

Hunger in Massachusetts 2010

Key Findings

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ABOUT HUNGER IN MASSACHUSETTS 2010

In order to solve the problem of hunger, first we must understand it. To that end, *Hunger in Massachusetts 2010*, funded by three Massachusetts food banks and Feeding America, provides an in-depth look at who is in need in the Commonwealth, how the need is met and by whom.

The Greater Boston Food Bank, Worcester County Food Bank, and The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, all members of Feeding America – The Nation’s Food Bank Network (Network), participated in the Network’s national study, *Hunger in America 2010*, from which the state’s study is derived. In Massachusetts, more than 1,160 face-to-face client interviews were conducted and more that 731 surveys of local charitable agencies were surveyed. *Hunger in Massachusetts 2010* chronicles the nature and incidence of demand for emergency food assistance in the state. This data helps charitable feeding organizations better address the burgeoning demand through program development and refinement. The results also better inform the public policy discourse so that federal and state nutrition programs can better serve those in need.

Though each an independent entity, the food banks of Massachusetts are united in their purpose to not only immediately alleviate hunger through the distribution of food and grocery products to people in need, but also to solve the problem of hunger in the long-term through public education and advocating changes to programs and policies that support low-income Americans and ultimately end hunger.

METHODOLOGY

Hunger in Massachusetts 2010 derives from independent research conducted for the national study, *Hunger in America 2010*. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), a leading social policy research firm based in Princeton, N.J., conducted the research, which was funded by Feeding America at the national level and by the three Network Massachusetts food banks at the state level. MPR worked with The Greater Boston Food Bank, Worcester County Food Bank and the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts who voluntarily agreed to collect data in their communities.

All aspects of the study were overseen by an independent review team—the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The TAG is comprised of noted social scientists, including demographers, nutritionists, academics and statisticians, who reviewed everything from the survey instruments to the analysis plan to the final results. The TAG members’ impartiality, broad range of expertise and regular critical oversight ensured that the project has adhered to the highest standards in survey research.

There are two main data sources for *Hunger in Massachusetts 2010*: client data and agency data, which were collected in 2009. The client data was amassed through face-to-face interviews with randomly selected recipients at emergency feeding sites across the state. More than 1,160 individuals offered to share their stories with us, including the circumstances that led them to the pantry, kitchen or shelter at which they were interviewed. Their generosity makes it possible for us to better understand who seeks

emergency food assistance and why. Secondly, each participating Massachusetts food bank mailed surveys to or had them completed electronically by their emergency food provider members. Emergency food providers are defined to include food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters serving short-term residents. This mailing yielded 731 completed surveys. The agency surveys provide information on the services available to low-income people in Massachusetts, their needs and their stability.

The research results of *Hunger in Massachusetts 2010* should be discomfoting. Though we live in a state with the sixth highest median household income in the nation¹, too many among us have to decide daily between paying for food or other household necessities, such as fuel, rent, medicine, and transportation. And our state's most vulnerable citizens, children and seniors, may have to forgo their most basic need—the need for food—because of a lack of resources.

HUNGER REMAINS HIGH IN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts food banks provide emergency hunger-relief services to an estimated 571,600 low-income people annually, or roughly 9% of the Massachusetts population. This represents a 23% increase since the 2006 Massachusetts hunger study. An estimated 101,400 people are served weekly, a decrease of 11% since 2006. We believe that this decrease is a reflection of the economic impact on the hunger network; emergency food providers, overall, have reduced their service days during the week (from agency hours of operation collected by GBFB and analyzed by Mathematica). Additionally, it could be reflecting new users who do not chronically use the hunger network and so are counted on a weekly basis but are not duplicated in the annual number.

WHO SEEKS EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE?

MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND SENIORS

Children

A third (33%) of the members of the households we serve in Massachusetts are children under the age of 18, and 7% are children under five years of age. The rate of poverty for American children under 18 remains higher (25%) than those aged 19 to 64 (17%) and for those aged 65 and over (13%).² Hunger has long-lasting, devastating affects on the health and development of children. Research indicates that even mild undernutrition experienced by young children during critical periods of growth may lead to reduction in physical growth and affect brain development.³ Over a third (35%) of the households using emergency food providers in Massachusetts have children under 18.

Seniors

Scientific evidence supports good nutrition as critical to the health and life quality of seniors.⁴ Because of issues that relate specifically to age, including decreased mobility

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), 2008

² U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey: Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 2008-2009

³ Tufts University School of Nutritional Science and Policy, *The Links between Nutrition and Cognitive Development of Children*, 1998

⁴ The Journal of the American Dietetic Association, "Nutrition, Aging and the Continuum of Care", 2000

and limited outside assistance, the elderly are especially vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Because of fixed and low incomes—13% of the elderly live below the poverty line⁵—the elderly are among our most vulnerable citizens. About 14% of clients at program sites served by Massachusetts food banks are age 65 and older.

Women

The majority of clients at program sites served by Massachusetts food banks are women (57%), a 15% decrease since 2006. Single parent households with children represent just under half (43%) of all households with children served by state's food banks. The average household size remains 2.3, typically a female, single parent with a child or children.

Gender

Overall, 57% of clients served are women. However, where women make up 66% of the clients served at Massachusetts food pantry sites, adult males make up the majority at soup kitchens (52%) and represent 81% of those at shelters. About 47% of men and women using food pantries and 46% staying in emergency shelters are between the ages of 30 and 49.

ALL RACES AND ETHNICITIES

In Massachusetts 47% of the clients we serve at program sites are Non-Hispanic White, 19% are African-American, 25% are Hispanic/Latino/Spanish.

THE WORKING POOR

Many people in Massachusetts continue to find it hard to make ends meet. In 2009, just under a third (31%) of all households served by Massachusetts food banks had one or more working adults, and 19% of clients at program sites are currently employed. When considering the employment status of all adults in client households, 12% are employed full-time and 14.0% are employed part-time. For those adults not employed in households served, 7% have recently lost a job (unemployed less than three months), 25% have been unemployed for more than three months but less than two years, and 47% have been unemployed more than two years.

Nineteen percent (19%) of all households served by Massachusetts food banks indicate that a job was the primary source of household income for the previous month. Thirty-six percent (36%) listed Social Security. Just 13% reported traditional "welfare" payments (Temporary Assistance or Need Families or TANF and/or General Assistance) were the household's primary source of income in the past month.

THE FOOD INSECURE

"Food insecurity is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that varies along a continuum of successive stages as it becomes more severe. A scaling tool developed by USDA

⁵ US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey: Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 2008-2009

provides an important approach being used increasingly to assess food security among households..... Food security and food insecurity are conceptually defined as the following:

- Food security: 'Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.' Food security includes at a minimum (1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and (2) an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).'
- Food insecurity: 'Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.'"⁶

According to the federal government's own measure of hunger, 80% of households served by Massachusetts food banks are 'food insecure.' In addition, 42% of those food insecure households in Massachusetts reported experiencing 'very low food security'—that is experiencing serious disruptions to their food supply; this is a 40% increase from 2006. In Massachusetts, 79% of food bank households with children under 18 years of age are food insecure with 31% experiencing very low food security.

LOW INCOME AND FEW RESOURCES

Clients seeking emergency food assistance from Massachusetts food banks are typically part of hard-working families living below the federal poverty line. In fact, about half of all households reported incomes just over \$10,000 and approximately two thirds live below the federal poverty line, earning less than \$1,526 per month for a family of three (the average household size is 2.3 persons). Average household monthly income among all clients interviewed at emergency feeding sites was \$990.

Only about 50% currently receive food stamps, which last an average of just 2.6 weeks a month. Both these figures show an increase over the 2006 study, which found 40% of households received food stamps, which lasted an average of 2.5 weeks. Twenty one percent (21%) of client households responded that they had applied for food stamps in the last year and were currently not receiving them, unchanged since 2006. This suggests strong community and federal efforts to increase food stamp usage and streamline the process continue to achieve some success.

In addition, 59% of the households served do not have access to a working car.

INTOLERABLE CHOICES

Additionally, Massachusetts food banks clients are often faced with difficult choices no one should have to make: choices between food and other basic needs. Forty-four percent (44%) of those surveyed indicated their households have been forced to choose between

⁶ "Hunger in America 2010, Massachusetts State Report", Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., 2010: p.89. 'Food security' and 'food insecurity' definitions from "Core Indicators of Nutritional State for Difficult-to-Sample Populations." *Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 120, no.11S, November 1990

paying for utilities/fuel and food; 34% between paying rent/mortgage and food; 33% between paying medical bills and food; and 33% between paying for transportation. About one fourth (26%) had to choose between food and fuel for their car). More than 61% report being in at least one of these situations.

THE SICK

Poor health can affect anyone at any age—working-age adults, seniors, children. Poor health of an individual can lower job attendance or performance or restrict employment altogether. The poor health of a family member can equally affect job performance or attendance and put financial burdens on the household. In Massachusetts, 14% of households surveyed reported having at least one member in poor health, and 11% of all clients interviewed at program sites indicated being in poor health themselves. Seven percent (7%) reported having no health insurance, and 31% reported having unpaid medical or hospital bills.

HOUSING

About 21% of clients served by Massachusetts food banks are homeless, a 50% increase from the 14% reported in 2006. Of the remainder, 79% rent (35% of which receive public housing assistance), 11% own, and 7% live free with someone else.

EDUCATION LEVELS

In the general U.S. population, just over 16% of adults have less than a high school diploma or equivalent.⁷ By contrast in the emergency food assistance system in Massachusetts, the rate is 38% greater than the general U.S. population with 22% served at program sites having not completed high school or attaining the equivalent. For another 41% of adult emergency food recipients in the state, a high school diploma or equivalent is the highest level of education attained. This data strongly suggests a link between low educational attainment and the likelihood of being poor and needing emergency food assistance. However, even advanced education does not guarantee a person will not need emergency food assistance at some time in his or her life. Twenty two percent (22%) of clients interviewed have some college education or completed a two-year degree, 12% have completed college or beyond, and 4% have completed a business, trade or technical school.

THE STATE OF THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

For the purposes of this study, the emergency food assistance system is defined as those private nonprofit agencies that exist primarily to alleviate hunger in their communities. Excluded from this report are the hundreds of local agencies that provide after-school meals to low-income children, senior congregate meal sites, and similar local charities that provide food as part of their activities but that do not exist primarily to alleviate hunger.

The Greater Boston Food Bank, Worcester County Food Bank and The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts provide food and other services to 879 local agencies. For the

⁷ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, 2006-2008

purposes of this study, 731 agencies provided information on 1,304 programs operated by these agencies. *Hunger in Massachusetts 2010* looks at the three main types of ‘emergency food providers’ served by the state’s food banks: pantries, kitchens and shelters. The food banks are the primary providers of food and other services to these three main types of local hunger relief agencies.

Pantries (food pantries, emergency pantries, food shelves or church pantries) primarily serve households of more than one person and typically serve households that have a residence where foods can be prepared. Thirty five percent (35%) of the programs reported on in the survey are pantries. Pantry food assistance often provides sufficient food for several weeks to a month. About 57% of emergency pantry clients in Massachusetts are female.

Kitchens (soup kitchens, community kitchens, hot meal sites, urban missions) often serve one person households, which are typically households without a permanent residence or are in transitional or temporary housing. A majority (52%) of kitchen clients is men. Kitchens typically provide meals on site for a specific amount of time and require recipients to return for additional meals at other times during the week. Eleven percent of the programs served by food banks in Massachusetts are kitchens.

Shelters (homeless shelters, spousal abuse shelters, transitional shelters) serve small households depending on type. Spousal abuse shelters typically serve female-headed households with children whereas homeless and transitional shelters are typically populated by single-male households without children. Over two thirds (81%) of those using temporary shelters are men.

FOOD BANKS AS RESOURCE

Substantial resources are required to operate emergency food programs effectively, including community support, food, staff, and physical space. From 2006 to the present, the number of pounds The Greater Boston Food Bank, Worcester County Food Bank and The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts distributed has increased 30% from 34.4 million pounds to 44.7 million pounds. The Massachusetts food banks provide most of the food distributed by the emergency food system in the state, providing 71% of the food distributed by pantries, 40% of the food provided through shelters, and 43% of the food prepared and served in soup kitchens. The Massachusetts food banks are also the primary distributor of the federal (USDA) commodity donations—The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)—and the state’s Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP).

CRITICAL SUPPORT - VOLUNTEERS

The overwhelming majority of emergency food programs, especially pantries, rely on volunteers to provide food assistance benefits to recipients. As many as 95% of pantries, 91% of kitchens and 58% of shelters use volunteers; and more than 55% of food pantries and 31% of soup kitchens rely entirely on volunteers with no paid staff. The median number of paid staff was 0 for pantries, 1 for kitchens, and 10 for shelters, unchanged since 2006. The median number of volunteers in a week was 8 for pantries, 12 for kitchens

and three for shelters. The median number of volunteer hours during the previous week of the study was 20 for pantries, 32 for kitchens, and 6 for shelters.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

More than half (52%) of the pantries, 45% of soup kitchens and about 15% of emergency shelters served by Massachusetts food banks are run by faith-based agencies.

CLIENT SATISFACTION

Emergency food recipients were asked how satisfied they were with the amount, variety and quality of food provided to them at local agencies. The level of satisfaction is high across all three kinds of emergency food providers (pantries, kitchens and shelters). Eighty-seven percent (87%) of recipients were “very satisfied” (54%) or “somewhat satisfied” (33%) with the amount of food they received, and 84% reported they were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the quality of food.

SURVEY IMPLICATIONS

Hunger in Massachusetts 2010 shows that Massachusetts food banks serve some of the most vulnerable populations in the state. Based on the findings of this study, the hundreds of thousands served by the food banks do not create a stereotypical profile of a hungry, homeless person. The data show that more people are availing themselves of emergency food throughout the year, but doing so with less frequency. This indicates a pattern of need, but not all the time. Combined with the demographic data, it seems more working poor families with children are using emergency food providers. The data also show that hunger reaches into virtually all communities across the Commonwealth, affecting even the least likely of victims. While Massachusetts food banks have increased the amount of food they have distributed to emergency food providers throughout the Commonwealth, the need continues to outpace the ability of these organizations to provide help.

TERMS

AGENCY: The charitable organization that provides the food supplied by a food bank or a food-rescue organization directly to clients in need through various types of programs.

FOOD BANK: A charitable organization that solicits, receives, inventories and distributes donated food and grocery products pursuant to grocery industry and appropriate regulatory standards. The products are distributed to charitable human-service organizations, which, in turn, provide the products directly to needy clients through various programs.

FOOD INSECURITY: USDA's measure of lack of access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members; limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.

FOOD INSECURITY WITH VERY LOW SECURITY: An involuntary state that result from not being able to afford enough food.

FOOD PANTRY (FOOD SHELF): A charitable distribution agency that provides its clients food and other grocery products for home preparation and consumption.

FOOD RESCUE ORGANIZATION: A charitable organization that collects prepared and/or perishable foods from sites, such as restaurants, hotels and caterers, pursuant to its local health department and/or appropriate regulatory standards. This food is distributed either directly to needy people or to charitable human service agencies, which, in turn, provide the food to needy clients through various types of programs.

SHELTER: A charitable program whose primary purpose is to provide shelter or housing on a short-term or temporary basis to needy clients and typically serves one or more meals a day.

SOUP KITCHEN: A charitable program whose primary purpose is to provide prepared meals, served in the kitchen to clients in need