



April 2001

at a glance

Food Insecurity

The Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS) is a biennial, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. This report presents results from the Low-Income Supplement to the 1999–2000 LACHS. The sample included 1,858 adults with household incomes below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level who were recruited from the main LACHS. Support for the supplemental survey was provided by the California Department of Public Social Services and the Los Angeles County Medicaid Demonstration Project.

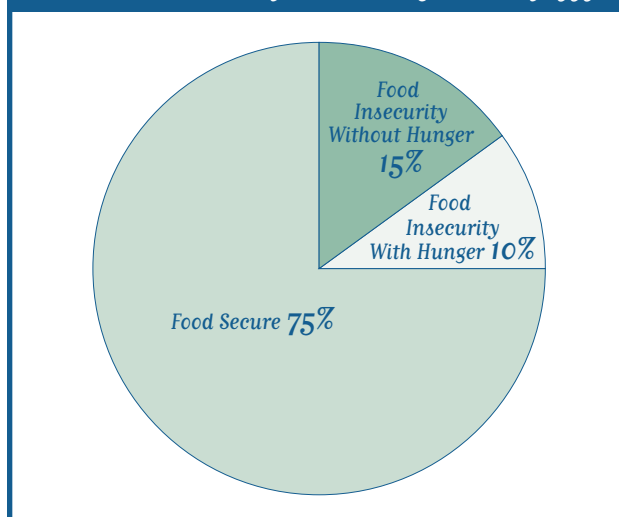
Despite an abundant food supply in the United States, people in some households lack access to enough food to meet their basic needs (referred to as food insecurity). In 2000, the Food Research and Action Center estimated that 31 million people in the United States experience food insecurity.¹ Many of these persons also experience hunger on a regular basis. Food insecurity can lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies and malnutrition. Food insecurity impacts people of all ages and is of particular concern for pregnant women, children, elderly persons and other nutritionally vulnerable groups.² Hunger decreases a worker's productive energy, reduces a child's ability to learn, and weakens a person's resistance to disease.³

The 1999–2000 Los Angeles County Health Survey included a set of six questions to assess food security among 1,898 households with incomes below 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL).⁴ The questions have been shown to be a valid measure of food security⁵ and have been used in state and national surveys. Based on responses to the questions, households in the survey were classified as either food secure or food insecure. Food insecure households were further classified as those with hunger and those without hunger.

Twenty-five percent of Los Angeles County's households below 300% FPL reported food insecurity, including 10% that reported hunger (Figure 1).

- 35% of households below 100% FPL reported food insecurity (Table 1).
- 26% of households between 100 and <200% FPL reported food insecurity.
- 16% of households between 200 and <300% FPL reported food insecurity.

Figure 1 Food Security Among Households Below 300% Federal Poverty Level, Los Angeles County 1999



1. Anderson, George M. (April, 2000). *Hungry in America: Thirty-One Million People in the United States Experience Either Food Insecurity or Actual Hunger*. America Press. Copyright 2000 Gale Group.

2. Garcia, Marito. *Malnutrition and Food Insecurity Projections, 2020*. International Food Policy Research Institute, Vision Brief 6, October, 1994.

3. Food Research and Action Center. (2001).

4. Poverty status is based on the 1999 Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In 1999, 100% FPL for a family of two adults and two dependents was \$16,895 per year, 200% FPL was \$33,790 per year, and 300% FPL was \$50,685 per year.

5. Blumberg, Stephen J., Bialostosky, Karil, Hamilton, William L., Briefel, Ronette R. (1999). *The Effectiveness of a Short Form of the Household Food Security Scale*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 1999; 89, 1231-1234.

- Among households below 100% of the FPL, those with children were nearly twice as likely to report food insecurity (42%) as those without children (23%) (Table 1).
- Food insecurity was reported by 32% of African Americans, 29% of Latinos, and 21% of whites.⁶
- Among Latino respondents, those who were not U.S. citizens were more likely to report food insecurity (34%) than those who were U.S. citizens (23%).

Table 1 Food Insecurity Among Households with and without Children by Household Income, Los Angeles County 1999

Household Income	With Children		Without Children		All Households	
	Percent	±95% C.I.	Percent	±95% C.I.	Percent	±95% C.I.
Less than 100% FPL*	42.4%	±5.3	23.0%	±6.6	35.1%	±4.2
100% to < 200% FPL	25.3%	±4.5	27.1%	±4.4	26.3%	±3.1
200% to < 300% FPL	16.5%	±4.9	16.2%	±3.6	16.2%	±2.9

**Federal Poverty Level*

Public Assistance

- Among food insecure households living below 100% of the FPL, 68% reported that they did not receive public assistance including Food Stamps, WIC vouchers, General Relief, or any other federal, state, or county payment.
- Among those participating in the State of California's Welfare-to-Work program (CalWORKs), nearly one-third (32%) reported food insecurity.

Homelessness

Respondents were asked if they had ever been homeless in the past five years.

- Among the 8% who reported past homelessness, 57% reported food insecurity compared to 23% of those who had not been homeless during this period.

Acknowledgements

Funding for the survey was provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, the California Department of Health Services, the Los Angeles County Medicaid Demonstration Project, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services.

This fact sheet is published by the Health Assessment Unit, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services—Public Health.

Mark Finucane, Director, Department of Health Services

Jonathan Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer

Paul Simon, MD, MPH, Director, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology

Cheryl Wold, MPH, Chief, Health Assessment Unit

Health Assessment Unit staff: Isabel Cardenas, MPH; Michele Liebowitz, MPH; Amy Lightstone, MPH, ATC; Amy Paturel, MS, MPH; Thomas Rice, MA; Zhiwei Waley Zeng, MD, MPH

Special thanks to Johanna Asarian-Anderson, MPH, RD and Norliza Tayag, RD of the Los Angeles County Nutrition Program.

Public Assistance Programs

For information on food stamps, contact: Los Angeles County Department of Social Services Health and Nutrition Hotline (877) 597-4777, a toll-free number

For information on food programs and services, contact: Los Angeles Regional Food Bank at (323) 234-3030, www.lafightshunger.org

For the publication *The People's 27th Guide to Welfare, Health and Other Services, How to Get Food and Money*, contact: Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness (213) 439-1070, www.peoplesguide.org (available in English, Spanish, Armenian, Russian, Vietnamese and Korean)

For more information or to obtain additional copies of this factsheet, call 213-240-7785 or visit our web site at www.lapublichealth.org.

Additional References:

- Nord, Mark., Jemison, Kyle., Bickel, Gary. (1999). *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-1998. Measuring Food Security in the United States. Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation, Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture.*
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (October 20, 2000). *Self-Reported Concern About Food Security—Eight States, 1996-1998. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 49 (41), 933-936.*

6. Asians and American Indians were not included because of insufficient numbers in the sample.