

Food Insecurity Fell Nearly 30 Percent between Spring 2020 and 2021

Hispanic/Latinx Adults Are Experiencing the Highest Rates as the Pandemic Eases

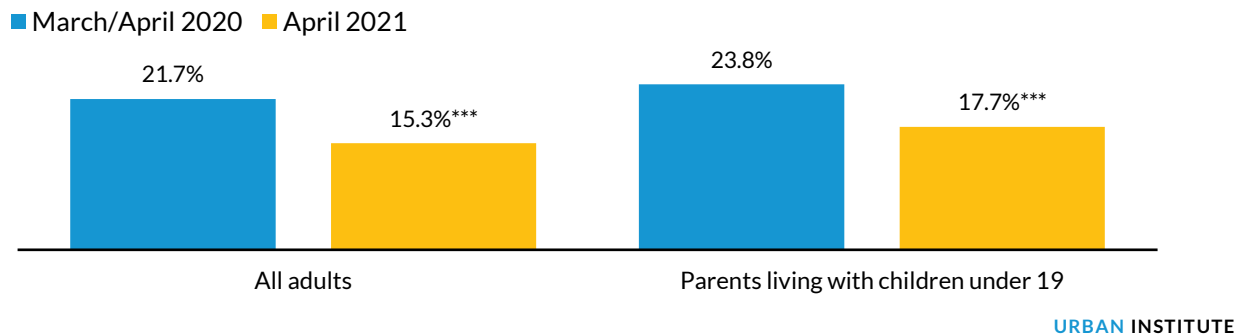
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Findings

In April 2021, household food insecurity rates improved significantly from about one year earlier, according to new data from the Urban Institute's Health Reform Monitoring Survey (figure 1). In the first few weeks of the pandemic shutdown in March/April 2020, more than 1 in 5 adults (21.7 percent) ages 18 to 64 reported experiencing food insecurity in the past 30 days. By April 2021, this share had declined to 15.3 percent, or approximately 1 in 7.

Figure 1

Household Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days among Adults Ages 18 to 64



Source: Health Reform Monitoring Survey, March/April 2020 and April 2021.

Notes: Estimates are regression adjusted to control for differences in respondent characteristics between 2020 and 2021.

*** Estimate differs from April 2021 at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

Food insecurity rates for parents living with children under 19 also declined significantly between 2020 and 2021 (figure 1), from nearly 1 in 4 (23.8 percent) to closer to 1 in 6 (17.7 percent).

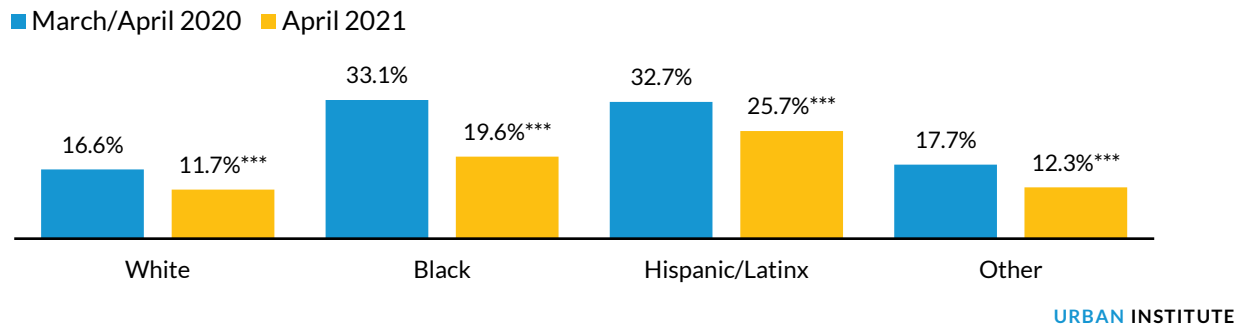
Food insecurity rates fell for people in all racial and ethnic groups captured in this survey, but worrisome disparities persist among these communities (figure 2):

- Although food insecurity rates among Hispanic/Latinx¹ adults improved between 2020 (32.7 percent) and 2021 (25.7 percent), these adults reported the highest rates of food insecurity in the past 30 days in April 2021, at more than 1 in 4 adults.
- Black adults saw greater improvements than Hispanic/Latinx adults over the past year, with the percentage of Black adults reporting food insecurity declining from about 1 in 3 (33.1 percent) to about 1 in 5 (19.6 percent).
- Between March/April 2020 and April 2021, the food insecurity rate among white adults declined from 16.6 percent to 11.7 percent, or about 1 in 9 adults.

¹ We use "Hispanic/Latinx" in this fact sheet to reflect the different ways in which people self-identify. The US Census Bureau uses the term "Hispanic." The terms "white" and "Black" refer to adults who do not identify as Hispanic or Latinx.

FIGURE 2

Household Food Insecurity in the Past 30 Days among Adults Ages 18 to 64, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Health Reform Monitoring Survey, March/April 2020 and April 2021.

Notes: Estimates are regression adjusted to control for differences in respondent characteristics between 2020 and 2021. “Other” includes non-Hispanic/Latinx adults who are not Black or white or are more than one race.

*** Estimate differs from April 2021 at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

What Has Changed?

Unemployment is a significant contributor to food insecurity, and in the early weeks of the pandemic in spring 2020 [the national unemployment rate jumped to 14.8 percent](#). By April 2021, the national unemployment rate had improved significantly, declining to 6.1 percent, although this was well above prepandemic rates.

The policy response to food insecurity during the pandemic has been robust, including [a temporary 15 percent increase in the maximum SNAP benefit](#), [waivers of federal rules to facilitate broader access to school meal programs](#), and the introduction of a new program, [Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer](#), designed to provide families with electronic benefits for missed school meals because of closures and virtual/hybrid learning formats.

More broadly, enhanced unemployment benefits and periodic economic impact payments (stimulus checks or recovery rebates) have provided households with additional resources that can help meet basic needs.

Data and Methods

This fact sheet draws on data from the March/April 2020 and April 2021 rounds of the Urban Institute’s Health Reform Monitoring Survey, a nationally representative, internet-based survey of adults ages 18 to 64. In 2020, 9,032 adults participated between March 25 and April 10. In 2021, 9,067 adults participated between April 2 and 20. Additional information can be found at hrms.urban.org. Estimated changes in food insecurity between 2020 and 2021 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, marital status, presence of children in the household, household income, family income, homeownership status, internet access, urban or rural status, region, citizenship status, and participation in the previous round of the survey.

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