Food Insecurity Remained Disproportionately Higher Among Black and Hispanic Adults in 2025

Findings from the Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey

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In this analysis, we examine household food insecurity[1] among adults ages 18 and older in 2025 by race and ethnicity and assess disparities among Black, Hispanic, white, and Asian adults using December 2025 data from the Urban Institute's Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS). We also examine trends in food insecurity among working-age adults (ages 18 to 64) by racial and ethnic subgroups from 2019 to 2025.

We find that Black and Hispanic adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report food insecurity in 2025. Further details on the WBNS data and methods are available in a companion policy brief (Karpman et al. 2026).

Black and Hispanic Adults Faced Disproportionately High Rates of Food Insecurity in 2025

In December 2025, more than 1 in 3 Black (36.5 percent) and Hispanic (37.1 percent) adults ages 18 and older reported household food insecurity in the last 12 months, compared with 18.1 percent of white adults (figure 1). Asian adults were less likely to report food insecurity (13.1 percent) compared with white adults.

Among adults ages 18 to 64, Black and Hispanic adults were nearly twice as likely as white adults to report food insecurity (39.0 and 38.8 percent versus 21.8 percent). Similarly, Asian working-age adults were less likely than white working-age adults to report food insecurity (13.3 percent).

Older adults, ages 65 and older, reported lower rates of food insecurity across all racial and ethnic subgroups than adults ages 18 to 64, consistent with the overall lower rates of food insecurity found in the older adult population in 2025 (Karpman et al. 2026).

However, we observed similarly wide disparities among older adults between racial and ethnic subgroups. Among older adults, Black (25.4 percent) and Hispanic (25.7 percent) adults were nearly three times as likely as white adults (8.9 percent) to report food insecurity in 2025.

FOOD INSECURITY IN THE 2025 WBNS

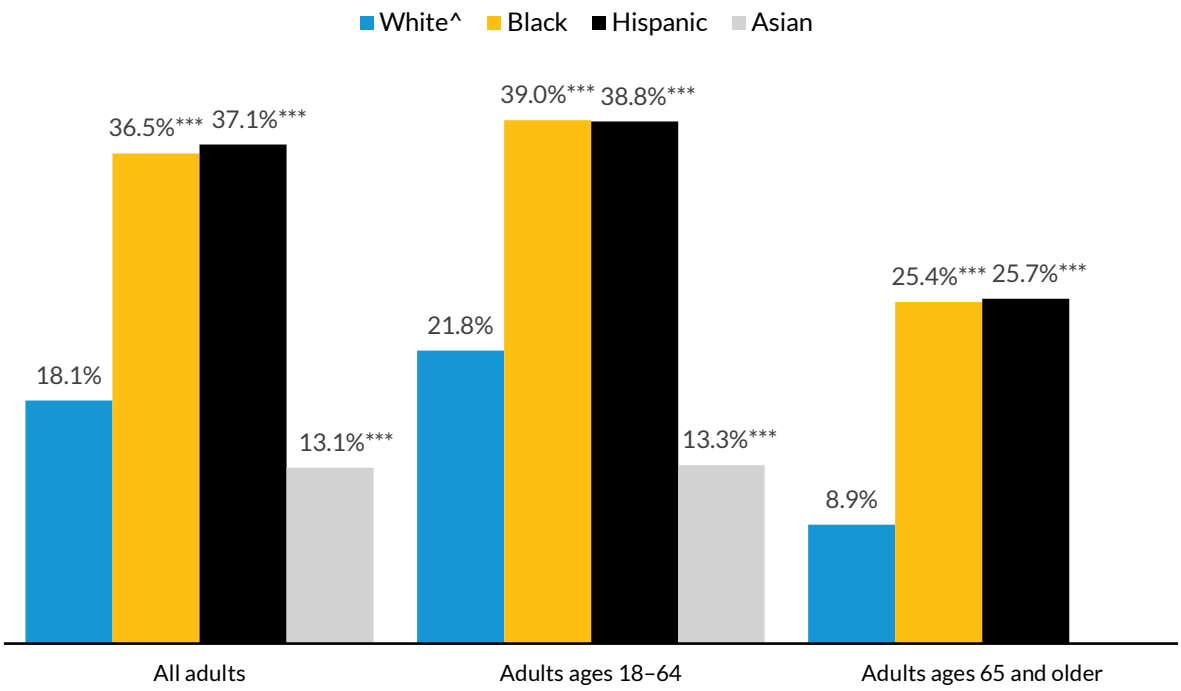
The Urban Institute's Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey (WBNS) is a nationally representative, annual survey of adults that monitors individual and family well-being in the context of a changing safety net. It has collected data on household food insecurity from a sample of working-age adults since 2017. The 2025 sample was expanded to include adults of all ages.

The WBNS can help address key knowledge gaps following the US Department of Agriculture's decision to stop collecting household food security data in federal surveys, and amid looming cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and other safety net programs.

In this series of data summaries, we examine household food insecurity in 2025 among population groups that are disproportionately at risk of experiencing food access challenges and deeper levels of hardship under forthcoming safety net cuts.

FIGURE 1

Household Food Insecurity Among Adults, Overall and by Age Group and Race/Ethnicity, December 2025



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025.

Notes: Among adults in the last 12 months. Adults who are white, Black, or Asian refer to those who are not Hispanic. Estimates for Asian adults ages 65 and older are suppressed because of insufficient sample size. Estimates are also not shown for adults of additional races, including those who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. Most adults in this group identified as having more than one race, and sample size limitations preclude us from disaggregating additional racial groups.

*/**/*** Estimates differ significantly from the reference group (^white adults) at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Although Social Security and other social insurance programs provide key financial protections for older adults (Brucker, Jajtner, and Mitra 2021; Singleton 2022), higher levels of food insecurity among older adults of color relative to white adults in this age group reflect the compounding effects of structural economic and health inequities on access to adequate and healthy foods. Fewer Black and Hispanic adults have access to key financial supports that can help them meet basic needs later in life, such as retirement accounts, compared with white adults.[2] Further, racial and ethnic disparities in lifetime employment, earnings, and assets contribute to limited household resources (Brown 2020; Glover et al. 2022).[3] Coupled with higher rates of certain types of chronic disease (e.g., a higher prevalence of diabetes among Black and Hispanic adults),[4] having more limited resources places older adults of color at greater risk of health issues associated with insufficient access to adequate, nutritious food (Pooler et al. 2018).

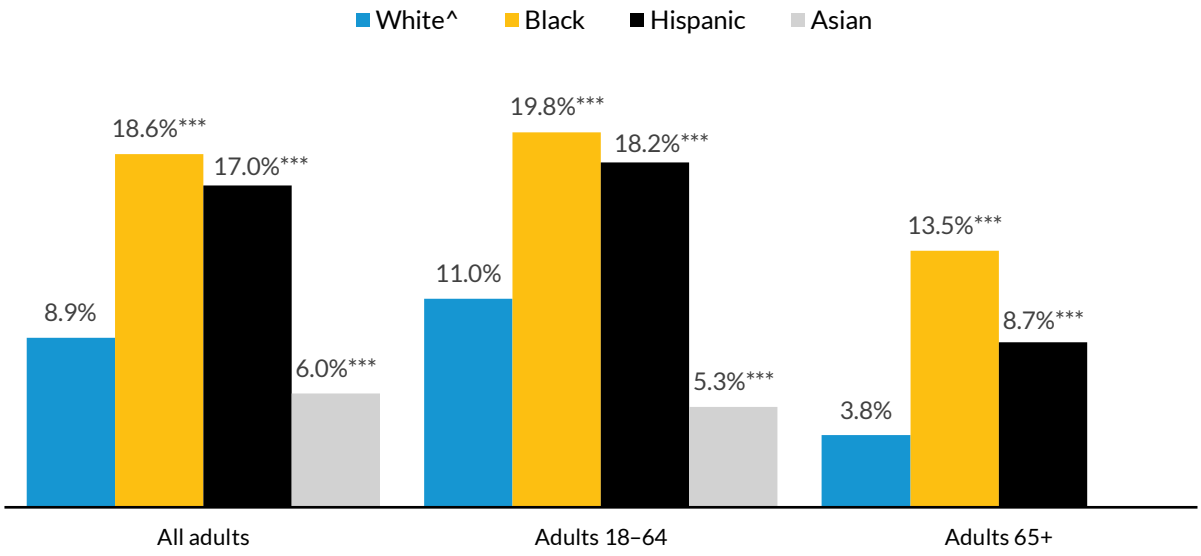
We found elevated rates of food insecurity among adults of additional races (44.7 percent overall and 46.7 percent among working-age adults in 2025; data not shown). This includes those who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. Though we cannot disaggregate these data further because of sample size limitations, previous research has found high rates of food

insecurity in these populations (Long et al. 2020; Nikolaus et al. 2022). Because of sample size limitations in the older adult subgroup, we also cannot report on food insecurity among Asian adults ages 65 and older.

Figure 2 shows differences by race and ethnicity in very low food security, a more severe form of food hardship that captures disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. We found higher rates of very low food security among Black (18.6 percent) and Hispanic (17.0 percent) adults ages 18 and older, compared with white (8.9 percent) and Asian adults (6.0 percent). These patterns also held among working-age adults, and the disparities observed between Black and Hispanic adults and white adults were similar for adults 65 and older.

FIGURE 2

Very Low Household Food Security Among Adults, Overall and by Age Group and Race/Ethnicity, December 2025



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2025.
Notes: Among adults in the last 12 months. Adults who are white, Black, or Asian refer to those who are not Hispanic. Estimates for Asian adults ages 65 and older are suppressed because of insufficient sample size. Estimates are also not shown for adults of additional races, including those who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. Most adults in this group identified as having more than one race, and sample size limitations preclude us from disaggregating additional racial groups.
*/**/*** Estimates differ significantly from reference group (^white adults) at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Severe food hardship is of particular concern for adults with chronic health conditions, who may need to make tradeoffs between buying food, paying for medications to manage their health, and visiting their doctor (Berkowitz, Seligman, and Choudhry 2014; Herman et al. 2015; Men et al. 2019). Previous studies indicate these tradeoffs are more common among Hispanic and Black adults, who have higher rates of medication underuse (Berkowitz, Seligman, and Choudhry 2014).

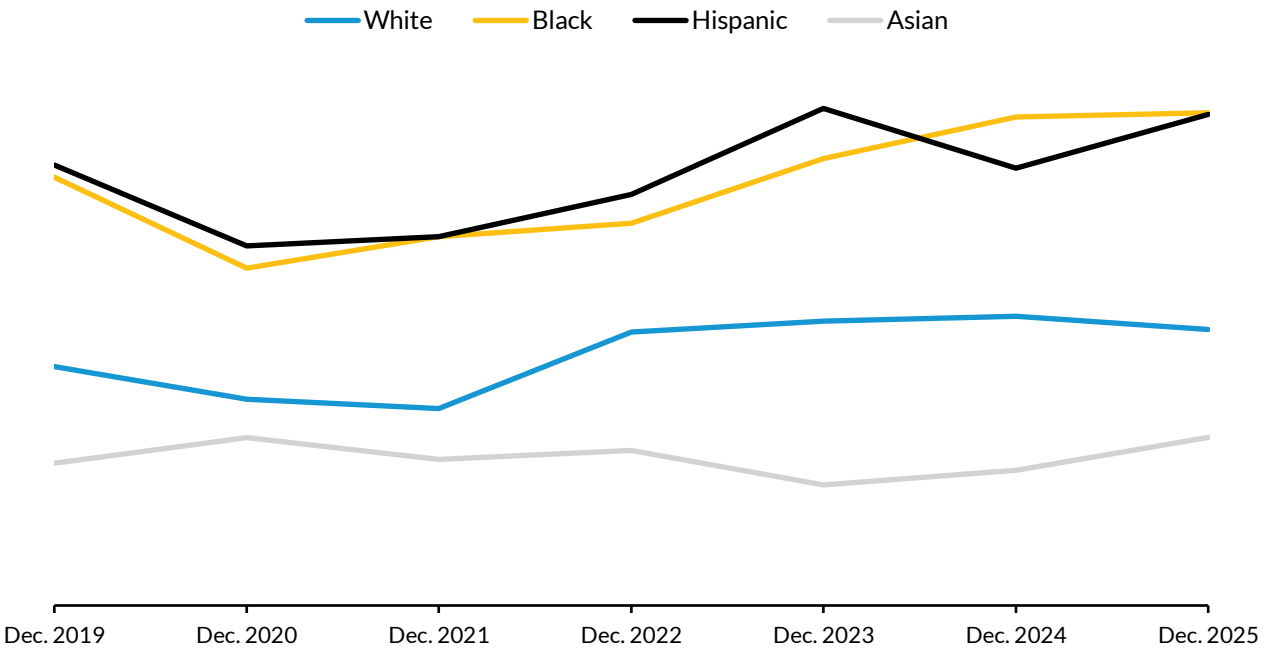
Among Working-Age Adults, Rates of Food Insecurity Have Increased Across Most Racial and Ethnic Groups Since 2021

The WBNS sample has included working-age adults in each survey round since it was launched in 2017, with a sample of adults ages 65 and older added for the first time in 2025. In figure 3, we report annual trends in household food insecurity among working-age adults by race and ethnicity between 2019 and 2025.

Food insecurity held steady or declined following the federal government's efforts to temporarily strengthen the safety net in response to the pandemic. But much of the pandemic-related assistance expired by late 2021 (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2021; Gupta et al. 2024). Coupled with accelerated food price inflation in 2022, household food budgets have faced ongoing strain (Martinchek et al. 2023). We find that between 2021 and 2025, rates of household food insecurity increased by at least 30 percent for white (21.8 percent, up from 15.6 percent), Black (39.0 percent, up from 29.2 percent), and Hispanic (38.8 percent, up from 29.1 percent) working-age adults (figure 3). The shares of Black and white adults reporting food insecurity in 2025 remained above prepandemic levels, while the shares of Hispanic and Asian adults reporting food insecurity in 2025 were not statistically different from the shares reported for those groups in 2019.

FIGURE 3

Household Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Adults, by Race/Ethnicity, December 2019 to December 2025



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Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2019 to December 2025.
Notes: Among adults ages 18 to 64 in the last 12 months. Adults who are white, Black, or Asian refer to those who are not Hispanic. Estimates are also not shown for adults of additional races, including those who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, another race, or more than one race. Most adults in this group identified as having more than one race, and sample size limitations preclude us from disaggregating additional racial groups.

As shown in figure 3, Asian working-age adults were less likely than other groups to report experiencing household food insecurity in recent years. However, because the panel from which WBNS respondents are sampled excludes those who are not proficient in English or Spanish, our sample does not include Asian adults who only speak other languages, which may result in an underestimation of food insecurity among this group. Significantly more Asian adults have limited English proficiency compared with Black or white adults, and this varies substantially across subgroups of the Asian population (Haley et al. 2022).

Further, because sample size limitations preclude us from further disaggregating the data, our estimates also do not capture the wide variation in food insecurity among these subgroups. For example, California Health Interview Survey data highlight this variation among selected groups of low-income Asian American adults in California, finding higher levels of food insecurity among those who are Filipino relative to other groups (Vu et al. 2023).

Upcoming Safety Net Cuts Could Increase Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Food Insecurity

After decades of the impacts of structural racism, including overrepresentation in the low-wage workforce,[5] Black and Hispanic households have long experienced food insecurity at higher rates than their white counterparts (Odoms-Young and Bruce 2018; Bowen, Elliott, and Hardison-Moody 2019; Martinchek et al. 2023). The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a key buffer against food insecurity (Ratcliffe, McKernan, and Zhang 2011). Despite white households making up the majority of SNAP recipients,[6] Black and Hispanic households are disproportionately more likely to participate in SNAP relative to their share of the population.[7]

Passed in July 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) made unprecedented cuts and changes to SNAP, including expanding strict work requirements and associated benefit time limits. In the past, SNAP work requirements have been found to result in higher rates of disenrollment for Black and Hispanic adults than for white adults, likely due to less access to work opportunities, discrimination in hiring, and other challenges to finding employment (Brantley, Pillai, and Ku 2020; Quillian et al. 2017).

OBBBA also established new work requirements as a condition of receiving coverage through the Affordable Care Act Medicaid expansion, and households enrolled in both SNAP and Medicaid may experience the compounding loss of both resources.[8] Loss of these benefits may also lead to reduced student access to free school meals because of intertwined eligibility for the programs (Gutierrez 2025).

States can invest in connecting communities of color to employment, workforce training, and other work supports, and in updating SNAP and Medicaid eligibility systems to ensure that people who are meeting work requirements or who should qualify for an exemption can successfully report their compliance and exemptions to maintain critical benefits. Policymakers can also expand targeted strategies for improving access to healthy food, such as nutrition incentive programs through SNAP that support the purchase of fruits and vegetables (Shanks et al. 2025; Olsho et al. 2016),[9] and in the long term, promote evidence-based policies to reduce food insecurity, including expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit (Shafer et al. 2022; Winkler et al. 2025).

Notes

1 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*.

2 US Census Bureau, "Who Has Retirement Accounts?" U.S. Census Bureau, August 2022, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/08/who-has-retirement-accounts.html; and Kimberly Blanton, "Single Retirees of Color Face Greatest Financial Hardship," Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, August 17, 2023, https://crr.bc.edu/single-retirees-of-color-face-greatest-financial-hardship/.

3 "Nine Charts About Wealth Inequality in America," Urban Institute, April 25, 2024, https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/.

4 Nambi Ndugga, Latoya Hill, Alisha Rao, Akash Pillai, and Samantha Artiga, "Key Data on Health and Health Care by Race and Ethnicity," KFF, December 16, 2025, https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/key-data-on-health-and-health-care-by-race-and-ethnicity/.

[5] "Who Is the Low-Wage Workforce?," WorkRise Network, October 2, 2023, https://workrisenetwork.org/feature/who-low-wage-workforce.

[6] According to fiscal year 2023 USDA data, 35 percent of SNAP recipients are white, 26 percent are Black, 16 percent are Hispanic, 4 percent are Asian, 1 percent are Native American, 1 percent identify as more than one race, and 15 percent are of unknown race and ethnicity. See "Characteristics of SNAP Households: Fiscal Year 2023," USDA, accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/characteristics-fy23.

[7] Ismael Cid-Martinez, "Cuts to SNAP Benefits Will Disproportionately Harm Families of Color and Children," Economic Policy Institute (blog), April 29, 2025, https://www.epi.org/blog/cuts-to-snap-benefits-will-disproportionately-harm-families-of-color-and-children/.

[8] Aubrey Winger, Nancy Ochieng, Akash Pillai, Matthew Rae, Juliette Cubanski, Emma Wager, and Robin Rudowitz, "The Implications of Federal SNAP Spending Cuts on Individuals with Medicaid, Medicare and Other Health Coverage," KFF, June 26, 2025, https://www.kff.org/medicaid/the-implications-of-federal-snap-spending-cuts-on-individuals-with-medicaid-and-other-health-coverage/.

[9] "GusNIP: Communicating Impact of Federal Food Assistance Program," Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition, accessed March 11, 2026, https://www.centerfornutrition.org/gusnip?msclkid=90977356b43e11eca856f67707818810.

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