



**COMMUNITY HUNGER 2006
A REPORT ON HUNGER
AND POVERTY IN
NORTHERN NEVADA AND THE SIERRA**

BY



Hunger

The physical and mental condition that results from not eating enough food, due to insufficient economic, social and community resources.

Food Insecurity

The lack of nutritionally adequate, safe, and culturally acceptable food, available through non-emergency sources at all times.

Food Bank

A central clearinghouse for donated and government surplus food. Donated food from individuals and corporations is collected, sorted and stored at food banks before being distributed to direct service providers like food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters.

The Food Bank of Northern Nevada also offers direct service programs, such as Kids Café free after-school and summer meals for low-income children, the Back Pack program, providing a supply of easy-to-prepare foods for homeless children to take with them over the weekend when school meals are unavailable, nutrition education for children and adults, outreach for food stamps and other assistance programs and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.

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Executive Summary



Tens of thousands of low-income residents of northern Nevada and the Eastern Sierra cannot afford meals for themselves and their families. Many never imagined they would need to request food assistance, but barren cupboards and empty pockets led more than 58,000 of our community members to local food pantries and meal sites in 2005.

The demand for emergency food has increased steadily throughout the Food Bank of Northern Nevada's 25-year history. The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent recession at the beginning of this decade have resulted in even greater challenges for low-income people. In Nevada unemployment rates are low, but so are typical wages, leaving residents working hard but failing to keep pace with the cost of living. Since our last hunger study in 2001, 57% of the Food Bank's partner agencies reported an increase in the number of clients served.

The Food Bank of Northern Nevada participated in this national study of hunger to better understand the realities of individuals seeking emergency food assistance.

The study was coordinated by America's Second Harvest-the Nation's Food Bank Network™, of which the Food Bank of Northern Nevada is a member, and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Community Hunger 2006 presents the results of a survey of 283 households, selected at random, who turned to one of the Food Bank's emergency food programs in the spring of 2005, as well as completed questionnaires from 56 Food Bank of Northern Nevada partner agencies. The key findings from our study, along with related research and supporting data, are summarized below.

The Food Bank intends that this report will not only inform policymakers and the general public about the circumstances of people who request emergency food assistance, but that it will also inspire community and government action to end hunger.

Key Findings



Children are the most vulnerable to hunger

- 37% of emergency food recipients are children under the age of 18.
- 5.4% of client households with children report that their children skipped meals due to lack of food and money in the previous 12 months.
- In client households with children, 76% of children are food insecure. In 30% of households with children either a parent, a child or both experience hunger.

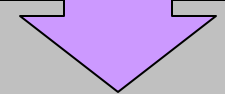




HOW THE FOOD BANK WORKS

THE DONORS

Growers • Processors • Restaurants • Manufacturers • Distributors • Retailers • Wholesalers • Food Industry Associations • Food Service Operators • Food Drives • USDA commodities often funneled through America's Second Harvest, the Nation's Food Bank Network



THE FOOD BANK OF NORTHERN NEVADA

The Food Bank of Northern Nevada distributes and tracks donated food to more than 90 partner agencies throughout northern Nevada and the Eastern Sierra.



THE AGENCIES

Food Pantries • Youth Programs • Soup Kitchens • Senior Centers • Day care Centers • Rehabilitation Programs • Homeless Shelters • Domestic Violence Shelters • Kids Cafes • Residential Programs • Other Charitable and Social Service Organizations



58,000 HUNGRY NEVADANS

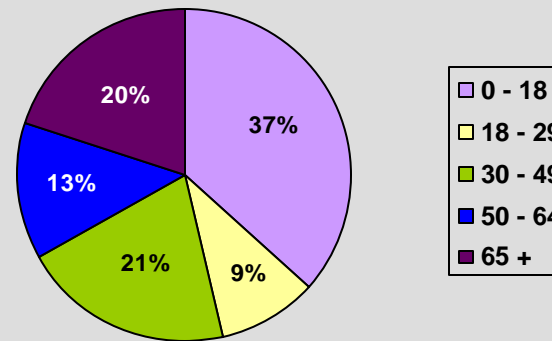
Children • Working Poor • Single-Parent Families • Newly Unemployed • Elderly • Disabled • Homeless • Mentally Ill • Victims of Disaster



Seniors experience hunger in significant numbers

- 20% of all emergency food recipients are seniors age 65 and over. However, among clients who visit emergency food program sites, 58% are over age 50 and 35% are over age 65.
- 34% of client households report Social Security is their main source of income (the average income in Nevada from Social Security is about \$900 per month).
- 45% of seniors report being food insecure.

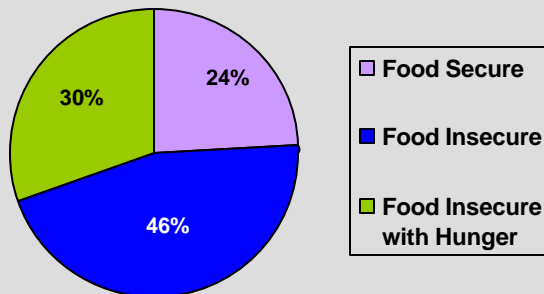
Hunger Study Clients by Age



Households struggle with employment

- 32% of client households have at least one employed family member
- 41% of clients not currently working have been unemployed for more than two years.
- 27% of Food Bank clients never finished high school, a key factor in securing a job that provides an adequate income; the comparable percentage for the state of Nevada is 18% and for the entire U.S. population is only 15%.

Food Insecurity Amongst Households with Children

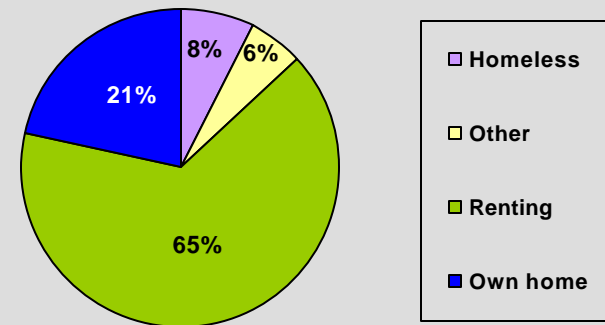




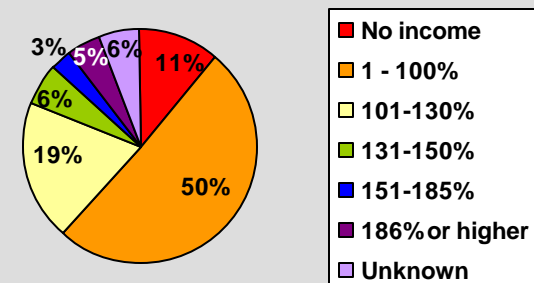
Federal nutrition programs are underutilized

- 32% of client households receive food stamp benefits, although 81% percent are eligible; statewide, only 44% of eligible households participate in the program.
- In Nevada, more than \$108 million in food stamp benefits are not being used each year due to low participation by potentially eligible families
- 90% of client households report that their food stamp benefits do not last the entire month (3 weeks or less); on average, their food stamps last for 1.9 weeks.
- 29% of client households who have never applied for food stamps say they don't think they are eligible because of income or assets; of these households 17% were likely income-eligible.
- According to the US Census, in 2004 there were 81,108 households in Nevada with income *below the poverty threshold* that did not receive food stamp benefits (eligibility for food stamps begins at 130% of poverty.)
- Nationwide, more than half of food stamp beneficiaries are children.

Hunger Study Client Housing



Household Income as a Percentage of Federal Poverty Level



Soup Kitchen

Soup kitchens provide cooked meals to needy families or individuals on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. A majority of clients are elderly or homeless individuals who do not have access to a place where they can cook for themselves. The Food Bank currently helps to supply 10 kitchens in northern Nevada and the Eastern Sierra.

Food Pantry

Pantries, often located at churches or community centers, operate on a weekly or monthly basis, distributing bags of food to low-income households. The Food Bank currently helps to supply 45 food pantries in northern Nevada and the Eastern Sierra.

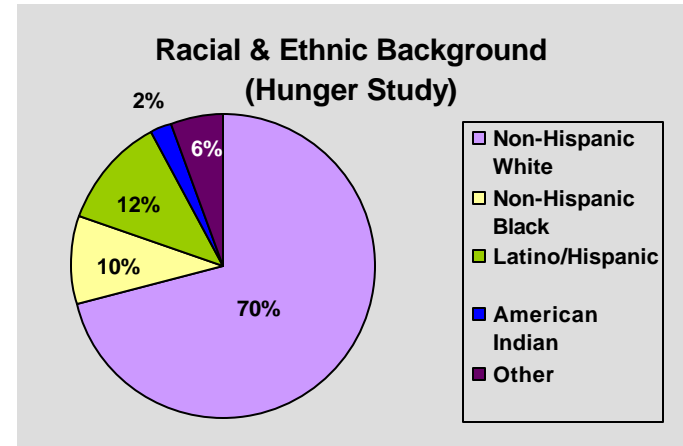
Shelter

Shelters provide temporary housing on a nightly or monthly basis to single men and women, seniors, youth and families who are homeless. Shelters provide food on a regular basis, generally breakfast and dinner. The Food Bank currently helps to supply 37 shelters and residential/daycare programs in northern Nevada and the Eastern Sierra.



Cost of living skyrockets while wages stagnate

- 61% of client households have incomes below the federal poverty threshold, and 81% live below 130% of poverty.**
- The median monthly income of client households is \$900; median monthly income for all Nevada households is \$3,721 per month.
- 35% of clients have had to choose between paying for food or paying for rent, utilities or medical care.
- While the Federal Poverty Threshold for a family with two adults and two children in 2004 was \$18,850, the Economic Policy Institute calculates that a more realistic “Basic Family Budget” in Nevada – for food (cooked at home), shelter, clothing, childcare, healthcare, taxes and basic transportation – was more than twice that amount – \$39,904.



Family Size	2005 Poverty Threshold		2004 Basic Family Budget *
	100%	130%**	
2 – one parent, one child	\$12,830	\$16,679	\$31,032
3 – one parent, two children	\$16,090	\$20,917	\$35,364
4 – two parents, two children	\$19,350	\$25,155	\$39,960

* Economic Policy Institute, calculated for Reno area.

** 130% of poverty is eligibility threshold for nutrition programs, food stamps, free lunch at school, and USDA commodity programs.





Policy Recommendations

Addressing Hunger and Food Insecurity in Nevada through Public Policy.



The Food Bank of Northern Nevada encourages policymakers at all levels of government, corporations, small businesses, non-profit organizations, school districts, faith-based communities and citizens to implement the following recommendations, which will improve food security for all Nevadans.

Strengthen Federal Nutrition Programs

The Food Bank encourages policymakers to strengthen federal nutrition initiatives by improving access to the Food Stamp Program and expanding the reach of child nutrition programs, such as summer food, school breakfast and the WIC program.

A. Increase and Expand Child Nutrition Programs

- Increase consumption of breakfast by children through education and increased participation in school breakfast.
- Ensure that children in all 50% needy school neighborhoods have access to the Summer Food Program for Children.
- Reach food stamp-eligible families with children with outreach and application assistance to ensure maximum participation.
- Fund the WIC program to serve all women, infants and children who qualify, and create new avenues to reach disenfranchised populations.

B. Improve Nutrition Access for Seniors

- Provide eligible seniors with monthly Commodity Supplemental Food Program boxes to ensure adequate nutrition.
- Adequately fund Meals on Wheels and the Congregate Meal Program to ensure meal services for all eligible seniors.
- Decrease barriers for intergenerational meal programs.

C. Increase Participation in the Food Stamp Nutrition Program

- Increase participation to 75% of the eligible population through food stamp outreach and application assistance.
- Simplify the Food Stamp Program and application procedures to make the program more responsive to the needs of working families, the elderly and the disabled.
- Increase food stamp benefits, and reinstate benefits for all residents with eligible incomes and improve access to the Food Stamp Program among immigrant communities.

D. Support Access to Emergency Food Services

- Ensure that an effective emergency food network is available in all Nevada communities for short term aid.

E. Encourage Eligible Families to Participate

- Fund and implement outreach campaigns for all federal nutrition programs and energy assistance.
- Support full funding for the 211 system to assist families in accessing services.

Address the Root Causes of Hunger

To end hunger, the community must address the root causes of hunger and poverty by supporting wages, work and education, building affordable communities for low-income families and strengthening government safety net programs.

Support Wages, Work and Education

- Increase the minimum wage and create jobs with more sustainable wages that allow families who are working to meet basic needs.

Policy Recommendations



- Ensure that eligible Nevada families receive the federal earned income and child tax credits that are due to them.
- Facilitate effective transitions to economic independence for people leaving the welfare system by creating education and employment opportunities, ensuring safe and affordable child care and providing transportation options.

Build Affordable Communities

- Increase the number of affordable housing units.
- Support the full funding of subsidized housing programs.
- Improve access to nutritious food in low-income neighborhoods.
- Increase funding for the Low-Income Housing Trust Fund.

Strengthen Government Safety Net Programs

- Ensure adequate unemployment, cash welfare and Social Security and Supplemental Security benefits.
- Offer basic health care coverage for all low-income families.
- Increase access to child support for families.
- Maximize outreach for child care assistance.

For more information on how you can help end hunger, contact us at:

Food Bank of Northern Nevada
994 Packer Way
Sparks, NV 89431
775-331-3663
www.fbnn.org

Expand Food Bank Services

The Food Bank is committed to strategically expanding its services to meet emerging needs identified in this study.

Assist More People in Need

- Expand Food Bank services in underserved areas of northern Nevada and eastern Sierra portions of seven California counties.
- Provide support to the Food Bank's network of partner agencies to develop food distribution programs that better meet the needs of low-income working families and seniors.
- Coordinate more supplemental food delivery programs for seniors and the homebound.
- Increase the number of remote, rural communities effectively served.
- Develop local food security efforts to reduce need for emergency food assistance and build self-sufficiency.

Enhance Existing Services

- Continue to improve the nutritional quality of food provided to Food Bank partner agencies and clients.
- Help Food Bank partner agencies link clients to other critical services, such as federal nutrition programs, housing, health services and job training.

