2026 HUNGER IN CHICAGO REPORT

GREATER CHICAGO FOOD DEPOSITORY®

Dear Partners and Friends,

Thank you for taking the time to read the 2026 Hunger in Chicago Report.

Behind every statistic in these pages is a person, a family, a neighbor striving to build a better future. This report captures an important snapshot of food insecurity in Chicago today while also shedding light on the experiences of our neighbors who, every day, are making difficult choices just to get by.

The findings are troubling and urgent. Too many households continue to struggle with the rising cost of food, housing, health care, transportation, and other essentials, even as critical safety net programs are cut. Many are working. Many are raising children. Many are individuals living with disabilities or older adults on fixed incomes. The reality that about one in three Chicago households experiences food insecurity needs to concern all of us. And while this report focuses primarily on Chicago, similar trends and experiences are being reported across Illinois and the United States.

At the same time, this research explores how food assistance programs are key to helping households maintain stability during difficult times. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is especially impactful as our nation's strongest defense against hunger, reinforced by access to nonprofit community services. Together, consistent support helps our neighbors on their journey toward sustained food security.

Ending hunger and food insecurity requires more than food alone. It requires partnerships built on trust, policies grounded in evidence, and a shared commitment to dignity and opportunity for all. We are grateful to the many community members, network partners, advocates, elected officials, government offices, researchers, and supporters who stand shoulder to shoulder with us on this mission.

By 2030, the Greater Chicago Food Depository envisions a future where every person in every neighborhood has reliable, dignified access to three meals a day. We believe that food is a human right and that hunger is a problem we can solve.

Thank you for being part of this work.

Kate Maehr
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer
Greater Chicago Food Depository

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DEFINING FOOD INSECURITY VS HUNGER:

FOOD INSECURITY The set of circumstances that prevent one's access to food. Lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

HUNGER The physical symptom of a lack of adequate food. What you feel when you do not have enough to eat.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food insecurity, the need for food assistance, and the cost of living have increased over the past five years.[1] The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest public anti-hunger food assistance program, yet the federal enactment of the budget reconciliation law H.R.1 in July 2025 cuts SNAP by $186 billion over ten years and decreases access to public social safety net supports.[2]

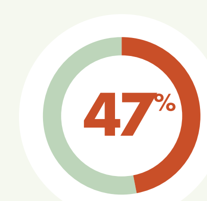
To better understand and share the magnitude of this public health crisis, the Greater Chicago Food Depository partnered with nonpartisan research organization NORC at the University of Chicago to survey Chicagoans about their access to food and their use of food assistance in June 2026.[3] The findings are statistically representative of the City of Chicago household population.[4]

This report provides quantifiable insights shared by our neighbors about their struggles to get enough to eat and how food assistance programs facilitate the stability of food security.

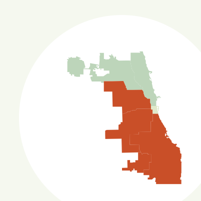
While the following pages focus on residents living within the City of Chicago boundaries only due to survey constraints, we include high level insights into food security based on income across our service area, including suburban Cook County.

KEY FINDINGS

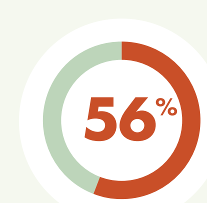
About 1 in 3 Chicago households is food insecure, meaning they do not have consistent access to enough food.[5] As of June 2026, around 417,000 Chicago households (36%) struggle to put food on the table. The high cost of living here, insufficient wages, rising prices, and decreasing access to SNAP indicate this suffering will continue to worsen unless economic drivers improve or supports increase.



Food insecurity rates are higher among households with children. Forty-seven percent of households with children are food insecure compared to 30% of households with no children.



Food insecurity rates are higher among households living on the South, West, and Southwest sides of Chicago. 51% of South side households, 45% of West side households, and 41% of Southwest side households are food insecure, compared to 27% of Northwest side households and 20% of North Central region households.



Most adults living in households experiencing food insecurity are either working (56%), not working due to disability (12%), or not working due to retirement (11%). Fifteen percent are unemployed temporarily or unemployed and looking for work.[6]

In this report's survey of Chicago adults, 52% of food insecure households and 10% of food secure households receive SNAP benefits, indicating that SNAP assists many residents in reaching food security but leaves large gaps in service.

A CONTINUUM OF FOOD STABILITY

Based on an approach first developed in 2024 by Second Harvest Heartland in Minnesota,[7] understanding our neighbors' experience of food insecurity along a continuum of food stability can inform policy actions to push forward movement toward food security without assistance. While connections to food assistance can help stabilize struggling households on their pathway to food security, the continuum also recognizes that this cannot be done through food assistance alone. In Chicago, we have learned that 11% of households are food insecure and without assistance, 25% are food insecure and getting assistance, 11% have their food needs met with assistance, and 54% are food secure and without assistance. Several factors described in this report impact forward and backward movements along this continuum.

FOOD INSECURE → FOOD SECURE

1	2	3	4
FOOD INSECURE WITHOUT ASSISTANCE	**FOOD INSECURE WITH ASSISTANCE**	**FOOD NEEDS MET WITH ASSISTANCE**	**FOOD SECURE WITHOUT ASSISTANCE**
Households not accessing food assistance, do not meet food needs.	Households accessing food assistance, but still do not have enough food.	Households accessing food assistance, have enough food.	Households meeting food needs without food assistance.
11% of households	**25%** of households	**11%** of households	**54%** of households
~128,000 households	**~289,000 households**	**~124,000 households**	**~631,000 households**

By 2030, the Greater Chicago Food Depository envisions a future where every person in every neighborhood has reliable, dignified access to three meals a day. No matter their zip code, income, or circumstance. That's the goal. No one should go hungry in a community this full of possibility.

FOOD INSECURITY TRENDS

Food Insecurity in Chicago

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), food security means access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.[8] When this access is not available, food insecurity leads to poor physical and mental health outcomes; higher risk of development delays in children; decreased capacity to learn, concentrate, and thrive; and increased health care costs.[9] Moreover, food insecurity is very stressful as individuals, households, and communities worry about getting enough to eat and making tradeoff decisions between purchasing food and other basic goods.[10]

For the purposes of this survey of Chicagoans, we measured food insecurity using the USDA's U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form, a validated and reliable measure of food insecurity adapted from the 18-item U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module for use when the longer version cannot be implemented. We modified the series from the 12-month reference period to a 30-day reference period to capture recent experiences with food security.[11]

- **As of June 2026, around 417,000 Chicago households (36%) are experiencing food insecurity.**[12]
- **Nineteen percent of households experience very low food security**, indicating disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. This is the most severe category captured by the screener.

Table 1. Food security status in Chicago.

	Food security status[13]	Percent overall[14]
Food Secure	High: no reported indications of food access problems or limitations.	56%
	Marginal: anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house.	9%
Food Insecure	Low: reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet.	16%
	Very Low: multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.	19%

The percentages presented in the chart may not match the combined percentages in the text due to rounding. U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six -Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA. (Appendix survey questions: GCFD_HESS1_LEAD, GCFD_HH4, GCFD_AD1, GCFD_AD1A, GCFD_AD2, and GCFD_AD3).

Populations Most Impacted by Food Insecurity in Chicago

The Chicago survey also reveals significant disparities in food security across regions of Chicago, demographic characteristics, income, and employment levels. These wide differences reflect the root causes of hunger and food insecurity – poverty, systemic inequity, and structural racism.

Food insecurity rates are highest among communities on the South, West, and Southwest sides of Chicago, households with children, Black and Hispanic households, households with lower incomes, adults not working due to a disability, adults without a college degree, and unemployed adults. At the same time, sizable numbers of Chicago households living on the North and Northwest side, households with no children, White households, households with higher incomes, college graduates, and employed adults are experiencing food insecurity as well.

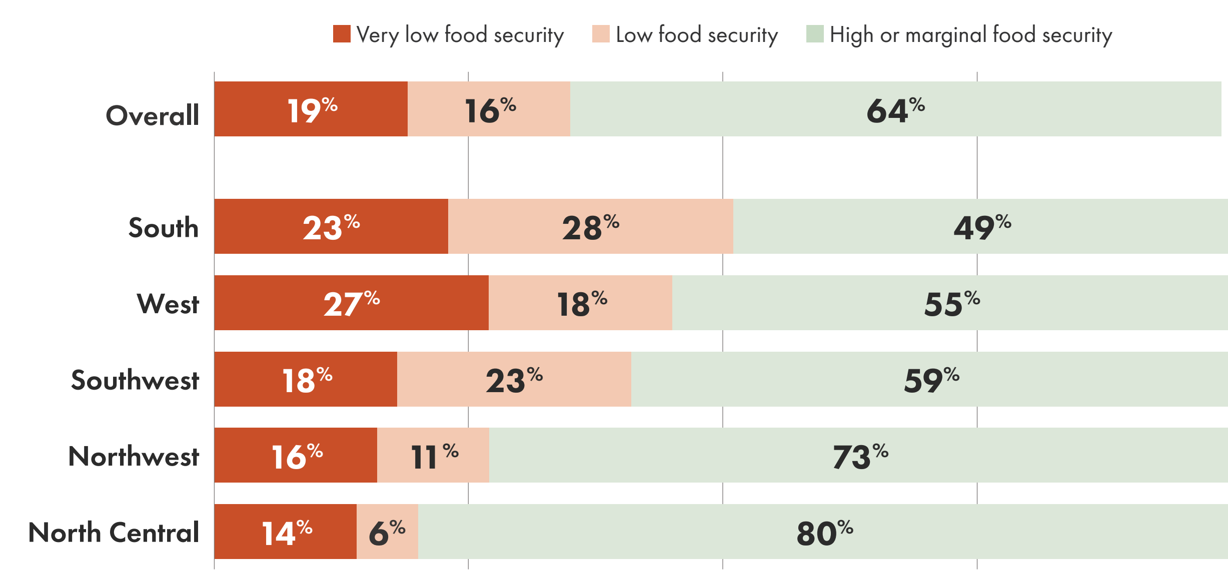
The following pages detail the populations most impacted by food insecurity in Chicago by region, demographics, and income and employment status. These population-level disparities point to broader economic and policy forces and structural barriers driving food insecurity.

Regions

Monitoring where food insecurity is most entrenched and widespread helps us direct resources where neighbors need them most.

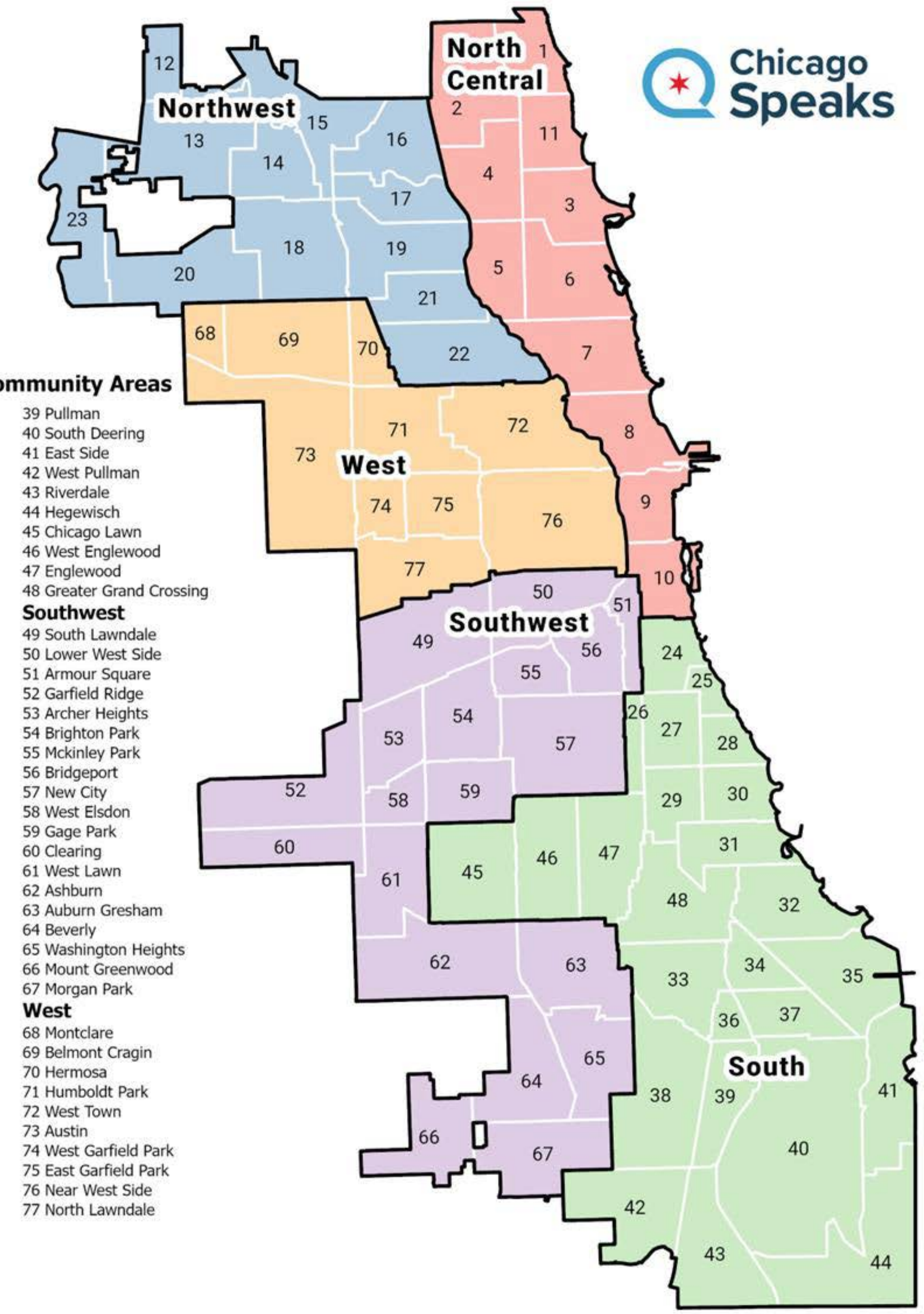
- **Households living in the South, West, or Southwest regions of Chicago:** 51% of South region households, 45% of West region households, and 41% of Southwest region households are food insecure, compared to 27% of Northwest side households and 20% of North Central region households. These regions experienced disinvestment for decades through historical policies and practices such as redlining, restrictive covenants, persistent economic disconnection, and lack of market investment.[15]

Figure 1. Food insecurity is highest in the South and West regions of Chicago.



The percentages presented in the chart may not match the combined percentages in the text due to rounding.
U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA & Chi_Region.

Figure 2. Regions and community areas of Chicago.[16]



Regions and Community Areas

North Central
1 Rogers Park
2 West Ridge
3 Uptown
4 Lincoln Square
5 North Center
6 Lake View
7 Lincoln Park
8 Near North Side
9 Loop
10 Near South Side
11 Edgewater

Northwest
12 Edison Park
13 Norwood Park
14 Jefferson Park
15 Forest Glen
16 North Park
17 Albany Park
18 Portage Park
19 Irving Park
20 Dunning
21 Avondale
22 Logan Square
23 Ohare

South
24 Douglas
25 Oakland
26 Fuller Park
27 Grand Boulevard
28 Kenwood
29 Washington Park
30 Hyde Park
31 Woodlawn
32 South Shore
33 Chatham
34 Avalon Park
35 South Chicago
36 Burnside
37 Calumet Heights
38 Roseland
39 Pullman
40 South Deering
41 East Side
42 West Pullman
43 Riverdale
44 Hegewisch
45 Chicago Lawn
46 West Englewood
47 Englewood
48 Greater Grand Crossing

Southwest
49 South Lawndale
50 Lower West Side
51 Armour Square
52 Garfield Ridge
53 Archer Heights
54 Brighton Park
55 Mckinley Park
56 Bridgeport
57 New City
58 West Elsdon
59 Gage Park
60 Clearing
61 West Lawn
62 Ashburn
63 Auburn Gresham
64 Beverly
65 Washington Heights
66 Mount Greenwood
67 Morgan Park

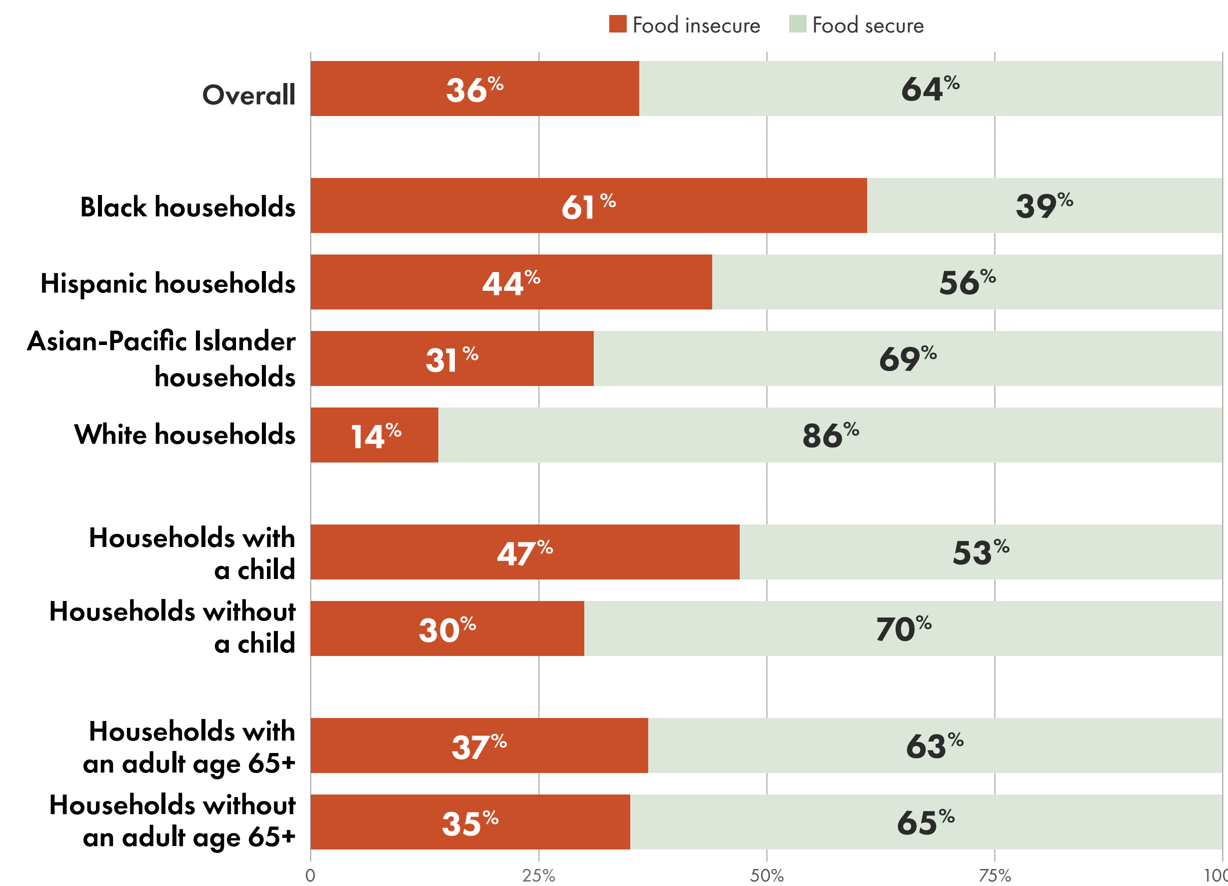
West
68 Montclare
69 Belmont Cragin
70 Hermosa
71 Humboldt Park
72 West Town
73 Austin
74 West Garfield Park
75 East Garfield Park
76 Near West Side
77 North Lawndale

Demographics

Examining the household composition, ages, race and ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics of our neighbors facing food insecurity clearly indicate hunger is not evenly distributed.

- **Black and Hispanic households:** 61% of Black households and 44% of Hispanic households are food insecure compared to 14% of White households. Nearly a third of Asian-Pacific Islander households are food insecure. While this survey does not break down race and ethnicity further, we know from national studies that Indigenous populations and some multiracial households, for example, also face much higher rates of food insecurity than average.[17]
- **Households with children:** 47% are food insecure, compared to 30% of households with no children.

Figure 3. Food insecurity by population type.



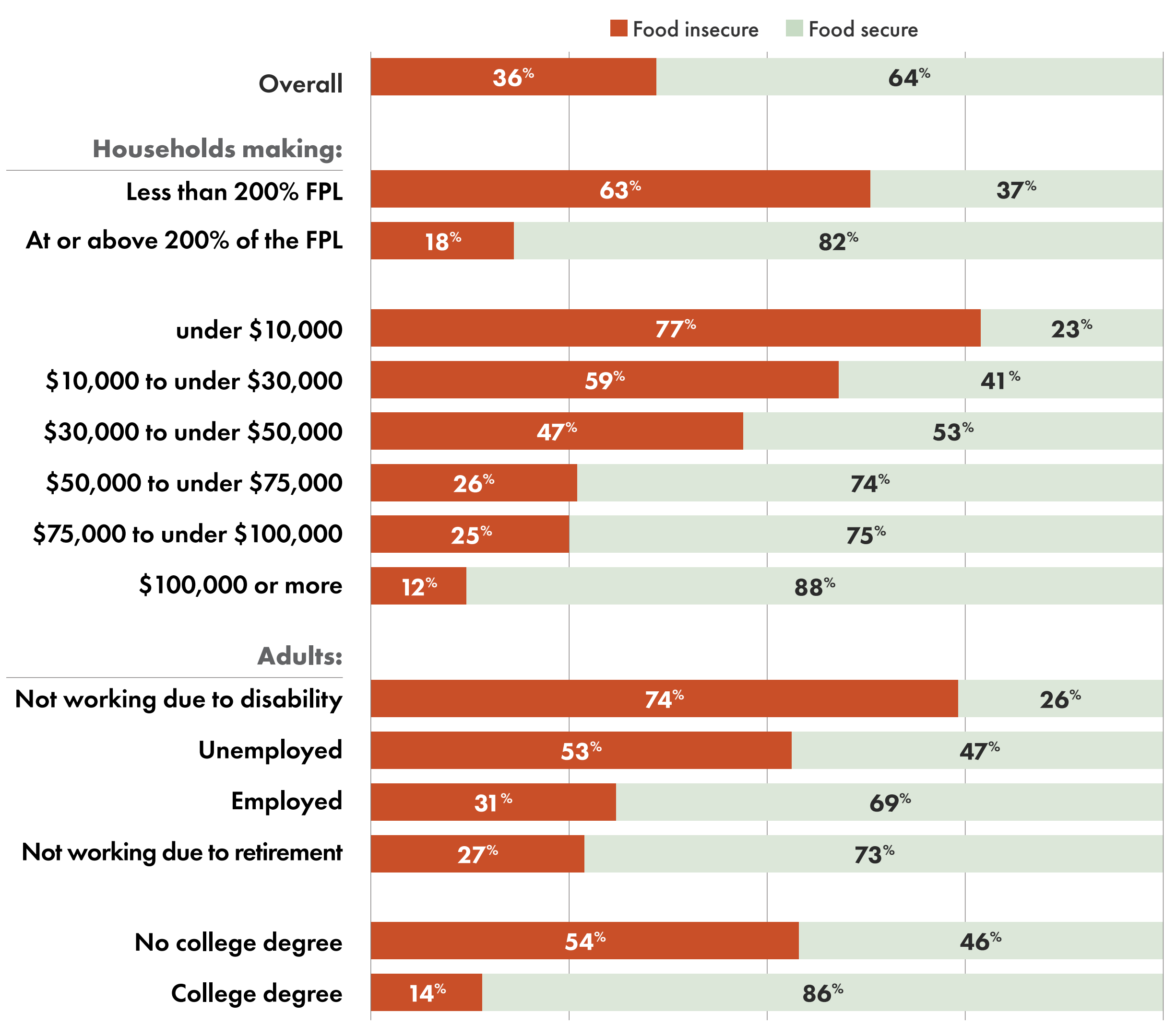
U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA, GCFD_D10, and ChicagoSpeaks question RACEETHNICITY.

Income and Employment Status

Understanding the financial circumstances and limitations facing neighbors that are more likely to be food insecure helps us direct our advocacy for policy changes that increase opportunities for economic stability.

- **Households with income below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL):** 63% are food insecure, compared to 18% of households above this income threshold. The cost of living is higher than 200% FPL for all household sizes in Cook County.[18] In 2026, 200% of the FPL for a household of one is $31,920 and $66,000 for a household of four.[19]
- **Adults not working due to disability:** 74% are living in food insecure households.
- **Adults not working due to furlough, temporary layoff from a job, or looking for work:** 53% are food insecure compared to 31% of employed adults.
- **Adults without a college degree:** 54% are living in food insecure households compared to 14% of adults with a college degree.

Figure 4. Food insecurity by income and employment status.



U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA, GCFD_EMPLOY1, and ChicagoSpeaks question INCOME & EDUCATION.

NEIGHBOR STORIES

Mike Krystyn

Temporary Support During Hardship

For Mike Krystyn, 64, losing his job during COVID triggered a series of events that severely impacted the Rogers Park resident's quality of life. At first, unemployment and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits helped him afford the basics while he looked for a new job.

Earlier this year, Krystyn was among the 100,000 Illinois residents who lost their SNAP benefits due to new work requirements.

> **"I have been struggling financially since COVID. SNAP had been one thing that had kept me on my feet."**

The loss of his benefits felt traumatic. At the same time, he learned he needed to find somewhere else to live, compounding his financial challenges.

Today, Krystyn is staying with a local family while he searches for permanent housing. The temporary arrangement enables him to keep his part-time job at his neighborhood health center. However, finding a new affordable home won't be easy – losing his SNAP benefits means that money he used to spend on rent now must go toward food, limiting his budget for rent.

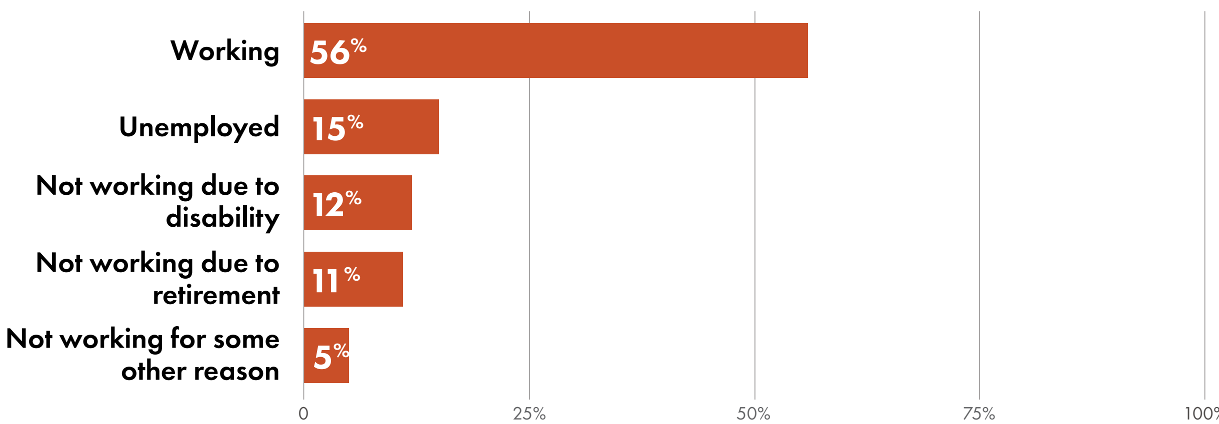
Krystyn remains grateful for his social security benefits which, combined with his income, have helped stabilize his finances. And when resources are thin, he visits his local food pantry.

But his goal is to become self-sufficient once again, without relying on SNAP or other support to get by. Until then, Krystyn lives with the anxiety of knowing that he is one unexpected job loss or housing change away from losing the financial stability he is working so hard to rebuild.

Economic Drivers of Food Insecurity

While adults who are unemployed or otherwise not working are more likely to live in a household experiencing food insecurity, most adults living in food insecure households are working (56%). Another 12% are not working due to disability and 11% are not working due to retirement, yet they are not able to make ends meet. Only 15% are unemployed temporarily or unemployed and looking for work.[20]

Figure 5. More than half of those who are food insecure are currently working.



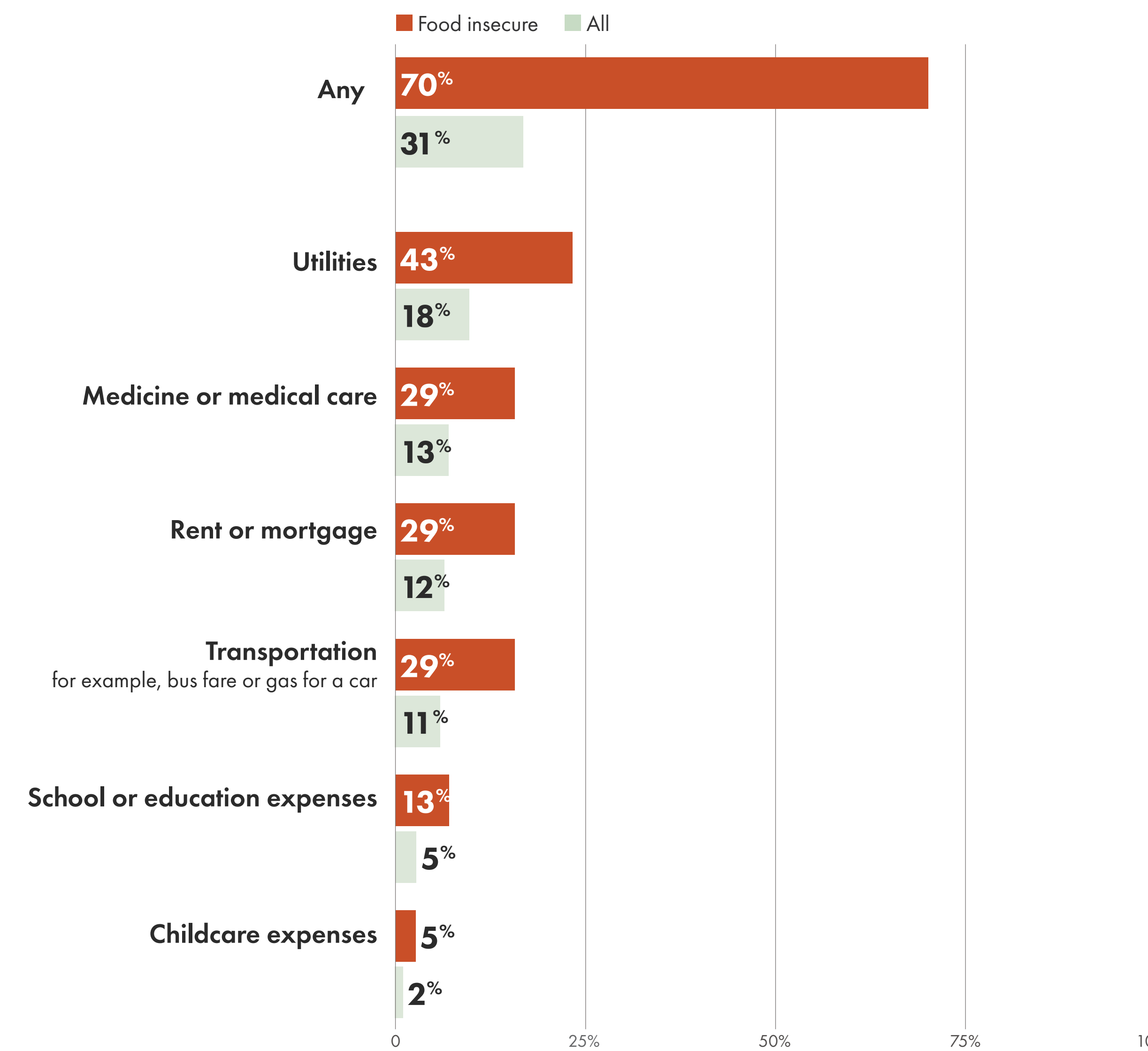
U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA & GCFD_EMPLOY1.

However, the high cost of living, insufficient incomes and wages, and rising prices for necessities like food, rent, utilities, and healthcare are putting immense economic pressure on Cook County residents.

- **According to the latest United Way United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Report, 40% of Cook County households could not afford the cost of living here in 2024.**[21] This study uses household income captured in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey and local estimates of basic household costs from a range of publicly available data sources, including housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology, and taxes, to estimate the gap between household income and what families need to make ends meet.
- **As of June 2026, food prices have increased 22% and rent has increased 31% since June 2021 in the Chicago Metropolitan Area.** The volatility of gas prices also increases financial instability. For example, the price of gasoline increased 44% between January and July 2026, swinging between monthly changes of a 26% increase to a 13% decrease.[22]
- **The minimum wage is far from a livable wage.** In Cook County, as of July 2026, the minimum wage for non-tipped employees is $15.40 per hour and $17.05 per hour in Chicago for employers with four or more employees.
    - This is $10.04 and $8.39 per hour below the living wage for one adult with no children living in Cook County, based on the 2026 MIT Living Wage Calculator.[23]

This lack of affordability and consistency requires stressful tradeoff decisions between purchasing food and paying for utilities, medicine or medical care, housing, and transportation. In fact, based on this report's survey, 31% of Chicagoans overall and 70% of food insecure households have had to delay, reduce, or skip payments on at least one household necessity in the past month to afford food.

Figure 6. Chicagoans are delaying or skipping payments to afford food.



U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA & GCFD_Q7.

FOOD STABILITY CONTINUUM

The Food Stability Continuum

To better understand food insecurity in Chicago, we can place households along a Food Stability Continuum based on their level of food security and whether they receive food assistance. The continuum identifies four points of food stability, ranging from food insecurity without assistance to food security without the need for assistance. This framework helps us better understand the experiences of our neighbors facing food insecurity, the role of food assistance in stabilizing households, and where systems and policies can better support progress toward food security.

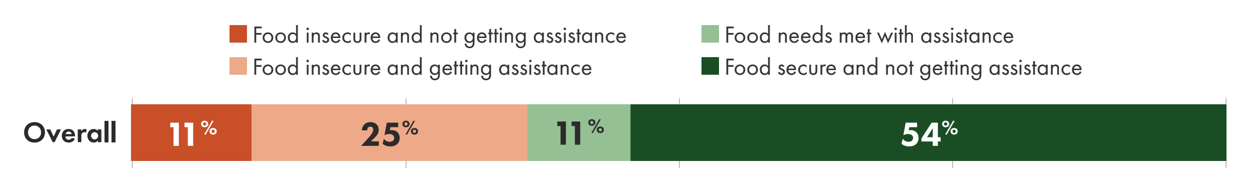
First developed in 2024 by Second Harvest Heartland through its Make Hunger History initiative, the continuum recognizes that households experience different points of food stability and may move between them as policies change and circumstances evolve. It also frames how food assistance can help stabilize struggling households on their pathway to food security, but movement to point 4 cannot be done through food assistance alone.[24]

Progress toward greater food stability is driven by factors such as higher incomes, lower living costs, improved access to assistance, and positive program experiences.

Conversely, economic shocks, reduced eligibility for assistance programs like SNAP, and economic shifts that decrease affordability or incomes disrupt progress and cause a backward slide on the continuum. However, access to multiple forms of support can prevent a temporary crisis from becoming a long-term instability.

In Chicago, 11% of adults live in households that are food insecure without assistance, 25% live in households that are food insecure with assistance, 11% live in households where their food needs are met with assistance, and 54% live in households that are food secure without assistance.

Figure 7. Percent of Chicagoans by food security and assistance status of household.



U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA & GCFD_SNAP1, GCFD_BUDGETA OR GCFD_BUDGETB.

The following pages describe the characteristics of households at each point along the Food Stability Continuum, based on this survey.

By better understanding the populations at each point, we can work with elected officials, partners, decision-makers, staff, and neighbors, to build and strengthen policies and programs that help more Chicagoans experience long-term stability and food security without assistance.

NEIGHBOR STORIES

Natalie Morehead

Support During Persistent Financial Strain

Natalie Morehead, 40, lives with her three children – ages 21, 13, and 5 – in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood. She works in a medical office and is the sole earner for her household of four. She's also the primary caregiver for her oldest son, who is living with Down syndrome and a congenital heart defect.

Morehead wants to support her family without assistance but caring for her children limits the number of hours she can work. Additionally, her work schedule was recently cut to one day a week due to staffing reductions.

> **"When you have multiple kids, and you're not making enough income, you struggle. You're sitting in the doctor's office getting a list of nutritional foods your kids should be eating, and then looking at your bank account knowing it's just not possible."**

Morehead relies on her Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and visits to her local food pantry to keep her children fed. She also volunteers at the food pantry and has become an advocate for others struggling to afford food.

Earlier this year, despite submitting required paperwork on time, her SNAP benefits were cut off suddenly for four months without warning. "It was so hard. I had to decide if I was going to pay bills, get gas in the car, or buy food," she said, adding that it took many months to recover from the lost support.

When Morehead's SNAP benefits were finally restored, they were nearly $250 a month lower than before. She's still working to understand why her benefit was reduced and if she can return to her previous level of support. The loss has made it even harder for her to maintain financial stability for her family.

Household Characteristics by Continuum Point

1 FOOD INSECURE AND NOT RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE

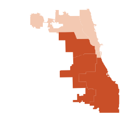
~128,000 households (11%) in Chicago are at Point 1 of the Food Stability Continuum.[25]

INCOME

50%

have income below 200% of the federal poverty level. Average income ~ $70K per year.

GEOGRAPHY



Those at Point 1 are spread out across the City of Chicago, with slightly higher prevalence on the West and Southwest sides within the City of Chicago.

EMPLOYMENT

80%

are employed, 12% are unemployed temporarily and/or looking for work, 6% are not working due to retirement, 2% are not working due to disability.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

0%

of households at this point receive SNAP or private/charitable food assistance.

CHILDREN

40%

have children in the household.

TRADEOFFS

59%

have had to delay, skip, or reduce payments for at least one other essential need to afford food in the last 30 days.

2 FOOD INSECURE AND RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE

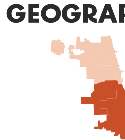
~289,000 households (25%) in Chicago are at Point 2 of the Food Stability Continuum.

INCOME

78%

have income below 200% of the federal poverty level. Average income $32.5K per year.

GEOGRAPHY



Those at Point 2 are spread out across the City of Chicago, with higher prevalence on the South or Southwest sides within the City of Chicago.

EMPLOYMENT

46%

are employed, 16% are unemployed temporarily and/or looking for work, 16% are not working due to disability, 14% are not working due to retirement.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

100%

receive either SNAP (74%), private/charitable food assistance (73%), or both.

CHILDREN

42%

have children in the household.

TRADEOFFS

75%

have had to delay, skip, or reduce payments for at least one other essential need to afford food in the last 30 days.

3 FOOD NEEDS MET WITH ASSISTANCE

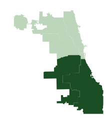
~124,000 households (11%) in Chicago are at Point 3 of the Food Stability Continuum.

INCOME

67%

have income below 200% of the federal poverty level. Average income $50K per year.

GEOGRAPHY



Those at Point 3 are spread out across the City of Chicago, with higher prevalence on the South or Southwest sides within the City of Chicago.

EMPLOYMENT

48%

are employed, 21% are unemployed temporarily and/or looking for work, 19% are not working due to retirement, 9% are not working due to disability.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

100%

receive either SNAP (60%), private/charitable food assistance (58%), or both.

CHILDREN

39%

have children in the household.

TRADEOFFS

23%

have had to delay, skip, or reduce payments for at least one other essential need to afford food in the last 30 days.

4 FOOD SECURE AND NOT RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE

~631,000 households (54%) in Chicago are at Point 4 of the Food Stability Continuum.

INCOME

14%

have income below 200% of the federal poverty level. Average income $107K per year.

GEOGRAPHY

Those at Point 4 are spread out across the City of Chicago, with higher prevalence on the North Central region within the City of Chicago.

EMPLOYMENT

75%

are employed, 5% are unemployed temporarily and/or looking for work, 17% are not working due to retirement, 1% are not working due to disability.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

0%

of households at this point receive SNAP or private/charitable food assistance.

CHILDREN

23%

have children in the household.

TRADEOFFS

6%

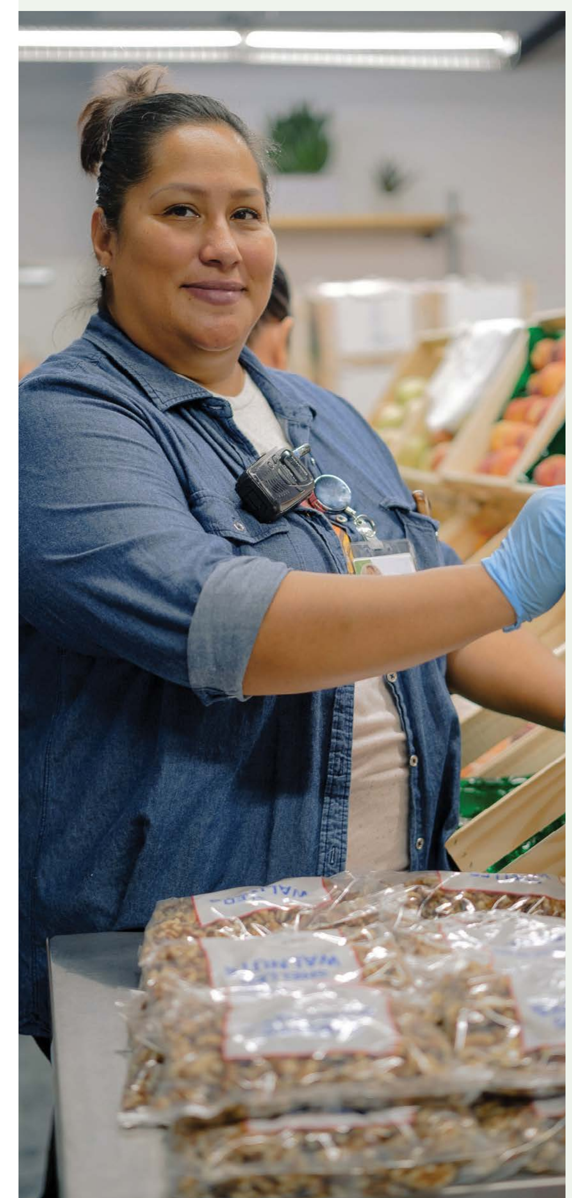
have had to delay, skip, or reduce payments for at least one other essential need to afford food in the last 30 days.

Importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for Households Facing Food Insecurity

SNAP, also known as food stamps, EBT, or the Link Card, is our nation's largest and most effective anti-hunger program. Research shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity, improves health outcomes, lowers health care costs, and strengthens local economies, particularly during economic downturns.[26] SNAP benefits are spent at local grocery stores, supporting jobs and businesses throughout the food supply chain while helping households free up limited income for other basic needs.[27] In 2025, SNAP generated $6.6 billion in economic activity in Illinois alone.[28]

In this report's survey of Chicago adults, 52% of food insecure households and 10% of food secure households receive SNAP benefits. These findings demonstrate SNAP's critical role in helping families attain the stability of food security, while also highlighting the significant need that remains.

PARTNER VOICES



Verenice Martinez

Meeting Rising Needs

Verenice Martinez, the director of food distribution services for New Life Centers, is proud of what a vital resource Pan de Vida Fresh Market Midway has become to her community in just three years. The pantry started with distributions of pre-packaged food boxes during the COVID pandemic and now offers a full market of groceries to 300 guests each week in Chicago's Archer Heights neighborhood.

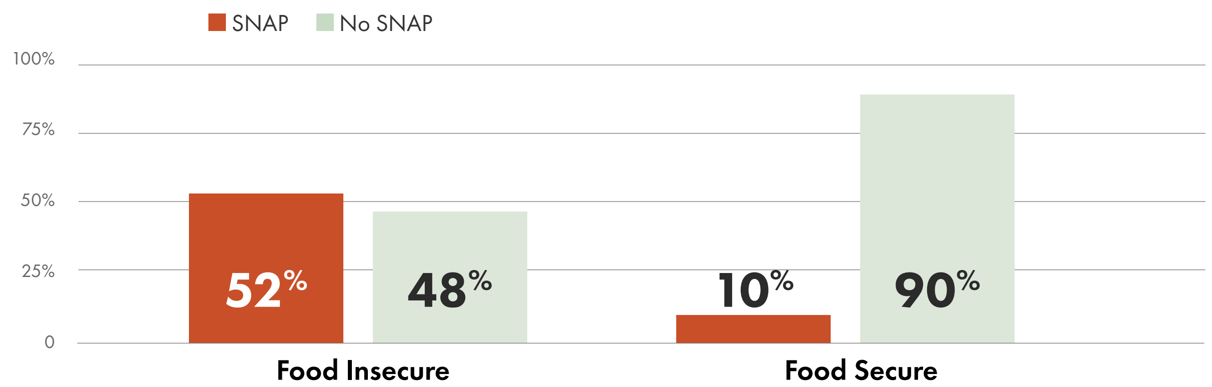
The pantry works to build relationships with their guests and connect them to other critical resources that help to build long-term financial stability – from housewares to legal assistance.

> **"Everything starts with food. People come looking for food and we're able to connect them to wraparound services that help serve the whole person."**

In recent months, the number of guests the pantry serves has risen, largely due to cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other vital resources. Martinez says they're serving more people who work full-time. "We see a lot of uniforms – construction, CTA workers, nurses – in our line," she said.

"No one's immune to needing help. Most of us are just one paycheck away from being in the pantry line," Martinez said, adding that recent flooding in her family's basement put them in a financial bind as well. "We try to get the word out that we're here and that nobody should suffer alone."

Figure 8. SNAP participation & food insecurity status among Chicago households.



U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA & GCFD_SNAP1.

Despite SNAP's ability to reach households struggling to meet their food needs and the alarmingly high level of economic and food hardship faced by our neighbors, SNAP enrollment in Cook County decreased 23% between July 2025 and July 2026. Almost 196,000 fewer Cook County residents, representing more than 117,000 households, receive benefits compared to a year ago.[29]

Figure 9. SNAP enrollment among Cook County residents from 2025 through July 2026[29]

At the same time, the federal budget reconciliation law, H.R.1, enacted in July 2025, cuts SNAP by $186 billion over ten years, reducing access to critical supports that help families reach food security.[30]

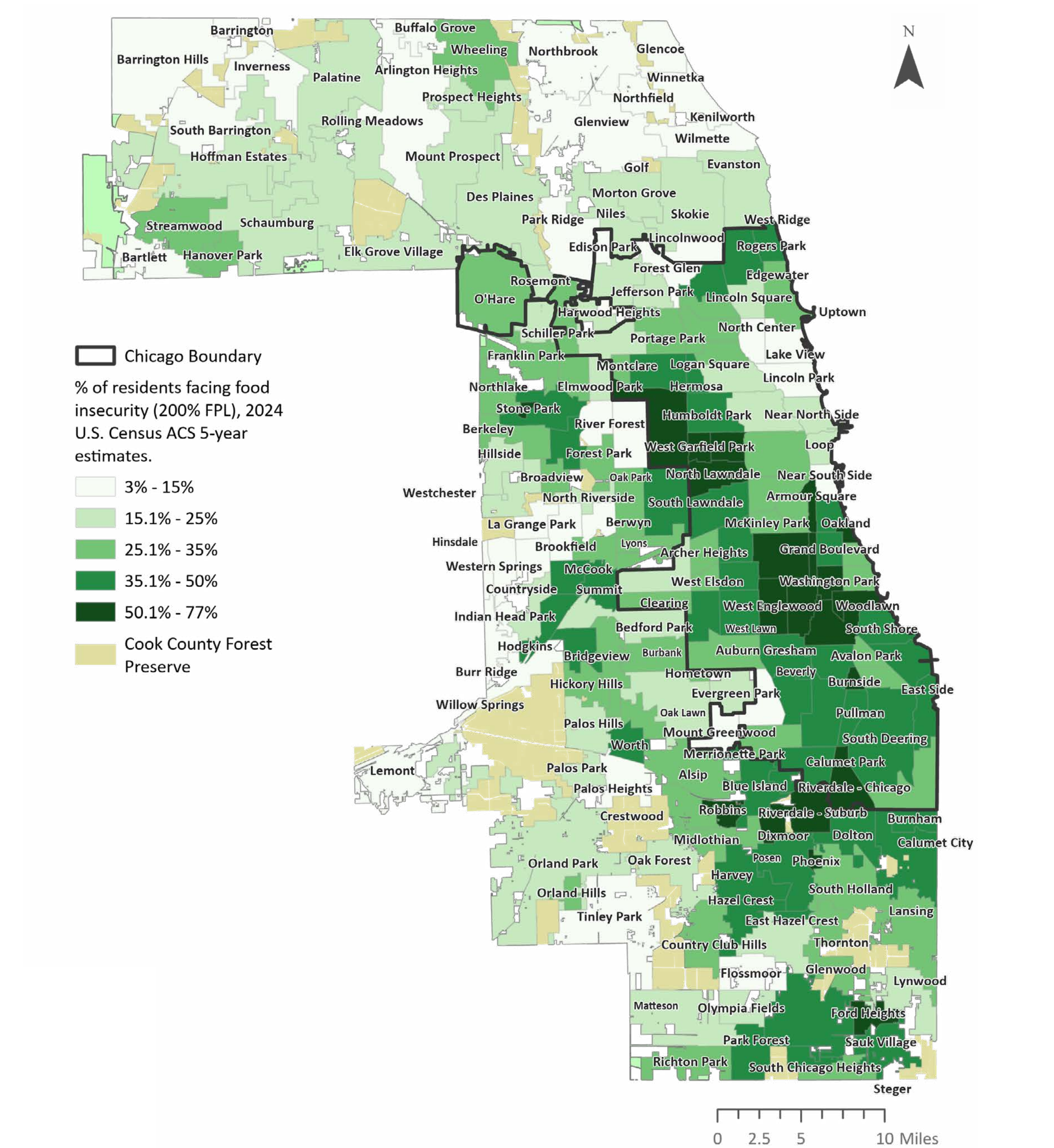
We urge all our elected officials and community partners to protect access to this vital program.

While the Greater Chicago Food Depository network will continue working to ensure food is available to anyone who needs it, private and charitable food assistance cannot match the scale, reach, or long-term impact of SNAP in Cook County.

Households Likely Facing Food Insecurity Across Cook County Based on Income, 2020-2024

Since the survey featured in this report is only representative of the City of Chicago and the Food Depository's service area includes suburban Cook County, for now we estimate levels of food insecurity across our service area of Cook County community areas using household income of twice the federal poverty level. We use this metric because households living below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are more than three times as likely to be food insecure than households who fall above 200% of the FPL, and 200% of the FPL is below the cost of living for all household sizes in Cook County.[31] In 2026, 200% of the FPL for a household of one is $31,920 and $66,000 for a household of four.

Figure 10. Percent of Cook County residents facing food insecurity based on income, 2020-2024.[32]



The most recent data available on households with incomes below this threshold reflects 2024, however, so insights into food insecurity in suburban Cook County are two years before this report's Chicago survey results from June 2026.

In 2024, over 1.4 million Cook County residents (28%) lived in households with income below 200% of the FPL. As shown on the previous map, the percent of residents facing food insecurity by community area based on income ranged from 3% to 77% in Cook County, with communities on the West and South Sides of Chicago and the South Suburbs most impacted.[33]

Mission and Vision of the Greater Chicago Food Depository

The Greater Chicago Food Depository's mission is to end hunger. To achieve that mission and help every neighbor reach permanent food security, we work in partnership with a network of community-based organizations and individuals. Together, we connect our neighbors with healthy food, lift our voices, and advance solutions that address the root causes of hunger – poverty, systemic inequity, and structural racism. Together, we are greater. Together, we can end hunger.

By 2030, we envision a future where every person in every neighborhood has reliable, dignified access to three meals a day. We believe that food is a human right and that hunger is a problem we can solve.

Our path forward is clear. We will do this by:

ENSURING
emergency food access for everyone who needs it

IMPROVING
participation in safety net programs

ADVOCATING
for policy and systems change

IMPROVING
access to thriving wages and economic opportunity

INVESTING
in our people and infrastructure

THREE MEALS EVERY DAY EVERY NEIGHBOR

Learn more and join us at chicagosfoodbank.org

ADDENDUMS

Methodology

Food Insecurity Measurement

For purposes of this study, food insecurity is defined using the USDA's U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form, a validated and reliable measure of food insecurity adapted from the 18-item U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module for use when the longer version cannot be implemented. The series was modified from the 12-month reference period to a 30-day reference period to capture more recent experiences with food security.

The USDA's Six-Item Short Form questions and scoring criteria were used to assign a score and create a food security status for each respondent as follows:

- Raw score of 0-1—High or marginal food security
- Raw score of 2-4—Low food security
- Raw score of 5-6—Very low food security

Households with a food score indicating low or very low food security are classified as food insecure, and those with marginal or high food security are classified as food secure.

Table 2. **Food security status in Chicago.**

	Food security status	Number of affirmatives	Percent overall[34]
Food Secure	High or Marginal	0	56%
		1	9%
Food Insecure	Low	2	8%
		3	4%
		4	5%
	Very Low	5	4%
		6	15%

U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module: Six-Item Short Form Economic Research Service, USDA.

NORC Survey Methods

This survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago with funding from the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Staff from the Greater Chicago Food Depository and NORC collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Funded and operated by NORC, ChicagoSpeaks™ is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the Chicago household population. NORC conducted the ChicagoSpeaks spring 2026 survey using two sample sources: (1) NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panelists who reside in Chicago and (2) NORC's ChicagoSpeaks Panelists.

AmeriSpeak and ChicagoSpeaks are probability-based panels. The final survey estimates were calibrated to account for these different sample sources. This research was done to support a scientifically rigorous, community-driven research resource for informing policymakers and the public with accurate information about the experiences and opinions of all Chicago residents.

The online survey was conducted between June 15-23, 2026, with Chicago residents aged 18 and older, the overall study target population. Overall, 1,194 Chicago residents completed the survey. AmeriSpeak panelists were invited through the password-protected AmeriSpeak Mobile App and received email reminders and SMS reminders. ChicagoSpeaks panelists received a combination of email and SMS communications. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference, using an online survey. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured errors in this or any other survey.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 25 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them or for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included Chicago region, age, sex, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. The sociodemographic characteristics are weighted to benchmarks from the American Community Survey 2024 1-year estimates.

For more information, email info@norc.org.

NORC Survey Questions (available in English and Spanish)

GCFD_EMPLOY1: Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

Response options:
1. Working – as a paid employee at one job
2. Working – as a paid employee at more than one job
3. Working – self employed
4. Not working – on furlough or temporary layoff from a job
5. Not working – looking for work
6. Not working – retired
7. Not working – disabled
8. Not working – other

GCFD_D10: We'd like to know a little about your household.

Of all the people who live in your household at least 50 percent of the time, including yourself,...

Grid items:

A. How many are 17 years of age or younger?
B. How many are ages 18 to 64?
C. How many are 65 years of age or older?

GCFD_HESS1_LEAD: The next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 30 days, and whether you were able to buy the food you needed. Please read the statement and answer to the best of your knowledge how often these statements have been true for your household.

"The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more."

Was that often, sometimes, or never true for your household in the past 30 days?

Response options:
1. Often true
2. Sometimes true
3. Never true

GCFD_HH4: *"We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."*

Was that often, sometimes, or never true for your household in the past 30 days?

Response options:
1. Often true
2. Sometimes true
3. Never true

GCFD_AD1: In the last 30 days, did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Response options:
1. Yes
2. No

GCFD_AD1A: In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?

GCFD_AD2: In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

Response options:
1. Yes
2. No

GCFD_AD3: In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

Response options:
1. Yes
2. No

GCFD_BUDGET: In the last 30 days, did you or anyone in your household ever get any of the following?

Grid items:

A. Free groceries or meals from a food pantry, shelter, religious organization, health care or housing agency, or other place that helps with free food or meals.
B. Free home-delivered meals from a service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free home meal delivery.
C. Free groceries or meals from friends, neighbors, or family members outside of your household.

Response options:
1. Yes
2. No

GCFD_SNAP1: Are you or anyone in your household currently enrolled to receive any SNAP or food stamp benefits, also referred to as EBT or the Link Card?

Response options:

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't Know

Q: GCFD_SNAP2: In the last 30 days, did you/ you or anyone in your household experience a change in SNAP or food stamp benefits, also referred to as EBT or the Link Card?

Response options:

1. Yes, I/I or someone in my household didn't receive any SNAP benefits
2. Yes, I/I or someone in my household received full SNAP benefits, but they were delayed
3. Yes, I/I or someone in my household only received partial SNAP benefits
4. Yes, I/I or someone in my household is no longer enrolled to receive SNAP benefits
5. No, neither I nor anyone in my household experienced any change in SNAP benefits
6. Don't Know

GCFD_Q7: In the last 30 days, have you or anyone in your household delayed, reduced, or skipped payment for any of the following in order to afford food?
Please select all that apply.

Response options:

1. Medicine or medical care
2. Utilities
3. Rent or mortgage
4. Transportation (for example, bus fare or gas for a car)
5. Childcare expenses

Endnotes:

[1] According to the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, food insecurity has been increasing since 2021. Rabbitt, Matthew P. et al. Household Food Security in the United States in 2024. USDA ERS. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics. The increase in food assistance is based on the Greater Chicago Food Depository's levels of service since 2018. The increase in cost of living is based on the increases in basic needs prices in the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index, the increased cost of living described in the 2026 United Way United For ALICE Report (compared to previous years), and the 2026 MIT Living Wage Calculator (compared to previous years).

[2] Coffey, Amelia, and Heather Hahn. SNAP Cuts in One Big Beautiful Bill Act Leave Almost 3 Million Young Adults Vulnerable to Losing Nutrition Assistance. Urban Institute. August 6, 2025.

[3] The survey measures the share of adults living in food insecure households in the city of Chicago. Since it is a person-level survey of a household measurement (food security), the responses are weighted at the person rather than household level. For this reason, calculations and counts at the household level are estimated based on available information (e.g., the number of Chicago households based on the U.S. Census American Community Survey). Throughout this report, references to food secure and food insecure households refers to the proportion of adults living in food secure or food insecure households and should not be interpreted as measures of individual-level food security. References to Chicago adults or Chicago households are used interchangeably.

[4] The Chicago survey was conducted June 15-23, 2026, using ChicagoSpeaks™, a probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago designed to be representative of the Chicago household population. Online surveys were conducted with 1,194 adults. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

[5] The rate of food insecurity based on this survey (36%) multiplied by the number of households in Chicago according to the 2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey 1-year estimates - 1,172,455 (the most recent available), Table S1101.

[6] For purposes of this study, unemployed is defined as those who are not working, either because they are on furlough or temporary layoff from a job or that they are looking for work. Those who are not working due to retirement, disability, or some other reason are coded in a separate category.

[7] Second Harvest Heartland, a food bank operating in Minnesota and western Wisconsin, developed the food stability continuum framework, now named their Food Security Scale, as part of their Make Hunger History initiative in 2024. For more information, visit: https://www.2harvest.org/

[8] United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Food Security in the U.S. - Definitions of Food Security. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security

[9] Odoms-Young, Angela et al. Food Insecurity, Neighborhood Food Environment, and Health Disparities: State of the Science, Research Gaps and Opportunities. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Dec 2023. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10972712/
Berkowitz SA, Seligman HK, Meigs JB, Basu S. Food insecurity, healthcare utilization, and high cost: a longitudinal cohort study. Am J Manag Care. Sept 2018. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6426124/
Gallegos D, Eivers A, Sondergeld P, Pattinson C. Food Insecurity and Child Development: A State-of-the-Art Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. Aug 2021. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8431639/
Gregory C, and Reed-Jones, M. Predicted prevalence of five chronic diseases increased as household food security worsened. U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. 2024 Aug 1. https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/108211
Ziliak JP, Gundersen C. The Health Consequences of Senior Hunger in the United States: Evidence from the 1999–2014 NHANES. Report submitted to Feeding America; 2017. https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/senior-hunger-research/senior-health-consequences-2014.pdf

[10] Ibid. Waxman, Elaine. How coping with food insecurity can lead to further instability. Urban Institute, Dec 2016. https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-coping-food-insecurity-can-lead-further-instability

[11] Affirmative responses to these six questions include reporting that (1) it was often or sometimes true that the food the household bought did not last, and the household did not have money to get more; (2) it was often or sometimes true that the household could not afford to eat balanced meals; (3) adults in the household ever cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food; (4) meals were cut or skipped 3 days or more; (5) the respondent ate less than they felt they should because there was not enough money for food; and (6) the respondent was ever hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food. For more information, visit: https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/6426/six-item-short-form-food-security-survey-module.pdf

[12] The rate of food insecurity based on this survey (36%) multiplied by the number of households in Chicago according to the 2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey 1-year estimates - 1,172,455 (the most recent available), Table S1101.

[13] United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Food Security in the U.S. – Definitions of Food Security. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security

[14] The percentages presented in the chart may not match the combined percentages in the text due to rounding.

[15] Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Regional plan recommendation: invest in disinvested areas. https://cmap.illinois.gov/regional-plan/goals/recommendation/disinvested-areas/
The Chicago Community Trust: Color of Wealth in Chicago: Assets, Debts, and Net Worth in the Chicago Metro Area. June 2024. https://www.cct.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Brief_Color-of-Wealth-in-Chicago-2024.pdf Moore, Natalie. The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation. St. Martin's Press. 2016. Shame of Chicago, Shame of the Nation. Documentary series. https://shameofchicagodoc.org/about-shame-of-chicago-shame-of-the-nation/

[16] Regions and community areas of Chicago used in the ChicagoSpeaks panel survey.

[17] Hales, Laura. Food insecurity in U.S. households varies across race and ethnicity. USDA Economic Research Service. April 8, 2024. https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/108925
Food Research & Action Center. Issue brief: High rates of food insecurity are hiding among Asian Pacific American Populations, May 2020. https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/issue-brief-apa-2020.pdf

[18] Greater Chicago Food Depository Research and Evaluation Team analysis comparing 200% FPL income amounts at all household sizes compared to the 2026 MIT Living Wage Calculator and 2026 United Way United for ALICE budgets by household composition.
2026 MIT Living Wage Calculator for Cook County. https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/17031
2026 United Way United for ALICE Report for Illinois and Cook County, reflecting 2024 data. https://www.unitedforalice.org/introducing-ALICE/illinois

[19] We derived the federal poverty level (FPL) using the 2026 poverty guidelines for the contiguous United States published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The ChicagoSpeaks™ panel collects household income using an 18-category scale, with income ranges increasing in increments of $5,000 to $25,000. The lowest category is less than $5,000, and the highest is $200,000 or more. To classify respondents relative to the FPL, we mapped income categories and household size, collected in the survey, to the 200% FPL threshold. Because income was collected in categories rather than as exact dollar amounts, respondents were classified as having household incomes at or above 200% of FPL if the applicable threshold fell anywhere within their reported income category.

[20] For purposes of this study, unemployed is defined as those who are not working, either because they are on furlough or temporary layoff from a job or that they are looking for work. Those who are not working due to retirement, disability, or some other reason are coded in a separate category.

[21] 2026 United Way United for ALICE Report for Illinois and Cook County, reflecting 2024 data. **https://www.unitedforalice.org/introducing-ALICE/illinois**

[22] Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index for Chicago Metropolitan Area. **https://www.bls.gov/cpi/data.htm**

[23] 2026 MIT Living Wage Calculator for Cook County. **https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/17031**

[24] Our methodology for calculating receipt of food assistance is slightly different than other food banks and Feeding America's methodology. For example, Feeding America includes participating in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, and the Summer Food Service Program among the public assistance captured, while our survey only captures SNAP participation. Moreover, the wording of our local community food assistance question asks "In the last 30 days, did you or anyone in your household ever get any of the following? Free groceries or meals from a food pantry, shelter, religious organization, health care or housing agency, or other place that helps with free food or meals? Or Free home-delivered meals from a service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free home meal delivery?", while Feeding America's template asks "During the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household gotten free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?" and "During the past 12 months, have you or anyone in your household received a free meal from a church, shelter, home-delivered meal service like Meals on Wheels, or other place that helps with free meals?"

[25] We estimated the number of households in each point by multiplying the percent of adults by the total number of adults in Chicago, based on 2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey 1-year estimates (2,215,568 adults).

[26] Gundersen, Craig. SNAP: The Most Important Component of Our Efforts to End Food Insecurity in the United States | AJPH | Vol. 112 Issue 10 American Journal of Public Health, October 2022. **https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2022.307058**
Carlson, Steven and Joseph Llobrera. SNAP Is Linked With Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Dec 14, 2022. **https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs**

[27] Canning, Patrick, and Brian Stacy. USDA Economic Research Service. **Quantifying the Impact of SNAP Benefits on the U.S. Economy and Jobs** | Economic Research Service, July 2019.

[28] U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service/Administration (FNS/FNA) public website on SNAP participation and average benefit amount in Illinois, CY2025: **https://www.fna.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap**. Assumes an economic multiplier of 1.5 per USDA ERA study authored by Canning and Stacy above.

[29] Illinois Department of Human Services public website on SNAP Data, accessed 8.26.2026. **https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=56952**

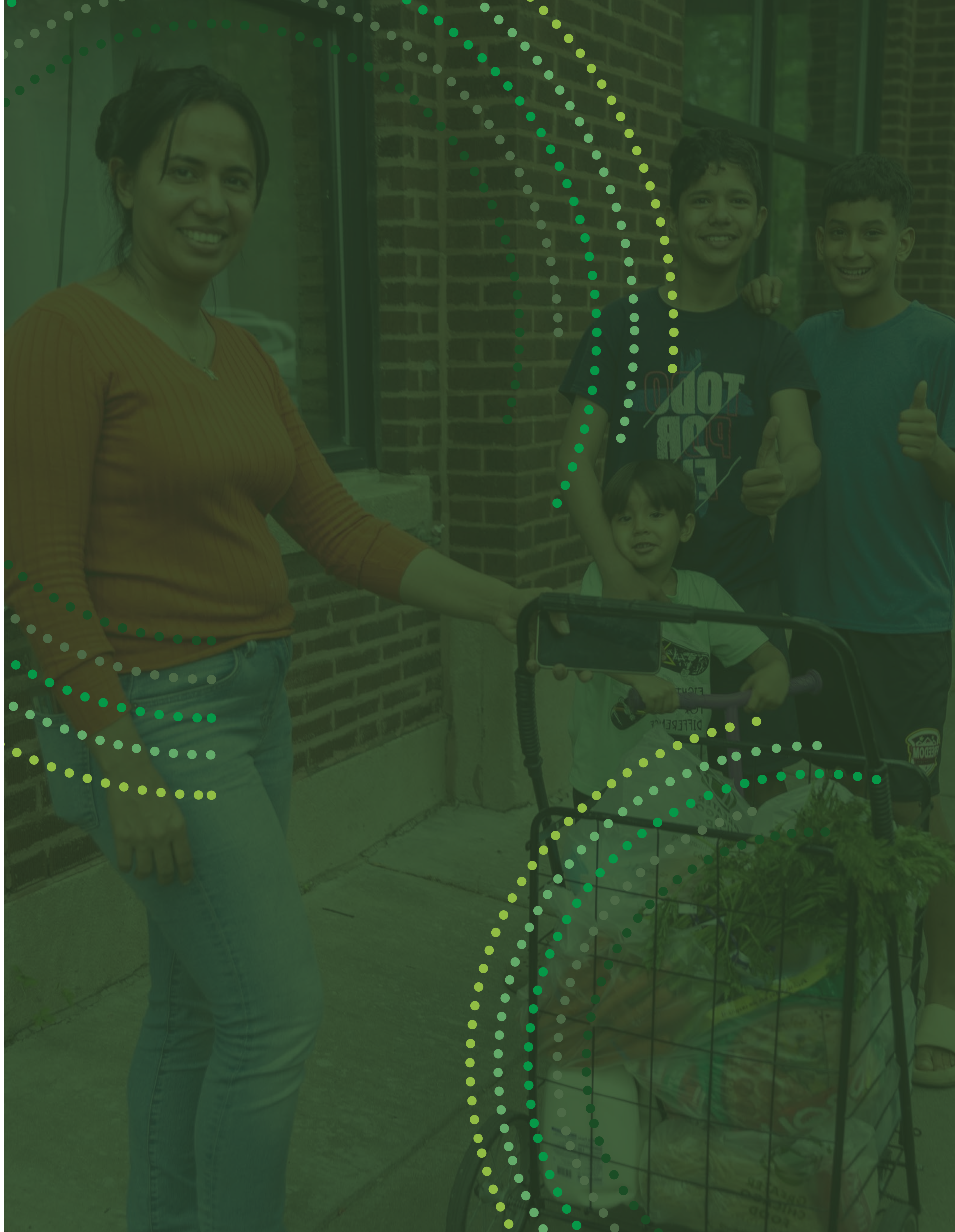
[30] Coffey, Amelia, and Heather Hahn. **SNAP Cuts in One Big Beautiful Bill Act Leave Almost 3 Million Young Adults Vulnerable to Losing Nutrition Assistance**. Urban Institute. August 6, 2025.

[31] Hales, Laura. Food insecurity in U.S. households varies across race and ethnicity. USDA Economic Research Service. April 8, 2024. **https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/108925**
Food Research & Action Center. Issue brief: High rates of food insecurity are hiding among Asian Pacific American Populations, May 2020. **https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/issue-brief-apa-2020.pdf**

[32] Greater Chicago Food Depository analysis and mapping of percent of residents living in households below 200% of the federal poverty level by census tract and census place. 2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

[33] 2020-2024 U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Our proxy data source for likelihood of facing food insecurity locally is the U.S. Census Bureau reports of individuals living in households with incomes below twice the federal poverty level, which in 2026 is $31,920 for a household of one and $66,000 for a household of four. This income threshold is below the cost of living in Cook County according to both the MIT Living Wage Calculator and the United for ALICE Household Survival Budget, is a common marker for low-income, is an income eligibility threshold for SNAP in Illinois for older adults and people with disabilities, and is available annually at the community level.

[34] The percentages presented in the chart may not match the combined percentages in the text due to rounding.



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