



Food Insecurity Increased for the Second Straight Year in 2023

Households Faced Continued Pressure from High Food Prices and Fewer Supports

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US households have struggled to pay for food as prices for groceries and other essential household bills have increased, and temporary expansions of the safety net have expired (Martinchek et al. 2023). Though inflation moderated in 2023, food prices remain well above their levels from a few years ago,¹ and additional nutrition supports for households have lapsed. In this brief, we examine trends in food insecurity² and the receipt of charitable food using December 2023 data from the Urban Institute's Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS), a nationally representative annual survey of more than 7,500 adults ages 18 to 64. We estimate the shares of adults reporting household food insecurity and charitable food receipt in 2023 and compare those to 2019–22 estimates. This assessment is important to see how food insecurity and coping mechanisms have fluctuated throughout the economic volatility of the last four years.

We look at key groups that are particularly affected by food hardship, including low-income households, Black and Hispanic/Latinx³ households, and households with children. New to our analysis this year is an assessment of food insecurity among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)⁴ adults and low-income renters and homeowners to understand the levels of food hardship in demographic groups typically overlooked in previous research. We find the following:

- **Food insecurity increased for the second straight year in 2023.** The decline in food insecurity between 2019 and 2021 in the wake of the robust government and private response to the COVID-19 pandemic was followed by a sharp increase in food insecurity between 2021 and 2022, coinciding with expiring aid and rising inflation. Food hardship continued to rise in 2023,

with more than one in four adults (27.0 percent) reporting food insecurity, up from 24.9 percent in 2022.⁵ The 2023 rate exceeds the prepandemic level of food insecurity (22.5 percent in 2019).

- **The increase in food insecurity primarily affected lower-income households.** The share of adults with family incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) reporting food insecurity increased between 2022 and 2023 (from 46.6 percent to 52.2 percent), while food insecurity was statistically unchanged for adults with higher incomes.
- **Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults also reported significantly higher rates of food insecurity in 2023 compared to 2022.** Over one in three Black adults (35.1 percent) and nearly two in five Hispanic/Latinx adults (38.7 percent) reported food insecurity in 2023. Food insecurity continued increasing for Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults between 2022 and 2023, even as the rate of food insecurity for other racial and ethnic groups examined in the survey stabilized.
- **Adults were more likely to report food insecurity in 2023 if they lived with children, identified as LGBT, or were low-income adults renting as opposed to owning a home.**
- **Use of charitable food in 2023 remained above prepandemic levels and was unchanged from 2022.** One in six adults (16.6 percent) reported their households received charitable food in 2023, roughly the same share as in 2022 but higher than the share in 2019 (12.2 percent).
- **Many adults in food-insecure households were unaware of charitable food resources in their communities or were not comfortable receiving charitable food.** Among adults whose households were food insecure in 2023 and did not receive charitable food, less than half were aware of local charitable food resources (41.6 percent) or comfortable getting help (37.0 percent).

Background: Changes in Food Price Inflation and Federal Aid During 2023

Ample evidence shows the effectiveness of pandemic-era policies and the robust federal response in staving off material hardship. Policies such as the economic impact payments, enhanced unemployment benefits, and expanded child tax credit payments were associated with reductions in food insecurity early in the COVID-19 pandemic (Cooney and Shaefer 2021; Karpman et al. 2022; Raifman, Bor, and Venkataramani 2021; Shafer et al. 2022; Waxman and Gupta 2021). Temporary enhancements to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, known as “emergency allotments,” increased monthly household SNAP benefits between \$95 and \$250.⁶ These allotments reduced poverty rates, particularly among Black and Hispanic/Latinx people, and were also associated with a decrease in food hardship (Wheaton and Kwon 2022).⁷

However, food insecurity increased substantially in 2022. Rapid food price inflation coincided with the expiration of pandemic relief and most of the temporary expansions of public safety net programs, including the expanded child tax credit and universal free school meals (Martinchek et al. 2023; Rabbitt

et al. 2023). The 11.4 percent increase in prices that households paid for food eaten at home in 2022 was the highest rate of food price inflation in over three decades.⁸

Changes in federal aid in 2023 continued to affect low-income families' food budgets. In March 2023, the abrupt end of the SNAP emergency allotments still in use across 35 states created a "hunger cliff"⁹ for many families. When other states opted out of the allotments before 2023, the reduction in benefits was associated with reduced access to sufficient food (Dasgupta and Plum 2023). The expiration of emergency allotments resulted in SNAP recipients across the country having their benefits return to levels that previous studies found to be inadequate in meeting households' food needs (Waxman and Gupta 2023).

The reduction in SNAP benefits in 2023 coincided with continued fallout from the rise in food prices, even though the inflation rate slowed.¹⁰ Because the cost of staple items such as eggs and milk plays a significant role in how consumers perceive inflation, households may feel their budgets are tighter than ever (D'Acunto et al. 2019).¹¹

Trends in Food Insecurity, 2019–23

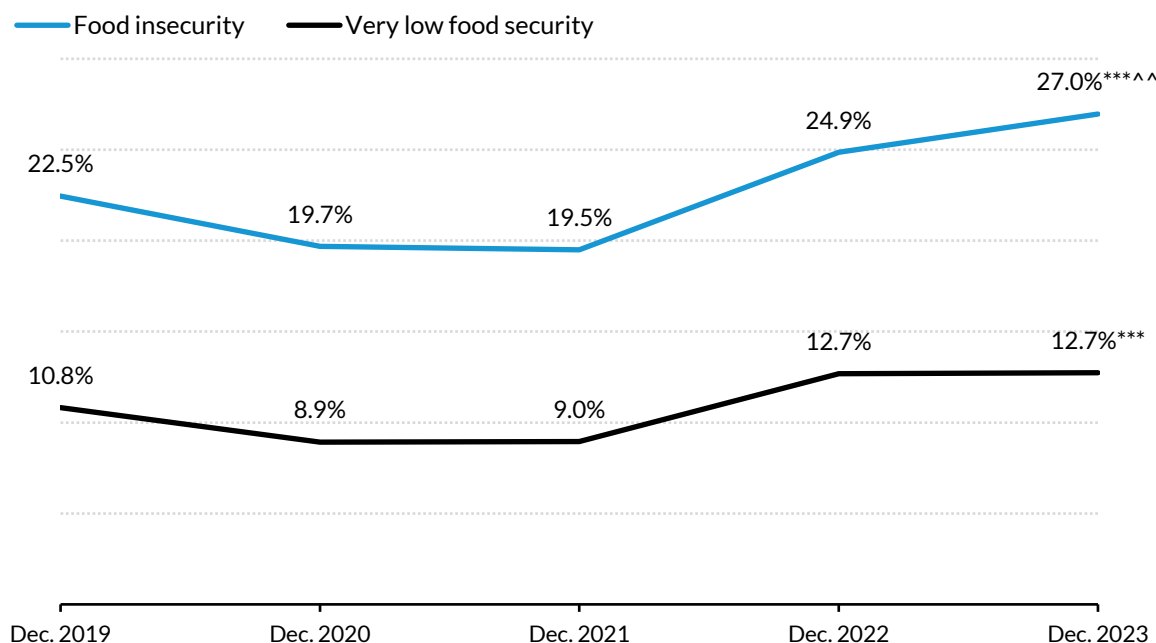
Following a sharp increase in 2022, food insecurity continued to rise in 2023.

The share of adults reporting food insecurity in the past year increased between December 2022 and December 2023, from 24.9 percent to 27.0 percent. This marked the second straight year in which the rate of household food insecurity increased between 2019–2023, and the 2023 level was higher than the prepandemic level of 22.5 percent reported in 2019 (figure 1). The trends in food insecurity observed in the WBNS are consistent with those found in federal surveys, even though the estimated levels of food insecurity in the WBNS are higher, likely because of differences in survey design and administration (appendix figure A.1).

Nearly half of adults living in food-insecure households in 2023 reported very low food security, representing the most severe form of hardship. People reporting very low food security are experiencing multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns, such as cutting back on the size of meals or going without food for a whole day.¹² While we did not observe an increase in the share of adults reporting very low food security in 2023 (1 in 8, or 12.7 percent), this level of severe food hardship is still elevated compared to the prepandemic level of 10.8 percent in 2019.

FIGURE 1

Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Household Food Insecurity in the Last 12 Months, December 2019 to December 2023



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2019 to December 2023.

Notes: Estimates are regression adjusted and therefore differ slightly from estimates published in previous reports.

*/**/** 2023 estimate differs significantly from 2019 at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

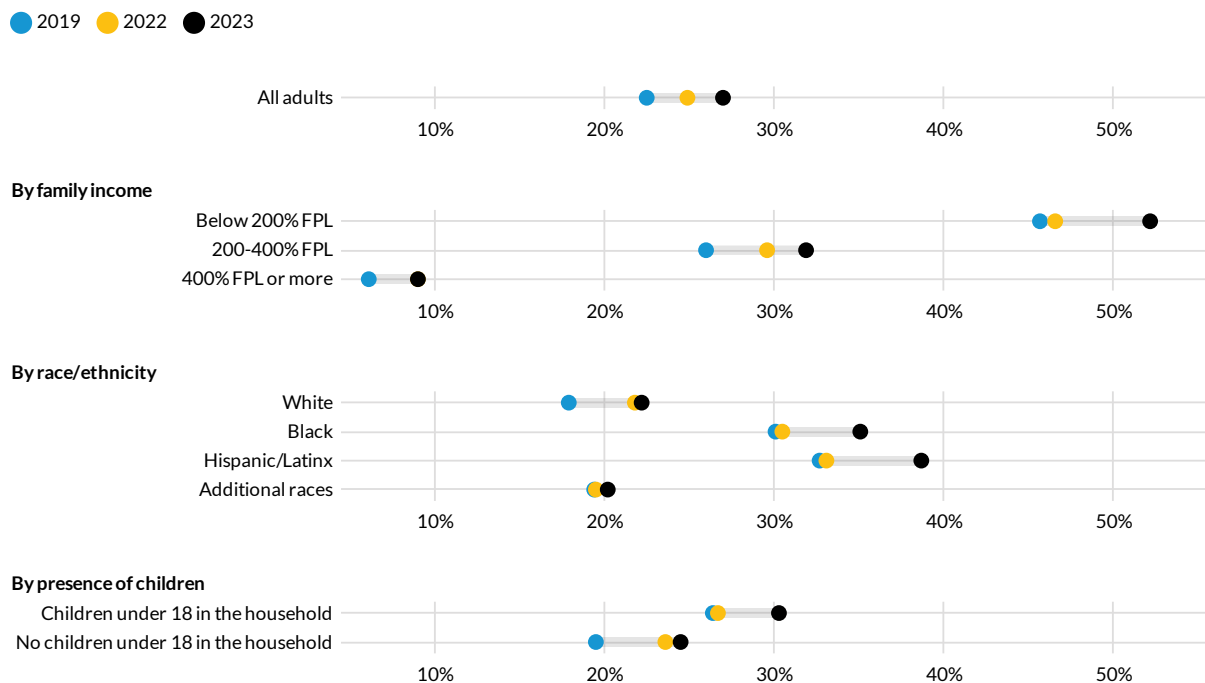
^^/^^/^^ 2023 estimate differs significantly from 2022 at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

The increase in food insecurity between 2022 and 2023 primarily affected lower-income households.

The share of adults with family incomes below 200 percent of FPL reporting food insecurity increased between 2022 and 2023 (from 46.6 percent to 52.2 percent), while food insecurity was statistically unchanged for adults with incomes between 200–400 percent of FPL and above 400 percent of FPL (figure 2). Though income is an important predictor of food insecurity, it is not the only determinant; some higher-income households report food insecurity, and some lower-income households remain food secure (Gundersen and Gruber 2001). SNAP is a particularly important buffer against food insecurity for people with low incomes (Gundersen 2022). Most households with gross incomes below 130 percent of FPL are eligible to participate in SNAP, and reductions in SNAP benefits in 2023 may have contributed to rising food hardship among this population.

FIGURE 2

Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Household Food Insecurity in the Last 12 Months, Overall and by Race/Ethnicity, Family Income, and Presence of Children in the Household, December 2019 to December 2023



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2019 to December 2023.

Notes: FPL= federal poverty level. Adults who are white, Black, or additional races are those who are not Hispanic/Latinx. Adults who are additional races are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. Estimates are regression adjusted and therefore differ slightly from estimates published in previous reports. The 2022 estimate of food insecurity among adults with incomes above 400 percent of FPL appears hidden, as it is the same estimate as 2023 (9.0 percent).

Over 1 in 3 Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults reported food insecurity in 2023. Rates of food insecurity increased for these groups between 2022 and 2023 while stabilizing for other racial and ethnic groups examined in the survey.

Black and Hispanic/Latinx people have long experienced food insecurity at much higher rates than their white counterparts, and these disparities continued during the COVID-19 pandemic (Odoms-Young and Bruce 2018; Martinchek et al. 2023). Moreover, the research shows that while poverty and unemployment are key drivers of food insecurity, structural racism is linked to food insecurity independent of poverty and socioeconomic status (Bowen, Elliott, and Hardison-Moody 2021).

Between 2022 and 2023, food insecurity increased among Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults. Nearly 2 in 5 Hispanic/Latinx adults (38.7 percent) reported food insecurity in 2023, up from 1 in 3 (33.1 percent) in 2022. Among Black adults, the share reporting food insecurity increased from 30.5 percent in 2022 to 35.1 percent in 2023. In contrast, the share of white adults reporting food insecurity in 2023

(22.2 percent) was statistically unchanged from 2022 (21.8 percent). However, Hispanic/Latinx, Black, and white adults all reported rates of food insecurity that were above prepandemic levels in 2019, pointing to an upward trend experienced broadly across large segments of the population in the face of inflationary pressures and receding federal support.

The diverging patterns by race/ethnicity between 2022 and 2023 widened disparities in food insecurity between Black and white adults and between Hispanic/Latinx and white adults. However, racial and ethnic disparities in 2023 were not statistically different from those observed in 2019.

We did not observe statistically significant changes in food insecurity between 2019 and 2023 or between 2022 and 2023 for adults of additional races, a diverse group that includes adults who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. In each of the three years shown in figure 2, approximately 19 to 20 percent of adults in this group reported food insecurity. Sample size limitations preclude us from disaggregating this group and estimating trends in food insecurity with sufficient precision. Still, previous studies have found that Native Americans experience persistently high rates of food insecurity (Nikolaus et al. 2022). Moreover, efforts to disaggregate data on the Asian population indicate that averages can mask wide differences among specific Asian communities and that, when disaggregated, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander people experience higher rates of food insecurity than white households (Long et al. 2020).

In 2023, almost one in three adults living with children reported experiencing food insecurity, compared with roughly one in four adults in households without children.

Adults living with children under 18 reported increased food insecurity between 2022 and 2023, from 26.7 percent to 30.3 percent. Among adults not living with children, 24.5 percent reported food insecurity in 2023, which was not statistically different from the share reported for the previous year (23.6 percent). However, both groups reported food insecurity at higher rates in 2023 than in 2019. Moreover, adults living with children have consistently reported higher rates of food insecurity than adults who are not living with children throughout the study period.

These results are consistent with other research showing that families with children historically experience higher rates of food insecurity than families without children (Rabbitt et al. 2023). Households with children also may have been exposed to rising inflation for a wider array of goods and services, such as child care costs, in the last two years.¹³ Higher rates of food insecurity among families with children are particularly concerning because food insecurity is associated with adverse physical and mental health outcomes for children, which can have lasting negative consequences (Gundersen and Ziliak 2015).

LGBT adults were more likely than adults who do not identify as LGBT to report food insecurity.

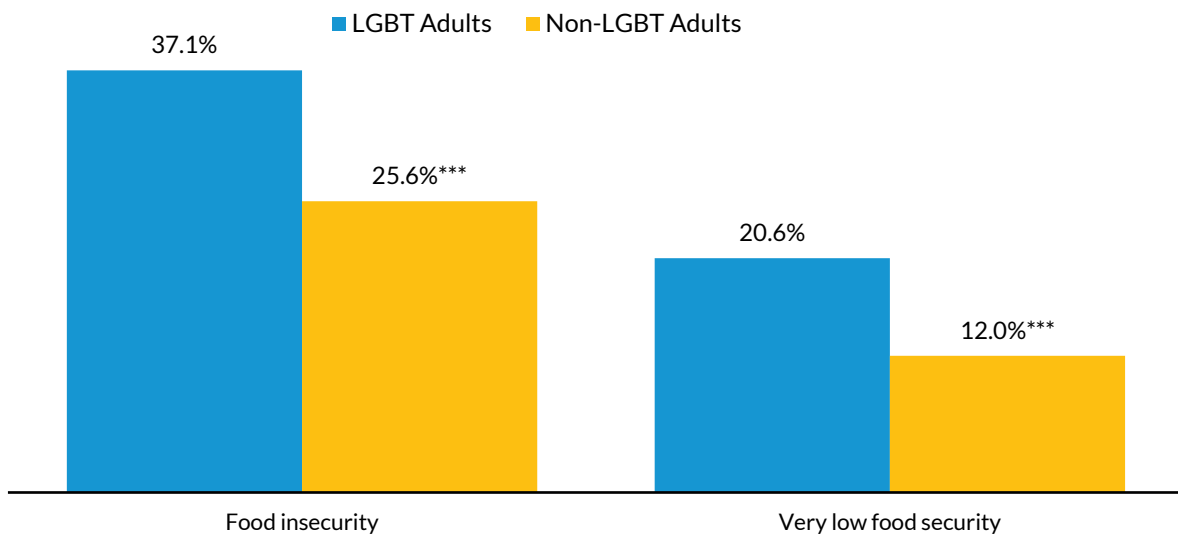
LGBT adults experienced food insecurity at a higher rate than non-LGBT adults in 2023 (37.1 percent versus 25.6 percent) (figure 3). LGBT adults were also nearly twice as likely to report the most severe form of hardship, very low food security (20.6 percent versus 12.0 percent). This data is consistent with

other recent estimates, which show that food hardship is more common among LGBT adults compared to non-LGBT adults (Conron, Guardado, and O’Neill 2022).

Higher rates of food hardship among LGBT adults reflect greater economic challenges in this population. Prior research shows that LGBT adults are more likely than non-LGBT adults to experience homelessness and poverty in their lifetimes (Wilson et al. 2020). LGBT adults are also more likely to report experiences of interpersonal discrimination and health care avoidance, which reflect societal stigma and could contribute to increased safety concerns and barriers to acquiring essential goods and services (Conron, Guardado, and O’Neill 2022; Bonvicini 2017; Casey et al. 2019).

While we are not able to disaggregate the sample of LGBT adults in our dataset into different subgroups, previous research has found the highest rates of material hardship, poverty, and homelessness among transgender individuals (Badgett, Choi, and Wilson 2019; Wilson et al. 2020). Bisexual men and women experience higher rates of poverty than straight men and women (Badgett, Choi, and Wilson 2019). Moreover, the intersection of marginalized identities of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity creates unique experiences of discrimination and hardship. Lesbian and bisexual women are 52 percent more likely to report food insecurity than heterosexual women (Jabson Tree et al. 2022). LGBT adults of color have higher poverty rates than LGBT adults who are white (Casey et al. 2019).

FIGURE 3
Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Household Food Insecurity in the Last 12 Months, by Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, December 2023



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2023.

Note: LGBT adults include adults who reported they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or nonbinary. Estimates are not regression adjusted.

*/**/** Estimate differs significantly from LGBT adults at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Food insecurity was more common among lower-income adults who rented rather than owned their homes.

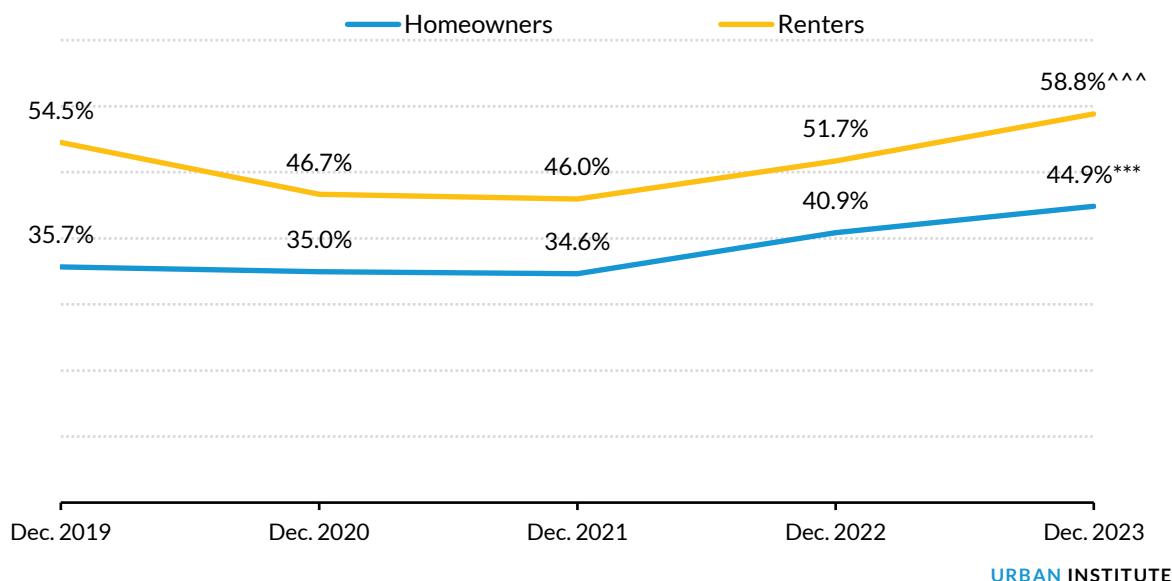
Though income is a key factor associated with food insecurity, it is not the only factor. Financial assets can also provide a buffer against material hardship (Maury et al. 2023; Rodems and Pfeffer 2021). Figure 4 shows the 2019–23 trends in food insecurity among adults with family incomes below 200 percent of FPL by homeownership status. While both renters and homeowners in this income group experience disproportionately high rates of food insecurity compared to all adults, low-income renters have experienced consistently higher rates of food insecurity than low-income homeowners throughout the study period, including in 2023 (58.8 percent versus 44.9 percent). Differences in food insecurity among these groups narrowed between 2019 and 2021, but this reduction in the gap was temporary. Food insecurity for low-income renters increased significantly between 2022 and 2023, from 51.7 percent to 58.8 percent.

The higher rate of food insecurity among low-income renters in the WBNS is consistent with other recent studies in both the US and Canada (St-Germain, Fafard, and Tarasuk 2020).¹⁴ In the US, homeownership is a primary source of assets for most households (Goodman and Mayer 2018). Prior research on geographic variations in food insecurity identifies an association between lower rates of homeownership and higher rates of food insecurity at the county level (Hake et al. 2023).

Other research has found that homeownership improves the odds of being food secure for Black households but not as much as it does for white households with similar incomes (Berning, Bonanno, and Cleary 2022). The persistent effects of segregation and redlining have contributed to lower rates of homeownership among Black adults, as well as a lower rate of financial return to homeownership (Traub et al. 2016). While we are not able to further analyze our survey results by race/ethnicity and homeownership status, it is important to note that these disparities may contribute to the ongoing gaps in food insecurity rates between Black and white households.

FIGURE 4

Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Experiencing Household Food Insecurity in the Last 12 Months, Among Homeowners and Renters with Family Incomes Below 200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level, December 2019 to December 2023



Sources: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2019 to December 2023.

Note: Renters include adults who reported paying rent; this group excludes adults who occupied their homes without payment of rent. Estimates are regression adjusted.

*/**/** 2023 estimate differs significantly from 2019 at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

^/^/^ 2023 estimate differs significantly from 2022 at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Trends in Charitable Food Receipt, 2019–23

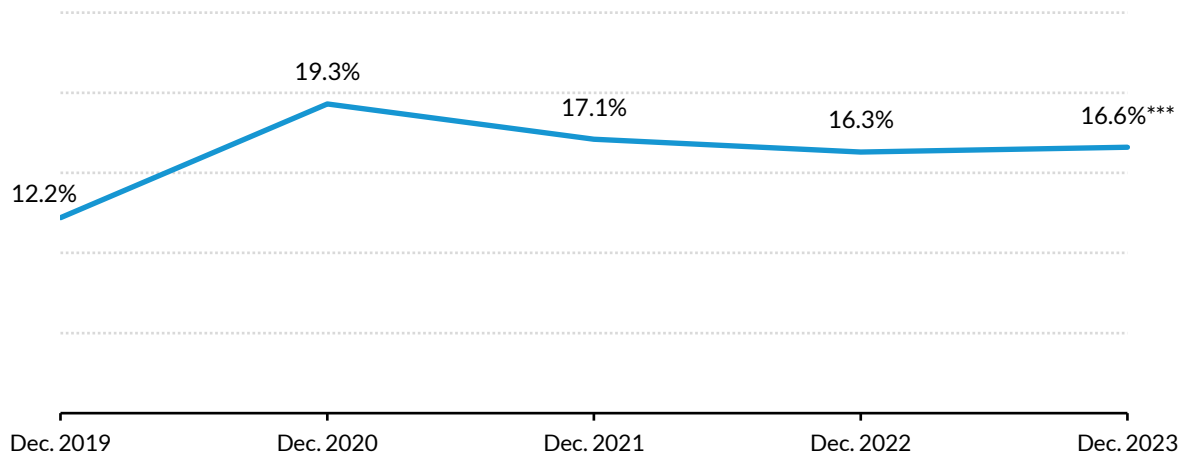
The receipt of charitable food, including free groceries and free meals, is a common coping mechanism for those experiencing or at risk of food insecurity, especially during times of economic hardship (Gupta et al. 2022; Martinchek et al. 2023). However, not all households that turn to this resource necessarily define themselves as food insecure, potentially because they fear stigma or view such assistance as a means of maintaining food security, among other reasons (Page et al. 2019; Waxman et al. 2019). We assessed the overall trend in charitable food receipt between 2019 and 2023, as well as among different subgroups, to see how the receipt of these resources has changed in response to the economic volatility over the past four years.

The share of adults reporting they received charitable food has declined since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the receipt of charitable food in 2023 remained above prepandemic levels.

One in six adults (16.6 percent) reported receiving charitable food assistance for their households in 2023, which was not statistically different than the rate of receipt in 2022 (16.3 percent; figure 5).

However, the rate at which adults participate in charitable food programs has decreased since its peak in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when nearly 1 in 5 adults (19.3 percent) reported accessing charitable food. Nevertheless, participation rates in 2023 remain elevated compared with the year prior to the pandemic (12.2 percent in 2019).

FIGURE 5
Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Household Receipt of Charitable Food in the Last 12 Months, December 2019 to December 2023



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Sources: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2019 to December 2023.

Note: Estimates are regression adjusted and therefore differ slightly from estimates published in previous reports.

*/**/** 2023 estimate differs significantly from 2019 at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

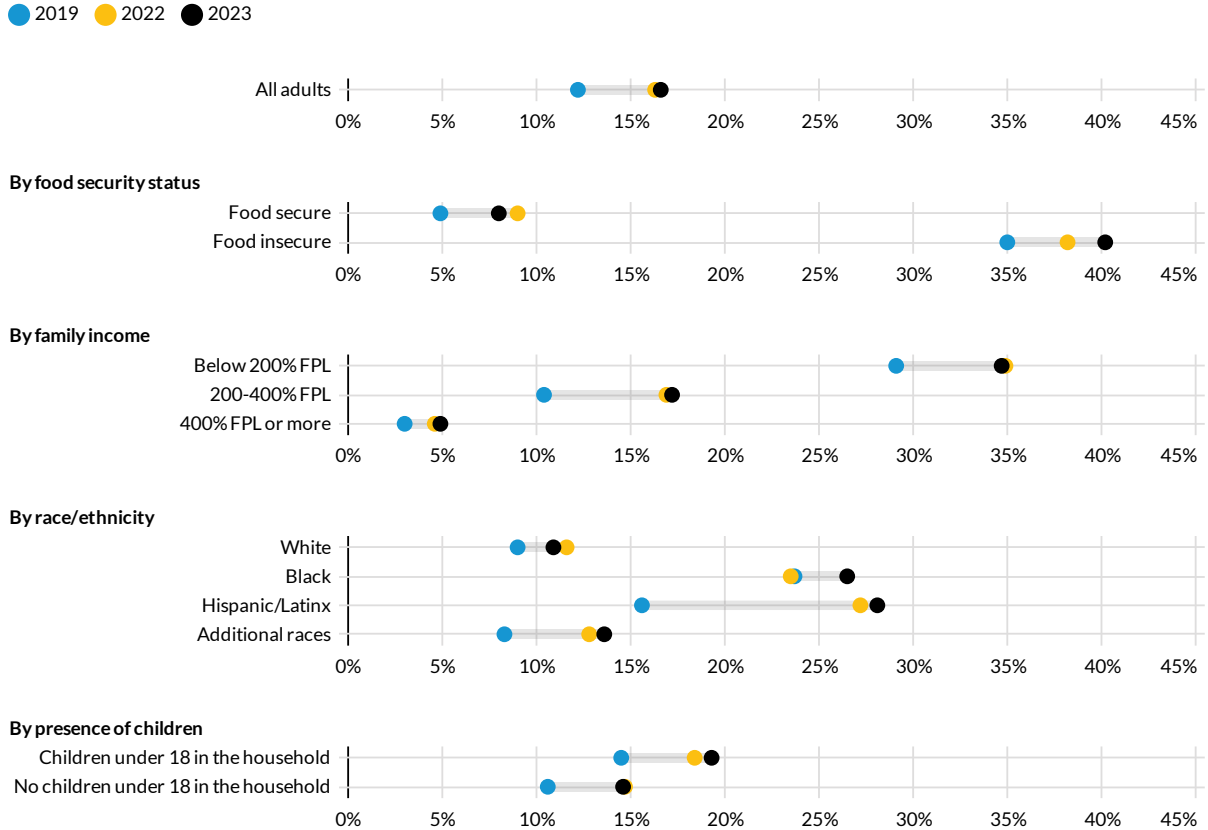
People of color, low-income households, and households with children reported accessing charitable food resources at disproportionately high rates, reflecting higher levels of food insecurity among these groups.

The share of adults reporting household receipt of charitable food did not change significantly between 2022 and 2023 for the subgroups shown in figure 6. However, many groups reported increased participation in charitable food programs between 2019 and 2023, including Hispanic/Latinx adults (15.6 versus 28.1 percent) and white adults (9.0 versus 10.9 percent), with the rate nearly doubling for Hispanic/Latinx adults.

In 2023, 26.5 percent of Black adults and 28.1 percent of Hispanic/Latinx adults reported accessing charitable food resources, compared with 10.9 percent of white adults. These differences track with the significantly higher rates of food insecurity among communities of color. Food-insecure adults were five times as likely to report accessing charitable food than food-secure adults in 2023 (40.2 percent versus 8 percent, respectively). Adults were also more likely to report receiving charitable food in 2023 if their incomes were below 200 percent of FPL (34.7 percent) or if they lived with children (19.3 percent).

FIGURE 6

Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Household Receipt of Charitable Food in the Last 12 Months, Overall and by Food Security Status, Family Income, Race/Ethnicity, and Presence of Children in the Household, December 2019 to December 2023



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Sources: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2019 to December 2023.

Note: FPL is federal poverty level. Adults who are white, Black, or additional races are those who are not Hispanic/Latinx. Adults who are additional races are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. Estimates are regression adjusted and therefore differ slightly from estimates published in previous reports.

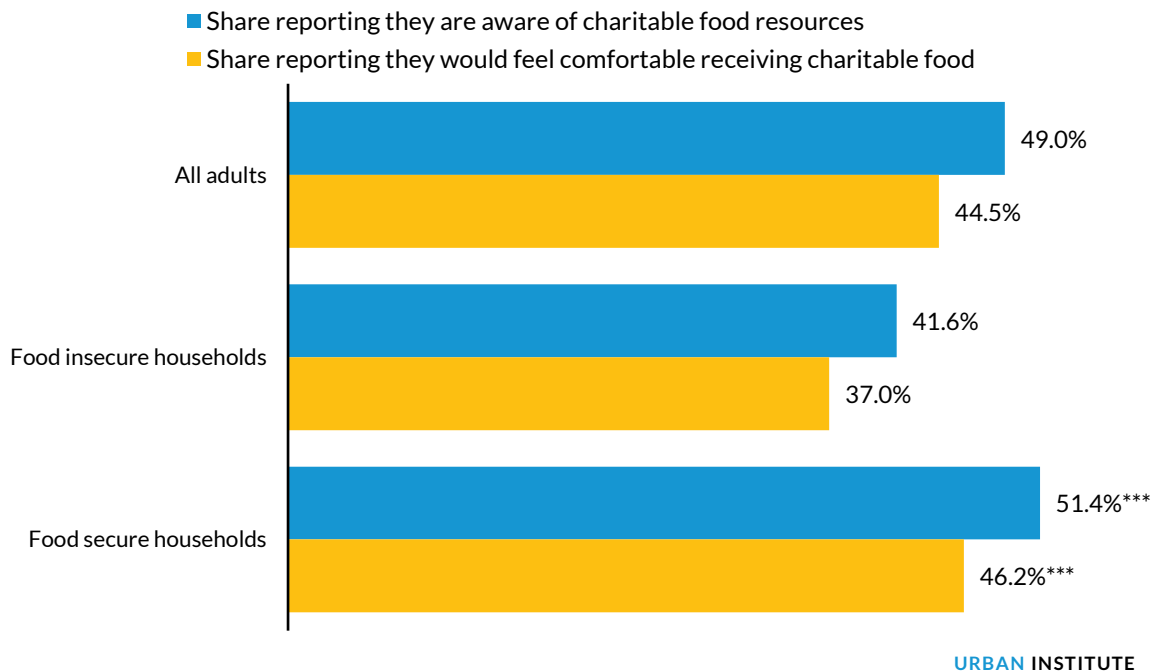
In 2023, less than half of food-insecure adults who did not receive charitable food that year reported being aware of local charitable food resources or comfortable accessing them.

Since 2020, the WBNS has asked respondents who reported they have not received charitable food resources in the last 12 months if they are aware of places in their community where they could access charitable food if needed. These adults were also asked how comfortable they would feel getting free groceries or meals if they needed help getting food for their households.

About half (49.0 percent) of adults who did not receive charitable food in 2023 were aware of places where they could get this help if they needed it (figure 7). Among adults in food-insecure

households, less than half (41.6 percent) were aware of such a resource, while a little more than half (51.4 percent) of adults in food-secure households reported awareness.

FIGURE 7
Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Awareness of and Comfort Receiving Charitable Food, among Those Reporting No Charitable Food Receipt in the Last 12 Months, Overall and by Food Insecurity Status, December 2023



Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2023.

Note: Share reporting they would be comfortable receiving charitable food includes those reporting they would feel very comfortable or somewhat comfortable.

*/**/*** Estimate differs significantly from adults in food-insecure households at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 levels, using two-tailed tests.

Overall, 44.5 percent of adults who did not receive charitable food in 2023 reported being very or somewhat comfortable getting charitable food assistance if needed. Although food-insecure adults might benefit from assistance offered by food banks and other charitable agencies, they were less likely than food-secure adults to report they were comfortable getting help (37.0 percent versus 46.2 percent). Levels of comfort were disproportionately higher among adults whose incomes were below 200 percent of FPL and adults who are Black or Hispanic/Latinx, likely reflecting the higher level of need among these groups (data not shown). We have not observed meaningful fluctuations in the rates of awareness or comfort in receiving charitable food since 2020.

Policy and Practice Implications

Although some economic indicators, such as the overall unemployment rate, remained steady,¹⁵ and the rate of food price inflation has moderated,¹⁶ food insecurity continued to increase in 2023—particularly for communities of color. The increase in food insecurity indicates the importance of tracking hardship in the wake of the recent significant food price shocks. Prior research has shown that grocery prices are the most common way consumers assess the inflationary environment and may explain some of the continued uncertainty among consumers about the overall state of the economy.¹⁷

Food insecurity is a well-documented public health risk, and sustained strategies to disrupt it are essential for the nation's health and well-being. SNAP remains the first line of defense for many low-income households, despite the fact that geographic variations in food prices mean the maximum benefit falls short of covering a modestly priced meal in the majority of US counties.¹⁸ As Congress continues to debate provisions in the 2024 Farm Bill—the legislative vehicle for reauthorizing SNAP—the evidence points to the need to further strengthen its effectiveness rather than target it for program cuts.¹⁹ Recent proposals to require future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan, the market basket upon which benefits are based, to be cost-neutral undermine the critical importance of benefit adequacy and its role in tackling the persistently unacceptable levels of food insecurity in the US.²⁰

In particular, the grave disparities in food insecurity among specific communities, especially people of color, demonstrate the need for a committed national strategy to eliminate these gaps in this decade while also reducing the rates of hardship for all households. Eliminating food insecurity gaps will require intensive policy and program interventions in states and communities with high rates of food insecurity, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, as well as a willingness to act on the robust research that points to high-impact policies such as the enhanced child tax credit, universal school meals, full take-up of the Summer EBT program for households with children, and enhanced SNAP benefits (Karpman et al. 2022; Marcus and Yewell 2022; Shafer, Gutierrez, and Ettinger de Cuba 2022; Wheaton and Kwon 2022).²¹

Even so, food insecurity intersects with other social determinants of poor health, such as housing cost burden, low wages and assets, and discrimination, which means that food hardship will not be adequately addressed without intentional choices to tackle these root causes. In the near term, charitable food continues to be an important support for millions of households. Still, there are food-insecure households that are not connected to these services, partly due to a lack of awareness. New outreach strategies are needed, and outreach efforts should consider ways to make charitable food as accessible as possible, such as ensuring access to a range of days and hours of service that are flexible for varying work and school schedules and working to reduce stigma through options for home delivery, curbside pickup, and embedding food distributions within other services that people routinely seek. Greater awareness of the unique needs of certain community members, including tapping the expertise of those experiencing food insecurity, can potentially reduce stigma and inform targeted strategies.

Data and Methods

This brief draws on data from nationally representative samples of adults ages 18 to 64 who participated in the 2019–23 rounds of the Urban Institute’s Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey. The WBNS is an internet-based survey designed to monitor changes in individual and family well-being as policymakers consider changes to federal safety-net programs. It is fielded annually in December, with more than 7,500 adults participating in each survey round. For each round of the WBNS, we draw a stratified random sample (including a large oversample of adults in low-income households) from the KnowledgePanel, a probability-based Internet panel maintained by Ipsos that includes households with and without internet access. Survey weights adjust for unequal selection probabilities and are poststratified to the characteristics of nonelderly adults based on benchmarks from the Current Population Survey and American Community Survey. Participants can complete the survey in English or Spanish. For further information on the survey design and content, see Karpman, Zuckerman, and Gonzalez (2018).²²

We estimated changes between December 2019 and December 2023 in the share of adults reporting that their households experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months and the share whose households received charitable food in the last 12 months. Charitable food estimates for 2019 are limited to the randomly selected half of the 2019 survey sample (3,863 adults) who received charitable food questions consistent with those asked between 2020 and 2023. The remaining half of the 2019 sample (3,831 adults) were asked charitable food questions that have been used in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement; we exclude this group when estimating charitable food receipt in 2019 for this brief.

Estimated changes between 2019 and 2023 are regression adjusted to control for any changes in the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the adults participating in each survey round not fully captured in the survey weights. We control for a respondent’s gender, age, race and ethnicity, primary language, educational attainment, family size, family income, residence in an urban or rural area, internet access, homeownership status, family composition, and census region; the presence of children under age 19 in the respondent’s household; whether the respondent participated in multiple survey rounds; and how long the respondent has been a member of the KnowledgePanel. In presenting the regression-adjusted estimates, we use the predicted rate of each outcome each year for the same nationally representative population. For this analysis, we base the nationally representative sample on respondents to the 2022 and 2023 survey rounds. Because of this regression adjustment, estimated rates of food insecurity and charitable food receipt in this brief differ slightly from estimates reported in previous briefs.

The WBNS has several limitations, including a low cumulative response rate, and the survey weights and regression adjustment mitigate but do not eliminate potential nonresponse bias. However, studies assessing recruitment for the KnowledgePanel have found little evidence of nonresponse bias for core demographic and socioeconomic measures (Garrett, Dennis, and DiSogra 2010; Heeren et al. 2008), and WBNS estimates are generally consistent with benchmarks from federal surveys (Karpman, Zuckerman,

and Gonzalez 2018). The sampling frame for the WBNS also excludes or underrepresents certain groups of adults, including those experiencing homelessness, those who have low literacy levels, and those who are not proficient in English or Spanish. Finally, there may be measurement error in self-reported household food security and charitable food receipt.

Appendix

How do food insecurity estimates in the WBNS compare with estimates from other national surveys?

The estimated trend in household food insecurity observed in the WBNS is consistent with trends found in federal surveys for the same age group. Figure A.1 compares rates of household food insecurity between 2019 and 2022 for adults ages 18 to 64 participating in the WBNS, the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS), and the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Like the WBNS, the CPS-FSS is fielded annually in December, and the food insecurity estimates shown in figure A.1 are based on the six-item short form of the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module with a 12-month reference period. The NHIS is fielded continuously throughout the year and estimates are based on the 10-item USDA Adult Food Security Survey Module with a 30-day reference period. Because of the shorter lookback period, NHIS food insecurity estimates are lower than those reported for the past 12 months in other surveys. Unlike the WBNS and NHIS, the CPS-FSS screens out households with incomes above 185 percent of FPL from receiving the food security module if they did not report difficulty getting food in earlier questions.

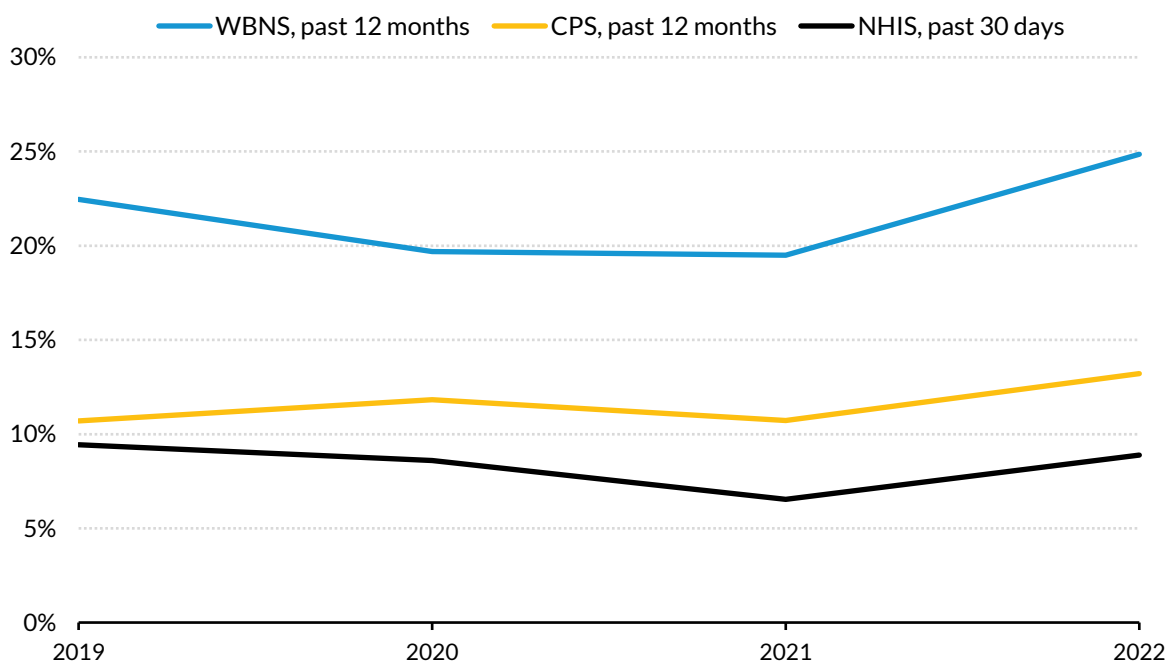
Though measurement approaches vary across each survey, all three show an uptick in food insecurity between 2021 and 2022. The WBNS and NHIS also find a reduction in food insecurity between 2019 and 2021, whereas the CPS-FSS finds a steadier trend during this period.

The higher level of food insecurity observed in the WBNS likely reflects differences in survey design and administration. Previous studies have found that people are more likely to report food hardship in self-administered internet surveys like the WBNS than in surveys conducted by an interviewer. For instance, in a 2014 experiment conducted by the Pew Research Center, respondents who were randomly assigned to complete a self-administered online survey were significantly more likely to report not having enough money to buy food than those assigned to a telephone survey with an interviewer (Keeter 2015). These differences in reporting hardship may be partially driven by social desirability bias, where respondents are reluctant to report socially undesirable circumstances when an interviewer is present.

FIGURE A.1

Comparison of Trends in Food Insecurity Among Adults Ages 18 to 64

Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey and Federal Surveys, 2019 to 2022



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Source: Authors' estimates based on the Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS), December 2019–22; Current Population Survey (CPS) Food Security Supplement, 2019–22; and National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), 2019–22.

Notes: WBNS and CPS estimates are for household food insecurity among adults ages 18 to 64 in the past 12 months based on the 6-item short form of the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module. NHIS estimates are for household food insecurity among adults ages 18 to 64 in the past 30 days based on the 10-item USDA Adult Food Security Survey Module.

Notes

¹ “Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers: Food in U.S. City Average (CPIUFDNS),” FRED Economic Data, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, March 14, 2014, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CPIUFDNS>.

² Our estimate of household food insecurity is based on the six-item short form of the USDA’s Household Food Security Survey Module and uses a 12-month reference period. Respondents with two to four affirmative responses are defined as having *low household food security*, and respondents with five to six affirmative responses are defined as having *very low household food security*. These groups are jointly defined as *food insecure*.

Respondents with one affirmative response are defined as having *marginal food security*. Affirmative responses include reporting that it was often or sometimes true that the food the household bought did not last, and the household did not have money to get more; it was often or sometimes true that the household could not afford to eat balanced meals; adults in the household ever cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food; meals were cut or skipped almost every month, or some months but not every month;

the respondent ate less than they felt they should because there was not enough money for food; and the respondent was ever hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.

- ³ We use the term “Hispanic/Latinx” throughout this brief to reflect the different ways in which people self-identify. The US Census Bureau uses the term “Hispanic.” Also, the terms “white,” “Black,” and “additional races” in this report refer to adults who do not identify as Hispanic/Latinx.
- ⁴ We use the term LGBT throughout this brief to reflect the way respondents reported their sexual orientation and gender identity when completing a demographic profile survey upon joining the Ipsos KnowledgePanel. Our definition of LGBT adults includes respondents who reported they were lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or nonbinary. We do not have data on whether respondents identify as queer or prefer other terms for their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ⁵ The estimates for food insecurity and charitable food in this brief differ from estimates reported in previous briefs because of the regression adjustment used in the analysis, which is described in the data and methods section.
- ⁶ Dottie Rosenbaum, Katie Bergh, and Lauren Hall, “Temporary Pandemic SNAP Benefits Will End in Remaining 35 States in March 2023,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 6, 2023, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march>.
- ⁷ Diane W. Schanzenbach, “The Impact of SNAP Emergency Allotments on SNAP Benefits and Food Insecurity,” Northwestern Institute for Policy Research, January 27, 2023, <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/news/2023/report-impact-snap-emergency-allotments-on-benefits-food-insufficiency.html>.
- ⁸ “Summary Findings: Food Price Outlook, 2024,” USDA Economic Research Service, last updated February 23, 2024, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-price-outlook/summary-findings>.
- ⁹ Aimee Picchi, “‘Hunger Cliff’ Looms as 32 States Are Set to Cut Food-Stamp Benefits,” CBS News, February 27, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/food-stamps-snap-benefits-cuts-march-2023/>.
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