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Tri-State Region Hunger Still Higher Than Before Recession, Reveals First-Ever Report on Hunger in NY Metropolitan Area

Area Hunger Falls Over Last Six Years but Still Far Higher than 2005-07

A Third of NYC Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries Lack Needed Resources

First-Ever Annual Cost of Ending Hunger: \$569M in NYC; \$1B in Metro Area

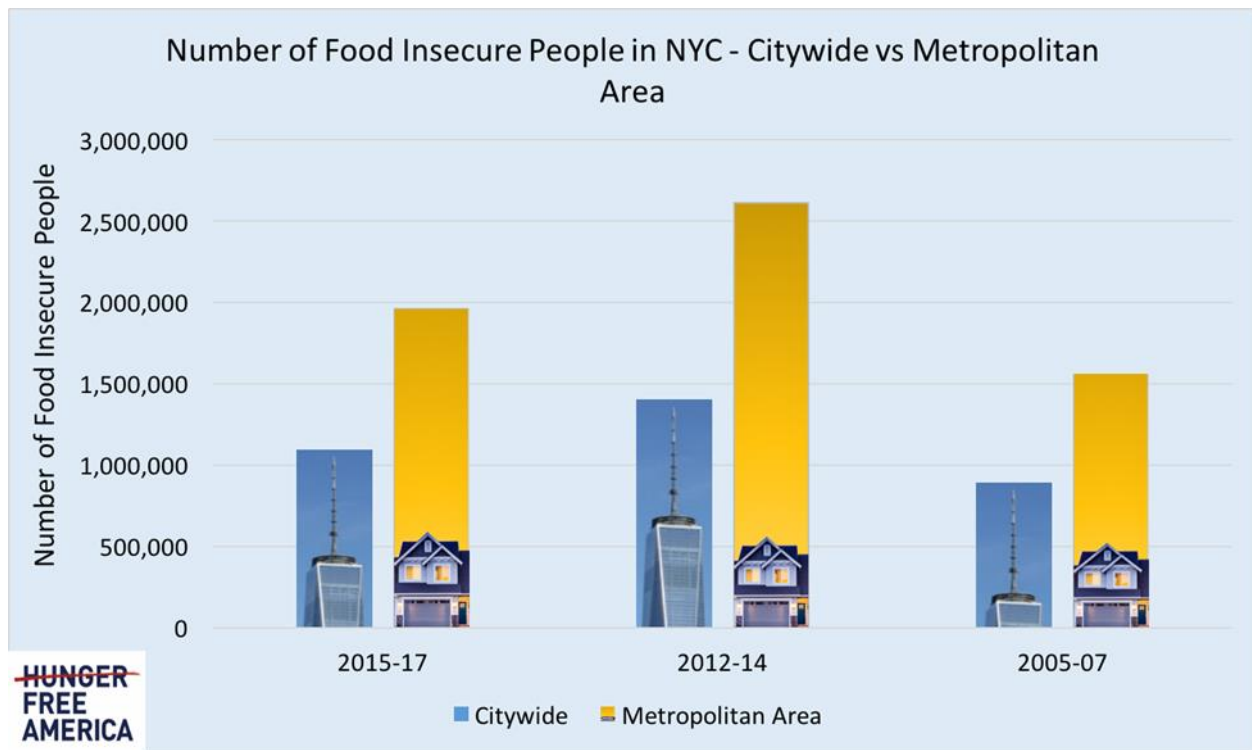
Advocates Decry Acceptance of Mass Deprivation as “New Normal”

The number of people unable to afford an adequate supply of food decreased in New York City, the New York City Metropolitan region, and New York State over the last six years, but remained higher than before the recession, according to a new report by the nonprofit group, Hunger Free America, based on an analysis of federal data. This is the first time in the last 20 years that food insecurity in the state, city, and region have demonstrated sustained, multi-year reductions, likely because of increases in wages and employment.

While previous reports have analyzed hunger in New York City and State, this is the first report to do so for the New York City Metropolitan area (including the five boroughs of the city, as well as the suburbs in New York State, Connecticut, and New Jersey). The study found that the number of people struggling against hunger in the region decreased by 25 percent during the past six years, declining from 2.61 million people in 2012-2014 to 1.96 million in 2015-2017. However, it is still 25.7 percent higher than the 2005-2007 number of 1.56 million—and one in ten New York City Metropolitan area residents were still unable to get the food they needed.

“While we are certainly pleased that job creation and wage growth over the last six years contributed to a significant decrease in hunger in and around New York, it is scandalous that the number of hungry residents is still far higher than before the recession,” said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, at an event at Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen in Manhattan Tuesday morning. “We simply must not accept mass deprivation as any sort of ‘new normal.’”

In New York City, the number of people living in food insecure households – households that are unable to afford an adequate supply of food -- decreased by 22 percent during the past six years, declining from 1.4 million people in 2012-2014 to 1.09 million in 2015-2017. However, the number is still 22 percent higher than the level of 0.892 million before the recession in 2005-2007, and one in eight city residents still struggles against hunger.



For the first time ever, Hunger Free America calculated how much it would take annually to end hunger in the city, state, and region. Their calculations look at increasing the food purchasing power of hungry people (through a combination of increased wages and increased government food benefits) to the levels of the food purchasing power of non-hungry people. The cost of ending hunger in this way would be, per year, approximately an additional \$569 million in New York City, an additional \$1 billion total in the Metropolitan region, and an additional \$1.1 billion total in all of New York State.

Continued Berg: “The cost of ending it isn’t nearly as high as the cost of accepting mass hunger, since hunger makes it more difficult for children to learn, workers to work, and older Americans to stay independent. Given the nation’s epidemic of working hungry and recent cutbacks in safety net programs, it’s clear that there is no way that even the most generous charities can pay for the \$1 billion tab of erasing hunger in the region. That’s why our solutions must go way beyond charity, and federal, state, and local elected officials should focus on creating jobs, raising wages, and ensuring an adequate safety net. In particular, Congress should use the pending Farm Bill to increase funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, and certainly reject conservative proposals to slash it.”

The report also found that New York City food pantries and soup kitchens fed five percent more people in 2018 than the previous year, on top of a six percent increase in 2017, a nine percent increase in 2016, and a five percent increase in 2015. In 2018, 34 percent of pantries and kitchens in the city were forced to turn people away, reduce their portion sizes, and/or limit their hours of operation due to a lack of resources. In contrast, the proportion of feeding agencies that were forced to reduce food distribution due to lack of resources was 38 percent in 2017 and 40 percent in 2016.

Berg added: “Concentrated efforts by both the City of New York and generous philanthropies have paid off, and considerably fewer feeding programs in New York now have to turn away hungry people. But given that we are the richest city in the history of the world, and are living during a time of soaring billionaire wealth, it is unacceptable that so many people are still forced to utilize soup kitchens and food pantries that a third of the charities that help them don’t have enough resources to meet the demand.”

“We are energized by the city’s progress in reducing food insecurity in the last four years,” said NYC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, Dr. Herminia Palacio, who spoke at the Holy Apostles event Tuesday morning. “As we work to build the fairest city in America, we remain committed to protecting access to food for New Yorkers in need. I thank Hunger Free America for their tireless advocacy and research — they are a driving force towards the goal of ending hunger in our city.”

The City’s Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks said, “New York City has safety net programs that are among the strongest in the nation, which is a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing food insecure New Yorkers with the resources they need to meet their nutritional needs. While we celebrate the significant progress New York City has made in fighting hunger, reported by Hunger Free America, the fact that there are New Yorkers who still face food insecurity is a somber reminder that we must continue to enhance access to federal, state, and local assistance and work with our partners in the private and philanthropic sectors to remove barriers to essential benefits and services.”

The Rev. Dr. Anna S. Pearson, Executive Director of Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, said, “With rates of food insecurity at stubbornly high pre-2008 recession rates, we’re reminded that hunger is a serious issue in our city and requires our heartfelt attention. Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen is now serving over 1,000 meals each weekday, including brown bag lunches for homeless students attending P.S. 33 in Chelsea, seniors on fixed incomes living nearby, and for homeless individuals in the Penn Station area, and we’ll soon be adding a Backpack Pantry Program to reach even more hungry New Yorkers.”

Other findings of the study:

- While food insecurity among working adults declined, most likely due to minimum wage increases, the area is still facing a “working hungry epidemic.” The number of adults working, but still struggling against hunger, in 2015-2017 was 351,912 in New York City; 666,852 in New York State; and 692,852 in New York Metropolitan Region.
- In 2015-17, 12.8 percent of the city’s population suffered from food insecurity, including 18.0 percent of all children, 8.9 percent of all employed adults, and 10.9 percent of all seniors.
- The Bronx remains New York City’s hungriest borough in every category, with more than one in four (26 percent) Bronx residents experiencing food insecurity. This includes more than 37 percent of all children, nearly 17 percent of working adults, and almost 24 percent of seniors.
- The number of children living in food insecure households in New York City is not decreasing as quickly as the overall number of food insecure people. While the number of food insecure individuals in New York City decreased by 22 percent from 2012-14 to 2015-17, the number of food insecure children (324,432 in 2015-17) fell by 16 percent. Conversely, the number of food insecure working adults (351,912 in 2015-17) experienced a larger drop of 26 percent in the same time period, likely due to the minimum wage increase.
- In 2015-17, 9.6 percent of the Metropolitan area’s population lived in food insecure households, including 12.8 percent of all children, 7.1 percent of all employed adults, and 7.1 percent of all seniors.

- In all of New York State, the number of people who can't afford an adequate supply of food decreased by 27 percent during the past six years, declining from 2.97 million people in 2012-2014 to 2.17 million in 2015-2017. However, the number is still 15 percent higher than the level of 1.83 million in 2005-2017, before the recession, and one in nine state residents still struggle against hunger.
- In 2015-17, 11.1 percent of the state's population suffered from food insecurity, including 15.8 percent of all children, 7.3 percent of all employed adults, and 7.2 percent of all seniors.

The study, "The Uneaten Big Apple: Hunger's High Cost in NYC," is available on Hunger Free America's website: hungerfreeamerica.org/media-research/research

Quotes from other elected officials:

"Food insecurity remains a top challenge. I want to thank Hunger Free NYC for their work on this critical issue." —**New York City Council Member Margaret S. Chin (District 1)**

"Hunger Free America's yearly report provides us a sobering landscape of how hunger and food insecurity continue to affect millions of New Yorkers, especially in districts like mine. This report should be used as an opportunity to formulate comprehensive, government-driven solutions to finally eradicate hunger and food insecurity from one of the richest cities in the world." —**New York State Senator Gustavo Rivera (33rd District)**

"This Thanksgiving, we must ensure that all New Yorkers are fed and warm. This Council has long advocated on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and will continue to fight hunger, not only through advocacy, but through direct funding to food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the five boroughs, ensuring that no New Yorker is left hungry this holiday season. I've always said it is imperative to strengthen this city's social safety net. Let's face it; there is nothing, literally nothing, more important than food. I thank Hunger Free America for conducting this Annual Hunger Survey and for being a proud partner with the Council on ending hunger in the city."—**New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson (District 3)**

"In what is supposedly the wealthiest nation on earth, hunger and food insecurity remain far too prevalent. We see its effects across New York City, especially among the very young and the elderly. Hunger Free America's Annual Hunger Survey provides us with crucial information about the scope of this crisis, pushing us to continue to fight for a better and healthier future for all Americans. As an elected official who continues to advocate for full funding for New York City's human service providers, especially organizations that address food insecurity, I am grateful for, and share, Hunger Free America's passionate commitment to ending hunger now."—**New York City Council Member Helen Rosenthal (District 6)**

"No New Yorker should have to go hungry at Thanksgiving or any time of the year. Yet the Trump Administration and House Republicans are proposing policies that would cut SNAP and scare people from accessing it. We are fighting those policies that would hurt our coworkers and neighbors." —**New York State Assembly Assistant Speaker Felix W. Ortiz (District 51)**

"At a time of year when most Americans are looking forward to holiday celebrations, we must not forget those who are going hungry, especially in our own city. To combat hunger, I call on my colleagues in all levels of government to join me in supporting livable wages and other policies that will help Americans feed their families. I also stand firmly against any cuts to the social safety net that protects thousands of Americans every day from going hungry. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, if you are able to give to your local food bank, I encourage you to do so, as so many food banks provide immediate relief to families across the five boroughs. And if you need help, please don't feel concerned or ashamed to visit your local food bank, as they are eager to help all New Yorkers." —**New York City Council Member Debi Rose (District 49)**

"Food insecurity continues to be a serious problem plaguing too many New York City residents. As we sit down this Thanksgiving with our loved ones to enjoy our dinners, we cannot forget that many families in our city are not as lucky. Now as the Trump administration works to cut SNAP benefits, many families could see an even more devastating blow to their food sources. As a city, we must stand up and be there for anyone affected by this. Thank you to Hunger Free NYC for putting together the Annual Hunger Survey and doing the work to find out how many New Yorkers are facing food insecurity this year." —**New York City Council Member Ben Kallos (District 5)**

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