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Statewide hunger study finds tradeoffs prevalent, with 1 in 2 foodbank visitors choosing between medicine and food, nearly six in ten choosing between utilities and food

The findings are from a survey of more than 2,600 foodbank network neighbors who visited a food pantry or food distribution between April 18 to May 22

COLUMBUS, OH – The [Ohio Association of Foodbanks](#) today released a new study finding that more than half of surveyed Ohio households were forced to choose between paying for medicine or food in the past year, while nearly six in 10 were forced to choose between paying for food or utilities amid ongoing health and financial challenges. The findings are based on an anonymous electronic survey of Ohio food pantry visitors, with more than 2,600 verified responses analyzed.

“As Hunger Action Month kicks off, this study reminds us that food insecurity is often a symptom of broader challenges facing families,” said Joree Novotny, executive director for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. “Ohio families are visiting food pantries as they work hard to keep up with rising food costs, inflation and other external pressures. These survey findings underscore the growing pressures fueling hunger across Ohio.”

Key findings from the 2026 Hunger Study

Rising food costs, inflation, limited household resources and chronic health conditions continue to drive demand for food assistance across Ohio. To better understand these challenges, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks surveyed neighbors who visited Ohio food pantries from April 18 to May 22, 2026.

Among the study’s highlights:

- More than half (52%) of households reported that at least one member was forced to skip meals during the past year. Among them, 59% had to skip meals every month, indicating that food shortages are a recurring challenge.
- 57% of households chose between affording utilities or affording food. This rate is higher among households with children, with 65% choosing between utilities and food.
- More than three-quarters (76%) of households reported that at least one member was living with a chronic illness or disability.
- More than half (53%) of households with a chronic condition reported having to choose between affording medicine and affording food at least once during the year.
- Half (50%) of households surveyed had at least one member employed during the previous 12 months. Among households without employment, 48% reported that a household

member was unable to work due to a disability or illness, while 38% were retired and 11% were serving as a caregiver.

- Four in ten households (40%) expected to rely on free meals or groceries more often in the next year. That number was higher for households with children, with 52% expecting to rely on free meals or groceries more often in the next year.

Behind the statistics are real Ohio families facing difficult choices every day. *Ashley, a resident of Ashland County, is a stay-at-home mother of four children while her husband works full-time as a truck driver. His income places their family above the threshold for SNAP benefits, which makes it difficult for them to make ends meet.

"Our bills added all up is more than what my husband's making," Ashley said. "We've pretty much sold a lot of our stuff... I had used up all of my credit limit, and now I'm in debt recovery. It [food insecurity] can happen to anybody... We're just trying to make ends meet by whatever means necessary."

Ashley's household and her in-laws both rely on and are thankful to local foodbanks to help stretch their grocery budget.

When survey respondents were asked about what they valued from receiving charitable food assistance, they reported benefits beyond having adequate food to eat. Half (51%) reported that their decreased stress levels were an important value of receiving food assistance, while 39% said they valued that receiving food assistance helped them eat healthier foods than they otherwise would have. About one in five (18%) said that the food they receive helps them better manage existing health conditions. This mirrors findings from Feeding America's July 2026 [Food as Medicine report](#), which showed that when people have access to reliable nutritious food, they are better able to prevent and manage chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease.

"Food secure, healthy individuals are more able to work and attend school, care for family members and participate in daily activities," Novotny said. "That consistency means they are more likely to maintain their income and have stability."

During Hunger Action Month and every month, Ohioans can support local foodbanks and take action against hunger by visiting [OhioFoodbanks.org](https://ohiofoodbanks.org). For more details on the 2026 Hunger Study, click [here](#).

*Note: Identification is limited to the first name only at their request to protect their privacy.

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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, hot meals, and other hunger relief programs. In SFY 2025, the association and its member foodbanks were able to source, rescue, and redistribute more than 281 million pounds of food and grocery items. Follow the association on Twitter, stay connected on Facebook and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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