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Study Finds Majority of Ohio Foodbank Clients Have to Choose Between Buying Food, Paying for Essential Household Expenses

The findings are from a survey of more than 2,000 emergency food distribution clients who visited Ohio foodbanks between April 14 to May 7

COLUMBUS, OH – A new study conducted by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks found that an alarming number of Ohioans are being forced to choose between buying food and paying for other essential household expenses. The findings, released today, are from an anonymous statewide survey, which included 2,087 validated responses from residents of 32.6% of all Ohio zip codes.

“The [results of this study](#) are deeply troubling and illustrate that we still have a long way to go to ensure that every Ohioan has access to healthy and affordable food,” said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. “Our foodbanks have been responding to elevated need after more than a year of inflation, supply chain challenges and high food prices, and that need has escalated even more now that 1.5 million Ohioans have lost an average of \$90 per person, per month in pandemic-era SNAP benefits. No Ohioan should have to choose between a meal and medicine they need, but that’s the reality many of our neighbors are dealing with too often right now.”

Key Findings from Study

After more than a year of above-average inflation and high costs for food and other basic needs, pandemic-era Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits ended in March, impacting more than 1.5 million Ohioans and further exacerbating food insecurity. To better understand how these factors have impacted Ohioans, the study collected survey responses from Ohio foodbank clients who visited one of dozens of emergency food distributions in rural, suburban and urban communities from April 14 to May 7, 2023.

Among the study’s highlights:

- More than 8 in 10 Ohio foodbank clients are seeking help with emergency food because of higher food costs.
- Since the end of pandemic-era SNAP benefits, more than 3 in 4 Ohio foodbank clients that participate in SNAP have exhausted their household’s SNAP benefit within the first two weeks of each month or less; just 5% of SNAP participants said their benefits lasted the full month.
- Nearly 2 in 3 (65.5%) have adults in their household that have cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food in the last 12 months, including more than 1 in 3 (36.6%) that did so almost every month over the last year.

When Ohio foodbank clients were asked about whether they had to choose between paying for food or other household expenses in the last 2-3 months, the study found:

- 68% had to choose between food and transportation/gas.
- 66% had to choose between food and utilities.

- 55% had to choose between food or medicine/health care.
- 50% had to choose between food and housing.

The summary of key findings from the study can be accessed [here](#).

“It is unconscionable that the most vulnerable individuals and families in our communities should be forced to make decisions between paying for essential household expenses, such as housing, utilities and medicine, or putting food on their tables,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “Ohio’s foodbanks are already at our breaking point, facing overwhelming demand amid record inflation and high prices. We are calling on our state and federal leaders to make a firm, demonstrated commitment to ensure that no Ohioan goes hungry.”

State & Federal Legislative Support Needed to Meet Increasing Demand on Ohio’s Foodbanks

As the state legislature works to approve the biennial budget and as Congress works to reauthorize the Farm Bill, it is imperative that funding and safeguards are included to protect and further strengthen federal and state nutrition programs.

2024-2025 Ohio Biennial Budget

Ohio’s hunger relief network is requesting that the State of Ohio invest **\$50 million per year in the 2024-25 biennial budget** to [support the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program](#). This investment will help the statewide network distribute at least 65 million pounds, or 54 million meals, of nutritious, wholesome foods to food insecure families in all of Ohio’s 88 counties. Funding will also be used for essential non-food household items, such as shampoo, toothpaste, diapers, and toilet paper.

This funding will allow the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to direct the maximum amount of state dollars available to Ohioans who need it most, putting food on the tables of Ohio families, positioning children to be healthy and ready to learn, protecting the welfare of older Ohioans, and setting the anti-hunger, pro-agriculture standard among states.

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks and other hunger relief and aging advocates also urge the State of Ohio to invest in a [state-funded minimum SNAP benefit for older adults](#). This investment would impact 70,000 one- to two-person 60+ households by bringing their monthly SNAP allotments to \$50 per month.

Farm Bill

Additionally, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks joins Feeding America and foodbanks throughout the country in imploring Congress to strengthen the nation’s commitment to ending hunger by supporting critical anti-hunger programs in the 2023 Farm Bill, including funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and SNAP.

As demand for food remains high at foodbanks, a reliable and continuous stream of TEFAP foods is essential. TEFAP also has a strong impact on the farm economy. TEFAP purchases give U.S. growers and producers an average of 27 cents per dollar¹ – by contrast, just around 16 cents of every retail food dollar go back to farmers. Lawmakers must **increase TEFAP baseline funding to \$450 million** a year indexed to inflation for TEFAP food purchases. Congress must also authorize **\$200 million per year for TEFAP storage and distribution funds and \$15 million per year for TEFAP infrastructure grants**.

In addition, SNAP is the cornerstone of the nation’s federal nutrition programs, providing around 40 million people in the U.S. with monthly food benefits via a grocery debit card. **SNAP benefits should be set at an adequate level so families can purchase healthy foods**. Strengthening SNAP benefits would also help older adults, people with disabilities, people working low-wage jobs, and others who are most likely to qualify for the minimum benefit.

For more information about the study or to learn about the current impacts on Ohio’s foodbanks, visit OhioFoodbanks.org.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service

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About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio's largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio's 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,600 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters who serve all 88 counties in Ohio. Follow the association on [Twitter](#), stay connected on [Facebook](#) and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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