

Lead



As leaders in the effort to eliminate hunger in our community, we understand the importance of spreading education, awareness and information about hunger and food insecurity in our community.

Significant attention was brought to the issue of food insecurity because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For months, people across the country have watched food bank lines stretch for miles as more individuals than ever found themselves in need of assistance.

Because food insecurity is heavily impacted by economic drivers including unemployment and income shocks, it was simple to understand why business closures and job losses impacted food insecurity by 33% for individuals in our service area and 47% for children.

One factor that wasn't as quickly distinguishable, however, is that COVID-19 has impacted people of color differently and uncovered disparities by geography. Even though the detrimental effects of the pandemic are widespread, economic factors have contributed to African Americans, Latinos and other people of color, as well as some individuals in rural communities, experiencing both unemployment and poverty at higher rates.

The issue of racial disparities contributing to food insecurity has been exacerbated and brought to light by COVID-19, but these are problems that have occurred long before the start of the pandemic. Before COVID-19, African Americans were two and a

half times as likely to live in food-insecure households as White individuals, and Latino individuals were twice as likely to live in food-insecure households as White individuals.

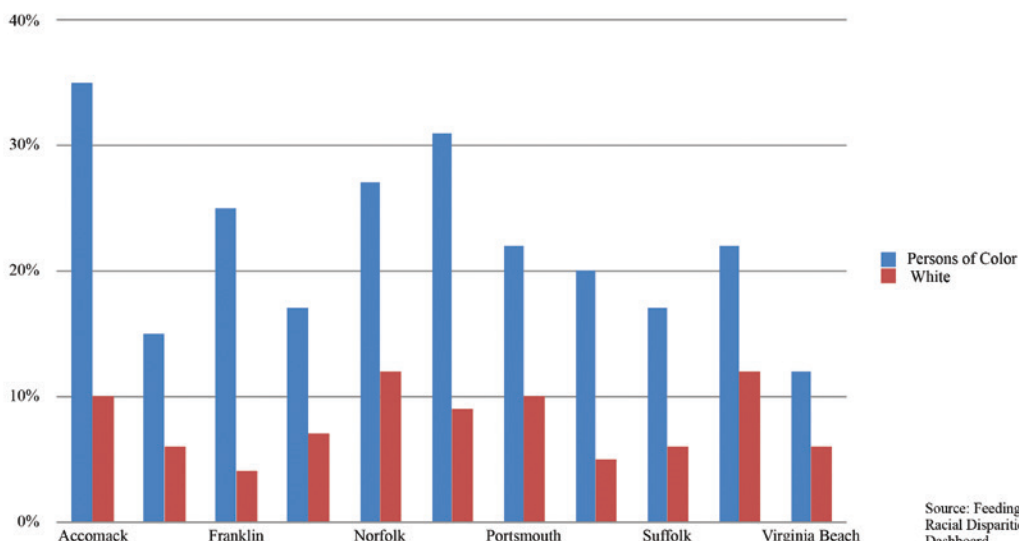
With this research and understanding in place, it is critical to educate the general public about not only the causes and consequences of food insecurity, but also the disparities contributing to a person not having enough healthy, nutritious food for their household.

Goal 1: Increase community awareness about the causes, consequences and disparities associated with hunger and food insecurity in Southeastern Virginia and on the Eastern Shore.

Goal 2: Mobilize the public to advocate for hunger-relief programs serving vulnerable adults and children.

We need individuals to share voice as well as use their own voice to help us bring education and awareness about the causes, consequences and disparities surrounding food insecurity and the individuals impacted. Take action by advocating for federal and state safety-net programs that are integral to providing food for children, seniors and families in our community. Connect with us on our social media channels and help to spread pertinent messaging to bring these issues to light. ■

Percentage of Individuals Living Below the Poverty Line



Source: Feeding America
Racial Disparities
Dashboard

Feed

Providing access to healthy food is at the core of the Foodbank's mission because we understand the critical role that nutritious meals play in a person's ability to live an active, healthy life. Children must have balanced meals in order to grow, thrive and stay focused in school. Seniors must be properly nourished to stay healthy and well. Families need access to enough nutritious foods for every member of their household.

Individuals in low-income urban neighborhoods who lack transportation and don't live within walking distance of grocery stores — or who live in rural areas and must drive more than 10 miles to the nearest store — are severely disadvantaged when it comes to accessing food. Oftentimes, however, the issue isn't lack of stores altogether but rather stores offering healthy options. Dollar stores, for example, provide basic necessities but not fresh produce, lean meats and dairy items that are needed to create balanced meals.

Through a variety of feeding programs, the Foodbank will increase access to healthy foods in communities with high rates of food insecurity and poverty, determined by data trends and extensive mapping capabilities. In addition to distributing a selection of healthy foods, the Foodbank will continue to provide nutrition education so that individuals can be armed with the information and resources needed to prepare healthy meals for their families and themselves.

Goal 3: Expand healthy food service options in underserved, low-income neighborhoods.

Goal 4: Increase access to healthy food in communities with a high prevalence of food insecurity and poverty rates.

A

Healthy Hub in Western Tidewater

Certain communities within our service area are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. For example, the city of Franklin is a predominantly African-American community where rates of food insecurity are projected to rise to 18%, which is higher than average for our service area. Challenges such as high poverty rates, low access to jobs that pay a living wage and limited transportation are all factors contributing to the need for increased food access.

In order to address food insecurity in Franklin and Western Tidewater, Obici Healthcare Foundation provided a three-year grant of \$300,000 for the Foodbank to launch a Western Tidewater Community Produce Hub that will also serve as the permanent home of the Western Tidewater Branch of the Foodbank. This two-level space will feature a marketplace, café and commercial kitchen, as well as a warehouse and distribution center. Upon the project's completion, the Community Produce Hub will serve as a one-stop shop for individuals to access healthy food in the form of prepared meals and fresh grocery options, and it will also provide Partner Agencies in Western Tidewater with bulk orders of fresh foods to distribute at their locations to residents throughout the rural region. ■





Strengthen



The Foodbank's efforts are made possible by the robust support received from individuals, businesses and groups which provide funding, food donations and volunteer time to support the organization's mission. There are many circumstances that impact the level of support contributed. Factors such as state of the economy, supply chain disruptions and critical events — including natural disasters, government shutdowns and public health crises — can all play a critical role on the pounds of food donations, the level of financial support and the amount of time volunteers are able to give. As with many nonprofits, the pandemic has taught us many lessons over its course, but it has specifically underscored the need to diversify food, funding and volunteer resources in order to scale and sustain hunger-relief initiatives.

We will pursue this goal by expanding our network of donors, considering innovative channels for acquiring food and engaging additional individuals and groups to donate time. Above all, we will prioritize responsible stewardship of any funds, food or time in order to serve the most vulnerable communities in our service area.

Goal 5: Diversify food, funding and volunteer resources to scale and sustain hunger-relief initiatives.

Goal 6: Nurture a workplace culture where employees are engaged and feel valued.

Just as it is crucial to ensure the strength and diversity of external support, it is equally important to bolster an organizational culture that allows employees to remain engaged and feel valued while carrying out the Foodbank's mission. Team Foodbank is made up of thoughtful and passionate employees who utilize their individual and collective strengths to help the Foodbank sustain services and continuously evolve to meet the needs of our community and the people we serve.

As the organization grows and evolves, so does its workplace culture. In 2019, a new role of senior director of organizational culture was established to strengthen the Foodbank's work culture in ways such as analyzing individuals' change management style, creating activities and events focused on team building and self-care, and learning ways in which team members most feel appreciated, valued and celebrated. The organization's culture will continue to be a priority in the years ahead as additional focus will be given to diversifying the team carrying out our critical mission. ■





Transform





For 40 years, the Foodbank has provided food for vulnerable populations in our community in an effort to eliminate hunger. We have heavily concentrated on the nutritious meals that individuals need in order to live healthy, active lives because we know that these are the types of foods needed to produce positive physical health outcomes.

However, giving someone access to food only meets their immediate needs. It doesn't address the underlying factors of food insecurity that cause individuals to seek food assistance for themselves or their families.

In September 2019, the Foodbank partnered with Old Dominion University to complete a research study and public report, *Hunger and Food Insecurity: The Root Causes and Consequences*. Through a mixed methods research design incorporating a series of interviews, survey questionnaire and statistical analyses, researchers recognized consistent themes that led us to identify these as five root causes of food insecurity: lack of access to healthcare, higher education, housing, financial literacy and workforce development.

Using information gleaned from this report and additional research, the Foodbank is well positioned to address root causes of food insecurity by collaborating with partners in these five realms. Access to higher education and workforce development are the most crucial factors in achieving success, and we are prioritizing these partnerships to propel individuals forward in accessing living wage careers. We believe that providing food *plus* additional tools and resources is the first step in helping individuals reach economic self-sufficiency.

Goal 7: Collaborate with traditional and non-traditional partners to promote food security and positive physical health outcomes.

Goal 8: Collaborate with higher education and workforce development partners to implement comprehensive solutions that help individuals access living wage careers.

What is a Food Hub?

A food hub is a central location providing access to healthy foods plus additional resources, such as information on affordable housing, employment opportunities, medical and legal services, education and more. The Foodbank has launched three food hubs in our service area in Portsmouth, Norfolk and the Eastern Shore. These three locations were chosen based on mapping of food insecurity rates and racial inequality data. Individuals visiting the food hubs can select items from a pantry, a farmers market and via online ordering. Food access will then be layered with other services to address root causes of food insecurity, thus ending hunger today and nourishing hope for tomorrow. ■