



## COST OF DOMESTIC HUNGER: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How is hunger defined?**

The federal government defines hunger as a recurring, painful sensation caused by inadequate food due to low-income status.

### **Is there a commonly accepted definition of hunger?**

This federal standard typically is used by policymakers and researchers, but many in the nutrition community note that it is too narrow since many people who are hungry feel no pain at all but suffer in other ways.

### **What is the difference between hunger and food insecurity?**

Hunger, noted above, is considered to be a more severe problem. Food insecurity refers to households and individuals that do not know where their next meal is coming from, have to cut back on the portions served to their families, or have to skip meals to get by.

### **How many people in the United States can we currently classify as hungry?**

On average, some 35 million people live in households that the federal government considers to experience hunger and food insecurity.

### **Which states or regions of the United States are the “hungriest”?**

Hunger is a manifestation of poverty, so it is most severe in regions with lower wages and higher unemployment, and in states that experience economic downturns. Hunger, however, exists in every state of the nation and can no longer be considered to be isolated to only a few places.

### **When did hunger in the United States turn into a critical issue?**

Severe hunger was first recognized in the late 1960s, and Congress acted on a bipartisan basis to reduce it greatly through programs like Food Stamps and Child Nutrition (school breakfasts and summer food programs). But in the early 1980s the President and Congress cut program budgets significantly at a time of national recession, and food banks and soup kitchens proliferated around the nation. We still have not recovered and now federal nutrition programs are not reaching many in need.

### **How many soup kitchens are currently in operation in the United States?**

There are 250+ food banks in the nation that distribute food to nearly 50,000 local feeding programs in communities across the U.S., including soup kitchens and food pantries.

### **What are some common physical side-effects of long-term hunger?**

Even periodic hunger can have lasting impacts, particularly on children and the elderly. These include more illness and hospitalizations, greater susceptibility to colds and flu, more depression and suicide attempts, and long-term cognitive impairments.

### **How do the cost burdens of hunger compare to other more common cost burden measures such as alcohol, smoking, drug abuse and obesity?**

This new study of the cost of hunger ranks it as a highly serious concern, close to the \$100 billion or more that other unresolved problems cost the nation. Hunger, however, is totally curable and can be ended by strengthening existing programs to be sure they reach all eligible people who are in need.

### **How do rates of hunger compare with those of other developed nations?**

Other developed nations do not keep track of hunger and food insecurity because they are not widespread. By all known standards, the U.S. is the only industrial democracy where hunger impacts nearly 13% of the entire population.

