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Number of Families Struggling to Afford Food Rose Steeply in Pandemic and Remains High, Especially Among Children and Households of Color

By Brynne Keith-Jennings, Catlin Nchako, and Joseph Llobrera

The number of households having difficulty putting food on the table grew sharply over the past year due to COVID-19's far-reaching health and economic impacts and remains high relative to pre-pandemic levels, multiple measures suggest, though it has fallen in recent weeks as additional federal relief has begun to reach low-income households. CBPP analysis of data from the Census Bureau's ongoing Household Pulse Survey from April 2020 through late March 2021 has found:

- **Food hardship spiked due to the pandemic and remained high through late March 2021, Census Bureau data suggest.** Some 18 million adults (8.8 percent) said their household didn't get enough to eat sometimes or often in the last seven days, data from late March 2021 show. Hardship by this measure, which skyrocketed with the onset of COVID-19 and its economic effects in spring 2020, remained well above pre-pandemic levels over the summer and rose once again in the fall, only beginning to decline in early 2021 as assistance from the relief package enacted in late December and from March's American Rescue Plan began reaching low-income households. By comparison, 8.5 million adults (3.4 percent) lived in households that didn't get enough to eat at some point in all of 2019.¹
- **Food hardship is especially high among Black and Latino households.** This disparity reflects both long-standing inequities across society and the disproportionate impact of the current crisis on those households. Black and Latino adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report in late March 2021 that their household didn't get enough to eat in the last seven days: 16 percent each, compared to 6 percent of white adults.

¹ Differences in survey methods likely explain some, but not all, of the increase. The December 2019 survey (the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement) is conducted with a live interviewer, whereas the Household Pulse Survey is conducted online. One comparison found that, before the crisis, people in an online survey were 38 percent more likely to report food insecurity than comparable respondents in a different survey with a live interviewer. Even if the December 2019 estimate of 3.4 percent were higher, however, the current figure of 8.8 percent would represent a significant rise. Moreover, the 2019 survey asked households about their having not enough to eat in the last 12 months; if it had asked about the last week, as the Pulse survey does, the 2019 figure would have been even smaller and the increase since 2019 even bigger. Michael Karpman, Stephen Zuckerman, and Dulce Gonzalez, "The Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey," Urban Institute, 2018, Table 9, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/98919/the_well-being_and_basic_needs_survey_1.pdf.

• **Food hardship is also higher among households with children.** Eleven percent of adults in households with children reported that their household sometimes or often didn't get enough to eat in the last seven days, compared to 7 percent of adults in households without children. The number of children living in households where *children* aren't getting enough to eat is especially concerning. In late March, up to 8.8 million children lived in a household where the children weren't eating enough because they couldn't afford enough food in the last seven days. That's much greater than the 1.1 million children in December 2019 living in households where the children didn't get enough to eat at any point in the last 30 days. Table 2 shows equivalent figures (over multiple weeks due to small sample sizes) by state.

Children of color face even higher rates of food hardship. Over one-fifth of children in Black and Latino households (based on the race or ethnicity of the parent) live in a household where children didn't eat enough in the last seven days, three times the rate for white children.

This level of food hardship observed in these data among children is unprecedented in recent decades. Adults generally try to direct resources toward children and shield them from food hardship. For that reason, over the past few decades a relatively small (though still concerning) number of children have been exposed to conditions such as reduced food intake, even in households where some adults may have to take those steps. The current high figures may mean that many families have so few resources they cannot protect children from food insecurity.

Multiple sources have found similarly high levels of households experiencing difficulty affording enough food over the past year. For example, a Brookings Institution analysis using April 2020 data concluded that "it is clear that young children are experiencing food insecurity to an extent unprecedented in modern times."²

Lack of adequate food can have long-term consequences for children's health and well-being. Studies link food insecurity among children with reduced intake of some key nutrients, health problems such as iron deficiency (which is linked with long-term neurological damage), and behavioral issues and mental health conditions, which can have negative impacts on children's educational attainment and economic well-being. Studies also show that receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits has significant long-term benefits for children, including improved health, educational attainment, and labor market outcomes.

Federal policymakers have enacted several relief packages over the past year to help families put food on the table and meet other needs. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of March 2020, for example, gave states the option to issue monthly emergency supplementary benefits to some SNAP recipients; it also created the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program, which allows states to provide meal replacement benefits to households whose children lost school meals due to school closures. The government spending bill of October 2020 extended P-EBT and other SNAP provisions. The relief package enacted in December 2020 boosted the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent. And the American Rescue Plan of March 2021 extended P-EBT and the SNAP benefit

² See Lauren Bauer, "The COVID-19 crisis has already left too many children hungry in America," Brookings Institution, May 6, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america>. See also Lauren Bauer, "About 14 million children in the US are not getting enough to eat," Brookings Institution, July 9, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/07/09/about-14-million-children-in-the-us-are-not-getting-enough-to-eat>.

increase and included funds to modernize the WIC nutrition program for low-income women, infants, and children. These packages also included other provisions, such as expanded unemployment insurance and Economic Impact Payments, aimed at reducing hardship and improving households' purchasing power. Without these relief measures, hardship likely would have been far more severe.

There are several likely reasons why, as these data suggest, food hardship remained high through 2020 and is still elevated. Some nutrition assistance and other federal relief excluded key groups of low-income households; the lowest-income 40 percent of SNAP households, for example, were left out of the emergency SNAP benefits in Families First until a policy change in April 2021. Some food-insecure households may have faced access barriers to receiving SNAP benefits as states have struggled to accommodate the large increase in applicants, especially while shifting to virtual operations due to the pandemic. Other families with difficulty affording food may still have income above SNAP's income limits or face other eligibility restrictions. Many families experienced long lags between the loss of school meals for their children and the start of P-EBT benefits, and most didn't receive P-EBT from the summer of 2020 through early 2021, as states had not yet implemented the program for the school year that started in the fall of 2020.

In addition, some families may not have known what assistance was available to them or had difficulty navigating the different programs amid other pandemic-caused disruptions and uncertainty over whether more relief might come as policymakers debated relief measures for much of the second half of 2020. And, given the depth of overall hardship and accumulating debt that many households have faced over months of economic distress with little federal relief, some may have struggled to afford food at times even if they received some of those additional benefits.

Recent declines in food hardship seen in the Pulse data likely reflect increased receipt of assistance (such as higher SNAP benefits and P-EBT reaching more families) as well as relief from American Rescue Plan provisions. The reduction in hardship is a promising sign, and relief from the American Rescue Plan and earlier measures will continue reducing hardship and poverty into the fall.³ But to ensure that families have access to adequate nutrition as the economy recovers and in future crises, federal and state policymakers need to strengthen nutrition assistance programs and address long-standing gaps.

In SNAP, that includes reassessing benefit levels (which studies suggest are too low to help households adequately afford food),⁴ reducing access barriers by simplifying and streamlining procedures, and reducing eligibility restrictions such as those on immigrant households. Policymakers should also build on P-EBT's success to support children during future summers and other school closures, such as by creating a permanent, nationwide summer EBT program.

³ Dottie Rosenbaum *et al.*, "Food Assistance in American Rescue Plan Act Will Reduce Hardship, Provide Economic Stimulus," CBPP, updated March 29, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/food-assistance-in-american-rescue-plan-act-will-reduce-hardship-provide>.

⁴ Steven Carlson, "More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Better Afford Food," CBPP, July 30, 2019, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>.

In WIC, policymakers should continue to support outreach, modernization, and innovation to make it easier for eligible families to enroll and participate. And policymakers should make it easier for high-poverty schools to continue providing free meals to all students under the Community Eligibility Provision. Finally, because factors outside the scope of food assistance, such as low-paying jobs and high housing costs, also contribute to food insecurity, policymakers should devote resources to these areas as well to support an equitable recovery, including by investing in children and supporting low-wage workers.⁵

Food Hardship Surged in Pandemic and Remains Extremely High, Census Data Show

The pandemic and resulting business closures led to massive job and income losses in the spring of 2020, while disruptions in the food supply system contributed to higher food prices.⁶ Families with children, already likelier to live in poverty, faced both school closures and income losses, with parents suddenly having to provide meals and other supports that schools previously provided, but often with less income.

Federal relief measures enacted in the spring of 2020 helped millions of families and prevented even more serious hardship, but also had some eligibility gaps, implementation lags, and short durations, leaving many households with limited or inconsistent assistance for much of 2020. The government funding bill enacted in October included some relief measures, but a new relief package was not enacted until late December.⁷ At the same time, the virus raged on in the second half of 2020, job creation stalled, and joblessness remained high, with disproportionate job losses among workers in low-wage industries, immigrants, and workers with less than a college degree.⁸ Many other workers who remained employed were working fewer hours. Many families also faced mounting bills, with more than 1 in 7 renters not caught up on rent in late March 2021.⁹

⁵ Sharon Parrott *et al.*, “Building an Equitable Recovery Requires Investing in Children, Supporting Workers, and Expanding Health Coverage,” CBPP, March 24, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/building-an-equitable-recovery-requires-investing-in-children>.

⁶ For information on rising food prices early in the pandemic, see Joseph Llobrera, “Rising Food Prices Means Rising Need for Aid,” CBPP, June 18, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/rising-food-prices-means-rising-need-for-aid>. In February 2021, food at home prices were still 3.7 percent above February 2020 levels; see <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings/>.

⁷ For more information on some of the changes in the October funding bill as they relate to P-EBT and other programs, see CBPP, “States Are Using Much-Needed Temporary Flexibility in SNAP to Respond to COVID-19 Challenges,” updated April 16, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/states-are-using-much-needed-temporary-flexibility-in-snap-to-respond-to>.

⁸ Chad Stone and Matt Saenz, “Labor Market Weaker Than Headline Numbers Suggest,” CBPP, March 1, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/labor-market-weaker-than-headline-numbers-suggest>.

⁹ Douglas Rice and Ann Oliva, “Housing Assistance in House COVID Bill Would Prevent Millions of Evictions, Help People Experiencing Homelessness,” CBPP, February 8, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/housing-assistance-in-house-covid-bill-would-prevent-millions-of-evictions-help>. For more recent figures see Stone and Saenz, *op. cit.*

Due to these factors, Census Bureau data and other research suggests that the number of families reporting difficulty affording food (in addition to housing and other expenses) increased dramatically in the spring of 2020 and remains well above pre-pandemic levels, despite declining in early 2021.

The Household Pulse Survey, launched in April 2020, has provided nearly real-time data on how the unprecedented health and economic crises are affecting the nation. Some 18 million adults (8.8 percent) said their household didn't get enough to eat sometimes or often in the last seven days in the most recent survey, conducted in late March (March 17-29). That's far above the most comparable pre-pandemic estimate, which showed that 8.5 million adults (3.4 percent) lived in households that didn't get enough to eat at some point in all of 2019.¹⁰ (See Figure 1.) Table 1 has estimates of these figures by state.

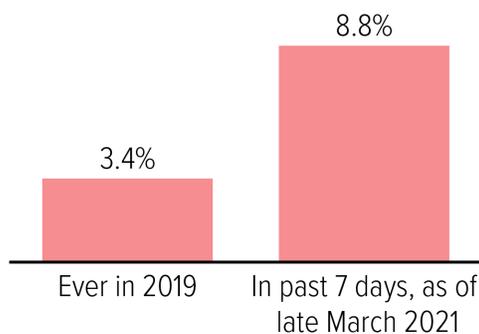
As Figure 2 shows, the number of adults reporting their family didn't get enough to eat was significantly above pre-pandemic levels when the Census Bureau began collecting data and stayed high through the end of Phase 1 of the survey in July. Food hardship rose again in the fall — reaching in December the highest level in comparable data back to August — before falling somewhat in early 2021 and sharply in late March. (Because of changes in the survey's design, the results for roughly the first half of 2020 are not directly comparable with more recent results. See box, "Household Pulse Survey.")

The Household Pulse Survey's measure of food hardship, known as "food insufficiency," is a more severe condition of food hardship than "food insecurity" (which the Agriculture Department [USDA] estimates on an annual basis)¹¹ and is closer in severity to USDA's "very low food security."¹² Food insufficiency is based on a single Household Pulse question that captures situations where households sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat. Food insecurity is based on the

FIGURE 1

In Pandemic, More Have Too Little to Eat, Census Surveys Suggest

Share of adults reporting that their household sometimes or often had "not enough to eat"



Note: The Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) asks about food sufficiency experiences over the last 12 months and the Household Pulse Survey asks about food insufficiency experiences over the past 7 days. Differences in collection methods mean the two figures may not be precisely comparable.

Source: CBPP analysis of the December 2019 CPS-FSS and the Household Pulse Survey tables for week of March 17-29, 2021.

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¹⁰ CBPP, "Tracking the COVID-19 Recession's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships," updated April 22, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and-employment-hardships>.

¹¹ Alisha Coleman-Jensen *et al.*, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2019," USDA, September 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99282/err-275.pdf?v=8745.4>

¹² According to USDA, "Food insufficiency is comparable to the classification of 'very low food security' used in USDA's annual assessments of food security." See USDA, "Food insufficiency in mid-June 2020 higher in some States than others," June 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=98778> and "Measurement," updated December 18, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx>.

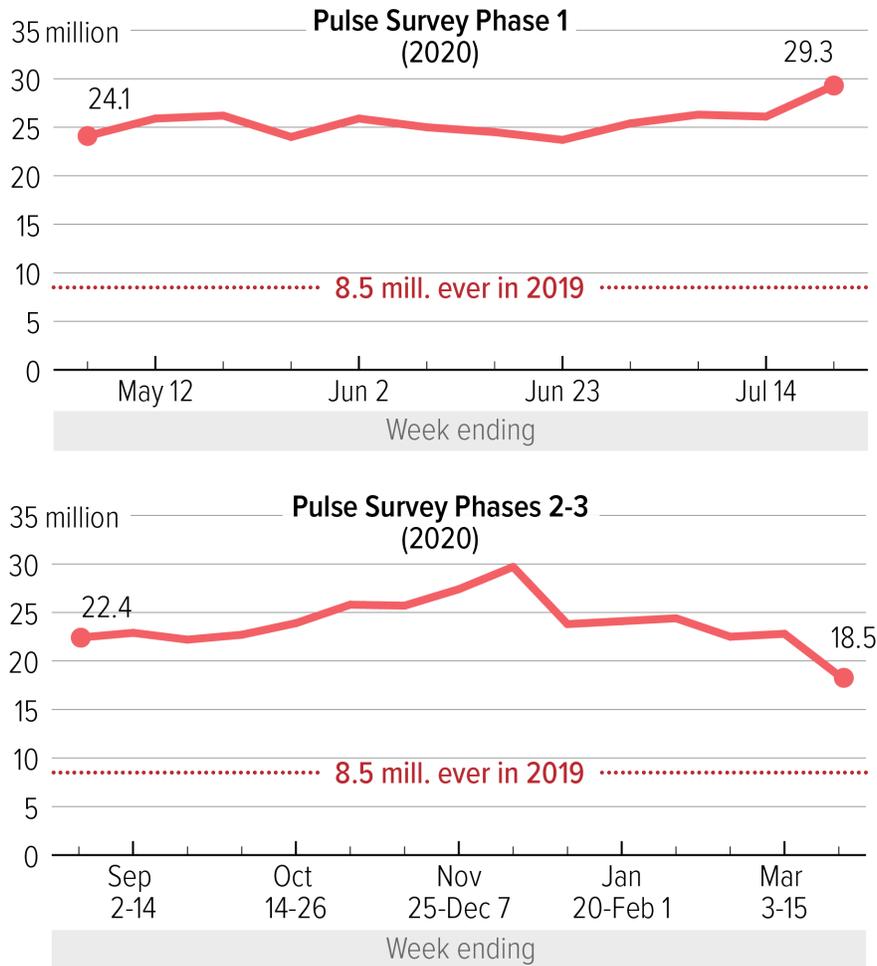
number of affirmative responses to a set of 10 to 18 questions covering a wide range of behaviors and conditions indicating that some household members are concerned about affording, or can't afford, enough food for an active life. A household could be classified as food insecure after experiencing reductions in dietary diversity or quality or concern about running out of food; food insufficiency reflects more serious situations such as reduced food intake or skipped meals. Given the sharp increase in food insufficiency, food *insecurity* has likely risen even more than food insufficiency during the pandemic. For example, in May 2020, when 10 to 11 percent of Household Pulse respondents reported experiencing food insufficiency in the past seven days, Northwestern University researchers estimated that the household food insecurity rates were about 22 to 23 percent, roughly double the share of households that reported experiencing food insecurity at any point of 2019.¹³

¹³ Diane Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts, "Food Insecurity in the Census Household Pulse Survey Data Tables," Institute for Policy Research, June 1, 2020, <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/reports/ipr-rapid-research-reports-pulse-hh-data-1-june-2020.pdf>. These researchers used several approaches to estimate food insecurity based on analyzing the relationship between food insecurity and food insufficiency in other data sets.

FIGURE 2

Food Hardship Significantly Higher During Pandemic

Number of adults who reported that their household didn't have enough food



Note: Figures based on respondent's answer that household sometimes or often had "not enough to eat" in last 7 days (for 2020-2021 data) or at any point in year (for 2019 data). Figures from May-July 2020 not comparable with more recent figures due to methodological changes in Pulse Survey starting in August. Pulse data were collected and disseminated every week prior to August, every two weeks thereafter.

Source: CBPP analysis of December 2019 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement and (for 2020-2021) Household Pulse Survey published tables.

Hearing Directly From Low-Income Families: Difficulty Finding Adequate Work

While surveys such as the Household Pulse Survey provide essential data on food hardship and other issues during the pandemic, some surveys with open-ended responses illustrate the challenges that low-income families are facing.

Many survey respondents report loss of jobs or work hours and difficulty finding adequate work that pays enough for them to pay bills:

- *“Hours were cut down to 5 hours a week at my job. Currently behind on rent.”^a*
- *“I only make enough to pay for bills but not enough to buy food. I don’t even make a lunch for work.”^b*
- *“Since the pandemic I have been turning to churches, family, and friends and even a few coworkers for help. I took a huge pay [cut] because my hours dropped at work because of the pandemic.”^c*
- *“I’m very close to losing our car & our home. If I go & take just any job that doesn’t have [health] insurance I still lose the state insurance & I’m diabetic, therefore it’s life or death. We’ve found ourselves in a lose-lose situation.”^c*

Respondents, especially families with children, report difficulty working due to challenges such as caretaking responsibilities for children attending school virtually from home:

- *“Back to school virtually for a 2nd grader. This has added 30 hours a week of being a teacher to my week. Returning to work to offset my husband’s loss of work has become impossible.”^c*
- *“Families with children are at a complete loss because at least one parent must remain home to care for the kids but that is a huge hit in income with nothing to replace it.”^a*
- *“I’ve had to stop taking blood pressure medication because I have to feed my kids, who are now home schooling because of the pandemic.”^c*
- *“I’m worried about if and when I do find a job, [my children] will have to do online home school and I will have to quit my job to be home with them. The kids have to take school one day at a time; every day might be the last it’s open. They don’t have the security they once felt, I think.”^c*

Excerpts have been edited for clarity.

Sources:

^a The Southern Economic Advancement Project surveyed SNAP participants in 12 Southern states in August 28-September 7, 2020; see https://theseap.org/wp-content/uploads/Southern-Voice_-Quote-Book.pdf.

^b The University of Oregon’s Center for Translational Neuroscience administers the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development-Early Childhood, a weekly survey of households with children aged 5 and under; see <https://www.uorapidresponse.com/>.

^c Propel, Inc., which operates Fresh EBT (a mobile app that helps SNAP participants manage their benefits), has conducted a monthly survey of app users since September 2020; see <https://www.joinpropel.com/covid-19>. Propel also provided CBPP with unpublished quotes from this survey.

Black, Latino Households Facing Especially High Hardship

Families of color have faced some of the worst hardship, due in part to harsh, long-standing inequities in education, employment, housing, health care, and other arenas that the current crisis is exacerbating. For example, disparities in unemployment are rooted in structural racism, such as

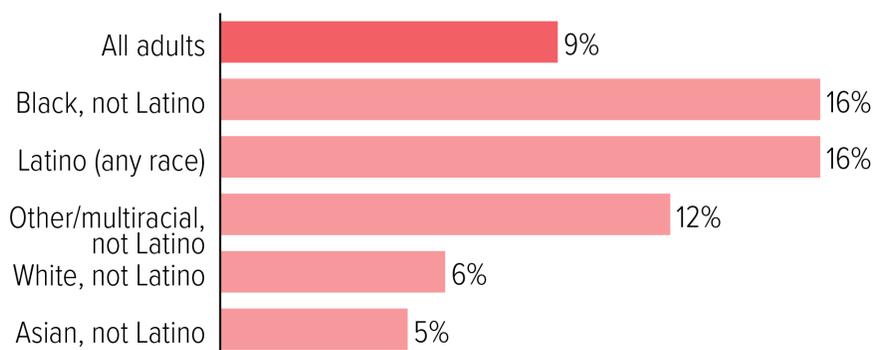
unequal school funding and hiring discrimination, and workers of color are likelier to have lost jobs due to the current crisis.¹⁴

Black and Latino adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report in late March 2021 that their household didn't get enough to eat in the last seven days: 16 percent each, compared to 6 percent of white adults. Similarly, 12 percent of adults who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or as multiracial, taken together reported that their household didn't get enough to eat. (See Figure 3.)

FIGURE 3

Black and Latino Households Likelier to Experience Food Insufficiency During Pandemic

Share of adults saying that their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last 7 days



Note: Other/multiracial, not Latino = people identifying as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race. Percentages are based on reporting distributions and do not include the populations that did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables for March 17-29, 2021

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¹⁴ Stone and Saenz, *op. cit.*; and Chad Stone, “Jobs Recovery Still Long Way Off, Especially for Low-Wage Workers and Workers of Color,” CBPP, February 5, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/jobs-recovery-still-long-way-off-especially-for-low-wage-workers-and-workers-of-color>.

Household Pulse Survey

The Census Bureau has conducted the Household Pulse Survey since April 2020, with three distinct phases:

- Phase 1: Data collected weekly April 23-July 21, 2020.
- Phase 2: Data collected biweekly August 19-October 26, 2020.
- Phase 3.0: Data collected biweekly October 28-December 21, 2020 and January 6-March 29, 2021.
- Phase 3.1: Ongoing data collection starting April 14, 2021.

Phase 1 asked respondents about their employment status, food insufficiency, housing, health and access to health care, and educational disruption. Phase 2 carried over many of these questions and added new questions about benefit receipt, spending patterns, financial resources, telework, and travel; the new questions roughly doubled the length of the survey. These and other factors resulted in an increase in the share of survey respondents who didn't respond to all questions. Phase 3 made slight changes to Phase 2, adding questions about vaccine receipt and removing some questions.

Importantly, the survey changes mean that data from Phases 2 and 3 are not directly comparable with data in Phase 1. Any differences in food insufficiency rates between Phases 1 and 2 may reflect those changes rather than changes in households' circumstances.

More Children, Households With Children Also Report Not Having Enough to Eat

Food hardship has been especially prevalent in households with children and even among children themselves, Census data suggest, which is especially concerning. Eleven percent of adults in households with children reported that the household didn't get enough to eat, compared to 7 percent of adults in households without children.

Seven to 13 percent of adults with children reported in late March that their *children* sometimes or often didn't eat enough in the last seven days because they couldn't afford it. By comparison, 1.1 percent of adults with children reported that their children didn't get enough to eat in the last 30 days of 2019. (The 7-13 percent range reflects the different ways to measure food hardship in the Household Pulse Survey.¹⁵) Households typically first scale back on food for adults or make other choices such as eating less healthy food before cutting back on what children have to eat or otherwise compromising their access to nutritious food.¹⁶ For this reason, the number of children in households where the adults report that the children aren't eating enough is generally relatively low.

¹⁵ Thirteen percent of respondents answered affirmatively to the question of whether their household didn't have enough to eat, while 7 percent of respondents answered affirmatively both to that question and to the question of whether their children didn't have enough to eat.

¹⁶ For example, research finds a strong relationship between food insecurity and worse dietary quality for adults, but less so for children, suggesting that adults shield children from the dietary consequences of food insecurity. See Karla L. Hanson and Leah M Connor, "Food insecurity and dietary quality in US adults and children: a systematic review," *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 100, No. 2, August 2014, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.114.084525>.

Over the last two decades, for example, the share of households with children where children experienced very low food security at some point in the year — meaning their eating patterns were disrupted (such as by having to skip a meal or not eating for a whole day) due to lack of resources — never exceeded 1.5 percent, according to USDA’s annual measurement of household food insecurity.¹⁷

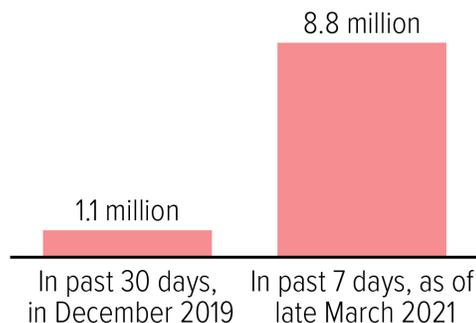
Up to 8.8 million children lived in a household where the children weren’t eating enough because they couldn’t afford enough food in late March 2021 (March 17 through 29). That’s *eight times* the 1.1 million children in December 2019 living in households where the children didn’t get enough to eat at any point in the last 30 days.¹⁸ (See Figure 4.)

Racial disparities in food hardship were even more pronounced for children. In late March 2021, up to 25 percent of children in Black households and 23 percent of children in Latino households (based on the race or ethnicity of the parent) lived in households where children didn’t eat enough in the last seven days because the household couldn’t afford it, compared to 7 percent of children in white households. (See Figure 5.)

FIGURE 4

Millions More Children Not Getting Enough to Eat

Children in households where children weren’t eating enough because household couldn’t afford it



Note: These estimates are approximations; the Pulse Survey was designed to provide data on adult well-being, not precise counts of children. The Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS) asks about food insufficiency experiences over the past 30 days and the Household Pulse Survey asks about food insufficiency experiences over the past 7 days. Differences in collection methods mean the two figures may not be precisely comparable.

Source: CBPP analysis of the December 2019 CPS-FSS and the Household Pulse Survey tables for week of March 17-29, 2021.

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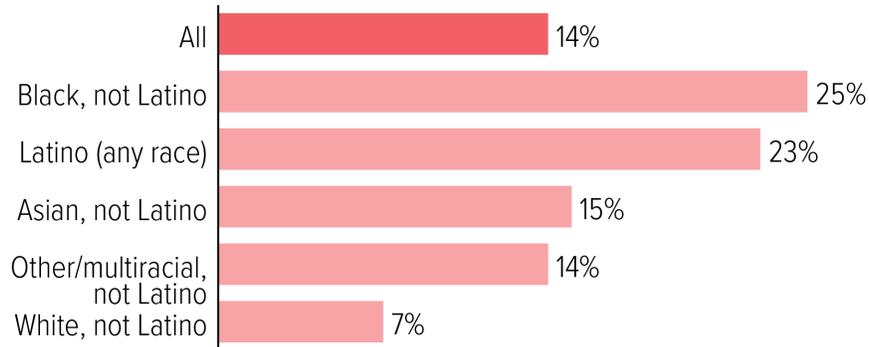
¹⁷ Coleman-Jensen, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, Table 1B. While the share of households with very low food security among children is distinct from the share of adults reporting that children sometimes or often don’t eat enough (food insufficiency), these figures are broadly similar.

¹⁸ As note 1 explains, this difference may partly reflect differences in survey methods, as the annual survey uses a live interviewer while the Household Pulse Survey is online. Even accounting for these methods, however, the difference is likely substantial, which would suggest a large rise in hardship, especially given that the 2019 survey asked about food hardship over a longer time frame (for these questions, over 30 days as compared to seven days in the Pulse).

FIGURE 5

Children in Households of Color Likelier to Experience Food Insufficiency During Pandemic

Share of children in households where children didn't eat enough in the last 7 days because the household couldn't afford it



Note: These estimates are approximations; the Pulse Survey was designed to provide data on adult well-being, not precise counts of children. Race/ethnicity designation is based on that of the parent. Other/Multiracial not Latino = people identifying as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race. Percentages are based on reporting distributions and do not include the populations that did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables for March 17-29, 2021

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Multiple Data Sources Find Similarly High Food Hardship

Other data sources and researchers have also found evidence that large numbers of households and children have struggled to afford enough food:

- “[I]t is clear that young children are experiencing food insecurity to an extent unprecedented in modern times,” according to a Brookings Institution analysis using April 2020 data from the COVID Impact Survey, Survey of Mothers with Young Children, and Household Pulse Survey.¹⁹ (As noted, food insecurity is a broader, less severe measure of a household’s difficulty affording adequate food than the Household Pulse Survey uses.) The researchers found later that the share of mothers reporting their children were not eating enough declined between the onset of the pandemic and November 2020, but that “the share of parents, especially parents of children younger than five, who report that their children are not eating enough is quite high by historic standards.”²⁰

¹⁹ Bauer, “The COVID-19 crisis has already left too many children hungry in America,” *op. cit.*

²⁰ Lauren Bauer, “Hungry at Thanksgiving: A Fall 2020 update on food insecurity in the U.S.,” Brookings Institution, November 23, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/11/23/hungry-at-thanksgiving-a-fall-2020-update-on-food-insecurity-in-the-u-s/>.

- Food insecurity may have doubled overall and tripled among households with children in April and May 2020, according to estimates by Diane Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts using data from the COVID Impact Survey, Current Population Survey, and other sources.²¹
- More than 1 in 5 parents reported their household experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, according to an Urban Institute Coronavirus Tracking Survey conducted in September 2020.²² This survey also found significant racial disparities, with 30.5 percent of Latino adults and 28.2 percent of Black adults reporting food insecurity, compared to 14.7 percent of white adults.²³
- Other evidence also points to a sharp increase during the pandemic in the number of households struggling to pay for food and other basics. This includes year-over-year increases in requests for help with food (up 97 percent), shelter (42 percent), and utilities (31 percent), according to an analysis of calls to the United Way’s “211” help line;²⁴ a 55 percent rise in the number of people using food banks since before the pandemic, according to the food bank network Feeding America;²⁵ and a near doubling (from \$8 billion to \$15.8 billion) in customers’ total estimated arrearages on electricity bills between December 31, 2019 and December 31, 2020, according to state energy assistance program directors.²⁶

In contrast, an Urban Institute report finds that food and other material hardship *declined* in 2020, but it also suggests that food insecurity is even more widespread than most other reports show (at 20.5 percent of adults in 2020 and 23.9 percent in 2019, more than double the rate in Census Bureau

²¹ Diane Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts, “How Much Has Food Insecurity Risen? Evidence from the Census Household Pulse Survey,” Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research, June 10, 2020, <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/reports/ipr-rapid-research-reports-pulse-hh-data-10-june-2020.pdf>; Diane Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts, “Food Insecurity Triples for Families With Children During COVID-19 Pandemic,” Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research, May 13, 2020, <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/news/2020/food-insecurity-triples-for-families-during-covid.html>.

²² Elaine Waxman, Poonam Gupta, and Dolce Gonzalez, “Six Months into the Pandemic, 40 Percent of Parents with Young Children Have Experienced Economic Fallout,” Urban Institute, December 2020, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103336/six-months-into-pandemic-40-percent-parents-with-young-children-have-experienced-economic-fallout.pdf>.

²³ Elaine Waxman, Poonam Gupta, and Dolce Gonzalez, “Food Insecurity Edged Back up after COVID-19 Relief Expired,” Urban Institute, October 27, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/food-insecurity-edged-back-after-covid-19-relief-expired>.

²⁴ Rachel Garg, Balaji Golla, and Matthew Kreuter, “Year 1 of COVID-19: Needs rise 59%,” Washington University in St. Louis Health Communication Research Laboratory, March 29, 2021, <https://hcr.l.wustl.edu/year-1-of-covid-19-needs-rise-59/>. The study compared phone requests received between March 12, 2020 and March 11, 2021 with those received during the same dates in the prior 12 months.

²⁵ Paul Morello, “The food bank response to COVID, by the numbers,” Feeding America, March 12, 2021, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/food-bank-response-covid-numbers>.

²⁶ Letter from National Energy Assistance Directors Association to Xavier Becerra, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, March 29, 2021, <https://neada.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/LetterHHSReleaseofFundsARP.pdf>.

data for 2019).²⁷ The data source used in the report also shows nearly a 50 percent rise in the number of adults using charitable food (such as food banks or free meals) in the past 12 months, reaching nearly in 1 in 5 adults in December 2020.²⁸

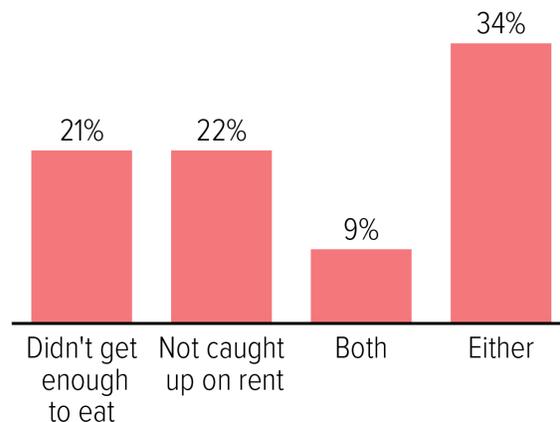
Lack of Food Can Harm Children’s Health and Well-Being

The data showing large number of children not getting enough to eat raise serious concerns about the long-term consequences of the current crisis. Research has shown links between children’s living circumstances and their brain development and life outcomes; experiences such as food insecurity can affect children’s physical, social, and emotional development in multiple ways.²⁹ Studies link food insecurity among children with reduced intake of some key nutrients, health problems such as iron deficiency (which is linked with long-term neurological damage), and behavioral issues and mental health conditions. These problems, in turn, can lower children’s test scores, their likelihood of graduating from high school, and

FIGURE 6

1 in 3 Children in Renter Households Face Food and/or Housing Hardship

Percent of children in households that:



Note: Didn't get enough to eat = household had “not enough to eat” sometimes or often in last 7 days. Figures omit children in households that do not pay cash rent, such as those in employer-provided housing, as well as those who did not respond to one or both hardship questions. Survey does not collect data on children directly; figures for children are estimated based on number of children in each household.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census' Household Pulse Survey public use file, data collected March 17-29, 2021.

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²⁷ Michael Karpman and Stephen Zuckerman, “Average Decline in Material Hardship during the Pandemic Conceals Unequal Circumstances,” Urban Institute, April 14, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/average-decline-material-hardship-during-pandemic-conceals-unequal-circumstances>.

²⁸ Elaine Waxman, Poonam Gupta, and Dulce Gonzalez, “Charitable Food Use Increased Nearly 50 Percent from 2019 to 2020,” Urban Institute, March 2021, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103825/charitable-food-use-increased-nearly-50-percent-from-2019-to-2020_0.pdf.

²⁹ Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child has resources that show how experiencing adverse experiences such as poverty and food insecurity can affect children’s development. See for example, “Connecting the Brain to the Rest of the Body: Early Childhood Development and Lifelong Health Are Deeply Intertwined,” Working Paper No. 15, 2020, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/connecting-the-brain-to-the-rest-of-the-body-early-childhood-development-and-lifelong-health-are-deeply-intertwined/>.

their earnings in adulthood.³⁰ Even short periods of food insecurity may pose long-term risks for children.

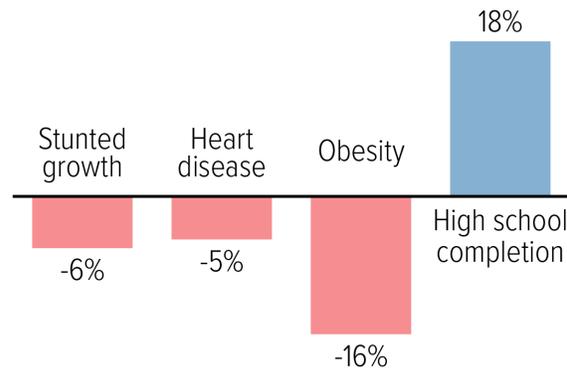
In addition, due to the pandemic, many children live in households with difficulty paying rent or other expenses in addition to food, Household Pulse data show. (See Figure 6.)³¹ The negative effects of food hardship may be compounded for children experiencing multiple hardships.

Parents struggling to meet basic needs often report high levels of stress, which can hamper caregivers' efforts to provide steady support to children and have serious consequences for the children. Research has found links between parental stress and children's emotional and behavioral outcomes, for example.³² Recent Household Pulse data suggest that stress is high among households experiencing hardship: 51 percent of adults in households with children that didn't have enough to eat sometimes or often in the last seven days said they felt

FIGURE 7

Children With Access to SNAP Fare Better Years Later

Percentage-point change in outcomes for adults who received SNAP as children, compared to adults who did not



Note: The study compared individuals who had access to SNAP (then food stamps) in early childhood after its introduction in the 1960s and early 1970s to similar children who did not (because they were born before its introduction) in each county.

Source: Hoynes, Schanzenbach, and Almond, "Long-Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net," *American Economic Review*, April 2016.

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³⁰ See Brynne Keith-Jennings, "Boosting SNAP: Benefit Increase Would Help Children in Short and Long Term," CBPP, July 30, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/boosting-snap-benefit-increase-would-help-children-in-short-and-long-term>.

³¹ For example, 1 in 3 children living in rental housing live in a household where household members aren't getting enough to eat, aren't caught up in rent, or both, according to CBPP analysis of Household Pulse Survey data.

³² LaDonna Pavetti, "Children in Distress Due to Increased Hardship: An Interview With Dr. Philip A. Fisher," CBPP, February 23, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/children-in-distress-due-to-increased-hardship-an-interview-with-dr-philip-a-fisher>; Elizabeth T. Gershoff *et al.*, "Income Is Not Enough: Incorporating Material Hardship Into Models of Income Associations With Parenting and Child Development," *Child Development*, Vol. 78, No. 1, January/February 2007, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2835994/>; April S. Masarik and Rand D. Conger, "Stress and Child Development: A Review of the Family Stress Model," *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 13, February 1, 2017, https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1238&context=psych_facpubs; Rand D. Conger *et al.*, "Economic Stress, Coercive Family Process, and Developmental Problems of Adolescents," *Child Development*, Vol. 65, No. 2, April 1994, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1131401>; Rand D. Conger *et al.*, "Economic pressure in African American families: a replication and extension of the family stress model," *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, March 2002, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11881755/>.

symptoms of anxiety and depression “nearly every day.”³³

Hearing Directly From Low-Income Families: Coping With Food Hardship

Many survey respondents report that the depth of their income losses and the duration of the crisis have forced them to deplete their savings, borrow from friends or family, or adopt other strategies to pay their bills:

- *“We are having issues making sure bills are paid. We have had to choose between food, vehicle, or internet for my job.”^a*
- *“I have had to borrow money from relatives to make ends meet. I have also had to pawn items to pay bills such as my car ... and gas for my car so I can continue to work.”^b*
- *“Lots of people, my family included, are paying rent with high interest credit cards or payday loans.”^b*
- *“I had my electric bill disconnected twice in the past three months, and my phone bill disconnected. An ex-coworker helped pay one of them.”^b*
- *“My family and I are basically constantly loaning each other money to hopefully not get anything taken from us or be evicted.”^b*

Some families with children have had difficulty affording food for all members and needed to make harsh tradeoffs to keep the children fed:

- *“I’m severely behind on bills, haven’t eaten in two days since I only have enough food for my children to eat three meals a day, no snacks.”^b*
- *“Some nights my husband and I go without eating but my one year old will eat.”^b*
- *“I have my son and stepson living with us so there is less food; mostly we eat once a day because food prices have risen and the food stamps don’t go as far.”^b*

Excerpts have been edited for clarity.

^a The University of Oregon’s Center for Translational Neuroscience administers the Rapid Assessment of Pandemic Impact on Development-Early Childhood, a weekly survey of households with children aged 5 and under; see <https://www.uorapidresponse.com/>.

^b Propel, Inc., which operates Fresh EBT (a mobile app that helps SNAP participants manage their benefits), has conducted a monthly survey of app users since September 2020; see <https://www.joinpropel.com/covid-19>. Propel also provided CBPP with unpublished quotes from this survey.

Just as not getting enough to eat can significantly harm children over the long term, receiving SNAP to help cover food purchases has significant long-term benefits. Research on the gradual nationwide expansion of SNAP (then called food stamps) starting in the 1960s found that children from low-income households that had access to food stamps in utero or as young children had better health and economic outcomes as adults than children in areas that had not yet implemented food stamps. One study found that receiving SNAP was linked with lower risk of heart disease and obesity and higher rates of high school completion (see Figure 7), while another found that access to

³³ Claire Zippel and Arloc Sherman, “Bolstering Family Income Is Essential to Helping Children Emerge Successfully From the Current Crisis,” CBPP, updated February 25, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/bolstering-family-income-is-essential-to-helping-children-emerge>.

SNAP was linked with improved educational attainment and labor market outcomes.³⁴ Raising SNAP benefits, especially during an economic downturn, is also linked with improved food security, higher spending on food and other needs, and a reduced risk of running out of benefits at the end of the month and eating less as a result.³⁵

Boosts in Food Assistance Have Helped Families Afford Food

President Trump and Congress enacted several pieces of legislation in 2020 to increase food assistance and expand eligibility, and the recently enacted American Rescue Plan and actions from the Biden Administration build on these measures. Together, these steps likely lessened the severity of food hardship for millions of households. In particular, the declines in food insufficiency and other hardship measures observed in the Pulse data from late March 2021 may be evidence that some of the latest relief has started to help families better afford food.

Emergency allotments have substantially boosted SNAP benefits for most SNAP households. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act gave states the option to issue SNAP households emergency supplementary benefits. Unfortunately, under the Trump Administration, USDA's interpretation of the law excluded the lowest-income 40 percent of SNAP households who already receive the maximum SNAP benefit, and other households with very low incomes received lower allotments, weakening the measure's effectiveness in reducing food insecurity. The Biden Administration directed USDA to modify the emergency allotments to reach the lowest-income households, and in April 2021, USDA adopted a new policy under which all SNAP households will receive at least \$95 in emergency allotments, though some states may not begin to issue these additional benefits for several weeks.³⁶

The temporary increase in SNAP benefits is helping all SNAP participants. The COVID relief package enacted in December 2020 included a 15 percent increase in the maximum SNAP benefit for January through June 2021. The increase amounts to about \$28 more per person per month for all participating households, or just over \$100 per month in additional food assistance for a family of four. About 40 percent of the added benefits go to households with incomes below 50 percent of the federal poverty level; nearly two-thirds go to households with children. These added

³⁴ Hilary Hoynes, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, and Douglas Almond, "Long-Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net," *American Economic Review*, Vol. 106, No. 4, April 2016. An earlier version of the paper is at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18535>. See also Martha Bailey *et al.*, "Is the Social Safety Net a Long-Term Investment? Large-Scale Evidence from the Food Stamps Program," National Bureau of Research Working Paper 26942, April 2020, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26942>.

³⁵ Keith-Jennings, *op. cit.*

³⁶ White House, "Fact Sheet: President Biden's New Executive Actions Deliver Economic Relief for American Families and Businesses Amid the COVID-19 Crises," January 22, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/01/22/fact-sheet-president-bidens-new-executive-actions-deliver-economic-relief-for-american-families-and-businesses-amid-the-covid-19-crises/>. See also Dottie Rosenbaum, "Executive Action on Food Assistance Strengthens Federal Response to Hunger," CBPP, January 22, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/press/statements/rosenbaum-executive-action-on-food-assistance-strengthens-federal-response-to>; USDA, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – Emergency Allotments," April 1, 2021, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-covid-emergency-allotments-phase-3-guidance.pdf>; Dottie Rosenbaum, "Reversing Trump Policy, Biden Administration Includes Lowest-Income Households in Emergency SNAP Benefits," CBPP, April 6, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/reversing-trump-policy-biden-administration-includes-lowest-income-households-in-emergency>.

benefits go to all SNAP households, including those with the lowest incomes. The American Rescue Plan extended these benefits through September.³⁷ A further extension may be warranted if the economy has still not recovered, but this extension will significantly ease hardship this summer.

Pandemic EBT is providing school-age and young children with benefits to replace missed school meals while they learn virtually. Families First created a program, known as P-EBT, that allows states to provide meal replacement benefits to households with children who attended a school that was closed in the spring of 2020 for at least five days and who otherwise would have received free or reduced-price school meals. All states and territories participating in SNAP (except Guam) elected the option to replace meals lost during the 2019-2020 school year.³⁸ Families First allowed states to provide these benefits through fiscal year 2020 (which ended September 30, 2020), and 20 states chose to extend benefits through August and September under this law.

Policymakers have since improved and expanded P-EBT, including extending it through the end of the public health emergency (including over the summer), allowing states to issue benefits more easily in light of complications such as varied and changing school schedules, providing benefits to children under age 6, extending the program to Puerto Rico, and increasing the maximum benefit.³⁹ Due to the complexity of implementing the program while providing both in-person and virtual schooling, school districts did not implement P-EBT for the full 2020-2021 school year in the fall of 2020, as discussed below. But since Congress simplified the policies and USDA recently issued guidance clarifying these changes, states have begun submitting plans to ensure that school-aged and young children can receive P-EBT for the rest of the 2020-2021 school year. More than 30 states have approved plans as of mid-April 2021, including more than ten with plans for young children.⁴⁰

The American Rescue Plan further extended P-EBT by allowing states to issue benefits during the summer. (Though the program was already authorized through September 2021, its rules align with the school calendar.) Extending P-EBT through the summer, when school is out of session and children's food hardship typically increases, will create a bridge to the next school year. This approach is consistent with the Summer EBT demonstration program, a SNAP supplement that has been shown to reduce food insecurity and prompt healthier eating when schools are out for the summer.⁴¹

³⁷ Rosenbaum *et al.*, *op. cit.*

³⁸ The U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam participate in SNAP and have been eligible for P-EBT since March 2020. The other territories — Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands — receive nutrition block grants in lieu of SNAP and were not originally eligible for P-EBT, but the government funding bill enacted in October 2020 extended eligibility to those territories. Puerto Rico has been approved to issue P-EBT benefits for the 2020-2021 school year.

³⁹ Zoë Neuberger, “New USDA Guidance Clarifies States’ P-EBT Flexibility to Mitigate Child Hunger,” CBPP, February 4, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/new-usda-guidance-clarifies-states-p-ebt-flexibility-to-mitigate-child-hunger>.

⁴⁰ USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), “State Guidance on Coronavirus Pandemic EBT (P-EBT),” <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-guidance-coronavirus-pandemic-ebt-pebt>.

⁴¹ See Ann M. Collins *et al.*, “Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) Demonstration: Summary Report,” Abt Associates, May 2016, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/sebctfinalreport.pdf>, Figure

Other temporary changes to nutrition programs have increased administrative flexibility, expanded eligibility, and enhanced benefits. Families First allowed states to request to temporarily modify some administrative procedures during both federal and state public health emergencies; the government funding law enacted in October added more flexibility, allowing states to continue several flexibilities without requesting a USDA waiver through much of 2021.⁴² These administrative flexibilities have enabled state SNAP agencies to serve more applicants despite obstacles such as limited in-person agency operations. Similarly, Families First allowed states to request waivers to modify the operations of child nutrition programs and WIC.⁴³

Families First also temporarily suspended SNAP's harsh three-month time limit for low-income, unemployed adults without dependents for the duration of the public health emergency, and the December COVID-19 relief package temporarily modified some SNAP eligibility rules for low-income post-secondary students. The American Relief Plan also temporarily increased WIC's fruit and vegetable benefits and funded outreach, modernization, and innovation initiatives.⁴⁴

Many Families Have Struggled Despite Benefit Expansions

SNAP benefit expansions and the creation of P-EBT, along with program simplifications in SNAP, WIC, and other nutrition assistance programs and additional assistance provided through other programs such as expanded unemployment insurance, have kept hardship from rising even further. For example, P-EBT reduced food hardship among the lowest-income children in the week following disbursement, lifting up to 3.9 million children out of hunger, according to a Brookings Institution study.⁴⁵ While research has not yet isolated the impacts of the SNAP benefit increases on outcomes such as food insecurity, research during the Great Recession has shown that increasing SNAP benefits during an economic downturn raises food spending and reduces food insecurity, along with other benefits.⁴⁶

The recent decline in the Pulse data in the number of adults reporting their household wasn't getting enough to eat is promising, and suggests that nutrition benefit expansions and other federal

4.8; Jin Huang, Ellen Barnidge, and Youngmi Kim, "Children receiving free or reduced-price school lunch have higher food insufficiency rates in summer," *Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 145, No. 9, September 2015.

⁴² "States Are Using Much-Needed Temporary Flexibility in SNAP to Respond to COVID-19 Challenges," *op. cit.*

⁴³ To see these waivers, see FNS, "Child Nutrition COVID-19 Waivers," <https://www.fns.usda.gov/programs/fns-disaster-assistance/fns-responds-covid-19/child-nutrition-covid-19-waivers> or FNS, "WIC: COVID-19 Waivers by State," <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/wic-waivers-flexibilities>.

⁴⁴ Rosenbaum *et al.*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ See Lauren Bauer *et al.*, "The Effect of Pandemic EBT on Measures of Food Hardship," Hamilton Project, July 2020, https://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/files/P-EBT_LO_7.30.pdf. Using data from the Household Pulse Survey and information on the timing of P-EBT disbursements, this paper compared changes in the food insufficiency rate within a state after the disbursement of P-EBT benefits to the rate in states that didn't disburse benefits over that time period. The study found the strongest reductions in the initial week following benefit disbursement. Without controlling for the many observed and unobserved factors contributing to food insufficiency and the different disbursement schedules across states ranging from April to July, it would otherwise be difficult to observe the impact of P-EBT on food insufficiency among households with children in the Pulse data.

⁴⁶ Carlson, *op. cit.*

relief such as Economic Impact Payments have begun to help families better meet their needs. Still, high levels of food hardship continued throughout 2020, with these data showing a significant decline occurring only in 2021. Further research is needed, but the following are some likely explanations.

Some food-insecure households aren't eligible for SNAP or haven't been eligible for expanded nutrition benefits. As noted, the SNAP households with the lowest incomes weren't eligible for Families First's emergency allotments, so they didn't receive a SNAP benefit increase until the 15 percent boost began in January 2021.⁴⁷

Moreover, some low-income households experiencing food insecurity have limited eligibility for SNAP overall. In some cases, households that lost income and had difficulty buying food may still have income above SNAP's low eligibility limits; others may have become eligible temporarily (due to a job loss, for example) but not have known this or not known how to apply. Households with non-citizens, which evidence suggests have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, face restricted eligibility for SNAP, and harsh Trump Administration policies toward immigrants deterred many *eligible* immigrants and their family members from seeking help from SNAP and other benefit programs.⁴⁸ (Eligibility for other forms of COVID relief, such as Economic Impact Payments provided under the CARES Act, has also been limited for many non-citizens.⁴⁹) Many low-income college students are ineligible for SNAP, though the December COVID-19 relief package temporarily relaxed these restrictions.⁵⁰ Similarly, while SNAP's three-month limit for unemployed adults without dependent children is temporarily paused, some of these adults may have assumed they remained ineligible.

⁴⁷ The relief bill that included this increase was enacted in late December, so some states may not have begun issuing this increase until late in January or in February.

⁴⁸ SNAP participation for non-citizens is limited to certain groups; see FNS, "SNAP Policy on Non-Citizen Eligibility," <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligibility/citizen/non-citizen-policy>. Evidence suggests that households with immigrants are likelier to face hardship; for example, the Urban Institute found that throughout the pandemic, households with at least one non-citizen member faced higher rates of food insecurity than households where all members are citizens. See Waxman, Gupta, and Gonzalez, "Food Insecurity Edged Back up after COVID-19 Relief Expired," *op. cit.* In addition to long-standing SNAP policies, the Trump Administration took a series of actions that deterred many immigrants, including eligible immigrants, from seeking public benefits. See Shelby Gonzales, "Administration Should Reverse Anti-Immigrant Policies That Will Worsen Impacts of Health and Economic Crises," CBPP, May 6, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/immigration/administration-should-reverse-anti-immigrant-policies-that-will-worsen-impacts>.

⁴⁹ The CARES Act excluded households where at least one individual did not have a Social Security number. See Chuck Marr *et al.*, "Future Stimulus Should Include Immigrants and Dependents Previously Left Out, Mandate Automatic Payments," CBPP, May 6, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/future-stimulus-should-include-immigrants-and-dependents-previously-left-out>. The December bill, which also included smaller Economic Impact Payments, expanded eligibility to some of these households and made these retroactive. See Robert Greenstein, "Bipartisan Agreement Provides Urgently Needed Relief," CBPP, December 21, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/press/statements/greenstein-bipartisan-agreement-provides-urgently-needed-relief>.

⁵⁰ For more on these changes, see U.S. Department of Education, "Education Department Amplifies USDA Expansion of SNAP Benefits to Help Students Pursuing Postsecondary Education During Pandemic," February 23, 2021, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/education-department-amplifies-usda-expansion-snap-benefits-help-students-pursuing-postsecondary-education-during-pandemic>.

Some food-insecure households face access barriers to receiving SNAP benefits. Many states have faced challenges, such as a large increase in applicants and a transition to virtual operations, that likely made it more difficult for some households to apply for or stay connected to SNAP. For example, some individuals may have had limited internet access or had difficulty using online or mobile phone applications. Others may have had difficulty completing required administrative steps due to barriers such as long wait times at call centers that process SNAP paperwork or difficulty receiving or sending mail to receive notices or submit documents. Many of these administrative challenges are long-standing but were likely exacerbated by the increase in caseloads and staffing changes from the pandemic, as well as the reduction in in-person service because of closed local human services offices.

Adding to these challenges, while Families First allowed states to simplify SNAP procedures to better respond to pandemic-related challenges, USDA under the Trump Administration opted to limit this flexibility in the summer of 2020 and pushed states to return to regular procedures.⁵¹ The October 2020 government funding bill restored many flexibilities, but by then states had already begun returning to regular procedures. Many states have likely faced challenges managing their workloads due to increased caseloads and uncertainty around flexibilities.

Every month, a portion of SNAP households is due to complete paperwork and an interview to retain benefits, called the recertification process; states must process both new recertifications and applications. Almost all states postponed recertifications for households due to renew in the spring of 2020, which helped keep participants connected. But as states returned to normal procedures, many likely faced a surge in workload from elevated applications and households due for recertification, including those that had been due to recertify in previous months but had their recertification deadline extended. This increased workload may have reduced states' capacity to process SNAP applications and renewals, thus making it harder for some applicants and participants to complete the required steps to receive or stay connect to SNAP. (For example, some call centers may have lacked the capacity to conduct phone interviews or respond to participant inquiries.)

The December COVID-19 relief package and the American Rescue Plan included additional administrative funding for states, which may help them improve program access.

Many families experienced long lags between the loss of school meals for their children and the start of P-EBT benefits. While states did a tremendous job of building a completely new program to issue P-EBT benefits in the spring of 2020, the complexity of creating this program meant that many states did not issue benefits to replace lost meals that were in the spring until the summer — months after households first began experiencing hardship. Furthermore, due to congressional delays in extending the program in the fall, challenges in adapting the program for a mix of hybrid and fully remote learning models, and a delay in federal guidance during the Trump Administration, no states issued P-EBT benefits between October and late December 2020 and

⁵¹ Ed Bolen, "USDA Rolling Back SNAP Flexibility That States Need in Current Crisis," CBPP, August 10, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/usda-rolling-back-snap-flexibility-that-states-need-in-current-crisis>.

most states did not submit plans for continuing P-EBT for the rest of the 2020-2021 school year until February 2021 or later.⁵²

In many states, therefore, households with children facing food insecurity had several periods without P-EBT: in the early spring of 2020 (before the program was implemented and benefits were flowing), in the summer (because P-EBT aligned with the school year in 2020 and states couldn't issue benefits for summer months), and in up to two-thirds of the 2020-2021 school year (because many states hadn't begun issuing benefits for the school year). Some eligible families may also have had difficulty accessing P-EBT benefits due to other barriers, such as problems with states identifying eligible children or communicating with eligible families.⁵³

Many families with young children lost access to free or reduced-price meals in child care and didn't receive additional SNAP benefits or P-EBT for those children in 2020. Those families thus received *less* food assistance during 2020 than before the pandemic. Families with young children, including infants and toddlers, are disproportionately represented among the SNAP households that were left out of the Families First emergency allotments. An estimated 2 million preschool children live in households that didn't receive any increase in SNAP benefits until January 2021; some of these children had been receiving free or reduced-price meals in child care before the pandemic.

While the October government funding bill extended P-EBT to certain children under age 6 in households receiving SNAP benefits, USDA didn't issue guidance to states on benefits for young children until January 2021, after the December COVID-19 relief package simplified administration of the provision. To date, most states have not yet been approved to issue benefits to young children.

Delays, gaps in other relief measures also affected food hardship. Millions of households have reported difficulty affording housing and other non-food expenses during the pandemic; SNAP and P-EBT alone often can't ensure food security in the face of this staggering rise in overall hardship. While relief legislation included measures to help families meet non-food needs, some of those programs also had implementation delays and eligibility gaps.

For example, many laid-off workers faced long delays in receiving unemployment insurance benefits due to state implementation challenges, particularly in the early months when the number of unemployed workers spiked dramatically.⁵⁴ Other unemployed workers didn't qualify for benefits

⁵² Zoë Neuberger, "New USDA Guidance Clarifies States' P-EBT Flexibility to Mitigate Child Hunger," CBPP, February 4, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/new-usda-guidance-clarifies-states-p-ebt-flexibility-to-mitigate-child-hunger>.

⁵³ Stacy Dean *et al.*, "Lessons From Early Implementation of Pandemic-EBT," CBPP and Food Research & Action Center, October 30, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/lessons-from-early-implementation-of-pandemic-ebt>.

⁵⁴ Chad Stone, "CARES Act Measures Strengthening Unemployment Insurance Should Continue While Need Remains," CBPP, June 9, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/cares-act-measures-strengthening-unemployment-insurance-should-continue>.

despite eligibility expansions or didn't apply because they didn't realize they were eligible.⁵⁵ And, while the temporary increase in unemployment benefits helped millions of workers afford food and kept hardship from rising, its expiration in July 2020 likely created further hardship for many workers.

Similarly, while federal eviction protections enabled many families with difficulty paying rent to remain in their homes, policymakers didn't enact major rental assistance to address pandemic-related housing hardship until the December 2020 relief package and then the American Rescue Plan.⁵⁶ Emergency rental assistance programs are now starting to roll out but weren't in place in 2020. Because of loss of income and limited assistance paying rent, over 1 in 7 renters reported in late March 2021 that they weren't caught up on rent; renters likely already owe tens of billions in back rent and will need more help paying rent in the coming months.⁵⁷ Economic Impact Payments from the CARES Act, the December relief package, and now the American Rescue Plan have helped millions of Americans afford household expenses, but millions of low-income individuals weren't eligible or didn't receive some of those payments because they weren't required to file a tax return in the past and didn't understand how to file for the payments or know that they were eligible for them.⁵⁸

For many households, the array of available programs with differing eligibility requirements and application processes, the temporary nature of some assistance, and uncertainty due to the changing labor market and school, business, and child care closures — plus uncertainty over whether more relief might come as policymakers debated relief measures for much of the second half of 2020 —

⁵⁵ For example, researchers evaluating eligibility and utilization of unemployment insurance in the summer of 2020 concluded, "During COVID-19, UI has been slow to reach the unemployed and there is a sizeable share — disproportionately those with low levels of education — who are not receiving benefits." Marianne Bitler, Hilary W. Hoynes, and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, "The Social Safety Net in the Wake of COVID-19," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 27796, September 2020, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27796/w27796.pdf. Urban Institute researchers also found that in May 2020, 36 percent of families reporting a job loss were receiving unemployment benefits and 17.6 percent had applied for benefits but had not yet received them. Gregory Acs and Michael Karpman, "Employment, Income, and Unemployment Insurance during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Urban Institute, June 2020, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102485/employment-income-and-unemployment-insurance-during-the-covid-19-pandemic_1.pdf. Other analysis also finds that from June 2020 through early 2021, many workers didn't receive unemployment insurance due to ineligibility or administrative problems or didn't apply due to perceived ineligibility. See Eliza Forsythe, "Understanding Unemployment Insurance Reciprocity During the Covid-19 Pandemic," March 1, 2021, http://publish.illinois.edu/elizaforsythe/files/2021/03/Forsythe_UI_draft_march8_2021-1.pdf.

⁵⁶ CBPP, "American Rescue Plan Act Will Help Millions and Bolster the Economy," updated March 15, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/american-rescue-plan-act-will-help-millions-and-bolster-the-economy>.

⁵⁷ Doug Rice and Ann Oliva, "Housing Assistance in American Rescue Plan Act Will Prevent Millions of Evictions, Help People Experiencing Homelessness," CBPP, March 11 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/housing-assistance-in-american-rescue-plan-act-will-prevent-millions-of-evictions>.

⁵⁸ Chuck Marr *et al.*, "Aggressive State Outreach Can Help Reach the 12 Million Non-Filers Eligible for Stimulus Payments," CBPP, updated October 14, 2020, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/aggressive-state-outreach-can-help-reach-the-12-million-non-filers-eligible>; and Stephen Roll and Michal Grinstein-Weiss, "Did CARES Act benefits reach vulnerable Americans? Evidence from a national survey," Brookings Institution, August 25, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/did-cares-act-benefits-reach-vulnerable-americans-evidence-from-a-national-survey/>.

may have also made it difficult to budget expenses and obtain all of the help for which they are eligible.

Census Data Showing Elevated Food Hardship Highlights Need to Strengthen Nutrition Programs

The historically high food insufficiency rates during the pandemic observed in these data and other sources, which (as noted) have only recently begun to decline, point to the need to strengthen nutrition assistance to ensure that families have access to adequate nutrition both as the economy recovers and in future crises. We recommend that policymakers:

- **Address SNAP benefit adequacy.** A strong body of evidence suggests that SNAP benefits aren't sufficient to meet many families' nutritional needs and that raising benefits would improve food security and could have other positive impacts, such as on participants' health.⁵⁹ The emergency allotments and 15 percent benefit boost will help families better afford food over coming months, and policymakers may need to extend the 15 percent increase past September if the economy isn't fully recovered. But for the longer term, policymakers should reassess SNAP benefit levels and modify them as needed to ensure they help households adequately afford food. The Biden Administration has issued an executive order directing USDA to move quickly on a provision of the 2018 Farm Bill mandating a reevaluation of the Thrifty Food Plan, the basis for SNAP benefit levels; this is an important step toward addressing the inadequacy of SNAP benefits.⁶⁰

Similarly, given that food insecurity rises during economic crises and that increased SNAP benefits not only mitigate those effects but also stimulate the economy, federal policymakers should adopt a permanent provision to automatically increase SNAP benefits during future recessions.

- **Address access barriers to SNAP.** Policymakers can look for ways to simplify and streamline SNAP procedures, and state SNAP agencies can invest in addressing access barriers that make applying for or staying connected to SNAP more difficult. The new funding for state administration in the American Rescue Plan could help state agencies manage their workload, identify access barriers, and invest in process improvements. State agencies could use that funding to invest in changes that improve access and reduce enrollment burdens for SNAP participants. It would be helpful for federal policymakers to provide state agencies with clarity regarding the timeline for the end to the temporary flexibilities and to work with states to ensure a smooth transition. State and federal policymakers also can identify areas for longer-term improvements.
- **Reduce SNAP eligibility restrictions and access barriers for specific populations.** Federal policymakers can reduce food hardship by extending assistance to populations with limited eligibility and access to SNAP. For example, now that the Trump Administration's public charge rule — one of many Trump Administration actions that deterred immigrants from accessing benefits for which they are eligible — is now permanently blocked, USDA and other public benefit agencies can conduct public education about the value of SNAP that

⁵⁹ Carlson, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Rosenbaum, "Executive Action on Food Assistance Strengthens Federal Response to Hunger," *op. cit.*

addresses immigration-related fears.⁶¹ Policymakers could also consider simplifying and reducing immigration-related restrictions on SNAP benefits. In addition, permanently eliminating SNAP's harsh three-month time limit for childless adults would reduce the risk of food insecurity for many.⁶²

- **Build on P-EBT's success to support children during future summers and other school closures.** With new P-EBT guidance and flexibility, the number of states with plans approved for the 2020-2021 school year will increase, and states can build on last year's rollout of this program to reduce access barriers for participants and issue P-EBT this summer to prevent food insecurity from rising in the summer.

For the longer term, we recommend that federal policymakers consider establishing a permanent summer EBT program. Only a fraction of children receiving free or reduced-price meals during the school year also receive meals during the summer, which leads to increases in food insecurity during the summer months. Now that states have implemented P-EBT programs and have the authority to deliver P-EBT benefits for the coming summer, they have the infrastructure in place to transition to summer EBT on a permanent basis.

Also, federal policymakers could leverage the new P-EBT structure to create a permanent authorization for states to issue meal replacement benefits similar to P-EBT in the case of lengthy school or child care closures resulting from a public health emergency or natural disaster. Such a program would help ensure that low-income children have prompt access to food during lengthy school and child care closures without Congress needing to act.

- **Address the falling share of eligible families that participate in WIC.** The American Rescue Plan invests in WIC, and future legislation could build on those investments to help the program reach the half of eligible families who are missing out on its proven nutrition, health, and developmental benefits. For example, maintaining the new law's increase in fruit and vegetable benefits or investing in a broader increase in food benefits for women and children would strengthen the program. And further investments in outreach, modernization, and innovation would make it easier for eligible families to enroll and participate.
- **Make it easier for schools to continue providing free meals to low-income students.** In recent years, under the Community Eligibility Provision, high-poverty schools and districts have offered meals at no charge to all students without processing applications, in exchange for accepting reimbursement under a federal formula designed to approximate the federal funding they would receive if they accepted applications. By increasing the Community Eligibility Provision reimbursement formula, policymakers could encourage more high-poverty schools that already qualify for community eligibility to implement it and serve meals at no charge to all students.⁶³ Policymakers could also expand the kinds of data that any

⁶¹ Shelby Gonzales, "Agencies Should Quickly End Trump Public Charge Policies, Remove Other Barriers to Public Supports," CBPP, February 9, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/agencies-should-quickly-end-trump-public-charge-policies-remove-other-barriers-to-public>.

⁶² Ed Bolen, Joseph Llobrera, and Brynne Keith-Jennings, "Permanently End the SNAP Cut-Off to Support a More Equitable Recovery," CBPP, April 19, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/permanently-end-the-snap-cut-off-to-support-a-more-equitable-recovery>.

⁶³ Under the COVID-19-related waivers of various rules regarding school meals, *all* schools have been allowed to offer meals at no charge to all students without processing applications and many have done so. Thus, schools that adopt community eligibility for the first time would be able to continue this practice even after the waivers expire.

school district can rely on to automatically enroll students for free or reduced-price meals, which would help low-income students receive free meals regardless of whether they attend a high-poverty school.

Hearing Directly From Low-Income Families: The Role of Federal Aid

P-EBT and SNAP have helped many families afford adequate food during an extremely difficult time, survey respondents report, though for some, benefit levels are too low:

- *“The EBT increase [through SNAP emergency allotments] has been a godsend. The \$194 a month almost gets me through the entire month with food costs. It’s too bad that we won’t get to continue this level of support.”^a*
- *“[P-EBT] has truly been a blessing with me having five kids at home out of school. It would have been very hard to feed them full time without the P-EBT.”^b*
- *“Having SNAP benefits for my family has meant that we have not had to worry about where our next meal was coming from. This was critical over the past few months, because unemployment benefits were not issued in a timely manner and I was laid off from working.”^b*
- *“Honestly I was out of work for over two months and had no income for that time because my unemployment benefits didn’t come in until after I went back to work. If not for SNAP there would have been no food.”^c*
- *“[P-EBT] was very helpful since the school began giving out expired food. Also, P-EBT helps my family prevent COVID exposure as opposed to waiting in line at the schools amongst other people.”^c*
- *“We need more food stamps to feed our kids. That’s what I worry about – we run out of food and the food pantries only help once a month and they hardly have anything to give.”^c*

Other programs, like unemployment insurance and Economic Impact Payments, helped many families make ends meet. But due to the difficulty of receiving some benefits and their temporary nature, many report continued hardship:

- *“We are experiencing hardship that the government does not fully understand. Going months without any help has put us in a hole that will take some years to get out. We have lost our lives while still living.”^c*
- *“It took months to get unemployment payments. I wasn’t able to receive food assistance until after I’d become homeless.”^a*
- *“The \$600 [federal unemployment insurance supplement] was a godsend. It made it somewhat possible to get by and pay our bills and provide our child with school uniforms and other necessities. When it ended we were evicted and were able to barely borrow enough to get into a new place. Then Hurricane Laura hit and our lives & financial situation went from bad to worse.”^c*
- *“We cannot survive just on unemployment. Jobs are shut down, children are out of school, and people are dying – some starving, most sick. None of us are certain about anything. Just very afraid. I lost one home due to not being able to afford rent. Then I received my stimulus payment and secured housing so we weren’t homeless, but I still can’t survive off \$160 a week.”^c*

Excerpts have been edited for clarity.

^a The Southern Economic Advancement Project surveyed SNAP participants in 12 Southern states in August 28-September 7, 2020; see https://theseap.org/wp-content/uploads/Southern-Voice_-Quote-Book.pdf.

^b The New America Foundation analyzed implementation of P-EBT in Michigan; see <https://www.newamerica.org/pit/reports/it-has-meant-everything-how-p-ebt-helped-families-in-michigan/>.

^c Propel, Inc., which operates Fresh EBT (a mobile app that helps SNAP participants manage their benefits), has conducted a monthly survey of app users since September 2020; see <https://www.joinpropel.com/covid-19>. Propel also provided CBPP with unpublished quotes from this survey.

TABLE 1

High Shares of Households Report Difficulty Getting Enough Food

Among adults; data collected March 3-29.

How to read this table: In the United States, some 20 million adults reported that their household sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat in the last seven days. This represents 10 percent of all adults in the country. Some 11 million adults living with children reported that "the children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food." This represents 14 percent of adults living with children.

State	Adults Reporting That Household Didn't Have Enough to Eat		Adults Reporting That Children in Household Weren't Eating Enough Because Household Couldn't Afford Enough	
	Number	As a Percent of Adults	Number	As a Percent of Adults Living with Children
United States	20,649,000	10%	11,033,000	14%
Alabama	321,000	11%	122,000	10%
Alaska	45,000	10%	25,000	14%
Arizona	418,000	9%	209,000	12%
Arkansas	252,000	13%	125,000	15%
California	2,669,000	11%	1,709,000	17%
Colorado	337,000	8%	140,000	10%
Connecticut	190,000	8%	76,000	9%
Delaware	58,000	9%	27,000	10%
District of Columbia	43,000	9%	24,000	17%
Florida	1,426,000	10%	788,000	16%
Georgia	742,000	11%	394,000	14%
Hawai'i	69,000	7%	64,000	15%
Idaho	93,000	8%	41,000	8%
Illinois	805,000	10%	470,000	15%
Indiana	444,000	10%	144,000	9%
Iowa	166,000	8%	89,000	12%
Kansas	141,000	8%	73,000	11%
Kentucky	311,000	11%	138,000	13%
Louisiana	387,000	14%	208,000	19%
Maine	59,000	6%	21,000	7%
Maryland	393,000	10%	246,000	15%
Massachusetts	287,000	6%	113,000	7%
Michigan	537,000	8%	213,000	10%
Minnesota	181,000	5%	91,000	7%
Mississippi	238,000	13%	150,000	19%
Missouri	329,000	8%	96,000	7%
Montana	46,000	6%	24,000	9%
Nebraska	116,000	10%	57,000	12%

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State	Adults Reporting That Household Didn't Have Enough to Eat		Adults Reporting That Children in Household Weren't Eating Enough Because Household Couldn't Afford Enough	
	Number	As a Percent of Adults	Number	As a Percent of Adults Living with Children
Nevada	229,000	11%	145,000	17%
New Hampshire	68,000	7%	26,000	8%
New Jersey	571,000	10%	307,000	14%
New Mexico	134,000	10%	80,000	15%
New York	1,504,000	12%	879,000	21%
North Carolina	500,000	8%	219,000	9%
North Dakota	36,000	7%	27,000	12%
Ohio	760,000	10%	316,000	11%
Oklahoma	320,000	13%	141,000	14%
Oregon	239,000	8%	109,000	10%
Pennsylvania	743,000	9%	285,000	10%
Rhode Island	77,000	11%	49,000	21%
South Carolina	300,000	9%	159,000	13%
South Dakota	43,000	8%	26,000	11%
Tennessee	383,000	9%	166,000	11%
Texas	2,229,000	12%	1,493,000	18%
Utah	120,000	6%	75,000	8%
Vermont	25,000	6%	15,000	12%
Virginia	487,000	9%	286,000	14%
Washington	362,000	7%	167,000	9%
West Virginia	125,000	11%	35,000	9%
Wisconsin	256,000	7%	139,000	11%
Wyoming	33,000	9%	15,000	11%

Note: Figures are averages of data collected March 3-15 and March 17-29. In the latest data, collected March 17-29, 8.8 percent of all adults reported that their household "sometimes" or "often" in the last seven days had "not enough to eat," while 12.4 percent of adults living with children reported that the children sometimes or often in the last seven days were "not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food." As recommended by the Census Bureau, percentages exclude persons not replying to the question.

Source: Calculated by CBPP from Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey published tables "food2," "food3," and "food5," for survey weeks 26 and 27, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>

TABLE 2

Children Not Eating Enough Because Household Couldn't Afford Enough Food

Data collected March 3-29.

How to read this table: In the United States, up to 9.7 million children live in households where the adults reported that “the children were not eating enough because we just couldn’t afford enough food.” This represents 15 percent of children in households with children.

State	Number	As a Percent of All Children in Households With Children
United States	9,687,000	15%
Alabama	97,000	10%
Alaska	22,000	14%
Arizona	192,000	13%
Arkansas	111,000	16%
California	1,280,000	18%
Colorado	114,000	10%
Connecticut	68,000	11%
Delaware	25,000	11%
District of Columbia	20,000	17%
Florida	777,000	20%
Georgia	430,000	19%
Hawai'i	31,000	12%
Idaho	26,000	6%
Illinois	406,000	16%
Indiana	154,000	11%
Iowa	85,000	13%
Kansas	75,000	13%
Kentucky	129,000	14%
Louisiana	200,000	21%
Maine	18,000	8%
Maryland	244,000	19%
Massachusetts	95,000	8%
Michigan	222,000	12%
Minnesota	96,000	8%
Mississippi	164,000	24%
Missouri	89,000	8%
Montana	23,000	10%
Nebraska	60,000	13%
Nevada	111,000	16%
New Hampshire	17,000	7%
New Jersey	212,000	14%
New Mexico	65,000	14%
New York	624,000	19%

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State	Number	As a Percent of All Children in Households With Children
North Carolina	185,000	10%
North Dakota	25,000	12%
Ohio	282,000	12%
Oklahoma	144,000	17%
Oregon	104,000	13%
Pennsylvania	285,000	12%
Rhode Island	30,000	17%
South Carolina	148,000	15%
South Dakota	30,000	15%
Tennessee	162,000	12%
Texas	1,367,000	21%
Utah	60,000	8%
Vermont	14,000	14%
Virginia	248,000	16%
Washington	160,000	11%
West Virginia	31,000	10%
Wisconsin	117,000	11%
Wyoming	13,000	10%

Note: Figures are averages estimated from data collected March 3-15 and March 17-29. The 9.7 million total shown in this table differs from the 8.8 million figure given in the body of this report because the former is based on data for two seven-day periods pooled together, while the latter is based on the latest single seven-day period. Figures are approximations; the Pulse Survey was designed to provide data on adult well-being, not precise counts of children. Percentages exclude children in households where the respondents did not reply to the question.

Source: Calculated by CBPP from Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey microdata for survey weeks 26 and 27, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>