



**GREATER  
CHICAGO**  
- FOOD -  
DEPOSITORY®

# HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY

## A SPRING 2022 STATUS REPORT

### THE ONGOING IMPACT OF COVID-19

Two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a hunger crisis persists across Chicago and Cook County.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository and its partners continue to respond to the elevated need for food assistance while employing new strategies to address the root causes of poverty and hunger.

Though food insecurity rates have fluctuated since March 2020, they have consistently surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Recent COVID variant surges, decades-high inflation<sup>1</sup> and a shrinking federal safety net have presented ongoing challenges for families at risk of hunger in our community.

Households in the Chicago Metro area, especially those with children, continue to experience higher rates of food insecurity than during pre-pandemic times. Food insecurity rates are even higher among households of color.

**ELEVATED FOOD INSECURITY CONTINUES TO HIT COMMUNITIES OF COLOR THE HARDEST. FOR GENERATIONS, SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES AND RACIAL INJUSTICE HAVE LED TO DISPROPORTIONATE RATES OF POVERTY AMONG OUR BLACK AND LATINO NEIGHBORS. OTHER MINORITY GROUPS, INCLUDING ASIAN AND INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS, ALSO FACE GREATER RISK OF HUNGER.**

The pandemic, and its economic fallout, has worsened those disparities. For these households, the expiration of some pandemic relief programs coupled with rising food prices has caused additional hardship this winter.

### JAN. 26 TO FEB. 7 NORTHWESTERN FOOD INSECURITY ANALYSIS<sup>2</sup>

In the Chicago Metro area, more than

**16%** of households overall

and

**22%** households with children experienced food insecurity.

#### BLACK HOUSEHOLDS:



Overall:  
29%



With children:  
32%

#### LATINO HOUSEHOLDS:



Overall:  
24%



With children:  
28%

#### WHITE HOUSEHOLDS:



Overall:  
11%



With children:  
16%



## A CRISIS OF INEQUITY CONTINUES

The current socio-economic effects of the pandemic may prolong our community’s recovery. COVID surges disrupt people’s health, businesses, school and childcare. Strained supply chains lead to an increase in consumer goods prices. These financial setbacks, as well as the expiration of pandemic income assistance, add extra barriers for those struggling to afford food.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 will continue for months, and in some cases years, after the worst of the public health crisis is behind us. Similar to past economic recessions, national data also shows that low-income workers of color have not only faced disproportionate job loss but will have slower recoveries.

An October 2021 analysis of Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households reported that, even with additional protective measures like eviction moratoria and food assistance programs, low-income households fared “significantly worse...financially, physically, and emotionally” throughout the pandemic compared to middle- or high-income households.

The ALICE research group also joins many others in highlighting how a large proportion of **households with lower incomes, particularly households of color, never recovered fully from the Great Recession and have faced high unemployment, income inequality, community disinvestment, inequitable access to public resources, and racial discrimination** well before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

## OUR RESPONSE

To meet the ongoing, unprecedented demand, the Food Depository has purchased, received and distributed record amounts of food since the start of the pandemic. In the first half of fiscal year 2022, the Food Depository distributed nearly:

# 48.4M LBS OF FOOD

That’s the equivalent of more than

# 40.3M MEALS

and represents an increase of more than

# 37%

 compared to the same time frame in fiscal year 2019, before the start of the pandemic.

**THE FOOD DEPOSITORY HAS ALSO PRIORITIZED EQUITY IN ITS PANDEMIC RESPONSE. IN THE FIRST HALF OF FISCAL YEAR 2022, NEARLY 60% OF THE FOOD DISTRIBUTED WENT TO THE 40 HIGH PRIORITY COMMUNITIES IN COOK COUNTY FACING THE HIGHEST RATES OF FOOD INSECURITY AND HISTORIC DISINVESTMENT.**





We've also strived 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. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Food Depository has allocated more than \$10 million in grants to offset costs for partners, improve partner spaces and open four new food pantries in high priority communities. Two of the four pantries, the Inner City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) in Englewood and the Free-N-Deed food pantry (run by the American Association of Single Parents) in Dolton opened in 2021.

**THANKS TO GENEROUS DONORS, THE FOOD DEPOSITORY HAS BEEN ABLE TO KEEP UP WITH RISING FOOD COSTS. THE FOOD DEPOSITORY EXPECTS TO SPEND NEARLY \$35 MILLION ON FOOD PURCHASING ALONE IN FISCAL YEAR 2022. THAT'S A 55% INCREASE COMPARED TO WHAT WE SPENT IN FISCAL YEAR 2021. IT'S ALSO MORE THAN TRIPLE WHAT WE SPENT IN FISCAL YEAR 2020.**



In addition to providing food, the Food Depository's staff continues to respond to the ongoing demand for public benefits. From March 2020 to February 2022 the benefits outreach team and our community partners submitted nearly

**11,000 BENEFIT APPLICATIONS**

These applications were for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP benefits, commonly referred to as food stamps), and Medicaid for households in need.

Since the start of the pandemic to the end of March 2022, our generous volunteers have logged more than

**160,000 HOURS OF SERVICE**

**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

As the COVID-19 pandemic surged this winter, the federal nutrition safety net continued to operate in crisis mode to respond to elevated need. However, even more pandemic-era relief aid has expired in recent months, like the expanded Child Tax Credit payments. This is in addition to expired Pandemic-EBT benefits for families with children and increased unemployment benefits.

## THE FOOD DEPOSITORY IS WORKING TO CONNECT FAMILIES TO PUBLIC BENEFITS.

Over the last several months, our staff has distributed informational materials to our community partners to help raise awareness about where to go for assistance applying for SNAP and Medicaid. Staff provided nearly 1,500 posters and 182,000 postcards in English and Spanish to more than 360 partner organizations across Cook County. We are preparing an awareness campaign to help families access Child Tax Credit benefits this spring.



At the federal level, the Food Depository will continue to urge Congress to pass the Build Back Better Act, including important investments in child nutrition programs and the Child Tax Credit that would make significant strides against child hunger. We are also pushing for a robust Child Nutrition Reauthorization that creates a permanent Summer EBT program to provide low-income families with a grocery benefit when school is out and children lack access to school meals.

Locally, the city of Chicago, the Food Depository and other stakeholders established the Chicago Food Equity Council. The council released a multiyear plan to transform the food system to ensure every Chicagoan has access to healthy, affordable food and that food becomes an engine for building community wealth. In February, Mayor Lori Lightfoot signed an executive order formalizing the council. [Read the full agenda.](#)

### SOURCES CITED

1 "US inflation soared 7.9% in past year, a fresh 40-year high." Associated Press. March 2022. (<https://apnews.com/article/us-inflation-soars-776c03520c90083894fedf31f1a7db00>)

2 Dr. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach analysis and prediction of food insecurity levels using the Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey and U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey food sufficiency responses for the Chicago Metro Region, January 26 to February 7, 2022.

3 United for Alice. The Pandemic Divide: An ALICE Analysis of National COVID Surveys. October 2021. (<https://www.unitedforalice.org/covid19>)