



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

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Washington's hungry families double

Hunger intensifies with continued economic downturn

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2011 – A report released yesterday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that the recession made a deep mark on Washington's families. The number of hungry households in the state shot up nearly 100 percent from 2008 to the end of 2010; Washington state now ranks as the 11th hungriest state in the nation.

Washington families experiencing hunger nearly doubled from 88,000 to more than 160,000 from right before the recession's onset in 2008 and when the data was collected in December 2010. Hunger in Washington rose in this 2008-2010 period to 6 percent. This rise in Washington's hungry households bucks the national downward trend and demonstrates the persistence of the economic downturn that has yet to show significant signs of recovery for low-income Washingtonians.

While across the nation hungry families decreased from 17.7 million to 16.1 million between 2009 and 2010, Washington state reflects the recession's prolonged toll on families in the three years from 2008 to the end of 2010. The results confirm what emergency food providers, advocates, and those who run critical food and nutrition programs have observed throughout the years and see day-to-day: the hunger crisis swelled in the shadow of the recession, and the impact falls hard on more low-income families.

"A staggering number of Washingtonians are hungrier after the recession," says Jon Gould, deputy director of the Children's Alliance. "As more families face hunger now in a continued downturn, they need food assistance to stabilize them through hard times, help them raise healthy children, and stimulate economic recovery."

Nationally, more than 48 million Americans – 14.6 percent — experienced food insecurity, down slightly from 14.7 percent in 2009. African-American and Latino households had significantly higher rates than the national average — 25 and 26 percent, respectively. In addition, more than 20 percent of children live in hungry households. And in Washington, the Children's Alliance estimates that as many as 400,000 children – or 25 percent – live in homes that struggle to put food on the table on a regular basis.

"As federal debt negotiators and state lawmakers make critical decisions in coming months, ensuring all struggling families and children don't go hungry should be a priority," says Gould. "Critical supports such as food stamps and federal nutrition programs have worked



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well to feed families and strengthen the economy. Cutting these supports would have a negative ripple effect, causing more economic distress and hardship.”

In order to reverse the hunger trend captured in the 2010 survey, immediate federal and state actions need to be taken:

- As part of debt limit agreement, Congress is considering slashing or cutting the popular Women's, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, Basic Food (food stamps) and Child Nutrition Programs successfully growing with rising demand to meet families' needs. **Sen. Patty Murray and the Congressional Super-Committee most preserve their effectiveness to respond to families' needs.**
- At the state level last year, the legislature chose to slash food benefits in half for immigrant families. The entire program will be on the chopping block this year, and one-third of state funding for school and summer child nutrition programs was cut. **Additional budget cuts would damage the state nutrition safety net that prevents more families from going hungry.**
- The food stamp program, Basic Food, is our number one defense against hunger. Changes made in local government service offices over the past several years improved program accuracy and enabled staff to service a dramatically increased number of applicants despite major staffing reductions. **Now is not the time to back off of program streamlining that reduces errors and gets key benefits to needy families quickly.**
- The Farm Bill is due for reauthorization by Congress in 2012. The last two Farm Bills have brought needed changes in the food stamp program, resulting in improved access for low-income families and seniors. **Farm Bill 2012 should continue this trend and federal lawmakers should reject current calls roll back these positive changes.**

Read the Children's Alliance report, [Hungry in Washington](#).

Read the [Food Research and Action Center's \(FRAC's\) press release](#).

Read [the USDA report](#).

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The Children's Alliance is a statewide public policy advocacy organization that works at the state and federal level to ensure that all children have what they need to thrive. To learn more about the Children's Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org.