



Hungry in Washington September 2014

Hunger continues to stay well above pre-recession rates. Families with children experience higher rates of hunger and food insecurity.

According to the most recent report on food insecurity and hunger in America released September 3rd by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the rate of hunger in 2013 dropped only slightly, from 5.7 to 5.6 percent nationally. Washington's rate dropped from 6.1 percent to match the national rate. This is the first time since 2008 that Washington's rate of hunger matched or was below the national rate. However, the rate of hunger continues to be significantly higher than before the recession.

USDA also measures food insecurity. Again, Washington and national rates match for 2014 at 14.3% of total households. Rates of food insecurity are higher in households with children. Nationally, 15.8 million children live in households that experience food insecurity – 19.5 percent of all children.



The Children's Alliance estimates that approximately 305,000 children in Washington live in food insecure households.

Washington ranks 22nd among the states in hunger, down from 15th hungriest in 2012.

An outline of immediate federal and state action to address hunger and food insecurity is included at the end of this report.

"Food insecurity" is a term developed to describe households financially stretched to the point where they cannot be certain that all household members will not go hungry.

The USDA survey also measures "very low food security" (formerly called "food insecurity with hunger"), describing the household where at least one family member goes hungry at times because there is not enough money for food. This report uses the more common term "hunger" to talk about this phenomenon.

Background

Each year the Children's Alliance publishes an analysis of the results from USDA's survey on household food security, outlining the impact of hunger on Washington families. Monitoring the extent of childhood hunger in Washington is an integral part of working collaboratively with state agencies and community-based organizations to end childhood hunger in Washington.

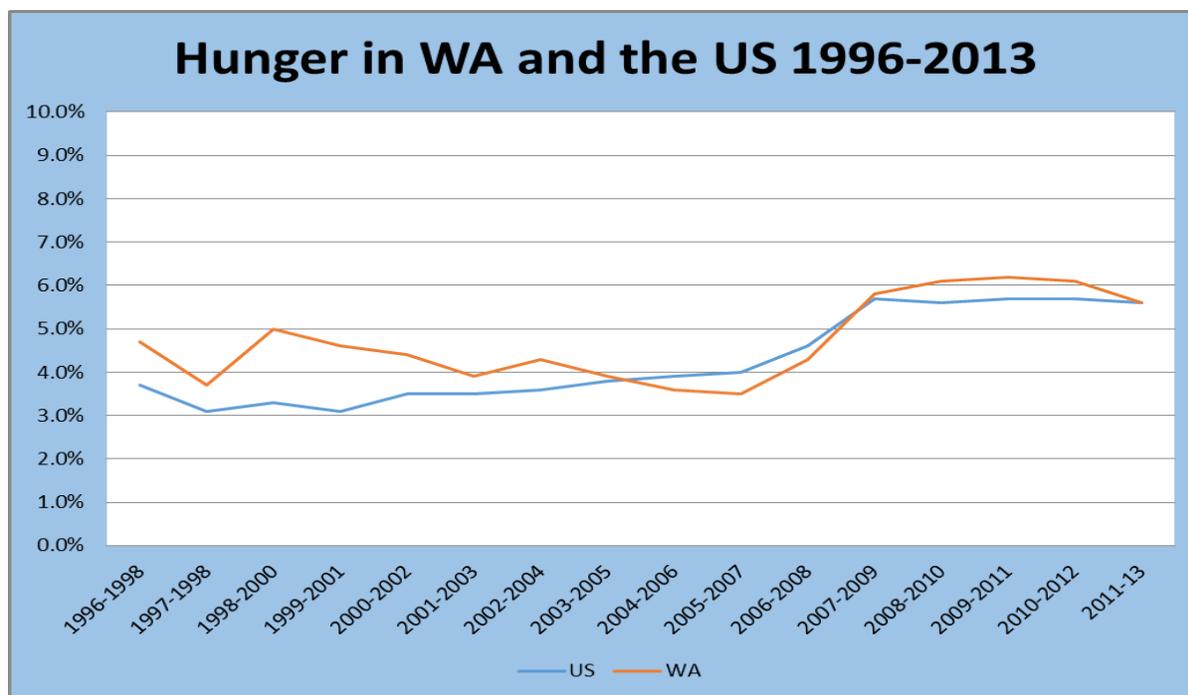
Hungry in Washington presents national data from the USDA 2013 survey, including food insecurity and hunger prevalence for Washington, and the state's ranking for food insecurity over the period from 2011 through 2013.

Food Insecurity highest in African American and Latino Households with Children

Households with children have substantially higher rates of food insecurity than the national average. Overall, the rate of food insecurity for families with children is 19.5 percent, however some types of households are much more likely to experience food insecurity:

- African-American households with children (32.6 percent), and Hispanic households with children (28 percent).
- Households with children with incomes below the official poverty line (45.6 percent),
- Households with children, headed by single women (34.4 percent) or single men (23.1 percent),
- Other households with children, including grandparents raising children, have a 30.6 percent rate of food insecurity.

Hunger Remains Higher Than Pre-Recession Levels



USDA began conducting the food security survey in conjunction with the U.S. Census Bureau in 1995. For the first eight years of the survey, Washington had one of the highest rates of hunger among the states. After several years with relatively low levels, hunger began to rise again from 2006 through 2012. In the period 2011-13, hunger in Washington began to recede to match the national rate. However, the national and Washington rates of hunger continue to greatly exceed rates prior to the economic recession.

Differences between states in food insecurity are attributable to a number of factors, according to USDA, including low wages, high housing costs, residential instability (moving frequently), and a high tax burden on low-income households. Other factors are relatively low rates of participation in federal food programs, including the summer meal programs for children. Washington ranks 39th out of 50 states in reaching low-income children with summer nutrition and 41st in reaching low-income students with school breakfast.

In a reverse from 2012, Washington’s rates of hunger and food insecurity dropped below the rates and rankings of neighboring states. In Oregon, 15.2 percent of households are food insecure; 6.1 percent are hungry. In Idaho, 15.1 percent are food insecure and 5.9 percent are hungry. Oregon ranks 14th for hunger and Idaho 19th.

Data Summary:

	Washington	United States
Rate of Food Insecurity	14.3%	14.3%
Ranking among states for food insecurity	23	
Rate of hunger (very low food security)	5.6%	5.6%
Ranking among states for hunger	22	

Conclusion

USDA’s summary assessment of the food security data cites recent research that found that while unemployment declined in 2012 and 2013, inflation and the price of food relative to other goods and services continued to increase. These increases offset greater improvements in food security that might have resulted from the decline in unemployment.

In addition, the rise of contract and part-time work has increased income instability for many families. Current monthly food stamp benefits average the equivalent of \$1.50 per person per meal – an inadequate level that barely gets families through the whole month, let alone allows them to buy the foods needed for a healthy diet. In addition, in November 2013, all households relying on Basic Food (food stamps) received a benefit cut due to the ending of the 2009 benefit increase that accompanied ARRA.

For Darius who lives in Pasco, the November benefit reduction for his family of 3 was \$60 per month. When asked what he is doing to cope with the loss of benefit, he replied, “Sometimes I just don’t eat so my wife and son can.”¹

State budget cuts have also placed more families at risk of hunger. State Food Assistance (SFA) provides food stamp benefits to legal, documented immigrants ineligible for federal food stamps. Benefits for SFA recipients are set at 75 percent of food stamp benefits, up from 50 percent in 2012. However, full restoration is needed.



¹ Northwest Harvest focus group interviews, 2014.

Recommendations

1. **Equal Benefits for hungry families:**

Governor Inslee and the Washington State Legislature should fully restore benefits for the State Food Assistance Program. A change in the state budget language approved by legislators in early 2014 sets the stage for immediate restoration of SFA benefits on the authority of the Governor. A total of 15,500 legally-residing immigrants currently receive only 75% of food benefits received by all other Washingtonians through the Basic Food Program.

2. **Feed Kids in the Summertime:**

Congress will begin work on reauthorizing the child nutrition programs – school, summer and afterschool meals and WIC – in 2015. Despite years of collaborative effort to increase access to summer meals provided in congregate settings by a variety of organizations across the state, Washington continues to reach only about 10% of eligible students. The state ranks 39th out of the 50 states for summer meal access. Senator Patty Murray has introduced a bill to provide families with students eligible for free or reduced price school meals with additional EBT food benefits during the summer months. Rep. Suzann DelBene is a co-sponsor of similar legislation in the House.

3. **Start the School Day Right:**

Washington is also failing to connect low-income students to school breakfast. Only 43 out of every 100 eligible students receiving free or reduced-price school meals also receive school breakfast. The most significant barriers to breakfast participation can all be addressed by converting to Breakfast After the Bell service models, including breakfast in the classroom, grab and go breakfast and second chance breakfast. Legislation requiring that very high need schools provide breakfast after the bell passed the House last legislative session but was not voted upon by the Senate. This legislation is a needed step in making sure students arrive in the classroom ready to learn and could have a positive impact on closing the achievement gap.

Washington ranks 41st out of the 50 states for school breakfast participation and 39th out of the 50 state for access to summer meals.

4. **Increase Food Stamps Benefits:**

Finally, Basic Food (food stamp) benefits continue to be too low to provide families with sufficient resources to purchase a healthy diet. The 2014 Farm Bill failed to address this issue, instead including a reduction in benefits for families in states like Washington utilizing the “heat and eat” option to increase benefits for many households. Thanks to Governor Inslee, Washington families will be insulated from this decrease by the creation of a new “heat and eat” program meeting federal guidelines.

Click here to read the full USDA report: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1565415/err173.pdf>

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CHILDREN’S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington’s Children, Youth & Families