

MORE THAN HALF OF AMERICANS FACING FOOD CHALLENGES STRUGGLE TO GET SUPPORT

Perceptions of ineligibility, confusion about how to enroll, and a lack of services in local communities kept more than 12.5 million experiencing food challenges from getting any help at all.

Chicago, IL, September 24, 2021 — Nearly a quarter of Americans report experiencing food challenges, and 37% of adults received some type of food assistance from a non-profit organization or a government service to help feed their household in the last year, according to a new study from Impact Genome and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But many also faced barriers to accessing needed services to meet these challenges.

Healthy eating and where people get their food are two crucial aspects of food security also addressed by the research. While most Americans report eating healthily over the last year, just 27% of those facing food challenges are confident in their household's ability to get enough healthy and nutritious food, compared to 87% of those not facing food challenges. These households are also about twice as likely to frequent convenience stores for their food needs as those who report having enough of the types of food they want.

"Nearly a quarter of Americans had trouble feeding their families this past year, and in the midst of that struggle, many ran into obstacles when they tried to get help, says Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. " This study provides a more nuanced understanding of food security – not just the ability to put food on the table, but to nourish their families the ways they'd like to."

Roughly half of those who faced difficulty getting food in the last year say extra money is necessary to help pay for food or bills, but the survey also reveals structural problems that require long-term solutions. For example, nearly three in ten with food challenges need reliable transportation, and many are unsure how long they would need this type of support.

"This research tells us not only how many people need support feeding their families, but also the barriers they faced and which solutions will meet their need," says Heather King, Vice President of Evidence & Implementation at the Impact Genome Project®. "This study gives us precision data – directly from the people that need help – with which we can guide corporate philanthropies and other funders in making investments in social programs."

Key findings from the study include:

- About a third of Americans say they struggle with knowing which foods are healthy when they shop, how to plan and prepare nutritious meals, and are uncertain about what they need in order to be healthy.



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- Just 27% of those facing food challenges are confident in their ability to get healthy food, compared to 87% of those not facing food challenges. They are also less confident about knowing how to be healthy and get nutritious food on the table.
- Roughly one in four Americans say it is difficult for them to find time to cook healthy food at home, and more than a third (36%) citing time constraints say the pandemic has exacerbated the problem.
- One in eight Americans regularly frequents convenience stores to meet their food needs. Those already experiencing food challenges are more likely to regularly shop at convenience stores (21% vs. 11%), as are those below 200% of the federal poverty line and Black Americans.
- Those who frequent convenience stores for their food are less likely to regularly buy (48% vs. 76%) and eat (47% vs. 72%) healthy food compared to those who rarely or never shop there.

About This Study

This study, funded by Impact Genome with support from The Albertsons Companies Foundation, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research August 5 and 23, 2021, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia; 2,233 completed the survey—2,011 via the web and 222 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. In addition, Black, Hispanic, respondents from households below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and respondents from households between 100%-200% FPL were sampled at a higher rate than their proportion of the population to support analyses. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (\$2) for completing the survey. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak®, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and Impact Genome collaborated on all aspects of the study. The full report can be found [here](#).

About The Impact Genome®

The Impact Genome® is a field-wide, systematic effort to standardize measurement, reporting, and evidence for the world's most common social outcomes. The data and tools of the Impact Genome enable funders, policymakers, and practitioners to allocate grant dollars based on impact, to design and implement effective interventions, to benchmark results, and to ultimately solve social problems more efficiently.



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Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and non-partisan research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more.

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