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New Hunger Report Finds Massive Increase in Federal Government Food Aid Dwarfed the Hike in Charitable Food Distribution

**More Than 22% of Food Pantries, Soup Kitchens Nationwide Lack
Resources to Meet Soaring Demand, Based on Data from 46 States**

**Amount of SNAP Benefits Received in 33 States from March to
August 2020 Jump 47% to \$4.4 Billion**

**Advocates Call on Federal Government to Boost SNAP Funding and
Make It Easier to Apply for Benefits**

“Only Thing Preventing Mass Starvation is Federal Aid”

A new report by Hunger Free America found that, in 2020, a historic surge in federal funding for SNAP (formerly called Food Stamp) benefits dwarfed the sharp hike in food distributed by charitable food pantries and soup kitchens nationwide.

From March 2020 to July 2020, the total SNAP caseload in 33 states increased from 30.8 million to 35.2 million, according to the states' social services department websites. This represents a 14 percent jump and includes the SNAP caseloads of California, Texas, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio. The total amount of SNAP benefits received from March 2020 to July 2020 in 22 states -- including California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Ohio -- went up from \$3 billion to \$4.4 billion, which represents a 47 percent increase.

At the same time, 11 percent of soup kitchens and food pantries nationwide reported that they did not distribute enough food to meet demand in 2020, according to Hunger Free America's survey of emergency feeding programs, which was expanded this year to organizations nationwide for the first time ever. And more than 22 percent of feeding programs were forced to turn people away, reduce the amount of food distributed, or limit hours due to a lack of resources this year. This is a large increase compared to the 4.8 percent of feeding programs who reported the same for 2019.

“While charitable food pantries and soup kitchens struggled heroically to meet the increased demand during the pandemic, they were only able to scratch the surface of the need, and the only thing that truly prevented mass starvation here was a historic surge in federal funding for SNAP benefits,” said Joel Berg, Hunger Free America's CEO. “State, county, and city agencies that administer SNAP nationwide – and their rank-and-file employees – are our greatest hunger heroes in this crisis.”

In California alone, from March 2020 to July 2020, the SNAP caseload increased from 4 million to nearly 4.6 million -- a 15 percent increase -- and benefits dollars increased from \$501.6 million to \$764.9 million -- a 52 percent increase.

More than 75 percent of respondents to Hunger Free America's survey, which included emergency feeding programs from 46 states, reported that the primary reason they saw an increase in clients this year was due to adults losing their jobs and/or income. This was followed by nearly 42 percent attributing the increase to a loss of school meals, nearly 29 percent attributing the boost to senior centers closing, and nearly 23 percent citing that it was because immigrants were scared to receive government help.

Continued Berg: “The pandemic and the national economic collapse during the last eight months have resulted in an estimated 54 million people, including 18 million children, struggling with food insecurity. But even before the pandemic, in 2019, there were 35.2 million (one in nine) Americans including 10.7 million (one in seven) children who lived in food insecure households. We've seen time and time again that the most effective way to decrease poverty and hunger – and in the case of this year to prevent mass starvation – has been to increase the federal nutrition safety net. The U.S. Senate should immediately pass the HEROES Act, which was passed by the House in May and which would increase funding for the SNAP Program by 15 percent.”

Hunger Free America's survey asked emergency feeding programs what policy recommendations they supported, and the most recommended policy was to “enable low-income people to get higher paying jobs and/or save for the future without losing government food benefits,” an issue known as the “benefits cliff” that pushes people off public assistance once they earn slightly more money. More than 68 percent of respondents supported this policy followed by 59 percent supporting that state and local government agencies and local charities “should work hand-in-hand with low-income people and families to give them more money while jointly agreeing to long-term plans to help those people and families get ahead in the long-run by getting better jobs, saving more money, obtaining more education and job training, purchasing their own homes, and/or putting away more money for their retirement.”

Many survey respondents identified that those struggling with food insecurity often face numerous other barriers to economic mobility including access to affordable housing, health care, and childcare.

Angie Wood, Food Bank Manager of Pike Market Senior Center & Food Bank in Washington State, said in her survey response, “Nutrition access is not independent from other needs. By the time someone is food insecure, there are often many other things that have gone wrong. Addressing restricted access to nutrition needs to be part of a wholistic look at people's well-being.”

Hunger Free America’s study, “Pandemic Hunger Crisis: Safety Net Soars While Charities Struggle,” is available on Hunger Free America’s website: [hungerfreeamerica.org/media-research/research\](https://hungerfreeamerica.org/media-research/research/)

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