

Food Insecurity and Economic Conditions in New Hampshire and the Nation

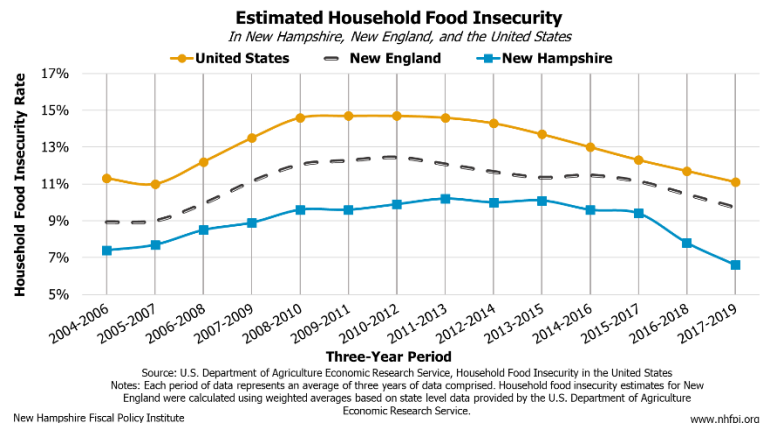
Issue Brief Summary and Key Highlights

Food insecurity is a measure estimating the number of households experiencing a lack of food. Official estimates of household food insecurity are calculated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through an annual survey. Households are considered food insecure if they indicated that, at some point in the last year, they were unable to acquire adequate food for one or more household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food.

Food insecurity has profound negative effects on children and adults alike. Food insecurity generally correlates with overall economic conditions, and those families and individuals who are most affected by economic declines are more likely to experience food insecurity, which may compound hardships. National data representing the most recent estimates of household food insecurity in the United States show that certain groups experienced heightened levels of food insecurity. These groups facing heightened food insecurity include households with children, and households headed by a single parent, by individuals identifying as Hispanic or African American, and by older adults. Additionally, households with incomes below or near poverty levels, as well as households in large cities and in rural areas, face higher levels of food insecurity.

Elevated Food Insecurity During the Great Recession and Recovery

The Great Recession, which lasted from late 2007 to mid-2009, resulted in large increases in food insecurity levels across the nation. Nationally, food insecurity levels started a slow, steady, and statistically significant decline beginning in the 2011-2013 period, and continued to the 2017-2019 period. In New Hampshire, food insecurity levels remained elevated over much of this time range and did not begin to decline significantly until the 2016-2018 period, when the state experienced a statistically significant decrease in estimated food insecurity. Only in this period did New Hampshire return to pre-Recession levels of household food insecurity. Throughout the latter half of the recovery from the Great Recession, levels of food insecurity appeared to remain elevated in New Hampshire despite declining steadily around the nation.



Factors Effecting Food Insecurity Levels

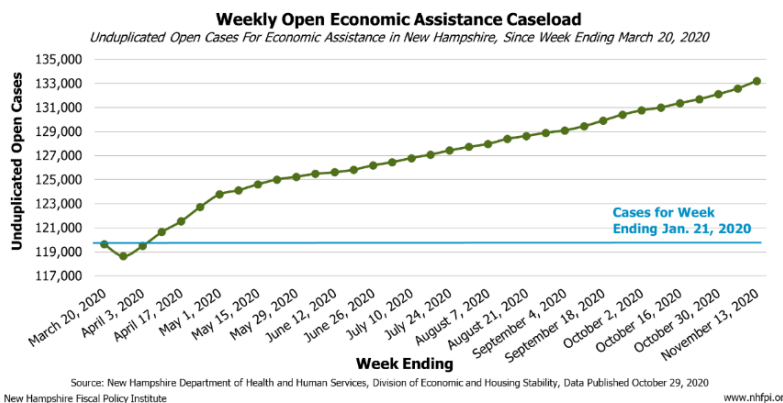
Several trends in New Hampshire throughout the recovery from the Great Recession may be correlated with these elevated levels of food insecurity in New Hampshire compared to the nation overall. Limited income growth for low-wage workers, affected by changes in employment opportunities, resulted in the economic recovery from the Great Recession taking longer to reach more vulnerable Granite Staters, and may have contributed to a delayed decline in food insecurity in New Hampshire. Minimum wage increases, state-level Earned Income Tax Credits, and additional policies that aided in boosting the incomes and overall economic security of individuals and families with lower incomes throughout the recovery from the Great Recession may have contributed to a more consistent decline in food insecurity in other states.

These factors may have contributed to estimated household food insecurity levels in New Hampshire remaining elevated for longer than in the nation as a whole. In more recent years, data show New Hampshire's food insecurity levels declining prior to the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, correlating with

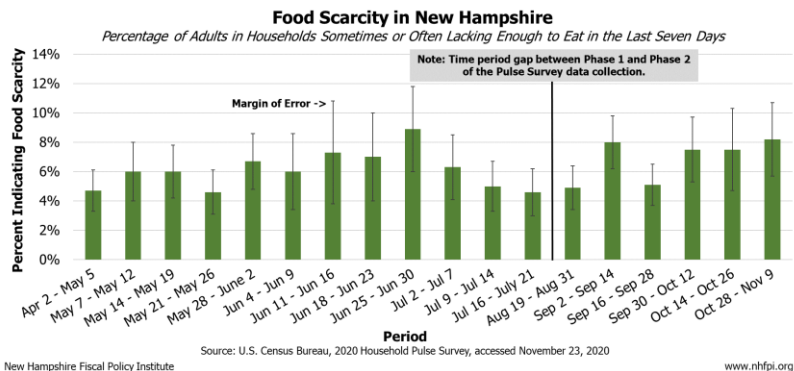
the rebound in the purchasing power for lower wages, the effectiveness of key nutritional aid programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and overall improvements to economic conditions relative to before the Great Recession.

The COVID-19 Crisis and Food Insecurity

Despite recent declines in food insecurity levels in New Hampshire, the current COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately impacted the economic stability of more vulnerable Granite Staters and may lead to further increases in food insecurity. According to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, the total number of unduplicated open cases for economic assistance has consistently risen since the COVID-19 crisis began. Key policies and programs that provide support to individuals and families during times of economic decline will be critical to respond to increased needs during and after the current crisis.



Survey data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau helps describe the impacts and challenges facing households since the pandemic began. Nearly half of New Hampshire adults reported a loss of household employment income between March and July, and significant portions of households expected future employment income losses or reported difficulty paying for usual expenses. Consistently since April, about one in every twenty households in New Hampshire indicated there was either sometimes or often not enough to eat in the last seven days.



Providing aid to vulnerable populations most impacted by economic downturns is key to mitigating financial hardships and stimulating the economy. As the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis continue to affect Granite Staters, relevant policies and support programs for the people most affected, and for those with the fewest resources, will be central in helping ensure all individuals and families are able to access food and for mitigating food insecurity during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

Learn more in NHFPI’s report, *Food Insecurity and Economic Conditions in New Hampshire and the Nation*, published on December 1, 2020, and available online at www.nhfpi.org.

Funding for the report was provided by:



The New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to exploring, developing, and promoting public policies that foster economic opportunity and prosperity for all New Hampshire residents, with an emphasis on low- and moderate-income families and individuals. Learn more at www.nhfpi.org.