

Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County

July 2022

Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County Increased in 2022

Rates of food insecurity in Los Angeles (L.A.) County spiked at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but had been improving (de la Haye, 2022). However, recent data show a *statistically significant increase* in food insecurity in 2022, compared to rates at the end of 2021. Data from the University of Southern California's Understanding America Study show that the percentage of households who experienced food insecurity — a disruption in regular eating because of limited money or other resources — over the past 12 months was:

- **16.6%** in December 2021 (553,195 households)
- **24.3%** in July 2022 (809,798 households)

As of July 2022, 24.3% of L.A. County households were food insecure in the past year.

Food Insecurity Hits Hardest in Low-Income and Hispanic/Latino Households

In L.A. County, the majority of residents who experienced food insecurity in 2021 and 2022 were:

- Low-income
- Female
- Hispanic/Latino
- 18-40 years old

About 4 in 10 have children in their household.

This increase in food insecurity, especially among households with children and other priority groups, is cause for alarm. Food insecurity is more than the stress of hunger: it is linked to poor nutrition, mental health challenges, and an increased risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015).

Inflation Has Made it Harder to Get Food

In July 2022, we asked participants in USC's Understanding America Survey if the rise in food and grocery prices changed the foods that they bought in the past year, compared to before prices went up. They reported the following changes:

- **42.2%** bought less food
- **62.0%** bought different types of foods to save money (e.g., less expensive types of foods or less expensive brands)
- **58.6%** bought groceries at different stores that are less expensive
- **38.1%** bought foods that were lower quality to save money

Food Insecurity Requires Continued Action and Investment

With a rise in households battling food insecurity, plus ongoing inflation and pandemic recovery, continued investment to decrease food insecurity is both necessary and warranted. This includes investment in emergency food assistance to quickly meet residents' food needs. It also includes investment in government food programs, like CalFresh, that are proven to be effective in helping households transition from food insecure to food secure (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2018)

This research brief is an update to [other public reports](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity in L.A. County released throughout 2020 and 2021.

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Acknowledgements

This brief report was supported by the University of Southern California (USC) [Dornsife Public Exchange](https://publicexchange.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2021-Food-Insecurity-in-LA-County-Brief.pdf) and by a grant from the National Science Foundation (Grant #2125616, S&CC-IRG Track 1: Smart & Connected Community Food Systems, PI: de la Haye). This project is part of a strategic partnership with the County of Los Angeles and the [L.A. County Food Equity Roundtable](#), whom we'd like to thank for ongoing input. We would also like to acknowledge the USC Dornsife's Center for Economic and Social Research, which administers the Understanding America Study and provided support for the data collection and analysis.

Disclaimer

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, the Keck School of Medicine, or the University of Southern California as a whole.

Research Methods

This report is based on data from the [Understanding America Study](#) (UAS), administered by the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research (CESR). UAS respondents are members of a probability-based internet panel who participated in tracking survey waves conducted between December, 2021 and August, 2022. All respondents are 18 years or older, and sampling is representative of all households in L.A. County. The survey is conducted in English and Spanish. All results are weighted to CPS benchmarks, accounting for sample design and non-response. The weighted sample size for this report ranges from 1,135 to 1,176. Participants were recruited for the UAS internet panel using an address-based sampling (ABS) method; methodological details for the UAS panel are available at <https://uasdata.usc.edu>. The UAS has been funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Institute on Aging, the Social Security Administration, the National Science Foundation, the University of Southern California, and many others who have contributed questions to individual waves or sets of waves.

References

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