



Issue Brief



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2017 San Diego County Food Insecurity

Hunger Free San Diego is a multi-year initiative to apply a data-driven approach to ending hunger in our region. The research in this issue brief was conducted with input and guidance from the Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board, a collaborative table comprised of leaders from 26 nonprofits, universities, school districts, and government agencies representing all aspects of hunger relief in San Diego County. Hunger Free San Diego is led by the San Diego Hunger Coalition and is part of the national Hunger Free Communities network.

This issue brief provides the most up-to-date and accurate information that currently exists on food insecurity in San Diego County, because it is compiled from interviews with San Diego County residents. **Thank you to the major funders of Hunger Free San Diego including Kaiser Permanente, Kasperick Foundation, Moxie Foundation, Charles A. Frueauff Foundation, Price Philanthropies and Food 4 Less.**

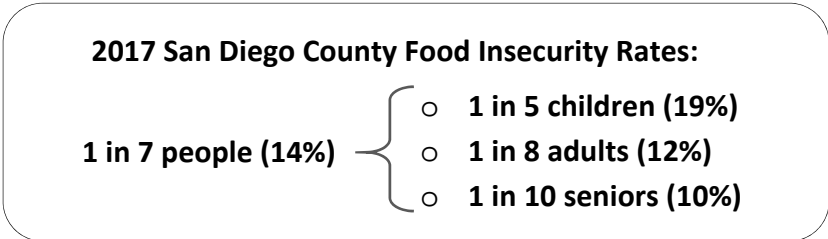
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Summary of Data

The estimates in this issue brief come from San Diego Hunger Coalition's analysis of data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), an annual telephone survey administered by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. See page 3 for additional data and demographics of food insecure households and the Appendix on page 5 for the survey questions.

Food Insecure Population: 1 in 7 people (14%)

The need for food assistance in San Diego County remains high. According to the latest research provided by San Diego Hunger Coalition, an estimated **443,000 people in San Diego County experienced food insecurity in 2017**. This represents 302,000 adults and 141,000 children who did not always have enough food for an active, healthy life.



Population At Risk of Food Insecurity: 1 in 5 people (20%)

In San Diego County, an estimated additional 197,000 people self-report as “food secure” but are currently relying on CalFresh and/or WIC to supplement their food budget. This represents 113,000 adults and 84,000 children who are *at risk of food insecurity* should they lose CalFresh or WIC benefits. **The total population at risk of food insecurity in San Diego County (either food insecure or food secure with CalFresh or WIC assistance) is 641,000 or 1 in 5 people.** This information is useful for understanding the total universe of people in need of food assistance in San Diego County, as well as the impacts that cuts to CalFresh (SNAP) or WIC at the federal level would have on San Diego County food insecure households and the organizations that serve them.

Food Insecure Household Characteristics: Sample Statements

In San Diego County...

- 41% of low-income adults and 43% of low-income children (i.e., below 200% Federal Poverty Level) are living in food insecure households.
- One-third (32%) of the food insecure population are children and youth under 18 years of age.
- Nearly half (46%) of low-income single parent households experience food insecurity.
- Half (50%) of food insecure adults are living with a disability.
- More than half (55%) of low-income adults experiencing food insecurity have a job; 43% are employed full-time.
- More than half (55%) of food insecure adults are Latino; 29% are White; 7% are Asian; and 5% are Black.
- 76% of food insecure adults are U.S. citizens and 24% are non-citizens (includes Lawful Permanent Residents/green card holders, visa holders, and undocumented individuals).

Analysis & Trends

How does 2017 food insecurity compare to prior years?

Similar to the slight decrease in food insecurity rates at the national and state level from 2016 to 2017, San Diego County also saw a slight drop. Table 1 compares rates from 2015 to 2017.

Table 1: Annual Food Insecurity Rates (percent of individuals)

	2015	2016	2017
San Diego County	16.0% <i>(est. 505,000 people or 1 in 6)</i>	15.3% <i>(est. 486,000 people or 1 in 7)</i>	13.9% <i>(est. 443,000 people or 1 in 7)</i>

Source: San Diego Hunger Coalition annual analysis of CHIS data.

Why is food insecurity so prevalent in San Diego County?

The food insecurity rate indicates how many people *do not have enough money to provide adequate food for themselves*. The questions in food security surveys (*see Appendix on page 5*) ask people if they have “*enough money for*” or are “*able to afford*” the food they need. As such, the measure does not take into account whether or how well that need has been met by federal or charitable nutrition programs. While connecting people experiencing food insecurity with food assistance does improve their supply of food and reduce their risk of hunger and malnutrition, it does not necessarily improve their ability *to purchase enough food with their own money*. Therefore, the food insecurity rate will only improve if people’s economic conditions improve and household incomes are sufficient to meet the local cost of living.

Post-recession, one-third of San Diegans continue to struggle. While the economic recovery has resulted in low unemployment and other positive outcomes for San Diego County, about one-third of San Diego’s population has insufficient income to make ends meet due to low wages, underemployment, unstable work schedules and other challenges.¹ Since 2009, the population in San Diego County living in economic hardship (defined as

¹ San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation. Future of Growth in San Diego. The Economic Case for Inclusion. San Diego: February 2018.

income below 200% of Federal Poverty Level) has remained between 30 and 35 percent.² Currently, 32% of San Diegans make less than \$14.35/hour or \$29,848/year (if full-time with paid vacation).³

Meanwhile, the purchasing power of income at or below 200% FPL (\$51,500 for a family of 4) has decreased significantly due to the rising cost of living in San Diego County, particularly housing.⁴ This leaves many in San Diego forced to make difficult tradeoffs between paying for food or housing, healthcare and other basic necessities.

If rates aren't changing, should San Diego's hunger relief community focus on root causes of hunger?

San Diego Hunger Coalition and the Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board recommend that the hunger relief community remain sharply focused on its critical role of ensuring that people do not go hungry.

The hunger relief sector's primary role is to ensure that all children, adults and seniors have access to enough healthy food, in order to prevent the detrimental, and potentially long-term, effects of hunger and malnutrition.

Both federal and charitable food assistance programs were developed to help supplement household budgets, supporting individuals through difficult periods and providing the stability required to engage in activities that bring greater economic security and wellbeing. While education and employment are widely recognized as the clearest pathways out of poverty, **basic needs must be met** in order to pursue either path effectively.

As such, **food assistance is an essential support to anti-poverty strategies** and needs to remain prioritized as linkages are built with educational programs, workforce development, food sovereignty, and other asset building strategies that can increase independence, income and, ultimately, the ability to purchase enough food for an active, healthy life.

The vision of a *Hunger Free San Diego* is that anyone experiencing food insecurity can readily access adequate and appropriate assistance to see them safely through their time of need.

Methodology

The estimates in this brief represent the most reliable and up-to-date information that exists on food insecurity in San Diego County because it is based on data from surveys of San Diego County residents. The estimates in this issue brief come from San Diego Hunger Coalition's analysis of data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), an annual telephone survey administered by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. The methodology was developed by San Diego Hunger Coalition in partnership with UCLA's Center for Health Policy Research and the rates are based on pooled 2015, 2016, and 2017 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) data.⁵ The Hunger Coalition pools data over multiple years to improve the precision of estimates.

² U.S. Census Bureau (2016). B17002: Ratio of Income to Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months, 2009-2016 American Community Survey 1-year estimates. Retrieved from: https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_B17002&prodType=table.

³ UC Berkeley Labor Center analysis of IPUMS American Community Survey, 2016. Retrieved from <http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/low-wage-work-in-california/#geography>.

⁴ U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). Consumer Price Index Historical Table - San Diego, CA. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/data/consumerpriceindex_sandiego_table.pdf

⁵ California Health Interview Survey. CHIS 2015-2017 Adult, Adolescent, Child Public Use Files. [computer files]. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, February 2019.

These estimates may differ from CHIS data referenced by other sources, as the Hunger Coalition’s analysis includes *children in food insecure households*, whereas the publicly-available CHIS data only includes *adults experiencing food insecurity*. This data release includes additional demographic analysis of the CHIS data by the Hunger Coalition to increase our understanding of the population experiencing food insecurity in San Diego County.

While the estimated rate and number of people experiencing food insecurity **cannot be used to measure incremental changes from year to year**, **these estimates do serve as important economic and public health indicators** to raise awareness and help educate decision makers and the general public about the prevalence of people needing food assistance in San Diego County.

The CHIS survey uses the USDA’s Six-Item Short Form of the Food Security Survey Module, which is the most widely used validated food security survey and is also the basis for the two-question screening tool recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Please see the Appendix below for the list of questions used in the CHIS survey to determine food security status. The food insecurity questions are only asked of households with income below 200% Federal Poverty Level (\$51,500 for a family of four in 2018). Therefore, the **food insecurity rates provided in this release are conservative estimates**, since they do not include people with incomes above 200% FPL who may also be food insecure.

Additional Data and Household Characteristics

San Diego County 2017 Food Insecurity Rates (pooled CHIS data from 2015-2017)

- **Total food insecure population: 443,000**
 - This represents 13.9% of the total population of San Diego County (3,182,000)
 - *1 in 7 people in San Diego County experience food insecurity.*
 - This represents 41.3% of the population below 200% FPL (1,073,000)
 - *More than 40% of low-income people in San Diego County experience food insecurity.*
- **Food insecure adults: 302,000**
 - This represents 12.4% of the total adult population in San Diego County (2,430,000)
 - *1 in 8 adults in San Diego County experience food insecurity.*
 - This represents 40.5% of adults below 200% FPL (746,000)
 - *Over a third of low-income adults in San Diego County experience food insecurity.*
- **Food insecure children: 141,000**
 - This represents 18.8% of the total child population in San Diego County (752,000)
 - *1 in 5 children in San Diego County are in food insecure households.*
 - This represents 43.1% of children in households with income below 200% FPL (327,000)
 - *2 in 5 children in low-income households in San Diego County are in households that experience food insecurity.*
- **Food insecure seniors: 141,000**
 - This represents 9.9% of the total senior population in San Diego County (433,000)
 - *One in 10 seniors in San Diego County experience food insecurity.*
 - This represents 32.6% of seniors below 200% FPL (132,000)
 - *One third of low-income seniors experience food insecurity.*

San Diego County Food Insecure Household Characteristics

Note: These statistics **only represent low-income households with income below 200% of Federal Poverty Level**. CHIS currently does not ask food insecurity questions of households with incomes at or above 200% FPL.

- 46% of low-income **single parent households** experience food insecurity

- 58% of food insecure adults are **women**
- 14% of food insecure adults are **seniors**
- 50% of food insecure adults are **living with a disability**
- 5% of food insecure adults are **Black or African American**
 - 43% of low-income Blacks/African Americans experience food insecurity
- 55% of food insecure adults are **Latino**
 - 42% of low-income Latinos experience food insecurity
- 29% of food insecure adults are **White**
 - 39% of low-income Whites experience food insecurity
- 7% of food insecure adults are **Asian**
 - 33% of low-income Asians experience food insecurity
- 32% of food insecure adults **visited emergency room in past 12 months**
 - 22% of all adults visited emergency room in past 12 months
- 76% of food insecure adults are **U.S. citizens** and 24% are non-citizens⁶
 - 88% of all adults are U.S. citizens
- 55% of food insecure adults **are working**
 - 64% of all adults are working
 - 43% of food insecure adults are employed full-time (defined as 21+ hours/week)
 - 12% of food insecure adults are employed part-time (defined as <20 hours/week)
- 6.5% of food insecure adults have served on active duty in the **U.S. Armed Forces**
 - 11% of all adults have served

Note: Sample size not large enough to analyze American-Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations.

<p>Appendix: Questions used to assess the food security of households under 200% FPL in the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)</p>
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1. "The food that {I/we} bought just didn't last, and {I/we} didn't have money to get more." Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for you and your household in the last 12 months?
2. "{I/We} couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for you and your household in the last 12 months?
3. In the last 12 months, 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? (Yes/No)
4. (If yes to question 3) How often did this happen -- almost every month, some months but not every month, or only in 1 or 2 months?
5. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?
6. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?

⁶ "Non-citizen" includes all people without U.S. Citizenship, including Lawful Permanent Residents (green card holders), visa holders, and undocumented individuals.