

Nutrition Assistance and Food Insecurity in North Carolina

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What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity—difficulty at some time during the year to provide enough food for all household members due to a lack of resources.

“enough food for an active, healthy life”

Food Insecurity

- In 2018, 14.3 million U.S. households were food insecure at sometime during the year (11.1%).
 - 13.9 percent of households with children who are under the age of 18
- In 2018, 37.2 Million people lived in food insecure households.
- North Carolina's food insecurity is above US average.
 - 14.4 percent of households

Factors that Contribute to Food Insecurity

- Education
- Income
 - Food insecurity declines as income rises
- Race
 - African American and Latino populations disproportionately affected by food insecurity
- Household structure
 - Female headed households—never married, separate, or divorced
 - Households with children

Consequences of Food Insecurity

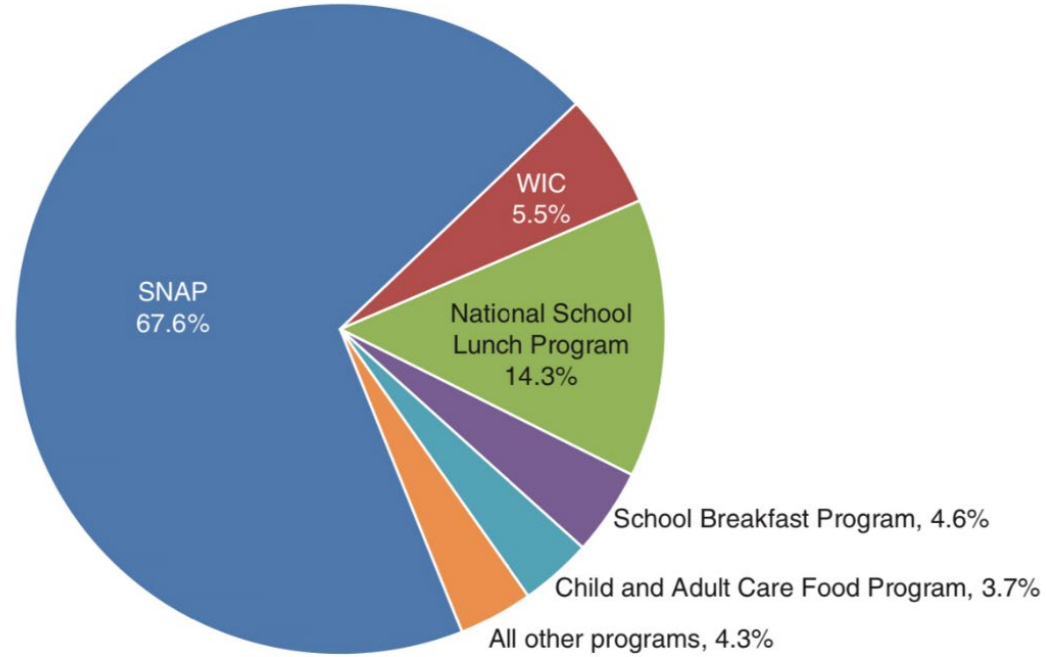
- Developmental and learning impairments
- Mental Health and Behavior Problems
- Anemia
- Chronic Illnesses
- Absenteeism
- Lower Academic Achievement

Nutrition Assistance Programs

Program	Established	Benefit Type	Targeted Population ¹
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	1964 (Food Stamp Act)	Monthly transfer to purchase food	Household (HH) members with income <130% of poverty threshold
National School Lunch Program (NSLP)	1946 (National School Lunch Act)	Free or reduced-price lunches at schools	Free meals to children from HHs with income <130% of poverty, reduced-price meals to children from HHs with income between 130% and 185% of poverty
School Breakfast Program (SBP)	1975 (School Lunch and Child Nutrition Amendments)	Free or reduced-price breakfasts	Same as NSLP
Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	1975 (see SBP)	Supplemental foods and nutrition education	Mothers and children (below 5 years) <185% of poverty threshold, and at "nutritional risk"

USDA food and nutrition assistance expenditures by program, FY 2018

SNAP accounted for over two-thirds of food and nutrition assistance expenditures



FY = Fiscal Year. SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

Note: Expenditures for all food and nutrition programs totaled \$96.1 billion. They include nutrition family assistance grants to Puerto Rico, the Northern Marianas, and American Samoa; the Commodity Supplemental Food Program; the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; the Nutrition Services Incentive Program; the Summer Food Program; the Special Milk Program; Disaster Feeding; The Emergency Food Assistance Program; and nutrition programs administration.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service.

Ongoing Research

- 12 counties
 - Vary by region, demographics, and rurality
- Examining barriers to accessing SNAP and WIC
- Interviews with SNAP and WIC workers
- Interviews with current and former program participants

WIC and SNAP Food Insecurity

- In 2018, over half (56%) of food-insecure households reported participating in one or more nutrition assistance programs.
- Access to nutrition assistance programs not *does not ensure* food security

WIC and SNAP Food Insecurity

Without WIC, I'm pretty sure a lot of babies wouldn't eat in this town. I don't know any other program that's better than that. Because it feeds kids and adults. It's not worried about just the kids. It's a pretty good program, I would say. Pretty amazing.

Without the WIC program I don't know what I would do, really. I mean, because I receive SNAP, but sometimes when the food runs out in between, the WIC was a big help to us, meaning I can go out and get fruits and vegetables, cereals and whatnot. And Lord, milk. I couldn't afford it.

WIC and SNAP Food Insecurity

I do get SNAP benefits so once I use those up and maybe if she's out of milk, I try to save those up until we're running low on eggs and milk. **So that really, really, really, really does help me so much towards the end of the month when we're kind of running low** on the milk and the bread and the eggs and the cereal.

Really just the amount of food that they give us, **the little amount of food that they give us for that month goes a long ways** because they like peanut butter. You can hold on to it for a while. Things like the beans, I cannot have -- when I was on WIC before I would always grab a bag of beans because you can make a meal out of that.

Why don't People Use Benefits?

- Burdensome Costs
 - Learning Costs : Figuring out complex eligibility rules
 - learning how to use benefits
- Psychological Costs: Negative & Stigmatizing interactions with workers
- Compliance Costs: Documentation and Appointment requirements

When Do Burdens Occur? : WIC & SNAP

- **WIC:** Outside of offices (Retail Settings)
 - Difficulty redeeming benefits at stores
 - Stigma
 - Hard to identify WIC approved food
- **SNAP:** Within DSS Offices (Encounters with Bureaucrats)
 - Stigmatizing interactions with bureaucrats
 - Inaccessible Caseworkers
 - Delays in benefits

WIC Experience: Trouble Shopping

Some of the people have trouble if you pick a different grocery store, you can't find the brand, you get the wrong brand, you get the wrong size, you've got to be doing math... I mean, it's confusing enough picking your cereal.... now I can get this type of Cheerios -- not just this type, but now I've got to add up boxes to add to this exact amount of Cheerios, but your kid wants this Cheerios. Well, you can't get that one. So I think people get frustrated.

WIC Experience: Trouble Shopping

Who's going to be labeled correctly? Because that is the biggest problem. It was like three different breads in their [Grocery store C] or something that will say WIC. Or it'll say WIC and it's between two breads And you're like, well I know it's whole wheat, so you just grab the whole wheat one, and they're like it's not right. Well maybe you all should label you all's stuff correctly. Ever think about that?

WIC Experience: Trouble Shopping

I go to [Grocery store C] because [Grocery store A] sucks when it comes to WIC. They act like brats. And then [Grocery store C] here, I don't understand how it says WIC under it, and then they're like, no, you didn't get the right thing. And I'm like, I've been getting the same bread for two years now. I'm telling you, this is the right bread. And they're like, no, it's not WIC approved. I'm like, okay, well, you go get it. I tell them, I'm like, you go get it then, because obviously I get the wrong one every time. So I don't even come to [Town J] and deal with them.

SNAP Experience: Stigma with Workers

I didn't get it in on time, which was my fault so, you know I was prepared to let it go...I don't know what it is, **but I certainly do not deserve that attitude.** You know? It makes me feel like...it...it **almost makes me feel ashamed** that I'm on... (tearfully) it makes me **feel embarrassed** to go to somebody and ask them for help...**I never had anybody so rude...**treat me...somebody like that...until I came up here to the social services office. I have never had that problem in the WIC office.

SNAP Experience: Stigma and Lost Paperwork

Sometimes the customer service sucks, because -- yeah. **They lose your paperwork and it's not their fault, it's your fault.** So you -- so for instance, when I went through the review process the first time, I took my information down to the office, got it timestamped so it shows proof that I was here and I dropped it off. **So in about 15 days when I didn't receive my benefits, I called down, it took me -- I was on hold for maybe an hour or so.** Finally, I spoke to somebody. They said, I don't see anything in the system.....So I held to talk to her [my worker] and she basically said, no, I never received your stuff.

SNAP Experience: Stigma and Lost Paperwork

So then I said, okay, I have my receipt here with my timestamp. Well, unfortunately, you can bring it in again and it'll take 5 to 10 business days for me to review it. **So they made me wait a whole other month when it wasn't my fault....to make people wait an entire month past -- you know, like for food, like that's, to me, barbaric.**

And you're like, oh, we can give you vouchers to -- or we can give you a referral to a food bank, but food banks are hit and miss and then it's limited....**So you're working on that for 30 days until you can get real food....**I don't like that process. It's broken, it needs to be fixed and revamped.

SNAP Experience: Stigma and Lost Paperwork

I had a really bad experience with my food stamps worker. She was very unprofessional. She was very rude, and when I confronted -- when I called back -- she hung up on me. Yeah. She -- that's why when I say I prefer to always give people my paperwork, that was my experience. That's why I always give it to the person. She lost my paperwork, and I had to call up here and then I was like, where my benefits at? And she was like, well, she hadn't received it. I was like, I turned it in, and I actually brought it back up here. And my Medicaid worker had gotten my paperwork, but she didn't get it.

SNAP and WIC Use in NC

- In North Carolina, SNAP covers 85% of eligible population
 - Does not capture delays in processing applications
 - Does not capture discontinuity in benefits
 - Does not capture variation in access across counties
- Families *still experience food insecurity*, especially when *access* to SNAP is *tenuous*
- WIC underutilized nationally and in North Carolina
 - In 2016, 54% of eligible population covered by WIC

2017 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement for US estimates; 2016 ACS; 2016 Puerto Rico Community Survey; Census International Database; WIC Administrative Data.

What can you do?

- Educate yourselves about the programs **AND** the process
 - Know the nature of benefits
 - Know how these programs are delivered
 - How does that state and federal government measure and monitor performance?
 - <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/low-income-services>
 - <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/>
- If your county has a DSS and County Health Board, inquire about how to serve on these boards.
 - Monthly board meetings are open to the public
 - Attend county board of commissioner meetings

What can you do?

Foundational knowledge of programs will help you identify opportunities to partner with local agencies.

- Attending board meetings will give you insight on the inner workings of agencies
 - Staffing
 - Caseloads
 - Technological needs
 - Budget short falls
- Get to know your DSS Director and County Health Department Director
 - Ask them what kinds of services they provide for families.
 - Ask them what they need.

Thank You!

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Works Cited

- 2017 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement for US estimates; 2016 ACS; 2016 Puerto Rico Community Survey; Census International Database; WIC Administrative Data.