

2024 Denver Food Insecurity Survey Results Report

A. Executive Summary

Food Insecurity Rates

Food insecurity is a measure of an individual's social and economic ability to access adequate food as well as a way to understand the economic stability of a community. The standard measure of food insecurity used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is whether a person has skipped or reduced the size of their meals because there was not enough money for food. Currently, 15% of Denver residents responded "yes" to this question in a statistically significant telephone survey (N=1,000) conducted by the Denver Department of Public Health and the Environment (DDPHE).

The Denver survey found statistically higher rates of food insecurity among those who are unemployed, have low incomes, identify as Hispanic or multiracial (with slightly higher, but not statistically different, rates among Black residents), identify as LGBTQIA+, face challenges shopping due to a disability, are aged 18 to 24, and are parents of children under 18. Among parents (N=246), 7% have cut the size of their children's meals, and 4% have children who have skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.

Food insecurity is much higher among those surveyed at food pantries, with 45% of adults reporting that they had cut or skipped a meal, and one-third of parents stating that their children needed to cut or skip a meal because there was not enough money for food. One in five parents report that their child went a day without food, according to in-person survey results.

B. Introduction

The Denver Department of Public Health and Environment contracted Kupersmit Research to conduct a survey with the goal of providing an accurate, statistically reliable set of data on food insecurity and related issues in Denver. By establishing a baseline for food insecurity in 2024, DDPHE and other city agencies, along with community food partners, now have data to reliably inform efforts to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy food for Denver residents, both now and in the future.

The food insecurity survey addressed the following research topics:

- *Current levels of food insecurity:* USDA food insecurity standards, questions, and metrics.
 - By using these metrics, comparisons can be made with other studies and state and national data sources that use these measures to determine food insecurity levels.
- *Food shopping habits and barriers to accessing healthy food:* Where people shop for their food and their ability to access the types and quantities of foods needed to prepare desired meals for their families.
- *Participation in, and sufficiency of, food assistance programs:* The number of people enrolled in these programs and whether they are sufficient to meet the needs of food-insecure people.
- *Demographics:* Which populations experience higher rates of food insecurity and what factors may contribute to these higher rates.

The following results and findings are from two surveys conducted in spring 2024. A telephone survey was administered to 1,000 randomly selected Denver residents over 18 years old. In addition, an in-person survey of 315 food pantry clients at local food pantries was conducted to improve DDPHE's understanding of food insecurity among specific subpopulations, such as individuals who may have been unlikely to be included in the telephone survey if they lack regular telephone access.

C. Methodology

Telephone Survey Methodology

Kupersmit Research developed a mixed-methodology telephone survey to ensure representative and statistically significant data. The survey resulted in a stratified sample with demographic quotas across Denver. A complementary set of in-person community surveys was also conducted at food pantries to ensure that perspectives unlikely to be included in a telephone survey were acquired.

The 1,000-person telephone survey of those 18 years or older living in the city and county of Denver was based on a sample utilizing a mix of cellphones and landlines from commercially available phone numbers and voter lists. Luce Research in Colorado Springs obtained the sample lists and implemented the survey calls, ensuring quotas for geography, age, gender, income, and ethnicity.

The telephone survey was conducted from April 3 to April 13, 2024, with an average call duration of nine minutes. The survey has a margin of error (m.o.e.) of $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level, which is higher for subgroups of analysis. For example, for specific subgroups, such as parents with children ages 18 or under [n=246], the m.o.e. increases to $\pm 6.3\%$ at the 95% confidence level. In other words, if the survey was redone using the same methodology, the same results would be expected—give or take 3.1 percentage points in either direction—about 95% of the time. Additional information on the subpopulations can be found in the data crosstab results (see Appendices). There were 800 cellphone interviews and 200 landline interviews (based on industry standards). The completion rates were 88% for landline calls and 71% for cellphones. These rates are standard in the survey industry.

The telephone survey was offered in both English and Spanish, with 98% of respondents opting for English and 2% for Spanish. The sample was stratified by zip code, with quotas for age, income, education, and ethnicity based on the most recent census data. The survey used city council districts as a geographic reference. One question asked respondents to identify their neighborhoods, but less than half knew this information. Respondents were also asked for their zip code.

In-Person Survey Methodology

DDPHE identified six food pantries or food access organizations involved with community-driven initiatives. These organizations, listed below, were located in different neighborhoods across Denver to ensure a diverse geographic distribution of respondents.

- Denver Inner City Parish
- Re:Vision
- Montbello Organizing Committee
- Centro Cristiano Amistad
- Commun
- Servicios de la Raza

These organizations each agreed to have their volunteers or employees intercept individuals seeking food pantry services and ask them to answer questions on a tablet. Each organization interviewed between 40 and 75 people. The same set of questions (with minor variations to account for differences between hearing the survey on a telephone call and reading it on a tablet) were utilized, and the survey was offered in both English and Spanish. Of the 315 completed surveys, 86% of food pantry clients took the survey in Spanish, while 14% responded in English. Notably, the 315 in-person surveys from a “hard-to-reach” population (compared to perhaps less than 1% of the survey population) give significantly more voice to these individuals.

The in-person survey results are presented separately from the telephone survey results in this report. The in-person data cannot be combined with the telephone data without knowing the percentage of the Denver population that is unreachable by telephones. If this data point was available, it would be possible to incorporate the in-person data into the overall data set.

Project Costs

The overall cost of the project was \$43,000, with specific costs as follows:

- 1) \$5,000 to Kupersmit Research for developing the methodology, analyzing the data, presenting key findings, and supervising the overall project. Kupersmit Research was selected through a competitive Request for Proposal process due to its experience in conducting surveys and specific knowledge of food insecurity and hunger issues.
- 2) \$35,000 to conduct the 1,000-person telephone survey.
- 3) \$3,000 was provided to six community organizations (\$500 each) to conduct in-person surveys on-site at food pantries. The food pantries were selected based on their geographic location and capacity to conduct interviews during pantry operating hours.

D. Key Metrics and Results

NOTE: DDPHE intentionally included standard USDA survey questions to measure food insecurity, allowing for comparisons with other studies that use the same USDA measures and questions to determine food insecurity levels.

Telephone Survey

Below are questions and responses related to hunger as a concern, levels of food insecurity, skipping or cutting meals, and whether there are sufficient funds to purchase food. The statistic that 15% of Denverites are food insecure is derived from the question below regarding skipping meals.

Hunger as a Concern

Q. Relative to other concerns you have for your household, how important of an issue is hunger?

Twenty-six percent of Denver residents report that hunger is a concern, including 5% who say it is their most important concern, 5% who say it is among their top concerns, and 16% who say it is a mild concern.

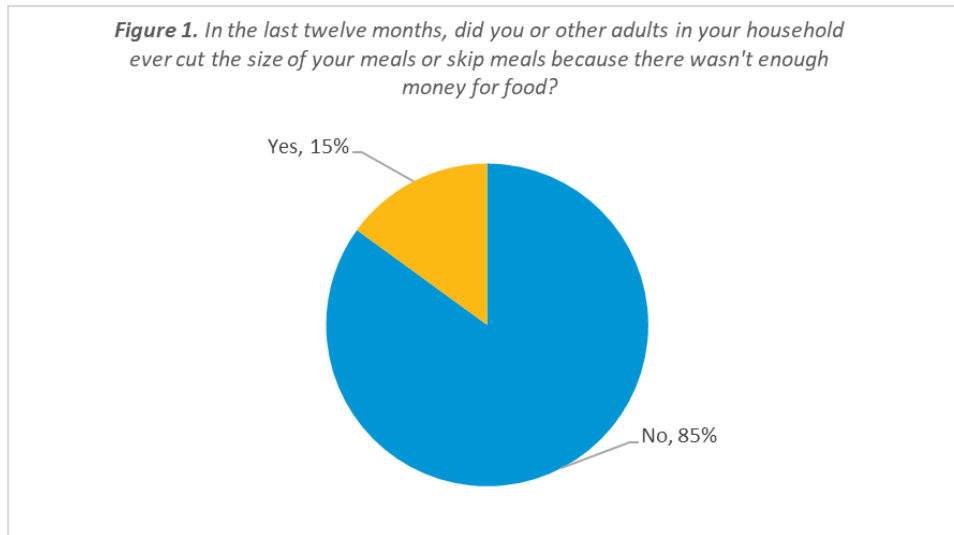
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| a. Hunger is not a concern | 73% |
| b. Hunger is a mild concern | 16% |

- c. Hunger is among my top concerns 5%
- d. Hunger is the most important concern I have 5%
- e. Prefer not to say 1%

Cut or Skipped Meals

Q. In the last twelve months, did you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (Figure 1.)

Fifteen percent of respondents cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.



This rate mirrors the rate identified by the [Colorado Health Access Study \(CHAS\)](#) in 2023 by the Colorado Health Institute, which interviewed 958 people through online and mail surveys and used the same USDA questions.

IF YES: Q. How often did you or other adults in your household cut the size of your meals or skip meals?

N=153

- a. Almost every month 47%
- b. Some months but not every month 29%
- c. Only one or more months 23%

For those who cut or skipped meals, statistically significant differences were found among those ages 18 to 24 years old, those who identify as Hispanic or multiracial, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, parents of children under 18, those who have difficulty with errands, and those who speak multiple languages in their household.

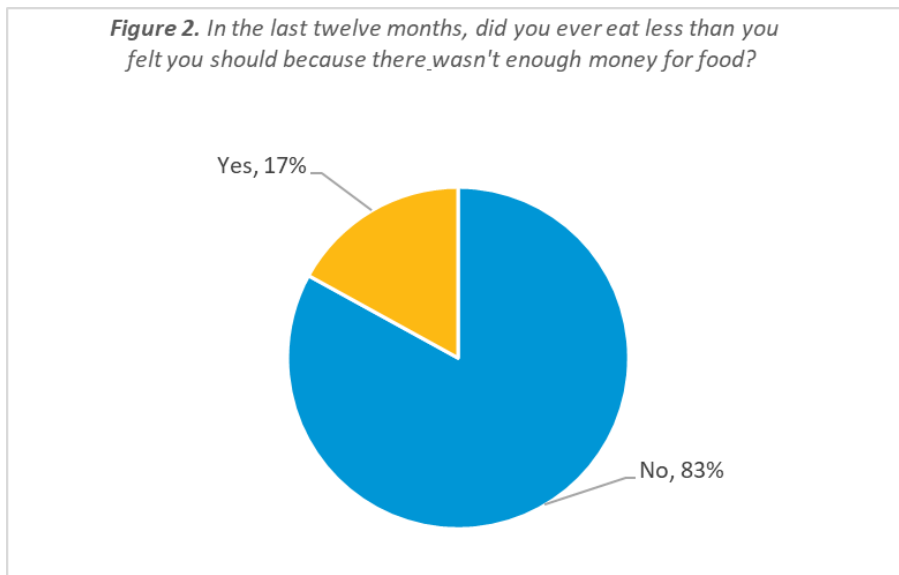
There are also statistically higher rates among individuals who are unemployed or working part time but seeking additional work, as well as those with annual household incomes below \$50,000 (especially those who make less than \$25,000).

Demographic	% Who Cut or Skipped Meals
Ages 18–24	32%
Hispanic	21%
Multiracial	28%
Identify as LGBTQIA+ in HH	23%
Children up to 6 years old	21%
Children ages 7–18	24%
Difficulty running errands because of a disability	31%
Other languages spoken	23%
Working part time, want to work more hours	22%
Unemployed and looking for work	33%
Income \$24,999 or less	41%
Income \$24,000–\$29,000	29%

Ate Less Because of Insufficient Funds

Q. In the last twelve months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food? (Figure 2.)

Seventeen percent of respondents ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food.



Food Purchasing Habits and Barriers

The next set of questions explore where people shop for groceries, if healthy foods are available and affordable, and the role of transportation in accessing healthy foods. Other challenges to people’s ability

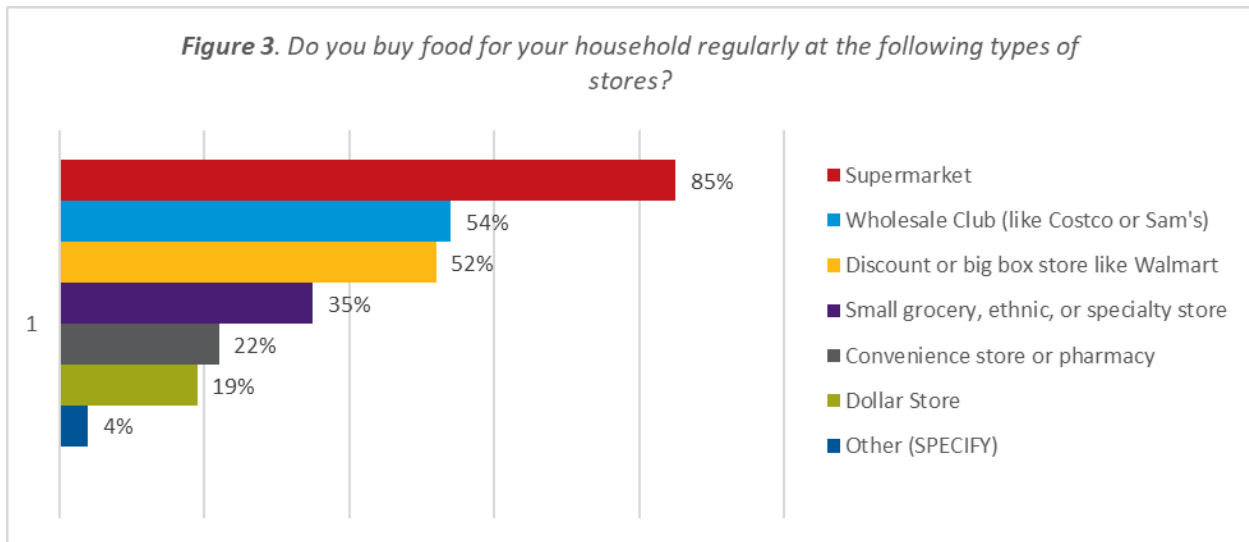
to eat healthy foods are addressed in a series of open-ended comments. Common issues mentioned include the cost of taxis or hire cars such as Uber or Lyft in getting to the grocery store, food pantries that are only open during business hours, and expensive delivery fees for those who cannot drive or leave the house.

Shopping Behavior

Q. Do you buy food for your household regularly at the following types of stores? ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES (Figure 3.)

Eighty-five percent of Denver residents shop at supermarkets, followed by 54% at wholesale clubs and 52% at big-box stores. One-third (35%) shop at small grocery, ethnic, or specialty stores, 22% shop at convenience stores or pharmacies, and 19% shop at dollar stores.

People with incomes under \$25,000 are less likely to shop at supermarkets or specialty stores and more likely to use discount stores, big-box stores, or dollar stores. They are also significantly less likely to belong to a wholesale club, whereas those with incomes over \$150,000 are far more likely to shop there. Respondents in City Council Districts 8 and 11 are less likely to mention supermarkets, with a higher percentage citing dollar stores in these districts as well as in City Council Districts 2 and 4.

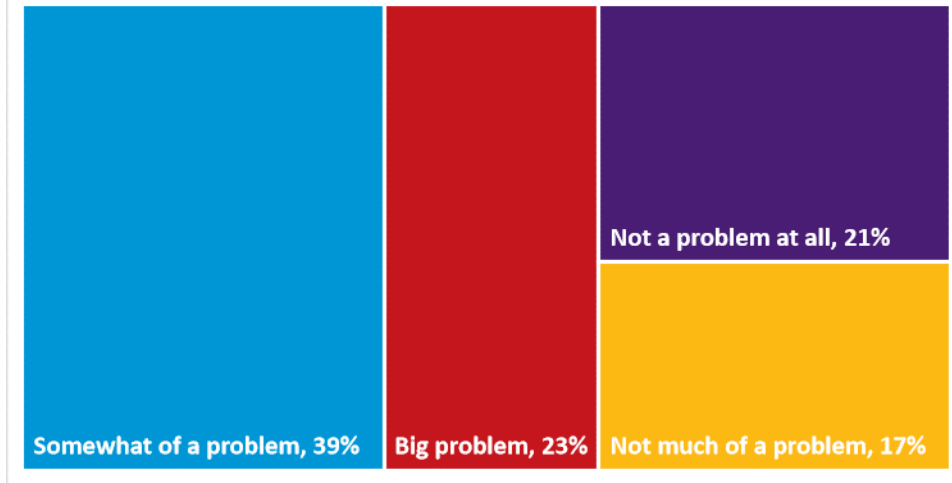


Healthy Foods are Too Expensive

Q. How big of a problem is healthy foods at your local store being too expensive? (Figure 4.)

Two-thirds of respondents indicated that healthy foods are too expensive at their local store, with 23% saying it is a big problem and 39% saying it is somewhat a problem.

Figure 4. How big of a problem is healthy foods at your local store being too expensive?



Those most likely to report this as a big problem, with statistically significant differences, include:

- Women (16%)
- Those under age 24 (24%)
- Hispanic, Black, and multiracial individuals (26%, 19%, and 24% respectively)
- Those with children ages 7 to 18 (29%)
- Households with multiple languages (26%)
- Those with incomes under \$49,000 per year, especially those earning under \$24,000 (32% and 47%, respectively)
- The unemployed (45%)
- Those who have difficulty running errands (38%)

This is more likely to be seen as a big problem by residents of City Council Districts 3 and 11.

Stores Only Sell Unhealthy Foods

Q. How big of a problem is it that stores in your area only sell processed and unhealthy foods?

Forty-two percent of respondents say that stores in their area only selling unhealthy or processed foods is a problem, including 18% who say it is a big problem.

Those more likely to report this as a big problem, with statistically significant differences, include:

- Individuals ages 18 to 24 (24%)
- Hispanic individuals (26%)
- Households with four or more people (29%)
- Households with multiple languages (26%)
- Those with incomes under \$50,000 per year (26%)
- The unemployed (31%)

Residents of City Council Districts 2, 3, 9, and 11 are somewhat more likely to say this is a big problem.

Transportation to and From the Store

Q. How big of a problem is not having transportation to get to and from the store?

Fifteen percent of respondents say that transportation is a problem, including 9% who say it is a big problem.

These groups are more likely to say this is a big problem:

- Individuals with difficulty running errands due to a disability (22%)
- Black and Hispanic individuals (23% and 17%, respectively)
- Households with multiple languages (14%)
- Households with incomes under \$25,000 per year (27%)
- The unemployed (21%)

Residents of City Council Districts 2, 3, 4, 9, and 11 are more likely to say this is a big problem.

Other Challenges in Getting Healthy Food

Q. Are there any other challenges or big problems that you face in getting enough healthy food to eat? If yes, can you tell me a bit about that?

Approximately 15% of respondents indicated facing additional challenges in obtaining enough healthy food, according to the randomized telephone survey of 1,000 respondents. The question was open-ended, allowing survey participants to elaborate on these challenges. A total of 165 open-ended responses were received in which individuals mentioned affordability, lack of grocery stores, transportation concerns, and the inability of federal nutrition assistance benefits to meet the economic needs of the household and eliminate barriers to purchasing or obtaining healthy food. Below are several examples of participant responses to the question above. The responses below are direct participant quotes and have not been edited for grammar:

Open-Ended Responses

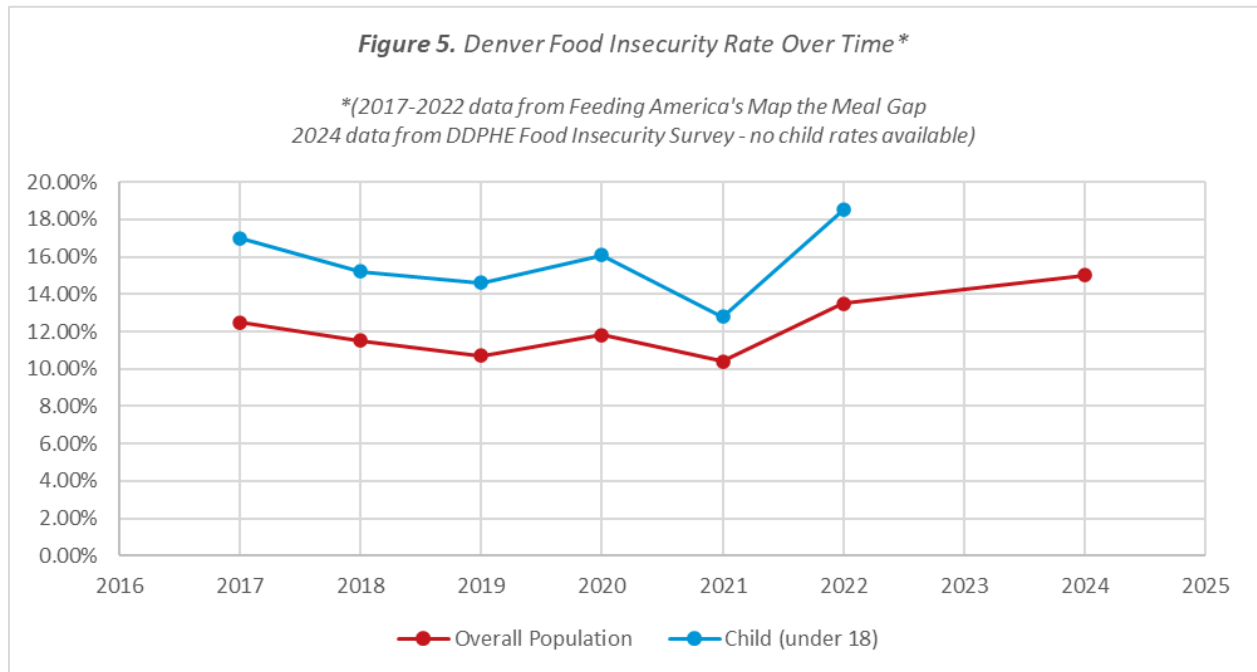
- *It is just expensive with the amount of money I make and not getting help from the government, then having to choose healthy food over normal food is too hard.*
- *Cannot drive and prices of produce are too high.*
- *I have to do it online because I am handicap and not enough money to buy it.*
- *Wages, I live paycheck to paycheck, so it can get pretty costly. I have to Uber to and from the grocery store to make it there and back so it can be costly.*
- *I am on food stamps, and it took months to process it, so I did not have funds during that time.*
- *People are disabled and they want to charge us an arm and a leg for a delivery and should not charge the people that cannot make it to the store.*
- *Having food banks open only a certain amount of hours are including hours I work, from ten a.m. to one p.m. They close right when I get off. If you make too much in Colorado you don't get any EBT benefits, any kind of assistance if you make too much like I do.*
- *When I get off work, they (food pantries/food banks) are already closed.*

Child Hunger

The next few questions focus on childhood food insecurity, addressing whether children have skipped or cut meals and whether a child went without food for an entire day. In Denver, child food insecurity rates have been higher than adult rates since 2017, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, food

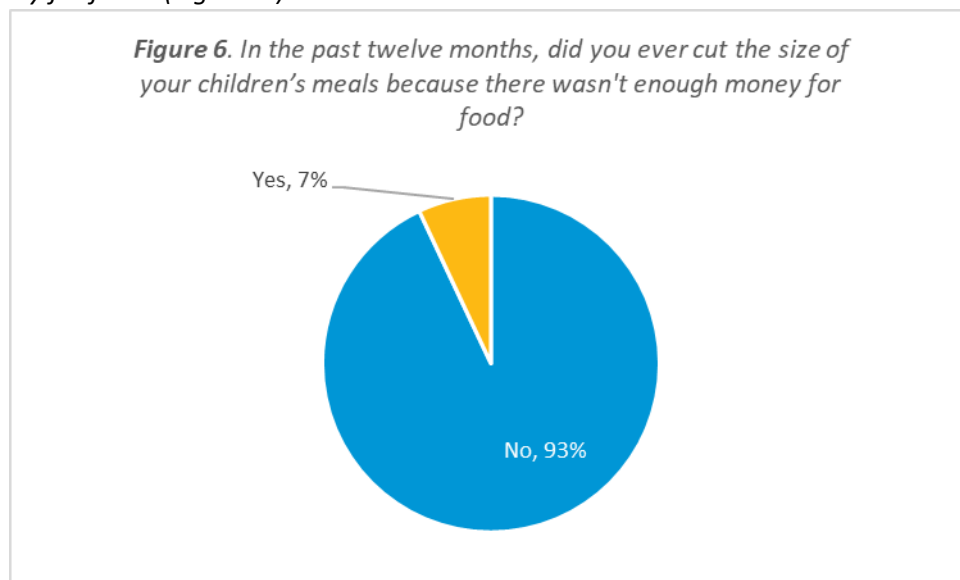
insecurity rates decreased during the pandemic, which may be attributed to additional SNAP benefits, universal free school meals for students, extended unemployment benefits, and other programs that positively affected peoples' incomes. These programs have been discontinued as the pandemic has subsided, leading to a rise in food insecurity rates.

Below are food insecurity rates in Denver over time (Figure 5). The information from 2017–2022 is sourced from Feeding America's [Map the Meal Gap](#), while the 2024 data is from this food insecurity survey conducted by DDPHE with Kupersmit Research.



Cut Size of Children's Meals

Q. In the past twelve months, did you ever cut the size of your children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (Figure 6.)



Among parents with children under the age of 18 living at home (N=246), 7% report cutting the size of their children's meals because there was not enough money for food.

Among low-income households, this figure is closer to 17%. It is also 17% among those with difficulty running errands and 15% among individuals who identify as Hispanic. Women are more likely than men to report cutting the size of their children's meals (11% versus 3%).

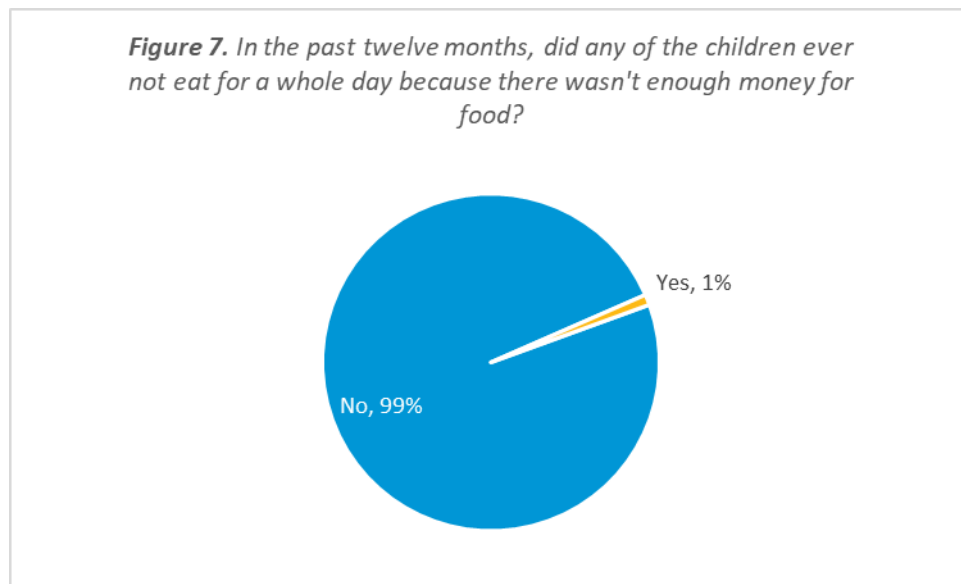
Children Skipped Meals

Q. In the past twelve months, did any of your children ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Among parents, 4% (N=10) report that their children skipped a meal in the past 12 months because there wasn't enough money for food. While this sample size is too small to draw statistically valid inferences, about half the respondents said this happened almost every month and the remaining half said this happened some months or less frequently. Among low-income parents, although sample sizes are also small, close to 9% report their children skipping a meal.

Children Did Not Eat for a Whole Day

Q. In the past twelve months, did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food? (Figure 7.)



Among Denver parents, 1% report that their children did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.

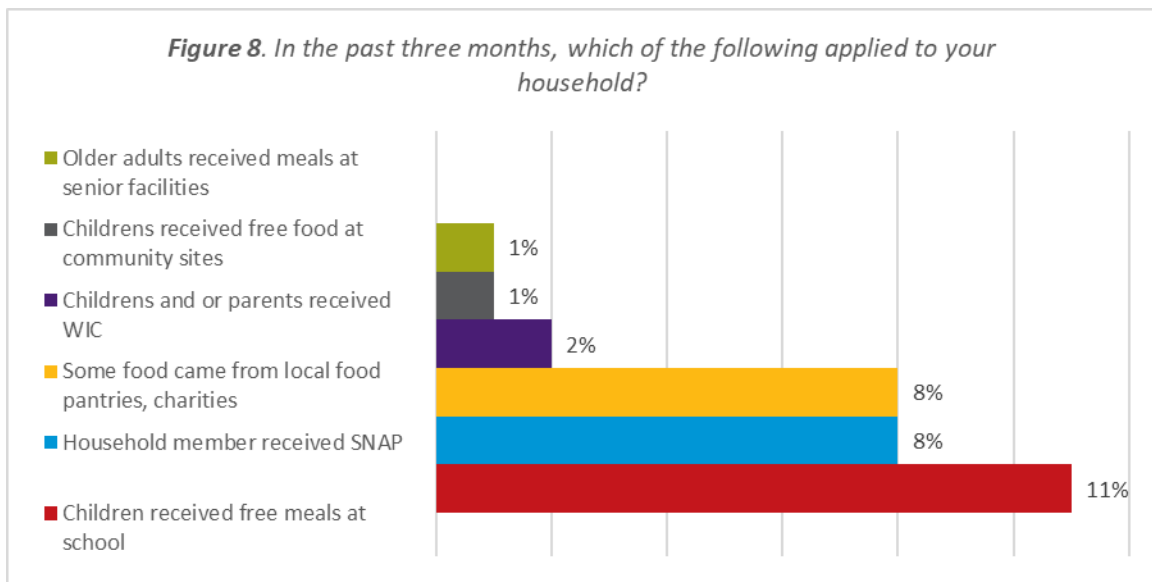
Food Assistance

The next few questions explore the role of food assistance and how it relates to food insecurity. Food assistance includes federal nutrition programs aimed at families, individuals, students, and women who

are pregnant or have children up to age five, as well as food pantries. The questions address whether these types of food assistance are meeting food needs.

Q. In the past three months, which of the following applied to your household? Multiple choice options were the following: free meals at school, free food at community sites, benefits through the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, older adult/senior meals, benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and food pantries. (Figure 8.)

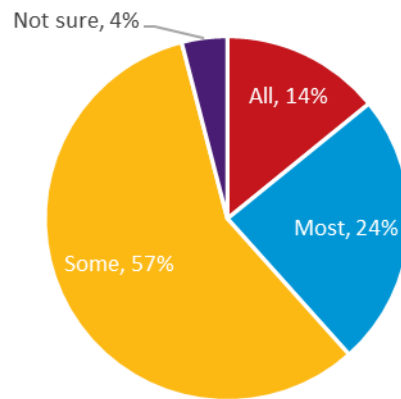
Approximately 32% of respondents reported receiving some form of food assistance. The majority of these individuals indicated they had received assistance within the past three months, primarily through free school meals, followed by SNAP and food pantries. This was most commonly observed among individuals with lower incomes, multiperson households, and Black, Hispanic, and multiracial individuals.



Q. If you utilized WIC or SNAP, how much of your household food needs did these cover?

Roughly 81% of respondents receiving SNAP benefits indicated that it covered most or some of their household meal costs. There were no statistically significant disparities among demographic groups or income levels. (Figure 9.)

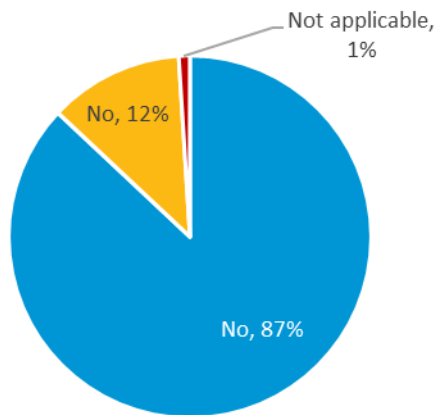
Figure 9. *If you utilized WIC or SNAP, how much of your household food needs did these cover?*



Q. If you utilized school meals or community sites, did your children receive enough food for breakfast and lunch?

Approximately 87% of individuals who reported that their children received breakfast and lunch at either a school or community site indicated that their children received enough food. Among those who indicated that children did not receive enough, no statistically significant disparities were found across demographic groups or income levels. (Figure 10.)

Figure 10. *If you utilized school meals or community sites, did your children receive enough food for breakfast and lunch?*



Q. If you used food pantries or similar organizations, were you able to obtain the kinds of food and amount of food needed for your household?

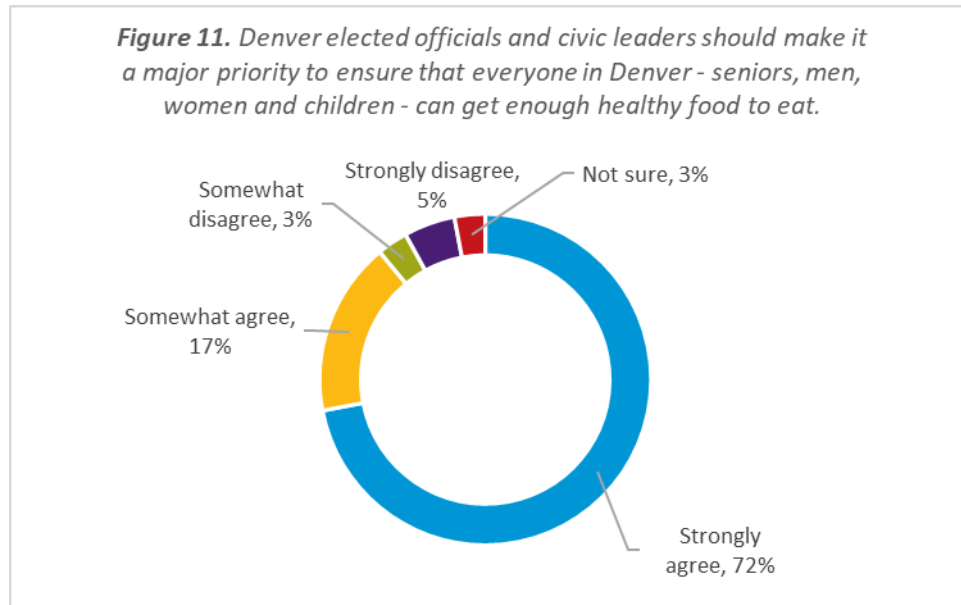
For individuals who utilized food pantries or similar organizations, 32% of respondents stated they were able to obtain enough food; however, it was not the kind of food they were seeking for their household.

In contrast, roughly 21% indicated they were unable to obtain either enough food or the desired types of food for their household. No statistically significant disparities were found across demographic groups or income levels.

Role of Denver Elected Officials and Civic Leaders

Q. Denver elected officials and civic leaders should make it a major priority to ensure that everyone in Denver—seniors, men, women, and children—can get enough healthy food to eat.

An overwhelming 90% of Denver residents, including 72% who *strongly* agree, believe that Denver leadership should make everyone getting enough healthy food to eat a major priority. (Figure 11.)



In-Person Survey Results

Below are the key findings from the in-person surveys conducted at food pantries, along with a summary comparison of some of the information from both the telephone and in-person surveys. The full in-person survey results can be found in Appendix D below.

Food Insecurity, Shopping Habits, Food Assistance

- 45% report that they cut the size or skipped meals in the last 12 months.
 - Among these individuals, 32% said they cut or skipped meals almost every month, and another 41% said it was some months but not every month.
- 49% say they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food.
- They are far more likely to shop at a discount or big-box store like Walmart (67%) followed by the supermarket (37%) and small grocery (24%) or dollar store (24%). Fewer access wholesale clubs (18%), and 5% shop at the convenience store/pharmacy.

- 66% say that healthy food is too expensive, including 28% who say this is a big problem. 61% say that there are only unhealthy or processed food options available, including 24% who say this is a big problem.
- Lack of transportation is a problem for 55%, including 19% who say this is a big problem.
- 41% have received food from a food pantry or similar, and 36% say their children receive free meals at school. 10% report receiving SNAP, 9% receive free food at a community site for their children, 8% receive WIC, and 4% say older adults receive free meals.

Child Hunger

- There was a subset of 226 parents of children 18 or younger in the 315 community surveys. Among these parents, 37% said they had cut the size of their children's meals in the past 12 months.
- 31% say that their kids had skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.
 - Among these parents, 31% say this happened almost every month, and 50% said it happened some months but not every month.
- 22% reported that a child did not eat for a whole day in the past 12 months because there wasn't enough money for food.

Highlight Comparison of In-Person and Telephone Surveys

Meals Skipped

- In-Person: 45% report that they cut the size of their meals or skipped meals in the last 12 months.
- Telephone: 15% report that they cut the size of their meals or skipped meals in the last 12 months.

Enough Money for Food

- In-Person: 49% ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food.
- Telephone: 17% ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food.

Healthy Food

- In-Person: 66% say that healthy food is too expensive, including 28% who say this is a big problem.
- Telephone: 62% say that healthy food is too expensive, including 23% who say this is a big problem.

Child Hunger

- In-Person: 22% report that a child did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.
- Telephone: 1% report that their children did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food.

Child Hunger

- In-Person: 31% of parents report that their kids skipped a meal because there wasn't enough money for food.

- Telephone: 7% of parents report that their kids skipped a meal because there wasn't enough money for food.

E. Limitations

There were several limitations to the survey, which limits the ability to extend results to smaller geographic areas such as neighborhoods. One issue arose when respondents were asked to identify their neighborhood of residence; many were unsure or did not know which neighborhood they lived in. Similarly, zip code data proved difficult to track accurately, as a single zip code can encompass multiple neighborhoods, and achieving meaningful insights at this granular level would have required a much larger sample size. The survey was intentionally designed as a county-level study, with the primary goal of establishing measures that reflect the broader context for food insecurity across the city and county of Denver. While obtaining city council district, neighborhood, or zip code-specific data is possible, doing so would require a more targeted survey design, significantly larger sample sizes, and additional funding, capacity, and resources to produce smaller geographic area reports on food insecurity. Moving forward, these more localized insights can be supplemented through other means, such as leveraging data collected through grants or programmatic activities by DDPHE.

F. Next Steps for Food Insecurity in Denver

The food insecurity survey highlights several areas where Denver can address both disparities and opportunities for more equitable food security across the city. For example, the demographic breakdown of individuals who frequently reduce meal sizes or skip meals because they do not have enough money for food illustrates that more nuanced support is needed for specific communities. Tailored approaches for demographic groups such as college-age students, the LGBTQIA+ community, and individuals with physical or mobility issues can address other disparities observed in the survey, including those tied to shopping behaviors and access to food assistance programs.

This food insecurity survey conducted in 2024 serves as a foundational methodology to further refine and monitor changes to food insecurity over time as well as develop responsive strategies to improve food access. DDPHE plans to conduct the survey at a regular cadence to align with city-wide strategies to support food security, community health, and economic stability.

The below appendices include the surveys used and referenced in this document.

G. Appendices

- [Appendix A English Language Survey](#)
- [Appendix B Spanish Language Survey](#)
- [Appendix C Data Crosstabs](#)
- [Appendix D In-Person Survey Results](#)
- [Appendix E How to Read Crosstab Information](#)