar to past economic recessions, national data also shows that workers of color have not only faced disproportionate job loss, but will have slower recoveries compared to white workers.



### 2021 FEEDING AMERICA FOOD INSECURITY PROJECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, it is projected that

**613,360**

or

**11.8%** of Cook County residents will live in food insecure households

In 2019 before the spread of COVID-19 ,

**481,720**

or

**9.3%** of Cook County residents lived in food insecure households

## FEBRUARY 2021 UNEMPLOYMENT

**9.5%**  
(237,479 people)



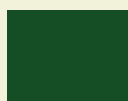
Cook County

**7.4%**



Illinois

**6.2%**



U.S.

## JOB LOSSES FUEL FOOD INSECURITY

Throughout Illinois, more than **3.5 million people** have filed new unemployment claims<sup>4</sup> and more than **700,000** have applied for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)<sup>5</sup> since March 2020.

In February 2021, the unemployment rate for Cook County was significantly higher than the rate for Illinois and the nation.<sup>4</sup>

The official employment figures don't capture the full picture of joblessness because they don't reflect people who have stopped looking for work for "pandemic-related health or caregiving reasons," according to March 2021 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Women, workers of color and immigrants all disproportionately fall into that category.<sup>6</sup>

Nationally, job recovery stalled this past winter, leaving 10 million fewer jobs nationally compared to February 2020, according to the same report. While expected to improve through 2021, the number of jobs is projected to still be several million below pre-pandemic figures.



## OUR RESPONSE

To meet the unprecedented demand, the Food Depository has purchased, received and distributed record amounts of food since the start of the pandemic. Between February 2020 and February 2021, the Food Depository distributed:

**30%**

**more pounds of food** compared to same time period during the prior year

an increase of

**22.3 MIL**

**additional meals**

including:

**580,000**

**emergency boxes** filled with 25-30 pounds of food each

**680,000**

**meals for children and youth** provided in partnership with community organizations



**SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC TO THE END OF MARCH 2021, OUR GENEROUS VOLUNTEERS LOGGED NEARLY 90,000 HOURS OF SERVICE.**

The Food Depository's priority has been to bolster the emergency food system, particularly in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods on the city's South and West Sides and in suburban Cook County. To that end, the Food Depository has launched pop-up distributions, provided all food at no cost and distributed hundreds of thousands of emergency food boxes.

The Food Depository has also allocated nearly **\$5 million in grants** to offset costs for partners, expand food access and open four new food pantries in high priority communities. These investments will make the emergency food system stronger and more equitable.





Thanks to generous donors, the Food Depository has been able to keep up with rising food costs. The Food Depository expects to spend more than \$30 million on food purchasing alone this fiscal year, more than double what was budgeted last fiscal year.

In addition to providing food, the Food Depository's staff responded to the ongoing demand for public benefits. From March 2020 to March 2021, the benefits outreach team and the community partners it trains submitted nearly 4,900 benefit applications – mostly for SNAP benefits, commonly referred to as food stamps – on behalf of households in need. None of these efforts are possible without the help of our supporters.

**TO THOSE WHO HAVE STEPPED UP DURING THIS TIME OF CRISIS – WHETHER IT'S BEEN THROUGH DONATING, VOLUNTEERING OR ADVOCATING – THANK YOU.**

**\$5 MIL**

in equity grants provided to our community partners

**4,900**

benefits applications submitted from March 2020 to March 2021



## THE VITAL ROLE OF PUBLIC POLICY

While community involvement is as needed as ever, federal nutrition programs are the key to solving this hunger crisis. Congress provided a much-needed 15% increase to SNAP benefits through September 2021 and provided additional funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program and the Pandemic-EBT program to help families with children. Alongside unemployment benefits, housing assistance, and other policies, these investments will help families across Cook County afford nutritious food.

In March, the Biden administration also reversed two proposed changes to SNAP from the previous administration. These changes would have made it harder for mixed status households and low-income working adults to access benefits. Removing these harmful policies will allow more of our neighbors to receive the food they need.

### SOURCES CITED

<sup>1</sup> "The Impact of the Coronavirus on Local Food Insecurity in 2020 and 2021," Feeding America, March 2021 ([https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Local%20Projections%20Brief\\_3.31.2021.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Local%20Projections%20Brief_3.31.2021.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach analysis and prediction of food insecurity levels using the December Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey and U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey food sufficiency responses for the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin region, April 23, 2020 to February 1, 2021."

<sup>3</sup> While the largest count of food insecure individuals in Cook County identify as white because

they make up a larger proportion of the overall population, Black and Latino residents are much more likely to be food insecure.

<sup>4</sup> Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) and The Bureau of Labor Statistics/LAUS

<sup>5</sup> Illinois Department of Human Services

<sup>6</sup> "Labor Market Weaker Than Headline Numbers Suggest," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 1, 2021 (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/labor-market-weaker-than-headline-numbers-suggest>)