

Introduction

All children and families should have the opportunity to lead a long and healthy life. However, too many Americans lack critical building blocks for good health, including consistent access to affordable, nutritious food. In 2014, 48.1 million Americans lived in a food insecure household.¹ Research shows that children and adults experiencing poverty are particularly vulnerable to higher rates of food insecurity, as well as adverse health outcomes like obesity and diabetes.² These issues disproportionately affect Latinos—the largest and one of the fastest-growing ethnic minorities in the United States—as they are more likely to experience poverty and associated negative health outcomes than other groups.

The state of Florida has the third-largest Latino population in the nation, behind California and Texas. Currently, there are 4.8 million Latinos living in Florida, accounting for one in four residents, as well as 29% of children in the state.³ As the Latino population grows in states across the country, an examination of Latinos' health in Florida may help other states prepare for demographic shifts and ensure the health of their burgeoning Latino communities.

This profile describes the nutrition landscape that Latino children and families face in Florida and the state's participation in key federal nutrition programs, which work to improve access to healthy, affordable food for millions of children and families.[‡]



DEFINITIONS

- ♦ **Food insecurity:** A household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.*
- ♦ **Household poverty:** Household income is **below 100%** of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or **\$24,300** for a family of four.
- ♦ **Low-income households:** Household income is **below 200%** of the FPL, or **\$48,600** for a family of four.†

* U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Definitions of Food Security*. Washington, DC, 2016.

† U.S. Department of Health Services, "Poverty Guidelines," Washington, DC, 2016.

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† The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. Unless otherwise noted, estimates in this document do not include the 3.7 million residents of Puerto Rico. Comparison data for non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks will be identified respectively as "Whites" and "Blacks."

‡ Data presented in this profile was obtained from several sources. In some cases, data was not available for all years in all datasets. Therefore, comparison years in this profile may vary based on best available data.

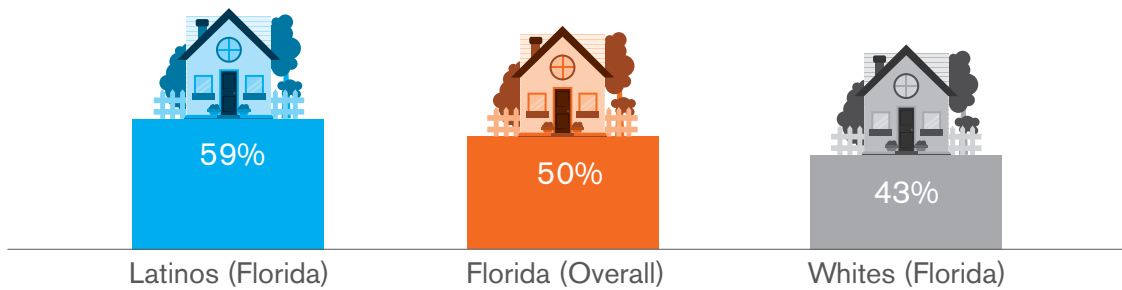
Latino children in Florida are more likely to live in low-income and food-insecure households.

Poverty and food insecurity are closely linked, as families living in poverty often lack sufficient income or resources to regularly purchase affordable, nutritious food.⁴ Across the United States, just one-third of households are categorized as low-income. However, two-thirds of the food-insecure population live in a low-income household.⁵

- Six in 10 Latino children in Florida live in a low-income household, compared to four in 10 White children (see Figure 1).⁶
- Latino households are more likely to be food-insecure than households overall in Florida (see Figure 2).⁷
- Food insecurity has particularly negative consequences for children, affecting cognitive development, school achievement, and overall health.⁸

FIGURE 1

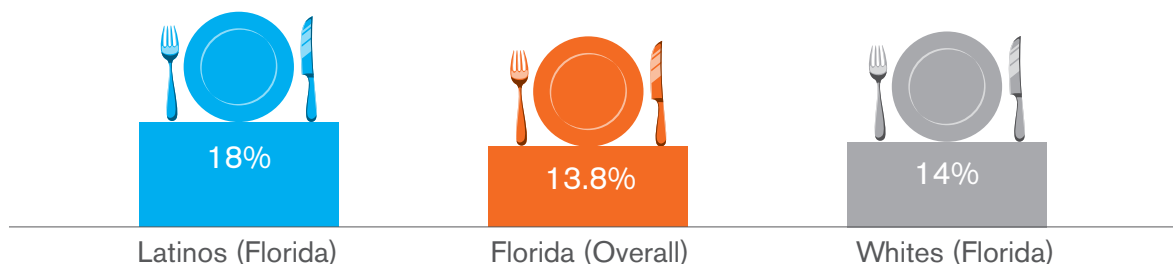
Children Living in Low-Income Households



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Children Below 200 Percent Poverty," 2016.

FIGURE 2

Household Food Insecurity



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2014*; *Food Security Among Hispanic Adults in the United States, 2011-2014*, 2016.

Millions of Floridians lack access to healthy food retailers.

Where people live, as well as their community's retail food environment, has a significant effect on their ability to lead a healthy life. More healthy food retailers in a community—including chain supermarkets and produce stands—means a larger variety of healthy food is available.⁹

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention uses an index score to measure a community's retail food environment. Higher index scores indicate greater numbers of healthy food retailers in the community and on average, communities in Florida have a comparable density of retailers to the nation as a whole.¹⁰
- However, over 2.5 million Floridians live in areas where it is difficult to buy nutritious food, including fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy, whole grains, seafood, and lean meats.¹¹

Latinos in Florida are more likely to be overweight and obese and experience associated chronic conditions.

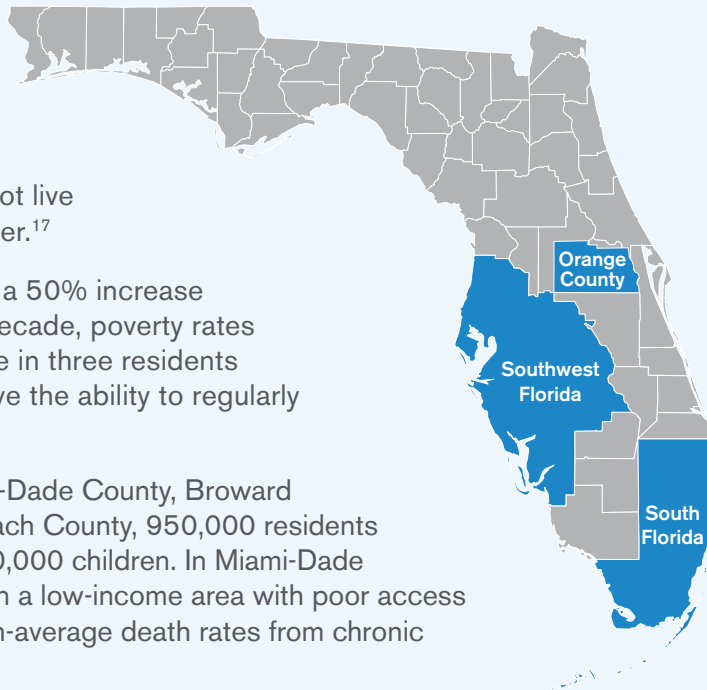
Living in a low-income household in a community with few healthy food retailers is associated with an increased likelihood of food insecurity, as well as an increased likelihood of developing a chronic health condition.¹²

- In Florida, Latinos are more likely to be overweight or obese than Whites across all age groups.¹³ For children, the most significant disparity is seen in children in kindergarten through eighth grade, with 41.4% of Latino children overweight or obese compared to 32.9% of White children.¹⁴
- Overall, Florida has the 15th highest rate of adult diabetes in the nation, and 11.3% of Latino adults in Florida suffer from diabetes.¹⁵

A REGIONAL SNAPSHOT OF HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS IN FLORIDA

As in many states, access to affordable, healthy food in Florida depends on where you live.

- The Orlando metropolitan area, located in Orange County, has the largest number of Puerto Ricans in the state, and Latinos now account for 30% of the area's population.¹⁶ Nearly half of the city's residents do not live within one mile of a healthy food retailer.¹⁷
- In Southwest Florida, which has seen a 50% increase in its Latino population over the last decade, poverty rates are particularly high. With close to one in three residents experiencing poverty, many do not have the ability to regularly access healthy food.¹⁸
- In South Florida, which includes Miami-Dade County, Broward County, Monroe County, and Palm Beach County, 950,000 residents are food insecure, including nearly 300,000 children. In Miami-Dade County alone, 250,000 residents live in a low-income area with poor access to supermarkets, as well as higher-than-average death rates from chronic conditions related to poor diet.¹⁹



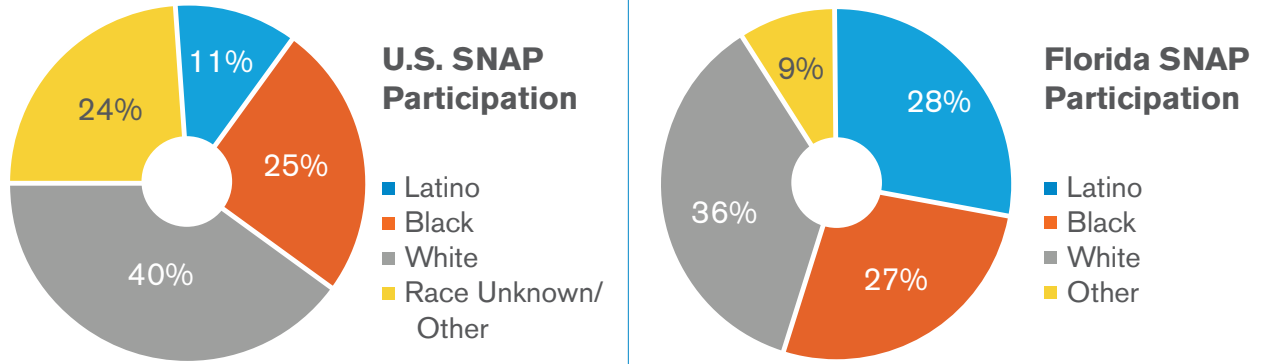
Source: Map of Florida with Counties - Single Color by FreeVectorMaps.com

Federal nutrition programs help alleviate the burden of hunger for millions of Floridians, including Latinos.

Collectively, federal nutrition programs help fill gaps in food access by connecting children and families to important resources at home, school, and the larger community, as well as buffering against poverty. While each federal nutrition program serves a critical role, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest food assistance program, providing 47.6 million Americans with monthly cash assistance to enable them to purchase healthy food for themselves and their families.

- Florida's SNAP program is one of the largest in the nation, serving 3.5 million Floridians monthly.²⁰
- Nationally, Latinos make up just over one in 10 households receiving SNAP benefits, however, they account for more than one in four households in Florida (see Figure 3).²¹
- A state's SNAP participation rate, measured by the number of beneficiaries compared to the eligible population, is an important indicator of a state's effectiveness at reaching its most vulnerable residents. Florida now ranks among the highest in the nation with 93% compared to 85% for the United States overall in 2013.²²
- The Latino participation rate in SNAP has historically lagged behind other groups, as fewer than two in three eligible Latinos in the United States participated in the SNAP program in 2011.²³

FIGURE 3



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2014, 2015*

ENROLLMENT IN SELECT FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS*

Program	National Enrollment	Florida Enrollment	Florida Latino Enrollment
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	47.6 million ²⁴	3.5 million ²⁵	537,000 ¹²⁶
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	9.73 million ²⁷	546,443 ²⁸	218,577 ²⁹
National School Lunch Program (NSLP)	31 million ³⁰	1.7 million ³¹	N/A [‡]
School Breakfast Program (SBP)	14.09 million ³²	782,000 ³³	N/A
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	3.4 million ³⁴	269,550 ³⁵	N/A

* For additional information on Florida's enrollment in select federal nutrition programs, see Appendix.

† Enrollment information provided by household only, not individual participants.

‡ Data breaking down state participation by ethnicity was not available.

Conclusion

Florida's Latino community will have an increasing role in shaping the health and socioeconomic well-being of the state and the nation. While Florida's overall healthy food retail environment is comparable to the national average, inequities remain as Latinos in the state are more likely to experience poverty, food insecurity, and related chronic health issues than other racial and ethnic groups. While federal nutrition programs, particularly SNAP, serve as a critical resource for many Latinos in Florida, more must be done to improve access to healthy food for more Floridians. Policymakers at all levels have a role to play to create a more equitable nutrition environment. Investment in a policy agenda that can improve the nutritional well-being for Latino children and families is essential to ensure that this and future generations see improved health trends.

APPENDIX: FLORIDA'S ENROLLMENT IN SELECT FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program provides important nutrition assistance for pregnant women, infants, and young children. A national study of WIC participants found that accessing WIC services reduced hunger and household food insecurity among pregnant women and children over time.³⁶ In 2012, 218,000 Latinos in Florida were enrolled in the WIC program, accounting for 40% of all Floridians enrolled in the program.³⁷

National School Meals Programs

On an average day in Florida, nearly 1.7 million children participate in the National School Lunch Program, and nearly 800,000 children participate in the School Breakfast Program. In Florida, 82% of children qualify for free and reduced price school meals.³⁸ Since the 2010-2011 school year, school breakfast has been offered in every school throughout the state.³⁹

Community Eligibility Provision

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools and school districts with high poverty rates to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. School districts where at least 40% of students automatically qualify for free school meals via participation in SNAP are eligible to participate in CEP. During the 2015-2016 school year, 475,000 Florida students received free school meals through their school's participation in CEP.⁴⁰

Child and Adult Care Food Program

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides nutritious meals and snacks for preschool-aged children and children in after-school programs. This program is critical for Latino children aged two to five, who face rates of overweight (30%) and obesity (17%), that are twice the national average.⁴¹ Florida has developed nutrition standards that exceed the federal standards at CACFP sites, including the requirement that fruits and vegetables be served at least twice a week at breakfast and snack.⁴²

Endnotes

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