

FOOD INSECURITY AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS DURING THE GREAT RECESSION AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS

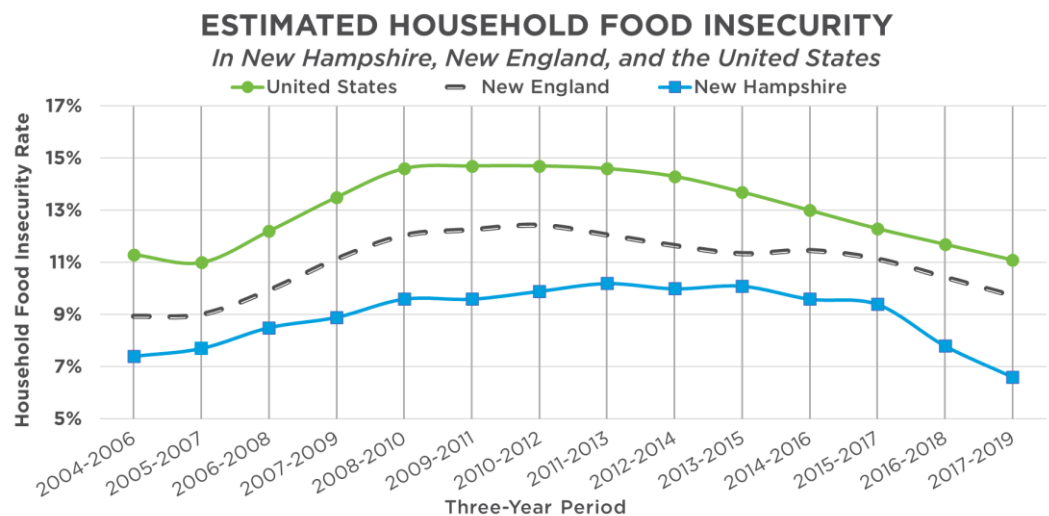
SUMMARY AND KEY HIGHLIGHTS

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 both adults and children. Food insecurity levels generally correlate 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 official estimates of household food insecurity in the United States show that certain groups experienced heightened levels of food insecurity. These groups 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 continuing through the 2017-2019 period.



Notes: Each period of data represents an average of three years of data. Household food insecurity estimates for New England were calculated using weighted averages based on state level data provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, *Household Food Insecurity in the United States*

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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.

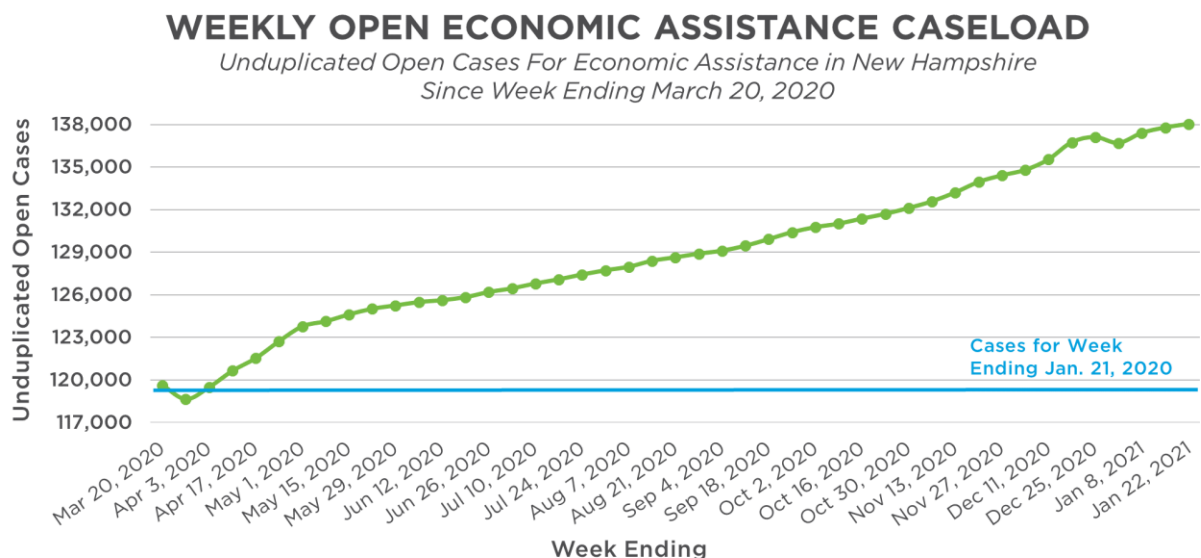
FACTORS EFFECTING FOOD INSECURITY LEVELS

Several trends in New Hampshire throughout the recovery from the Great Recession may be related to 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, likely 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 helped boost incomes and the economic security of individuals and families with limited resources may have contributed to a more consistent decline in food insecurity in other states.

These factors may be related to estimated household food insecurity levels in New Hampshire remaining comparatively 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 risen substantially 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 for responding to increased needs during and after the current crisis.

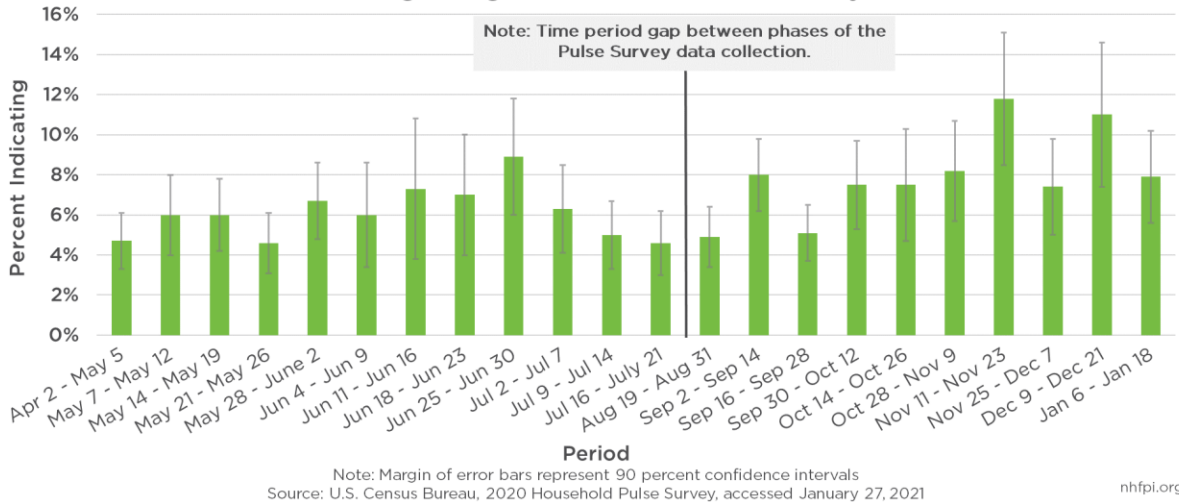


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Survey data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau helps describe the impacts and challenges facing households since the pandemic began. Nearly half of New Hampshire adults reported a loss of household employment income between March and July 2020, and in mid-January 2021, more than a quarter of New Hampshire households reported paying for usual expenses was somewhat or very difficult in the prior seven days. Since April, between four and twelve percent of surveyed households in New Hampshire indicated there was either sometimes or often not enough to eat in the previous seven days.

FOOD SCARCITY IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Percentage of Adults in Households Sometimes or Often Lacking 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 COVID-19 crisis continues to impact 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 to mitigate increases in food insecurity during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

Learn more in NHFPI’s December 1, 2020 report, *Food Insecurity and Economic Conditions in New Hampshire and the Nation*, and February 3, 2021 presentation in partnership with the New Hampshire Food Bank and New Hampshire Hunger Solutions, *Food Insecurity and Economic Conditions During the Great Recession and COVID-19 Crisis*, available online at www.nhfpi.org.

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