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Julie Cassidy, Policy Analyst

Still Hungry: Economic Recovery Leaves Many Michiganians Without Enough to Eat

The economic gains of Michigan's recovery from the Great Recession have not been equally distributed, and families at the lower end of the economic scale continue to struggle more than others with unemployment, underemployment and low wages.[1] While unemployment has decreased substantially and median household income has risen since the Recession officially ended in 2009, the poverty and food insecurity rates have not yet declined to their pre-Recession levels, indicating that the employment and income gains among those with low incomes are too small to overcome rising food prices and other barriers to healthy food access.

Under these conditions, proposed budget cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other federal programs that many families rely on to make ends meet would leave millions of people without access to the fuel their bodies need to lead healthy, productive lives. These cuts would disproportionately affect children, people with disabilities, people of color, seniors and rural residents. Policymakers should preserve and expand existing nutrition programs that have proven effective and implement other state and local reforms that protect public health and the economy from the costly impacts of hunger.

NEARLY 1.5 MILLION MICHIGANIANS ARE FOOD INSECURE

Food insecurity: Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food; limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways.

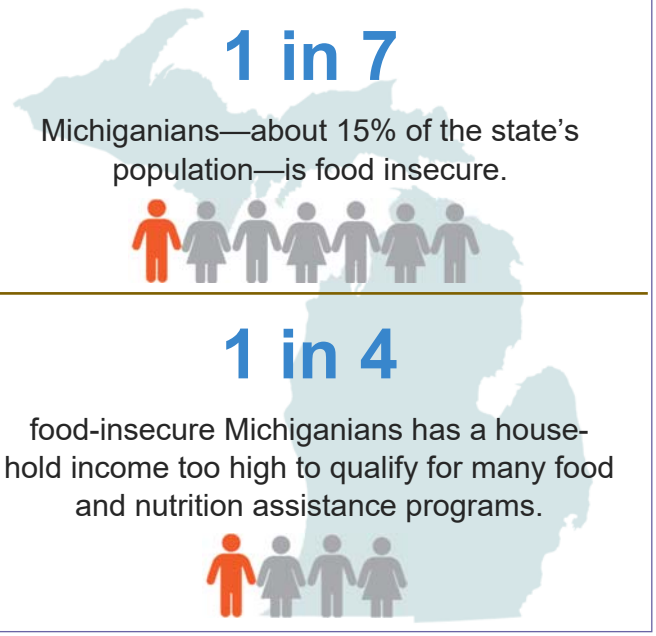
The causes of food insecurity and hunger include:

- Insufficient funds to buy food;
- Unavailability of nutritious food in a given area (a "food desert" or "food swamp");
- Lack of transportation;
- Unaffordable utility bills; and
- Poor oral health.

Hunger: A potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

Although food insecurity is strongly connected to poverty, it's not limited to households with the lowest incomes.



Source: Feeding America. (2017). *Hunger in Michigan*.

Federal and state nutrition programs helped alleviate hunger among many children in our state in 2015.

- Nearly **one-third** of Michigan **children age 0-5** received benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Almost **half of students** in the state qualified for **free or reduced-price** (FRP) lunch.
- **More than half** of Michigan **children age 0-4** received Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Sources: Michigan League for Public Policy. (2017). *2017 Kids Count in Michigan*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017). *Kids Count Data Center.*

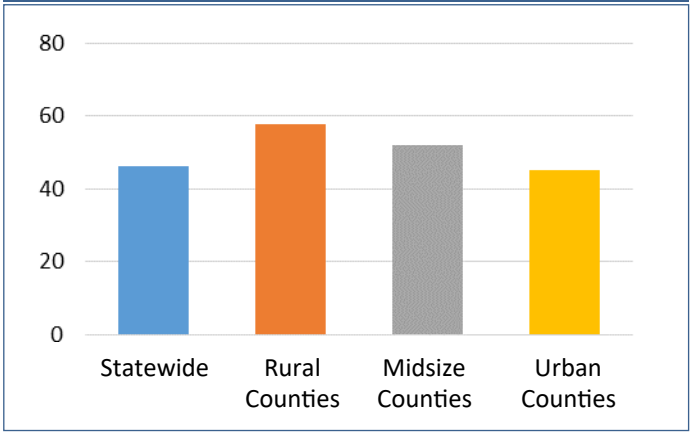
WHO'S ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO HUNGER?

Children: Households with children, particularly those headed by single parents, are less food secure than those without children. Hunger creates an intergenerational cycle: it's difficult for parents to raise healthy children to reach their full potential when they don't have enough to eat themselves. In Michigan, about 338,000 children experienced food insecurity in 2014.[2] Hunger peaks during the summer when kids no longer have access to the daily meals and snacks provided at school; for example, summer nutrition programs in Michigan serve only about one-twelfth of the children who receive free or reduced-price lunch during the school year.[3]

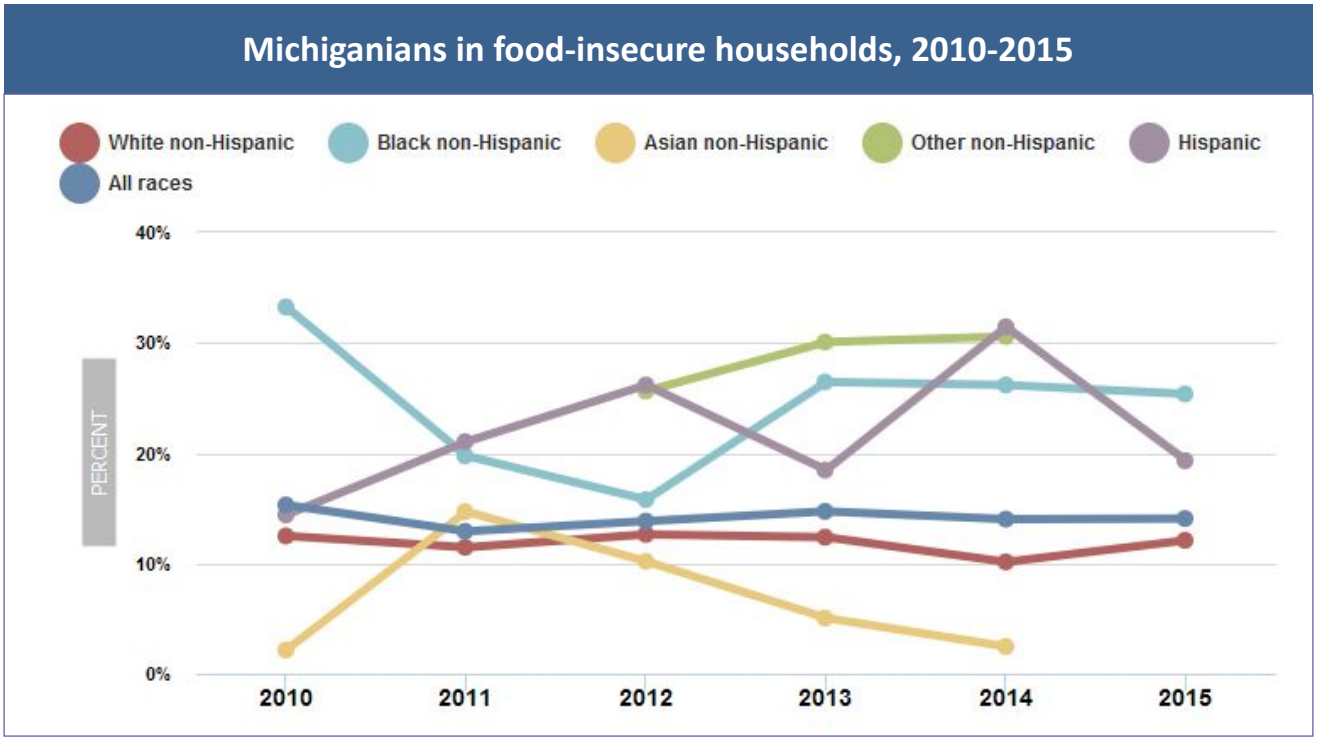
Rural Residents: Although Wayne County is the least food secure of all Michigan counties, a number of rural counties also report high food-insecurity rates, especially in Northern Michigan.[4] In these areas, poverty is higher than average, full-service grocery stores may be rare and dental providers may be scarce. The lack of public transit magnifies these challenges. Ultimately, rural Michiganians may struggle with issues of food availability, accessibility and affordability even more than some of their city-dwelling counterparts.

People With Disabilities: Due to educational, mobility and workplace barriers as well as discrimination, adults with disabilities face lower employment rates, less consistent employment, longer periods of unemployment and lower earnings than adults without disabilities. At the same time, they often have increased medical costs and other expenses of living in a world that's not designed to meet their basic needs. Thus, households including people with disabilities are more likely to experience food insecurity and to feel it the most severely of all food-insecure households.[5]

Percentage of Michigan children receiving free and reduced-price lunch, 2015



Source: Michigan League for Public Policy. (2017). *2017 Kids Count in Michigan.*



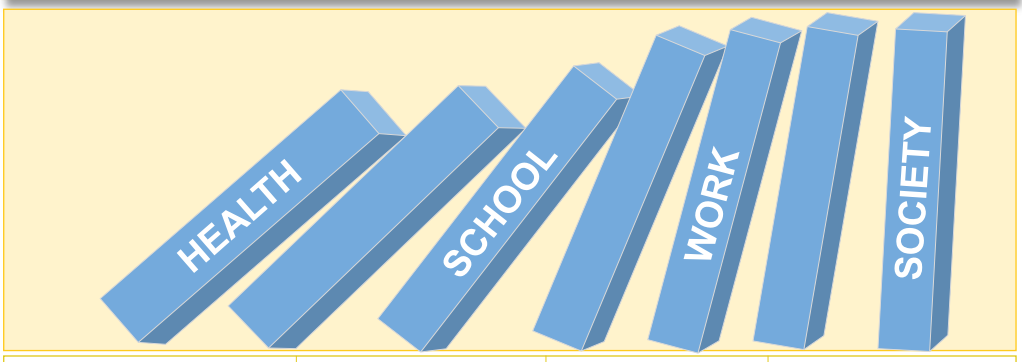
Source: AARP Data Explorer http://dataexplorer.aarp.org/indicator/187/household-food-security-status-by-age-and-raceethnicity#/trend?primarygrp=dist2&dist1=49&dist2=2,6,7,8,9,10&dist44=278&loc=24&tf=16,15,14,13,12,11&fmt=573.

People of Color: A long history of public policy shaped by racism, from slavery to redlining to mass incarceration, has led to inequities that persist long after the removal of explicit racism from American law. For example, the median wealth of White households currently is 14 times that of Latino households and 16 times that of African-American households.[6] As a result, African-Americans and Hispanics in Michigan experience higher levels of food insecurity than Whites and Asians do, a dynamic that has continued in the aftermath of the Great Recession.

Seniors: Aging is often accompanied by increased healthcare needs, income limitations and mobility challenges. As medicine advances, people are living longer but may not have the resources to maintain a basic living standard, especially after suffering losses in the Great Recession. More than 160,000 Michigan seniors struggle to pay for all of their essentials, including food.[7] Furthermore, they don't take full advantage of all available anti-hunger resources—nationwide, it's estimated that only 41% of eligible seniors have enrolled in SNAP, compared to 83% of the entire SNAP-eligible population.[8]

WE ALL PAY THE HIGH PRICE OF HUNGER

Hunger takes a direct toll on health, which triggers a domino effect of negative outcomes with high social and economic costs.



HEALTH	SCHOOL	WORK	SOCIETY
Birth defects	Tardiness & absenteeism	Limited job opportunities	Poverty
Cognitive & behavioral problems	Trouble concentrating	Absenteeism	Increased healthcare costs
Poor oral health	Decreased cognitive performance	Lower productivity	Increased criminal justice system costs
Underweight, obesity	Lower grades	Lower earnings	Less competitive workforce
Diabetes	Higher dropout rate		Family stress
High blood pressure			
Toxic stress, anxiety & depression			
Medication rationing			

Stigma compounds the negative health and economic impacts of food insecurity, as those living with hunger may feel shame over their situation and decline available food assistance.

Hunger would be even more widespread if it were not for a number of public agencies and nonprofit organizations that provide food and funds for vulnerable households. SNAP and other federal programs such as Women, Infants, and Children, The Emergency Food Assistance Program; the National School Lunch Program; and the Child and Adult Care Food Program attack the hunger problem through various local avenues—schools, food pantries, child and adult day care centers, emergency shelters, etc. State- and local-level partnerships involving government, nonprofit organizations, farmers and grocers further help fight hunger while boosting Michigan's agriculture industry.

A number of state and local initiatives to fight hunger in our communities depend on federal funds or are otherwise connected to federal programs, so structural

State Anti-Hunger Programs	
Heat and Eat	Increase in monthly SNAP benefits for families that receive at least $20 in heating assistance through the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB)	The Fair Food Network doubles the value of up to $20 per day in SNAP benefits spent on fresh produce at participating grocery stores and farmers markets. State funding for DUFB in Flint included in 2018 budget.
10 Cents a Meal for School Kids & Farms	The Michigan Department of Education pilot provides funding match of 10 cents per meal to 16 school districts to serve Michigan-grown produce to students. Additional state funding to expand the program included in 2018 budget.
Hoophouses for Health	The Michigan Farmers Market Association provides loans to farmers to build hoophouses; farmers repay loans by giving free produce to schools and families with low incomes.
Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS)	Partnership between food banks, farmers and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to distribute agricultural surplus to food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters.
USDA Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program	United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant for Michigan pilot project to provide monthly benefit to school children eligible for free and reduced-price lunch for healthy food purchases during summer break.
Michigan's Coordinated Access to Food for the Elderly (MiCAFE) Network	Initiative of Elder Law of Michigan to address stigma and other barriers to SNAP enrollment among seniors through outreach, education and application assistance.
Michigan Farm to Family Project	Through a USDA grant, the Michigan Fitness Foundation and local partners help Kent County families with low incomes purchase community-supported agriculture (CSA) shares from local farms.
Piloting CSA Shares as a Tool to Fight Childhood Obesity and Hunger	Pilot project of the Michigan Environmental Council to give free CSA shares to 120 families in Detroit, Lansing and Ann Arbor in 2017 through a grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

changes and budget cuts at the federal level can put Michigan's efforts at risk. For example, converting SNAP from an entitlement program to a block grant, as has been proposed, could cut benefit levels, restrict eligibility and make the program less responsive to economic crises.

All of these services help many families achieve food security, keep people out of poverty and stimulate our economy—for example, every $5 spent in new SNAP benefits generates up to $9 in economic activity.[9] These resources, however, aren't sufficient to serve everyone in need and address all of the root causes of hunger, so society continues to incur billions of dollars in avoidable costs every year through poor health and a less dynamic workforce. Ensuring access to adequate healthy food presents one of the most cost-effective opportunities to strengthen our state's greatest resource—its people—and promote our state and national prosperity.

State Policy Recommendations

- Expand school breakfast, summer and after-school meal programs
- Provide incentives for agriculture, grocery and convenience store industries to offer affordable healthy food in underserved areas
- Fund Double Up Food Bucks statewide
- Continue to fund Heat and Eat
- Ban "lunch shaming" and otherwise structure food assistance programs to avoid stigma
- Support initiatives connecting farms to schools, healthcare providers and other local institutions
- Improve access to dental care
- Raise the minimum wage
- Eliminate Michigan's asset test for SNAP eligibility

Federal Policy Recommendations

- Continue to provide SNAP benefits to all who qualify rather than give states a finite amount of money for food assistance
- Update SNAP benefit levels to reflect current food prices
- Eliminate the three-month time limit on SNAP benefits for able-bodied adults without children who do not work or attend a work training program at least 20 hours per week
- Maintain Medicaid expansion, LIHEAP and other programs that provide basic services and free up money in household budgets for healthy food

ENDNOTES

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