



More than 1 in 10 Washington families have empty plates

Hungry in Washington

September 2017

Each fall, USDA releases a report on food insecurity and hunger (“very low food security”) across America. Report released 2017 is based on data collected in 2016.

Washington is making progress - but too little and too slow, especially for our hungriest neighbors.

In 2016, more than 41 million American households including 328,000 Washington households - were food insecure, according to [USDA’s new report](#). Nearly 16,000 Washington households (4.6%) experienced hunger (“very low food security”). These measures mean that a household didn’t know if they had enough money to make their food last through the month, or that they did run out of food and didn’t have enough money to buy more. Despite the small but steady improvement in Washington’s food security since the recession’s depth, economic recovery hasn’t reached the hungriest in our communities. Our state’s hunger rate didn’t improve in the past year - and has been fairly flat for several years. Across the U.S., 10 million more people are facing hunger than in 1999 - and 5 million more than in 2007.

Food Insecurity		
	WA	U.S.
2007	10.1%	11.1%
2011	15.4%	14.9%
2012	14.6%	14.5%
2013	14.3%	14.3%
2014	13.7%	14.0%
2015	12.9%	12.7%
2016	11.6%	12.3%
Very Low Food Security (hunger)		
2007	3.5%	4.1%
2011	6.2%	5.7%
2012	6.1%	5.7%
2013	5.6%	5.6%
2014	5.5%	5.6%
2015	4.8%	5.0%
2016	4.8%	4.9%

U.S. Food Insecurity: In 2016, 12.3% of Americans were food insecure: more than 41 million Americans lived in households that struggled to buy groceries. Nearly 6.5 million children live in households where they don’t have enough food to eat.

Compared to national average (12.3%), rates of food insecurity were substantially higher for:

- Hispanic households (18.5%)
- African American households (22.5%)
- Households with children (16.5%), especially
 - headed by single women (31.6%) or
 - single men (21.7%)
- Rural households (15%)

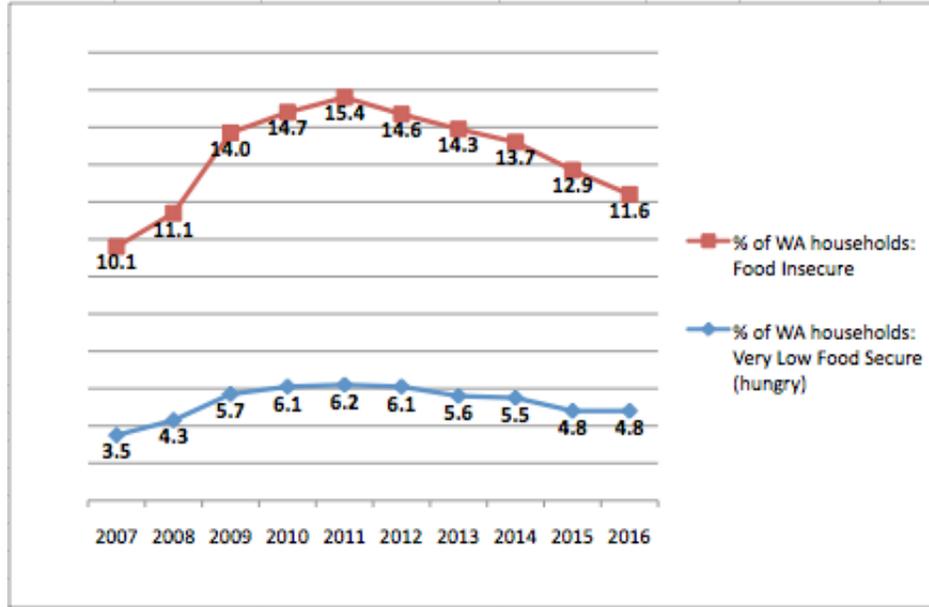
Hispanic and African American households experience food insecurity at 2 or 2.5 times the rate of White households (9.3%). Hunger is recurring: three-quarters of hungry households experienced hunger at least 3 months in a year. And food insecurity is persistent: for those households, its a struggle to put food on the table in 7 months of the year.

WA Food Insecurity: In Washington, food insecurity rates did have a real drop from the previous year: 11.6% of residents were food insecure, compared to 12.9% previously. The difference between the U.S. rate and Washington’s rate of food insecurity is not statistically significant. The national hunger data by race and ethnicity make a significant portion of Washington’s population invisible: there are no data available for Native American, Asian American, or multi-racial households.

U.S. Hunger - or, Very Low Food Security: Food insecurity in the very severe range is called “very low food security” (hunger). This is a more specific assessment which includes skipping meals, compromised nutrition, and disrupted eating patterns throughout the year. In 2016, **4.9% (6.1 million) of all American households experienced this severe food insecurity (hunger).** Except in 2010, there had been no statistically significant improvements in U.S. hunger rates from 2008 until last year’s report on 2015 data. Unfortunately, 2016 data are no different from 2015, stalling any progress on this measure.

WA Hunger / Very Low Food Security: In our state, 4.8% of all Washington households experienced hunger, a figure that hasn’t changed from the previous year and has plateaued at a substantially higher level than pre-recession rates.

Food Insecurity and Hunger in Washington



Note that none of the data include homeless individuals or families because they can't be reached by USDA's survey. Across our state there is widespread homelessness, so this major omission in the data makes targeted policies and programs difficult.

Anti-Hunger Policy Recommendations:

We know what works to beat hunger: investing in SNAP and programs like healthy school meals, WIC, and Medicaid, along with education, jobs and supports for working families, like child care and EITC.

1. Ensure food stamp benefits (SNAP) are available to all income-eligible people and are sufficient for a healthy diet.

SNAP is the single most effective way to fight hunger and poverty, and Washington has one of the most effective programs in the country. SNAP lifted nearly 3.6 million Americans out of poverty in 2016. Washington's award-winning SNAP program is timely and efficient; it supports healthy eating and local farmers, and is tied to a nationally-recognized education and job training program. Nevertheless, federal policies ensure that benefits are frequently inadequate and renewed eligibility restrictions and

time limits have led to fewer low-income people being eligible for SNAP compared to even a few years ago. This loss of eligibility is one reason Washington had one of the fastest declining SNAP caseloads in the U.S. last year - despite persistent hunger rates.

Congress must refuse to limit SNAP by changing its structure or funding: no cuts, no block grants, no eligibility changes.

SNAP's most essential characteristic is its structure that allows benefits to expand and contract in response to employment and income: **SNAP is there when you need help putting food on your table.** Congress must reject proposals like the House Budget Resolution that calls for \$150 billion in SNAP cuts and program changes over the next 10 years - on top of \$20 billion in other USDA cuts also intended to target SNAP.

Instead, lawmakers should use Washington as a model for policies that strengthen SNAP for all: eliminate time limits through waivers, improve screening and enrollment processes, improve payment accuracy and timelessness, expand access to education and work training, and expand SNAP incentive programs like Washington's Fresh Bucks.

In the next Farm Bill, Congress should eliminate the ABAWD restriction; expand eligibility for low income students; restore eligibility for all legally residing immigrants; increase the minimum benefit from \$15/month; and use the Low Cost Food Plan to calculate SNAP benefit levels for all.

2. Keep child nutrition programs effective by improving program access and preserving program structure in Congress.

Congress must stay the course with what's working for the healthy development of babies, children and youth by protecting and streamlining child nutrition programs. Congress should protect and strengthen these programs, and not roll back progress made in 2010's *Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act*. Community Eligibility for schools is a critical example of positive progress that's been put at risk in legislation and budget proposals. All eligible child care providers should have the benefit of the federal nutrition programs to feed the children in their care. Increasing participation in the WIC Program for eligible low income mothers and babies improves health outcomes from birth, as would restoring state funds for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Expanding outreach to providers and families for Summer and Afterschool Meals would improve access to healthy nutrition for kids, especially in rural areas.

3. Tax policies must provide economic opportunity for low and moderate income people - and not deepen poverty or hunger by requiring cuts or structural changes to safety net programs.

Washington has the most regressive tax code among all 50 states, causing low income and middle class families to pay more of their income in taxes than the wealthiest Washingtonians do. Tax credits for low income people and families with children lifted 8.1 million people out of poverty.

Just as in Washington, federal tax changes need to adhere to one basic, proven principle: revenue for communities and families to invest in the things that create thriving communities and a prosperous economy. Congress and our legislature must not cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans and corporations and create holes in our safety net and divest in the programs that ensure the well being of tens of millions of Americans.

4. Ensure schools across Washington provide healthy meals - especially breakfast - to students who need it most.

Children have to work harder to focus in school when they're hungry. Serving breakfast as part of the school day improves academic performance, attendance, behavior, and student health. Washington must pass legislation to ensure universal access to school meals, especially breakfast, for low income students. Schools should also take advantage of opportunities, like Community Eligibility for school meals, that enable schools to afford to offer nutritious meals for all students. Expanding Farm to School funding also improves meal quality while connecting local farms and schools.

5. Increase economic stability by expanding access to affordable housing, health care and jobs for low income people to fix the root cause of hunger: poverty.

Poverty is the root cause of hunger - Washington's solutions to poverty should be intergenerational and innovative to provide a steady pathway to financial stability and out of hunger. Washington can ensure basic needs of low income people are met by: improving access to affordable housing; expanding health care access; and remove barriers to education, training and jobs, especially for families with children and end intergenerational poverty.

For more information, contact:

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