



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



HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY

SUMMER 2021

THE ONGOING IMPACT OF COVID-19

More than one year after the peak of the pandemic, the Greater Chicago Food Depository continues to serve a heightened need for food assistance in the ongoing hunger crisis.

The estimated food insecurity rates for 2021 are an improvement from 2020, according to Feeding America, but they remain significantly higher than pre-COVID times. More than a year of record unemployment, school closures, and other barriers continue to make it difficult for families across Cook County to afford food.

In 2021, Feeding America projects that 613,360 – or 11.8% – of Cook County residents will live in food insecure households. By comparison, 481,720 Cook County residents – or 9.3% – lived in food insecure households in 2019 before the spread of COVID-19.²

RIISING FOOD INSECURITY IS STILL HITTING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR THE HARDEST.

For generations – long before the pandemic – systemic inequities and racial injustice have led to disproportionate rates of poverty and food insecurity among our Black and Latino neighbors. Other racial and ethnic groups, such as many Asian Pacific and Indigenous communities, also face higher than average rates of food insecurity.

A LONG – AND UNEQUAL – RECOVERY

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.³



JUNE 2021 NORTHWESTERN FOOD INSECURITY ANALYSIS¹

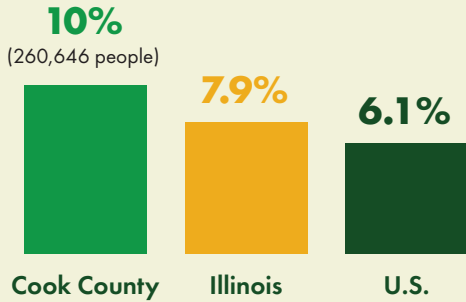
In the Chicago Metro area, more than

14% of households overall
and more than

16% of households with children
experience food insecurity.

**BOTH FIGURES SURPASS
PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS.**

JUNE 2021 UNEMPLOYMENT



Throughout Illinois, more than 3.8 million people have filed new unemployment claims and nearly 900,000 have applied for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from March 2020 to June 2021.⁴ Cook County's unemployment rate has also consistently been higher than the rate for Illinois and the nation. In June 2021, the unemployment rate for Cook County was significantly higher than the rate for Illinois and the nation.

In addition to workers of color, single mothers and mothers of young children also represent the largest drop in labor force participation rates since the start of the pandemic, largely due to the school closures, lack of childcare options, and being more likely to have lost their jobs due to COVID-19, according to a May 2021 Brookings Institute report.⁵

THE BURDEN OF FOOD INSECURITY AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC HAS ALSO LEFT PEOPLE AT INCREASED RISK OF MENTAL ILLNESS, INCLUDING ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION, ACCORDING TO A MARCH 2021 BMC PUBLIC HEALTH ARTICLE.⁶ THE RISK WAS HIGHER AMONG PEOPLE WITH CHILDREN, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAD ALSO EXPERIENCED FOOD INSECURITY PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC.

Those struggling to afford stable housing often also struggle to afford enough food. The national eviction moratorium, which prevents evicting tenants below a certain income threshold from residential properties, has relieved some of this financial stress for households across the country, including in Cook County. However, Illinois' state eviction moratorium ruling will be phased out in early October, adding to many families' financial stress.

Data collected from June to July 2021 showed that 13% of all renting households in the Chicago metro area and 17% of renters with children reported being behind on rent payments. Nearly a quarter of renters with children reported little to no confidence they'd be able to make the next month's rent.⁷ Like food insecurity, households of color are also disproportionately affected by housing insecurity.

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. By the end of fiscal year 2021 on June 30, the Food Depository distributed more than an estimated:

117M pounds of food – the largest amount by far in the organization's 42-year history.

That's the equivalent of more than

97.5M MEALS

and represents an increase of more than

25% from last fiscal year's total, which was also an all-time high.



SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC TO THE END OF JUNE 2021, OUR GENEROUS VOLUNTEERS HAVE ALSO LOGGED MORE THAN 110,000 HOURS OF SERVICE.

\$6.5M

in grants provided to:

540

community partners



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.

Thanks to generous donors, the Food Depository has been able to support our community partners and keep up with rising food costs. The Food Depository has also allocated **\$6.5 million in grants** to offset costs for partners, make food access more equitable and open four new food pantries in high priority communities. The first of the four, the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) in Englewood, opened in early June (*IMAN pantry pictured left above*). The rest will open in the coming months.

The Food Depository expects to spend nearly \$54 million on food purchasing alone in fiscal year 2022, which began July 1. That's more than double what was spent in fiscal year 2021.

The Food Depository is committed to sourcing more food locally to support the local economy. In fiscal year 2022, we plan to source 50% of the produce available to our partners on the online menu from local farms, wholesalers and distributors. That's a dramatic increase from 14% in fiscal year 2021.

One of the Food Depository's new local partnerships is with Growing Home urban farm in Englewood (*pictured left below*). Growing Home is growing fresh produce for one of the Food Depository's food pantry partners at The Salvation Army: Red Shield.

IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING FOOD, THE FOOD DEPOSITORY'S STAFF HAS CONTINUED TO RESPOND TO THE ONGOING DEMAND FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS.

From March 2020 to June 2021, the benefits outreach team and our community partners submitted nearly **6,000 benefit applications**. These applications were mostly for SNAP benefits, commonly referred to as food stamps, on behalf of households in need. The Food Depository is also in the early stages of launching a new SNAP enrollment pilot program in the Englewood, Austin and North Lawndale communities to help sign up the estimated thousands of residents who are living in poverty but don't receive benefits.

6,000

benefit applications –
submitted from March 2020
to June 2021

NONE OF THIS WORK WOULD BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT OUR SUPPORTERS. TO THOSE WHO HAVE STEPPED UP DURING THIS CRISIS – WHETHER IT WAS THROUGH DONATING, VOLUNTEERING, OR ADVOCATING – THANK YOU.



THE VITAL ROLE OF PUBLIC POLICY

The Food Depository continues to advocate for strong federal programs to provide families with the nutrition they need.

In August, the U.S. Department of Agriculture made a long-overdue correction to the way SNAP benefit levels are calculated. This led to an average benefit increase of \$36 per person per month, better reflecting present-day costs of food. Also, with the enactment of the American Rescue Plan earlier this year, Congress provided a much-needed 15% increase to SNAP benefits through September 2021, provided additional funding for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, and strengthened the Child Tax Credit to help families with children.

Looking forward, the Food Depository will be advocating with Congress for a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization. This legislation is an important opportunity to make it easier for families to connect with WIC, school meals, and out of school programs like summer and afterschool meals.

At the state level, we are working to advance the recommendations in the Illinois Commission to End Hunger's Roadmap to End Hunger in Illinois. [Read the report here.](#) Within the city, we are taking part in the new Chicago Food Equity Council and will be working with city agencies and community partners to advance a Food Equity Agenda, a multiyear plan to remove barriers in the food system to create health and racial equity for all. [Read the agenda here.](#)



SOURCES CITED

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- 2 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/National%20Projections%20Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf)
- 3 "State unemployment by race and ethnicity," Economic Policy Institute, July 2021 (<https://www.epi.org/indicators/state-unemployment-race-ethnicity/>)

- 4 Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) and The Bureau of Labor Statistics/LAUS
- 5 "Mothers are being left behind in the economic recovery from COVID-19, Brookings Institute, May 6, 2021 (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/05/06/mothers-are-being-left-behind-in-the-economic-recovery-from-covid-19/>)
- 6 "The association between food insecurity and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic," BMC Public Health, March 29, 2021 (<https://bmcpubhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-10631-0>)
- 7 U.S. Census Household Pulse Report for June 23-July 5, 2021