



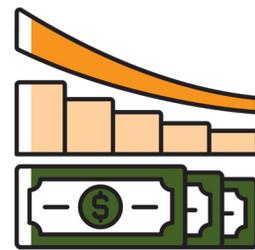
## Older Adults, Food Insecurity, and SNAP: *A special brief on the crisis facing Ohioans 60+*



Rising costs of food and other basic needs



Tradeoffs between food and medicine



Fixed incomes that don't stretch far enough



Approaching end of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Emergency Allotments that improved benefit adequacy for many older adults

# Older Adults in Ohio & Utilization of Hunger Relief Network

*The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing inflationary and supply chain pressure on food, fuel, and other basic expenses have exacerbated food hardship for older Ohioans.*

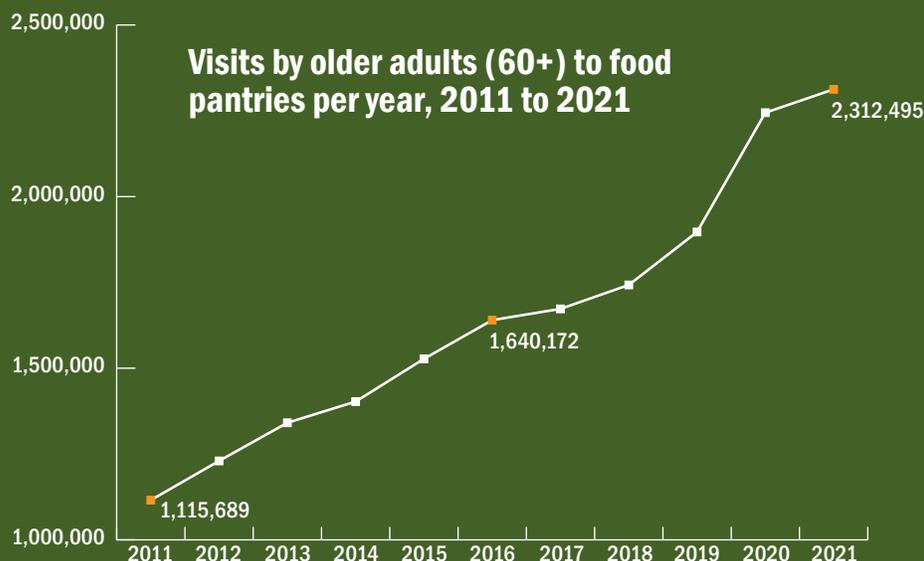
A decade ago, adults in Ohio 60 years of age and older (the population we will focus on in this brief) represented about 1 in 7 (14.24 percent) of the people served by Ohio's charitable food pantry network.

Last year, older Ohioans represented more than 1 in 5 (22.5 percent) of all food pantry visits. From SFY2011 to SFY2021, visits to food pantries by older Ohioans increased by 107 percent. For comparison, overall visits to food pantries over that same period increased by a more modest, yet still troubling, 30.5 percent.<sup>1</sup>

But this trend in increasing need among older Ohioans, while worsened by the current economic conditions we are all facing in the midst of a continued public health emergency, record-high inflation, long-lasting supply chain damage, and international warfare, has been consistent since the Great Recession.

Even in periods of modest economic gains for workers earning low wages, such as in 2018 when Ohio's inflation-adjusted median income had nearly recovered to pre-recession levels<sup>2</sup> and Ohio foodbanks saw overall visits for help with food plateau, older Ohioans continued to seek out help from food pantries more often every year.

In this brief, you will hear directly from older adults participating in SNAP about their experiences with food hardship.



Older adults (60+) represent a growing share of Ohio's overall population (23.7 percent in 2020, compared to 21 percent in 2012)<sup>3</sup>, and their ability to meet their food needs without help from hunger relief providers has deteriorated at an even faster rate over that same period. Through the first three quarters of SFY2022, older adults are on pace to represent close to a quarter of all food pantry visits statewide.

<sup>1</sup>Ohio Association of Foodbanks Service Statistics, [ohiofoodbanks.org](http://ohiofoodbanks.org)

<sup>2</sup>Hunger Factors Index 2018, as prepared by Dr. Howard Fleeter, [ohiofoodbanks.org](http://ohiofoodbanks.org)

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, [data.census.gov](http://data.census.gov)

## How are older Ohioans coping? How does basic help with food improve their wellbeing?

In April 2022, we spoke with ten older Ohioans who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits about how pandemic-related increases to their benefits (SNAP emergency allotments) have impacted their food security.

Ohio SNAP households have been receiving extra benefits throughout the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. SNAP households have been receiving an average of \$80 per person, per month in additional help to meet their food needs. Many households, particularly those with older adults or people living with disabilities, have received much more in temporary benefit increases.



**“There were times I didn’t pay bills because I needed food. I needed medicine, not a nice dinner, so I had to sacrifice. My pantry, freezer, fridge are stocked for the first time. It [SNAP emergency allotments] is really a godsend. Getting access to healthy food and my health declining is my biggest worry [when SNAP emergency allotments end]. It will affect my weight and mental health.”**  
*62-year-old single woman with diabetes in Jackson County, who will lose \$230 per month in SNAP*

Older adults usually live on fixed incomes, such as social security retirement benefits, social security disability benefits, or modest pensions. When prices for basic needs like food, heating and cooling, cooking fuel, gasoline, personal care items, medicine, or housing costs like rent or property taxes increase, their budgets are squeezed and they often have nowhere else to cut back but their grocery budgets.

**“[SNAP emergency allotments] helped my anxiety because I don’t have to run to a number of stores to save money. My self-esteem... [having extra benefits] made me feel... I didn’t feel as poor. Less like I’m being punished like I’m a bad person. Recently I’ve prepaid my funeral and I’m glad I did it because now I don’t have to worry about it.”**  
*84-year-old single woman living on \$841 per month in Summit County, who will lose more than \$100 per month in SNAP*

Research by Dr. James P. Ziliak and Dr. Craig Gundersen, *The Health Consequences of Senior Hunger in the United States*, examined National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data from 1996-2016 and found that food insecure seniors have lower nutrient intakes and experience a wide array of adverse conditions, from congestive heart failure to diabetes to asthma to depression, at much higher rates than food secure seniors. Simply put, older adults experiencing food insecurity have worse health outcomes.

**“We very rarely need to ration food like we did before. I think it is the most impressive thing the government has done during the pandemic. [Before SNAP emergency allotments] we skipped meals and went to foodbanks. I think not receiving all the food we needed contributed to my wife’s diabetes diagnosis.”**  
*63-year-old married man caring for teenage son and two young grandchildren in Athens County, who will lose \$500 per month in SNAP*

# What will happen when pandemic-era nutrition assistance ends?

*The older adults we spoke with said the loss of SNAP Emergency Allotments will mean more frequent visits to food pantries, more skipped meals, and worsening health outcomes*

**“I’m very grateful, I’m frightened when [increased SNAP benefit] goes away. It’s very important to me. I don’t want to lose it. I’m definitely going to have to rely more on foodbanks... when the pandemic [benefit] goes away I’m not going to have to worry about dieting because I won’t be able to buy enough food to eat. I’ll be on a government diet then.”** 61-year-old single disabled woman in Mahoning County, who will lose \$180 per month in SNAP

**“I’m not really worried because I discovered the foodbank. I will start using food giveaways to help make up for the deficit in SNAP benefits. I didn’t use foodbanks before the pandemic. People should be fed in this country. If you can do it during the pandemic, why can’t you keep doing it? \$50 would change my world.”** 63-year-old single disabled woman in Cuyahoga County, who will lose \$98 per month in SNAP

**Ohio will lose \$120 million/month in SNAP benefits when SNAP Emergency Allotments end.**

These enhanced benefits will end just as inflationary and supply chain pressure mount, and following the end of other pandemic-era supports. Basic needs providers like the Ohio Association of Foodbanks network can’t meet the need alone and are asking for immediate funding to ensure shelves remain stocked. In the upcoming Farm Bill, improved benefit adequacy for older adults and people with disabilities should be of particular priority to support their well-being and their ability to age at home. It is not only short-sighted but unjust and immoral to allow older adults to go hungry.

**“At the end of the month, I don’t have to worry about waiting for the next month’s money. I have a little extra then, and can buy the expensive bread that’s better for my diabetes. [I worry about] keeping the things I need, like bread and milk. Meat would be nice. If I can eat two meals a day and try to have enough food for the whole month, that’s good.”** 61-year-old single disabled woman living on \$861 per month in Meigs County, who will lose \$95 per month in SNAP



The Ohio Association of Foodbanks represents Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks and their 3,700 partners operating hunger relief programs. To learn more, visit [ohiofoodbanks.org](http://ohiofoodbanks.org) or follow us @OhioFoodbanks.

We would like to extend our special thanks to the older Ohioans that shared their stories and experiences with us.



The Ohio Association of Foodbanks partnered with The Center for Community Solutions and Advocates for Ohio’s Future to conduct interviews with older adults participating in SNAP. We are grateful for their partnership and expertise.