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Kentucky seniors, older adults at high risk of food insecurity, research finds

Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland seeks to address food insecurity among these groups and racial inequities therein

May 26, 2022 – Kentucky is one of the most food-insecure states in the nation among those age 50 and older. Feeding America recently released [The State of Senior Hunger in America in 2020](#), a study that sheds light on the extent to which food insecurity – or having limited access to enough food to live a healthy lifestyle – affects senior citizens, along with an [additional report](#) that assesses food insecurity among those in the 50 to 59 age range.

These studies found that 15.5 percent of Kentucky adults in the 50 to 59 age range face food insecurity. This makes Kentucky the second-most food insecure state in the nation in this age range, just behind Arkansas. The national average rate of food insecurity in this age group is 10.4 percent.

Older adults who experience food insecurity are 200 percent more likely to experience depression, 117 percent more likely to experience limitations in activities, 100 percent more likely to experience congestive heart failure and 64 percent more likely to experience asthma.

Among Kentuckians 60 and above, 10.8 percent were found to be food insecure. Only the District of Columbia, Mississippi and Louisiana were found to have higher rates. The national average rate of food insecurity in this age group is 6.8 percent.

Food-insecure seniors are 262 percent more likely to experience depression, 78 percent more likely to experience asthma, 74 percent to experience diabetes, 71 percent more likely to experience congestive heart failure and 64 percent more likely to experience a heart attack.

Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland, which serves 42 counties in central, south central and western Kentucky, has worked to assist low-income seniors with meals through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Through the program, recipients are provided with a monthly box of nutritious USDA non-perishable foods. In fiscal year 2021, Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland (FAKH) distributed over 100,000 senior boxes throughout its service area.

“Older Americans are many times dealing with isolation, fixed incomes and a generation's pride,” said Jamie Sizemore, FAKH executive director. “This very vulnerable population quietly goes hungry as they are forced to make tough choices between paying for medicine, rent or food. FAKH and our partner agencies continue to seek ways to meet the nutritional needs of seniors who are food insecure.”

According to the Feeding America studies, food insecurity was almost three times as high among Black older adults and more than twice as high among Latino older adults when compared to white older adults. Among seniors, food insecurity was more than four times as high among Black seniors and more than three times as high among Latino seniors when compared to white seniors.

Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland is committed to equitable food distribution and has utilized data to identify under-resourced communities throughout its region. In April of 2021, Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland hired its first Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Liaison to seek partnerships and help serve the identified communities in need.

Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland works with over 240 partner agencies, including food pantries, senior centers, disaster relief agencies, shelters, soup kitchens and more.

“Partnering with Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland makes it possible for us to serve residents of Western Kentucky who are facing food insecurity, including seniors and older adults” said Jeremy Buchanan, Purchase Area Development District executive director

Feeding America is the nation's largest hunger-relief charity with a nationwide network of 200 food banks, 21 statewide food bank associations, and over 60,000 partner agencies, food pantries and meal programs.

Released for the sixth consecutive year, both food insecurity studies were conducted by researchers Dr. James P. Ziliak of the University of Kentucky and Dr. Craig Gundersen of Baylor University. These reports are the source for national, state and metro-level information about food insecurity and very low food security among seniors and older adults. The full reports can be found [here](#).

The study was funded by the Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation through its Fill Your Tank program, a multi-year initiative launched in 2016 to address food insecurity in communities around the world. It is one of the largest donations aimed at fighting hunger.

Learn more about senior hunger at feedingamerica.org and join the conversation about The State of Senior Hunger using #SolveSeniorHunger.

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About Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland

Founded in 1982, Feeding America, Kentucky's Heartland helps those in need by acquiring and distributing donated food, grocery items, and government commodities throughout almost 16,000 square miles of Kentucky. The organization serves 42 of Kentucky's counties through a network of more than 240 partner agencies. Since its formation, the organization has distributed more than 300 million pounds of food and grocery items equating to 250 million meals.