

Hungry in Washington

September 2015



Families with children experience higher rates of hunger and food insecurity. Hungry families are not experiencing an economic recovery.

According to the most recent report on food insecurity and hunger in America released September 9th by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the national rate of hunger in 2014 did not improve over 2013's rate of 5.6 percent. Here in Washington, the rate dropped from 5.6 to 5.5 percent, a change that was not statistically significant. The rate of hunger continues to be markedly higher than before the recession.



The Children's Alliance estimates that 300,000 of Washington's 1.6 million children, or 19 percent, live in food insecure households.

USDA also measures food insecurity. Washington's rate of food insecurity continued to drop for the third year in a row, to 13.7 percent compared to 14 percent nationwide. Rates of food insecurity are higher in households with children. Nationally, 15.3 million children live in households that experience food insecurity—that's 19.2 percent of all children. One in five households with children under the age of 6 experienced food insecurity in 2014.

Washington ranks 23rd among the states in hunger, down from 22nd hungriest in 2013.

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

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.



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A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

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Hungry in Washington presents national data from the USDA 2014 survey, including food insecurity and hunger prevalence for Washington, and the state's ranking for food insecurity over the period from 2012 through 2014.

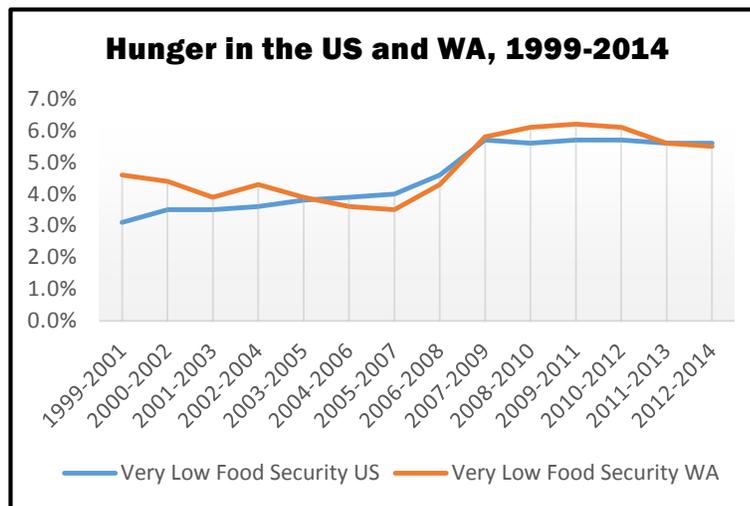
Households with Children

Nationally, 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 19.2 percent, yet some types of households are much more likely to experience food insecurity:

- Households with children with incomes below the official poverty line (44.8 percent),
- Households with children, headed by single women (35.3 percent) or single men (21.7 percent),
- African-American households with children (32.4 percent), and Hispanic households with children (26.9 percent).

The above rates are either the same as last year, or slightly lower, except that food insecurity in households with children headed by single women increased from 34.4 to 35.3 percent.

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 2012-14, hunger in Washington continued to recede, dropping below the national rate. However, the national and Washington rates of hunger continue to greatly exceed rates prior to the economic recession.



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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 meals programs for children. Washington ranks 37th out of 50 states in reaching low-income children with summer nutrition and 43rd in reaching low-income students with school breakfast.

Data Summary:

	Washington	United States
Rate of Food Insecurity	13.7%	14.0%
Ranking among states for food insecurity	28	
Rate of hunger (very low food security)	5.5%	5.6%
Ranking among states for hunger	23	

USDA's summary assessment of the food security data cites recent research that found that while unemployment declined in the last several years, 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.

Recommendations

1. Keep Child Nutrition Programs Strong and Accessible to Fight Childhood Hunger.

Congress was scheduled to reauthorize child nutrition programs by the end of September 2015. Congressional action is delayed and program funding has been continued into December. Discussion in Congress has focused on two areas: whether to uphold the higher nutrition standards that were part of the 2010 Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act, and how to increase access to nutritious food for low-income children during the summer months when school meals are not accessible. Our view:

- Retain the nutrition standards. According to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's recent national survey, 86 percent of Americans approve of the new guidelines and 67 percent feel that school meals are good or excellent, an increase of 41 percent since 2010. Even the food industry has realized that adapting products for the new guidelines not only helps kids, it helps their bottom line.
- Expand access to summer EBT benefits through the Basic Food Program for kids living in areas where summer meal sites are not located and where conditions prohibit kids from reaching sites. U.S. Senator Patty Murray has introduced the Stop Child Summer Hunger Act, which builds upon USDA pilots that were shown to reduce very low food insecurity for kids.
- Streamline the summer meals program as outlines in Rep. Rick Larsen's Summer Meals Act by expanding areas where meal sites can be located, streamlining rules so that community organizations can run summer and



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afterschool programs year-round through the same USDA program, and allowing sites open long hours to serve an additional meal.

2. 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.

Washington ranks 43rd out of the 50 states for school breakfast participation and 37th out of the 50 states for access to summer meals.

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.

3. Increase Food Stamps Benefits.

Basic Food (food stamp) benefits continue to be too low to provide families with sufficient resources to purchase a healthy diet. Although research determined that the increased Basic Food benefits received by families from 2009-2013 as part of federal counter-recessionary spending were effective in reducing food insecurity, these benefits were cut in November 2013 and have not been restored.

4. Collect Better Data.

The effect of childhood hunger on kids and families in communities of color can be better addressed with the right information. State, county, federal and community-based entities ought to disaggregate data on household hunger by race/ethnicity, so that policymakers may more accurately understand the dimensions of childhood hunger as it disparately impacts communities of color.

Final note:

On our recommendations list since 2010 has been restoring benefits to the State Food Assistance Program, a food assistance program for immigrants legally residing in the US. In 2015, the state legislature approved nearly \$10 million to fully restore benefits beginning July 1, 2015. Our thanks go to Washington's legislature and to the broad coalition of organizations and individuals who made this important investment happen.

Click here to read the full USDA report: <http://bit.ly/USDAhunger>.



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