



PORTRAIT OF PROMISE:

The California Statewide Plan to Promote Health and Mental Health Equity

Report to the Legislature and the People of California
by the Office of Health Equity,
California Department of Public Health,
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Food Security and Nutrition

Food security, defined as stable access to affordable, sufficient food for an active, healthy life, is a basic human right.¹ Yet here in California, the nation's food-rich "breadbasket," many people experience periods when they cannot afford to put sufficient food on the table or they have to forgo other basic needs to do so. The food insecurity of California households with children ages 0 to 17 increased from 11.7 percent in 2000-2002 to 15.6 percent in 2010-2012.²

Chronic Food Insecurity Means More Than a Missed Meal

Adults who are food insecure have poorer health and are at risk of major depression as well as chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension.³

► Food-insecure expectant mothers may experience long-term physical health problems,⁴ experience birth complications,⁵

and be at greater risk of depression⁶ and other mental health problems.⁷

► Food-insecure children have increased rates of developmental and mental health problems. They may also have problems with cognitive development and stunted growth, leading to detrimental impacts on their behavioral, social, and educational development.^{6,8-14}

► Women living in food-insecure households are more likely to be overweight or obese. One possible explanation for this paradoxical correlation is that these women tend to overcompensate for periods when food is scarce by overeating when food is available.¹⁵

Communities of Color and Children Bear the Brunt

The pain of hunger and food insecurity impacts virtually all racial and ethnic groups

and geographic regions of the state. However, low-income Latinos, African Americans, and American Indians/Alaska Natives have been disproportionately impacted by hunger and food insecurity (see Figure 7). More than 40 percent of these individuals experience food insecurity, as do more than 26 percent of all California children. Ironically, many of California's most food-insecure communities are located in the very heart of the state's agriculturally rich – and increasingly Latino – San Joaquin Valley. For example, the percentage of children in Fresno County who are food insecure is almost double that of food-insecure children in San Mateo County (see Figure 8).

Food Deserts in a Fertile Landscape

Marginalized, vulnerable communities experiencing high rates of food insecurity are not limited to the state's agricultural regions; they are also common throughout California's

MORE THAN 40% OF LOW-INCOME ADULTS ARE UNABLE TO AFFORD ENOUGH FOOD

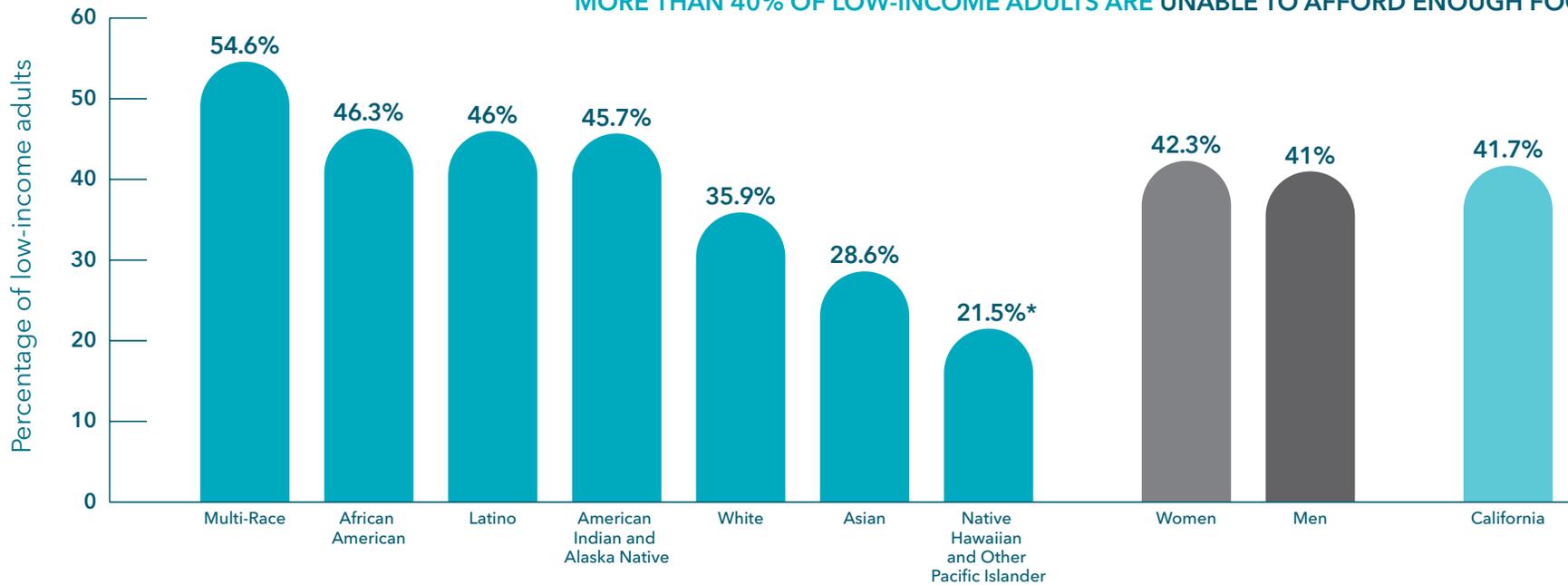


FIGURE 7: Percentage of adults whose income is less than 200% of the federal poverty level and who reported having food insecurity, by race/ethnicity and gender, California, 2011-2012.

Source: University of California, Los Angeles, California Health Interview Survey, 2011-2012.
 * Statistically unreliable data.

cities and suburban areas. Nationally, in 2010, nearly 30 million Americans (9.7 percent of the population) lived in low-income areas more than a mile from a supermarket.¹⁶ These areas are often defined as virtual “food deserts,” where fewer than 12 percent of local food retailers offer healthier food options, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and where residents have limited means of travel to more distant full-service grocery stores.

One study found that residents with no supermarkets near their homes were 25 to 46 percent less likely to have a healthy diet.¹⁷ A 2005 study focused on California found

Summer Food Service Program for Low-Income Kids

The Summer Food Service Program is a federally funded program that reimburses public and private schools, nonprofit agencies, and local governments for providing free, nutritious meals to children (18 and younger) in low-income communities through the summer months when school is not in session. Participating organizations, which are reimbursed for their costs, can serve two meals or a meal and a snack each day, or up to three meals in residential camps and migrant farm worker sites. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which sponsors the program, is working with California Department of Education officials to expand the program in California to at least 600 sites throughout the state. Nationally, about 7.5 million meals were served on a typical summer day in 2013.

Learn more at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/nt/sfsp.asp>.

1 IN 4 CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT

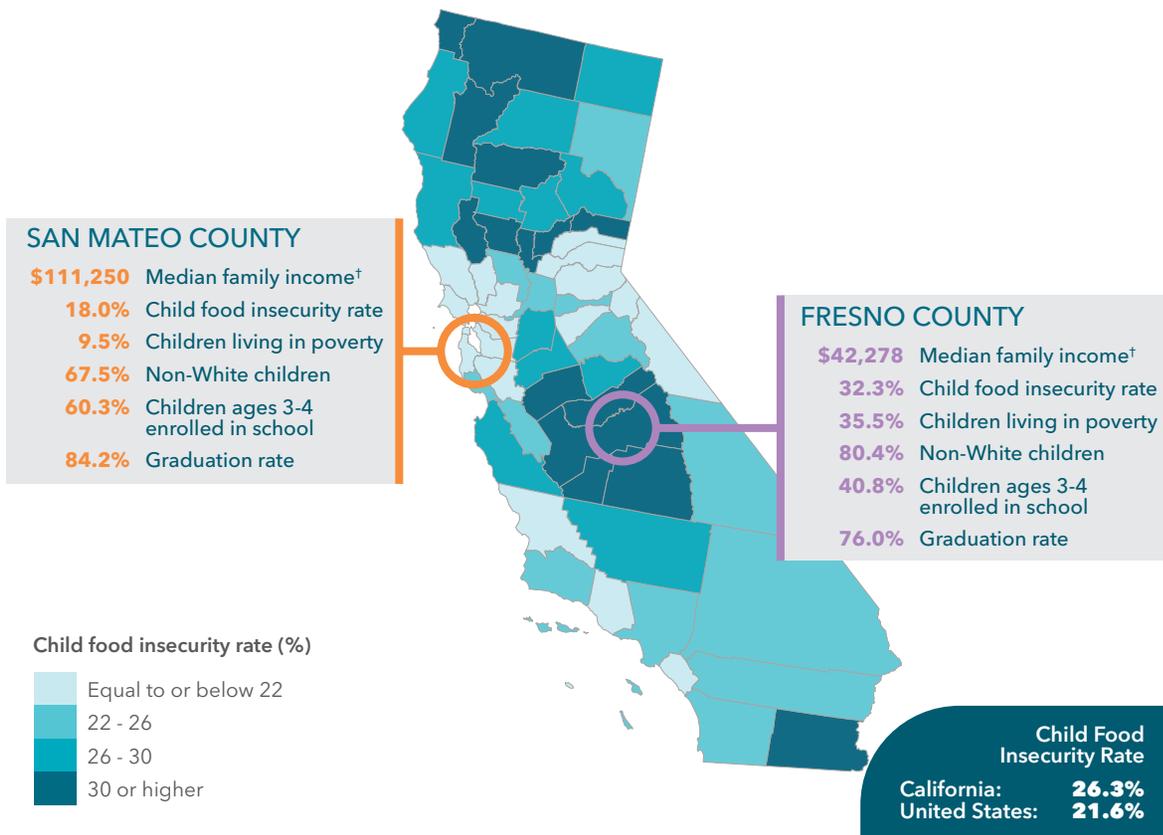


FIGURE 8: Child food insecurity rate: percentage of children under 18 years old who are food insecure, California, 2012.

Sources: Feeding America, *Map the Meal Gap*, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, 3-Year Estimates (2009-2011) and 5-Year Estimates (2008-2012); and California Department of Education, *Graduation Data*, 2011-2012.
[†]Median family income with own children under 18 years.

that for the state as a whole there were more than four times as many fast-food restaurants and convenience stores as supermarkets and produce vendors. This ratio of unhealthy to healthy food options varied substantially among counties and cities, with two counties (San Bernardino and Sacramento) and two cities (Bakersfield and Fresno) having nearly six times as many fast-food restaurants and

convenience stores as supermarkets and produce vendors.¹⁸ The communities with high concentrations of fast-food outlets and relatively high-priced convenience stores have been shown to be characterized by disproportionately high rates of obesity and diabetes, which are precursors of other chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, and arthritis.

Food Councils Tackle Food Insecurity

Food councils and local, food-centered community groups have emerged as leaders of a movement to solve food insecurity and food quality concerns across California. They do this by promoting policies and education at the state and local levels that encourage and support sustainable urban and regional foodsheds, including community and home-scale gardening efforts, farmers markets, and urban agriculture. The California Food Policy Council is bringing together the food councils from the smallest counties, such as Plumas County and Sierra County, with the largest, Los Angeles County, to ensure that California's food system reflects the needs of all its communities.

Food councils address food security through policy changes that increase access to subsidized foods, like CalFresh, WIC, senior nutrition programs, and food banks. They also promote home- and community-grown food efforts; encourage economic development; and advocate for sustainable farming and fair labor practices by large-scale food producers, retailers, and the food-service industry.

Food councils are changing the foodscape of California through local ingenuity combined with community resourcefulness and resilience.

Learn more at

<http://www.rootsofchange.org/content/activities-2/california-food-policy-council>

