**Hunger Nutrition Coalition**

**Of Bucks County**

Biennial Survey of Hunger

2021



**Acknowledgements**

The Hunger Nutrition Coalition of Bucks County would like to acknowledge the contributions of the many organizations and volunteers that assisted in the development and administration of the 2021 Biennial Hunger Nutrition Survey. We thank the County of Bucks for its support and Bucks County Opportunity Council for the leadership and coordination which makes this survey possible.

**Table of Contents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Acknowledgements | Page 2 |
| About HNC | Page 4 |
| About the Survey | Page 4 |
| Participating Organizations | Page 4 |
| Executive Summary | Page 5 |
| Key Findings | Page 6 |
| Demographics | Page 7 |
| Household Income, Employment, and Composition | Page 8 |
| Sources of Food Support | Page 9 |
| Quantity and Quality of Available Foods | Page 10 |
| Competing Needs | Page 11 |
| Special Diets | Page 11 |
| Pandemic and Recovery | Page 12 |
| Chronic Medical Conditions | Page 13 |
| Worry | Page 14 |
| Skipping Meals | Page 15 |
| SNAP Utilization | Page 16 |
| Discussion | Page 17 |
|  |  |

**About Hunger Nutrition Coalition of Bucks County**

The mission of the Hunger Nutrition Coalition (HNC) of Bucks County is ensuring food security and access to healthy nutritious food for residents of Bucks County by educating, connecting and promoting the efforts of hunger relief partners.

Members of HNC work collaboratively to promote awareness of hunger and nutrition needs in our community and to advocate for those impacted by these issues. Founded in 2001 by invested members of the League of Women Voters, HNC is a community-based coalition that counts hunger relief providers, community members, volunteers, health systems, and other organizations as its members. For more information, visit the HNC website at [www.hncbucks.org](http://www.hncbucks.org) or follow Hunger Nutrition Coalition of Bucks County on Facebook or @hncbucks on twitter.

**About the Survey**

The Hunger Nutrition Coalition conducts a biennial, county-wide survey of individuals who participate in one or more food support programs with the goal of capturing a current snapshot of the state of hunger in our county and to assess trends in hunger and food insecurity over time. This survey serves as a progress report on current food security work and a roadmap for future efforts. The survey was administered in the fall of 2021. Surveys were completed on-site at partner organizations and online. While the sampling of survey participants is not rigorously scientific, efforts are made to make the sample representative by seeking participation from residents from all over Bucks County and from the many and varied food support programs that exist.

**Participating Organizations**

Surveys were collected from a variety of sites and service locations including:

Food Pantries

WIC Offices

Fresh Connect

Farm to Families

Senior Centers

Shared (Communal) meal sites

Meals on Wheels

Weekend backpack/meal programs

**HNC Biennial Survey 2021 Executive Summary**

The Hunger Nutrition Coalition of Bucks County conducted its Biennial Hunger Nutrition Survey during the fall of 2021. Surveys were completed by individuals receiving food and nutrition support from food pantries, non-profit organizations, and governmental organizations in Bucks County. A total of 447 surveys were completed and returned by clients receiving one or more types of food support. Surveys were gathered from residents living in 40 zip codes and a review of these indicated all geographic areas of the county were represented. The survey was administered in both English and Spanish, and participation was voluntary.

A unique opportunity presented itself this year, which allowed us to take a more specific look at hunger in seniors in Bucks County. Of the 447 surveys returned, 265 were completed by those aged 60 or older. By disaggregating data by age, we were able to examine the impact of hunger on our seniors. There are significant difference in how seniors responded to many questions and these will be reviewed in our report.

The COVID-19 pandemic also changed community conditions significantly for many. It dramatically increased the number of people in need of assistance with food and also changed the composition of those seeking help. We included three questions in our 2021 to examine the financial impact of the pandemic on the people we surveyed.

Results of the survey were compiled and evaluated by a subcommittee of the Hunger Nutrition Coalition of Bucks County using an on-line survey tool to complete the analysis. This report includes tables and figures drawn from the data and interpretation based on informed observation. It should be noted that this is a community-based survey conducted without strict controls. Accordingly, outcomes should be viewed with this in mind, and cannot be said to be rigorously scientific. Nonetheless, given the large sample size and wide range of administration sites, we believe the information is valuable and generally representative of food insecure individuals and families in Bucks County and their needs.

On the following pages we will report the responses to each of the questions asked, including some contextual information as appropriate. Tables and figures are provided to further convey the results.

**Key Findings**

* 56% of adult-lead households reported that at least one household member was employed.
* 94% of senior households and 65% of adult households reported earnings of less than $30,000K per year.
* 66% of adult respondents felt they had enough food support to feed themselves and their families, a slight improvement over 2019. Seniors fared somewhat better, with 73% saying they felt they had adequate food support.
* 70% of seniors and 66% of adults reported that they could access quality foods.
* 77% of senior households report at least one family member having a chronic medical illness. 64% of adult-led households report that is the case.
* Nearly a third (67%) of adult-led households reported worrying about running out of food at least once in the last 30 days. Among seniors, only 30.5% shared that worry.
* Among adult respondents, 46.1% say that they were receiving no assistance with food prior to the pandemic. Among households reporting that they had been impacted financially by the pandemic, 71.6 % say that they have not recovered at all or only recovered at little.
* 10% of respondents follow a special diet (vegan, vegetarian, kosher, or halal).
* Only 39% of senior respondents currently receive SNAP benefits. Among adults, the rate was even lower at 34%
* 54.3% of those who say they are not receiving SNAP say that it is because they do not know whether they are eligible or do not know where or how to apply.

**Demographics of Survey Participants**

**Respondents by Zip Codes**

447 surveys were completed and returned in 2021. Respondents were asked to indicate in which zip code they reside. Responses came from people living in 40 zip codes in Bucks County. Mapping of the respondents’ zip codes confirms that surveys were returned from residents living in all areas of the county.

**Top six codes of participants**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **19030** | Fairless Hills |
| **18901** | Doylestown |
| **19020** | Bensalem |
| **19007** | Bristol |
| **19077** | Langhorne |
| **18951** | Quakertown |

**Gender Identity**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Female** | 74% |
| **Male** | 24% |
| **Other** | 0 |
| **Preferred not to say** | 2% |

**Race**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Caucasian/White** | 84.5% |
| **Black/African American** | 7.7% |
| **Hawaiian/Pacific Islander** | 0 |
| **Asian** | 1.4% |
| **Native American/Alaska Native** | 0.9% |
| **More than one race** | 5.4% |

**Ethnicity**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Latinx or Hispanic** | 5.4% |
| **Non Latinx or Hispanic** | 94.6% |

**Household Income**

Respondents were asked what their approximate yearly household income was. 78% of the total sample of households earned less than $30,000K per year; 56% earned $20,000 or less.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Earnings | % of participants |
| 0 - $10,000 | 15.7% |
| $10,001-$20,000 | 40.4% |
| $20,001-$30,000 | 21.8% |
| $30,001-$40,000 | 9.4% |
| $40,001-$50,000 | 3.9% |
| $50,001-$60,000 | 4.1% |
| $60,001-$70,000 | 1.2% |
| $70,001-$80,000 | 1.7% |
| $80,001-$90,000 | 1.7% |

The average household income for adult led households was approximately $26,900 per year. For senior only households the average income was approximately $20,600 per year.

**Household Employment Status**

Respondents were asked about the employment status of members of their household. Specifically, they were asked, “Is anyone in your household currently employed?” and they were given only “yes” and “no” response options. 56% of adults reported that someone in the household was currently employed, while 44% reported that no one was currently employed.

Among seniors, employment rates were less as would be expected. 7.3% reported that at least one person in their household was currently employed either full time or part time.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Adults** | 56% |
| **Seniors** | 7.3% |

**Household Composition**

Respondents were asked to indicate how many persons of various age ranges make up their household. The age range choices included 0-17, 18-59, and 60 years of age or older. Results indicate that the average size of an adult-led household accessing food support in Bucks County in 3.3 persons. 49% of these households had at least one child under age 18. Among Senior-led households the average household size was 1.3 persons. 137 households were single seniors living alone.

**Sources of Food Assistance**

To better understand the various types of food support that respondents access, they were given a list of food relief sources and asked, “In the last year, how often have your or your family received help from any of these sources?” Below are percentages of respondents that said they receive help “often” from each of the sources. Not surprisingly, there were significant difference between responses from senior and responses from adults. Without children in the vast majority of senior-lead households, the use of WIC and Free and Reduced school meals was very low. Conversely, the use of meals on wheels and food support through senior centers was much higher. Some adult households also included one or more seniors. Thus, a small number of adult households reported receiving meals through senior centers or CSFP boxes. SNAP remains the most common form of food support utilized in the county, among both seniors and adults.

Adults

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SNAP | 37.9% |
| Food Pantries | 35.7% |
| Free or Reduced School Lunches | 29.4% |
| Fresh Connect | 16.8% |
| WIC | 10.6% |
| Meals on Wheels | 8.1% |
| CSFP (Senior Food Boxes) | 5.7% |
| Shared Community Meals | 4.8% |
| Meals at or through Senior Centers | 4.3% |
| Farm to Families | 4.1% |
| Weekend Backpack Programs | 2.5% |
| Manna (Medically Tailored Meals) | 0% |

Seniors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SNAP | 38.1% |
| Meals on Wheels | 25.4% |
| Food Pantries | 20% |
| Meals at or through Senior Centers | 15.9% |
| Fresh Connect | 11.0% |
| Commodity Supplemental Food Program (Senior Boxes) | 10.3% |
| Farm to Families | 1.7% |
| WIC | 1.2% |
| Shared Community Meals | 1.1% |
| Weekend Backpack Programs | 0.1% |
| Manna (Medically Tailored Meals) | 0% |
| Free or Reduced School Lunches | 0% |

**Quantity and Quality of Available Foods**

Aiming to understand how adequately our food support system is meeting people’s needs, we asked respondents to answer questions about the quantity and quantity of food that is accessible to them. 67.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they could access an adequate quantity of food, while 14.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this assertion.

**When combining all of your food resources (including SNAP, cash, pantries, etc,) are you able to get the quantity of food you need to feed your family?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strongly Disagree** | 4.0% |
| **Disagree** | 10.8% |
| **Neutral** | 17.3% |
| **Agree** | 39.2% |
| **Strongly Agree** | 28.6% |

With regard to the quality of accessible foods, 63.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they could access the quality of food they desire to feed their families. 18.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the quality of food available met their needs.

**When combining all of your food resources (including SNAP, cash, pantries, etc, are you able to get the quality of food you want to feed your family?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strongly Disagree** | 6.9% |
| **Disagree** | 11.2% |
| **Neutral** | 18.6% |
| **Agree** | 35.7% |
| **Strongly Agree** | 27.6% |

**Competing Needs**

We are aware that people who are food insecure are often forced to make tradeoffs, deferring food purchases to buy medicine or not paying a utility bill so there would be money rent. We wanted to understand what types of expenses or bills keep people from being able to afford food. We asked, “Are any of these impacting you or your family’s ability to buy enough food currently?” and we gave six response options: housing costs, utility costs, transportation costs, medical costs, childcare costs, and taxes.

Among adults, housing costs were cited most often (by 68.1%) as impeding the family’s ability to buy food, followed by utility costs, (65.5%), medical costs (44.8%), transportation costs (36.2%), taxes (35.3%) and then childcare costs (15.5%). Among seniors, the most frequently cited competing expenses were medical costs (59.8%), followed by utilities (44.6%), housing (39.3%), taxes (39.3%) and transportation (27.7%). No senior in the survey cited childcare costs.

Seniors are more likely to have medical conditions and therefore medical expenses. They are also more likely to own their own homes, so it is not surprising that fewer seniors than adults cited housing costs. Seniors are also likely to drive less, and fewer seniors cited transportation costs as being burdensome. Seniors were only slightly more likely to cite taxes as problematic than adults, 39.3% compared to 34.3%.

**Speical Diets**

Among the total population, a subset of people choose to follow diets for religious, cultural, health or ethical reasons. We wanted to understand how commonly these diets are followed by the people we serve. Overall, 10.3% of respondents said that they observed either a vegetarian, vegan, kosher and halal diet. Of these, a vegetarian diet was most common, followed by 52.2% of those reporting a special diet. Those who follow kosher and halal diets each made up 17.4% of the subset, followed by 13% who said they were vegan.

Seniors were less likely to follow a halal or vegan diet, but more likely to be vegetarian. A kosher diet was observed by 19% of the seniors who reported following a special diet.

**Pandemic and Recovery**

To understand the degree to which the food-insecure in Bucks County were impacted economically by the COVID-19 pandemic, we asked, “Were you and your family significantly impacted financially by the pandemic?”

Among adults, 88.1% reported that they were either impacted deeply or impacted some. Only 4.4% of adults said the pandemic had not hurt them financially.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Deeply Impacted | 43.1% |
| Impacted Some | 35.0% |
| Impacted a Little | 17.5% |
| Not at all Impacted | 4.4% |

Among seniors, our findings were quite different. Only 39.3% reported being impacted either deeply or some and 29.1% said they were not impacted at all financially. We believe the relatively smaller impact on seniors is likely due to the fact that most are living on fixed incomes, social security, and pensions, which were more insulated against the pandemic’s economic impact. Only 7.3% of seniors reported that they were employed, so far fewer could have potentially lost employment and income during the pandemic.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Deeply Impacted | 10.7% |
| Impacted Some | 28.6% |
| Impacted a Little | 31.6% |
| Not at all Impacted | 29.1% |

As a follow up to the previous question, we asked “If you and your family were negatively impacted financially by the pandemic, to what degree have you recovered?” 71.6% of adults said they had recovered a little or had not recovered at all. Only 3.7% of adults said that they had totally recovered.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Totally Recovered | 3.7% |
| Mostly Recovered | 24.6% |
| Recovered a Little | 50.7% |
| Not at all Recovered | 20.9% |

Among seniors who reported being financially impacted by the pandemic, 32.3% of them said they had recovered a little or not at all. 27.7% of impacted seniors said they had totally recovered.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Totally Recovered | 27.7% |
| Mostly Recovered | 40.0% |
| Recovered a Little | 26.7% |
| Not at all Recovered | 5.6% |

We also wanted to know what percentage of the people who are receiving food support currently were doing so because of the pandemic. We asked, “Prior to the pandemic, were you receiving any type of assistance with food (including SNAP, WIC, food pantries, Fresh Connect, etc.)?

46.9% of adults taking the survey had not been receiving food support prior to the pandemic. Among our senior respondents, 43.9% had not been receiving food support prior to the pandemic.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Adults | Seniors |
| 46.9% | 43.9% |

**Chronic Medical Conditions**

We know that food-insecurity and chronic medical conditions are correlated. To assess the degree to which our food-insecure residents are living with a chronic disease, we asked, “Do you or does anyone in your household have a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease or high blood pressure?” 63.9% of adult respondents and 85.1% of senior respondents indicated that they do. These are significant numbers and underscore the importance of providing healthy foods that promote health and help people manage chronic medical conditions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Adults | 63.9% |
| Seniors | 85.1% |

Relatedly, we asked, “Has your health care provider recommended a special diet for you or for a household member's health?” Nearly two-thirds (66.4%) of seniors said that a special diet had been recommended to them or a household member for health reasons, while 50.3% of adults said this was the case.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Adults | 50.3% |
| Seniors | 66.4% |

Finally, those who reported that a special diet had been recommended to them by their health care provider were asked, “Are you able to follow your special diet with the foods available to you?” Slightly more than half of seniors (54.6%) responded that they are able to follow their diet, while closer to one third (37.8%) of adults said they could. One possible reason for this difference is that adults rely more heavily on food pantries than seniors do, and healthier foods may be harder to come by in food pantries. Seniors, on the other hand, rely more heavily on meals from senior centers and meals on wheels, which are designed to be nutritious.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Adults | 37.8% |
| Seniors | 54.6% |

**Worry**

Respondents were asked a series of questions about worry, running out of food and skipping meals. First, they were asked, “During the last month, did you worry about running out of food?” For adults, 27.7% say then often or sometimes worry about running out of food. 32.4% reported not worrying.

Adults

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 27.7% |
| Sometimes | 39.9% |
| Never | 32.4% |

Seniors

Seniors seemed to worry significantly less about running out of food when compared to adults.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 6.1% |
| Sometimes | 24.4% |
| Never | 69.5% |

**Skipping Meals**

Respondents were asked to respond to the following question: “During the past month, did anyone in your household skip a meal or eat smaller meals because there wasn’t enough food?” Slightly less than one quarter of adults respondents (24.4%) responded that they were often or sometimes forced to skip or reduce meal size. Senior respondents were significantly less like to skip meals, with only 4.5% saying skipping meals was a frequent occurrence.

Adults

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 24.2% |
| Sometimes | 27.5% |
| Never | 48.3% |

Seniors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 4.5% |
| Sometimes | 14.7% |
| Never | 80.8% |

We also asked, “During the past month, has anyone in your household gone without eating for a whole day due to lack of food?” 67.6% of adults said this was never the case. A significantly higher percentage of seniors, (92.4%), said this was never the case.

Adults

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 12.2% |
| Sometimes | 20.3% |
| Never | 67.6% |

Seniors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 0.4% |
| Sometimes | 7.3% |
| Never | 92.3% |

Finally, we asked respondents, “During the past month, were you able to eat a healthy balanced meal three times a day?” 35.1% of adults said they often are able to eat three balanced meals daily. Among seniors, that response was 53.3%

Adults

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 35.1% |
| Sometimes | 43.2% |
| Never | 21.6% |

Seniors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Often | 53.3% |
| Sometimes | 25.2% |
| Never | 21.5% |

**SNAP Utilization**

As noted earlier, SNAP is the most common food support used by those we surveyed. Among adults, 33.8x% said they were currently receiving SNAP and among seniors, 38.8% were. For those who indicated that they are not currently receiving SNAP we asked, “If you are not currently receiving SNAP, why not? There were several response choices and respondents were asked to check all that applied to them.

Among adults, earning too much money was the primary reason cited.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| I earn too much | 37.1% |
| I don't know if I am eligible | 31.5% |
| I don't want to apply | 12.4% |
| The benefit is too small/not worth it | 9.0% |
| The Process is too complicated | 5.6% |
| I don't know where or how to apply | 4.5% |

Among seniors, not knowing their eligibility status was the primary reason cited.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| I don’t know if I am eligible | 51.1% |
| I earn too much money | 23.4% |
| I don’t want to apply | 14.9% |
| I don’t know where or how to apply | 11.3% |
| The process is too complicated | 3.5% |
| The benefit is too small/not worth it | 2.1% |

**Discussion**

Hunger and food-insecurity continue to be problems for some residents of Bucks County, but the overall picture is not static. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic fallout it caused dramatically changed conditions here and nationwide. With thousands out of work for months, many food pantries and other food providers saw a significant increase in the number of people served. Not only that, many of the newly-served were people who had never needed help before. In fact, nearly half of all people we surveyed said they had not needed assistance with food prior to COVID-19.

Our 2021 Biennial hunger survey was conducted in the fall of 2021, when people who had lost employment due to the pandemic were beginning to return to the workforce. However, the impact of the shutdown was clearly still being felt by those we surveyed. Of those who reported being deeply impacted financially by the pandemic, the majority indicated they had a long way to go before they fully recovered. The financial impact appeared to be felt more by adults than seniors.

While the way we provided support to the food-insecure underwent significant changes due to COVID-19 safety protocols, survey results seem to indicate that the majority of people were still satisfied with the quantity and quality of the food they received. In fact, both measures were higher than in 2019 when the last HNC survey was conducted.

Among both adults and seniors, SNAP was the most common form of food support people reported using. Yet, a significant number of those who are not, may well be eligible, but don’t know it or don’t know where or how to apply. Increased SNAP application support and advocacy may be needed.

We know that affordable housing in Bucks County is limited. This survey corroborates that. Housing costs were cited by nearly 70% of adults as the expense that most impacted their ability to buy food.

There were differences in some areas of the survey between adult-led household and those that were led by seniors. Seniors were less impacted financially by the pandemic, less likely to report chronic worry about food, less likely to have to skip meals and more likely to eat three balanced meals daily. We can only speculate as the reasons for this, but some possibilities include that home delivered meals or foods available through senior centers might be more nutritious than some food available in food pantries.

Finally, we need to continue to strive to make sure both healthy and culturally appropriate foods are available. 10% of all respondents reported following a diet for religious or ethical reasons and more than half said they had been advised by a healthcare provider to eat a special diet for health reasons. It is important that we make it possible for our lower income and food-insecure residents to have equal access to quality, nourishing food to support a healthy life.