

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> These issues disproportionately affect Latinos<sup>†</sup>—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 Texas has the second-largest Latino population in the nation, behind California and ahead of Florida. Currently, there are 10.4 million Latinos in Texas, accounting for nearly four in ten residents and nearly half of all children in the state.<sup>3</sup> By 2023, Texas is projected to become a majority-minority state with Latinos accounting for the largest ethnic group in the state. By 2050, Latinos are projected to make up over half of all Texans.<sup>4</sup> As the Latino population grows in states across the country, an examination of Latinos' health in Texas 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 Texas 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.<sup>‡</sup>



## 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.

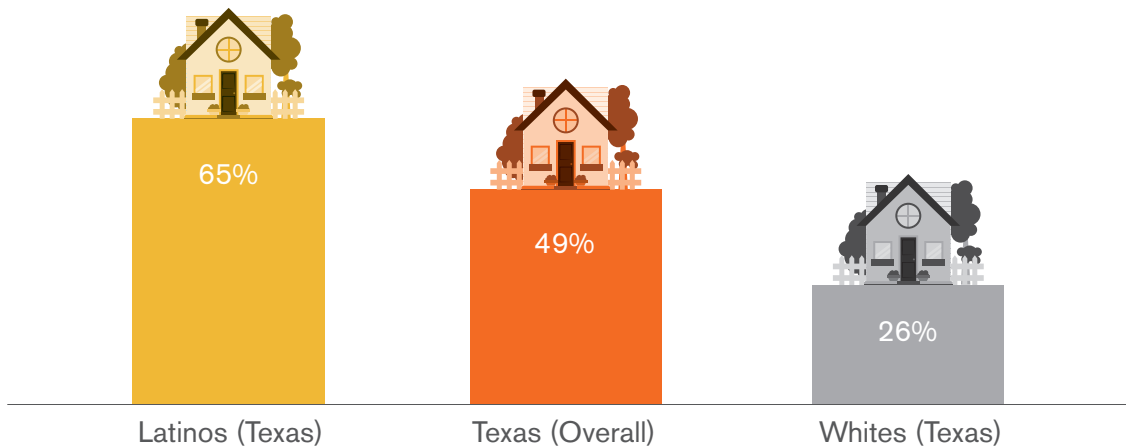
## Latino children in Texas are more likely to live in a low-income household and be food insecure.

Poverty and food insecurity are closely linked as families living in poverty often lack sufficient income or resources to regularly purchase affordable, nutritious food.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Latino children are more likely than children overall in Texas to live in a low-income household and be food-insecure.<sup>7</sup>

- Nearly two-thirds of Latino children in Texas live in a low-income household, compared to one-fourth of White children (see Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>
- Latino children in Texas are more likely to face food insecurity than other groups, with nearly one-third living in a food-insecure household (see Figure 2).<sup>9</sup>
- Food insecurity has particularly negative consequences for children, affecting cognitive development, school achievement, and overall health.<sup>10</sup>

**FIGURE 1**

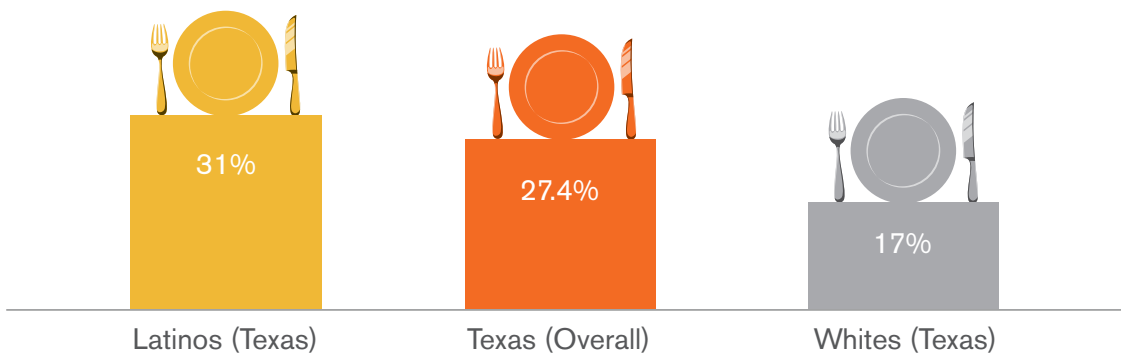
### Children Living in Low-Income Households



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

**FIGURE 2**

### Child Food Insecurity



Source: Center for Public Policy Priorities, *State of Texas Children 2016*, 2016

## Latinos in Texas have less access to healthy food retailers than other racial or ethnic groups.

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.<sup>11</sup>

- 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 Texas have a comparatively worse score (7) than the national average (10).<sup>12</sup>
- Research shows that in Texas, on average, communities with higher proportions of Latino residents have index scores 1.5 points lower than the state average.<sup>13</sup>

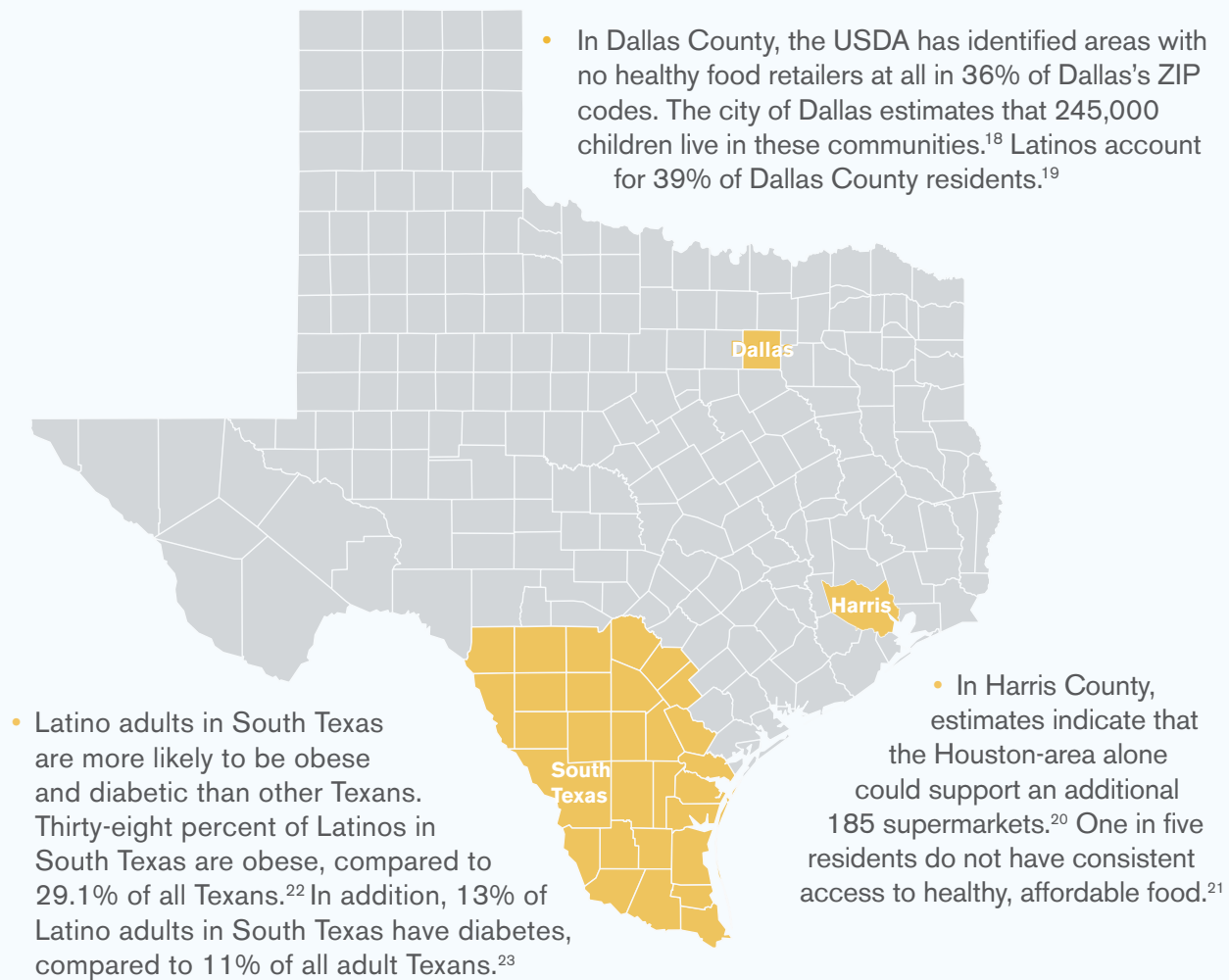
## Latinos in Texas are more likely to be overweight and obese, and experience associated chronic conditions.

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.<sup>14</sup>

- Texas has fewer supermarkets per capita than any other state, and low-income and minority communities have much less access to full-service grocery stores than higher-income communities.<sup>15</sup>
- In Texas, Latinos are overweight and obese at higher rates at all stages of life. This disparity is especially pronounced in Latino children ages 10-17, who are nearly 30% more likely to be overweight or obese than other children in the state.<sup>16</sup>
- Rising obesity rates have led to a dramatic increase in the prevalence of diabetes in Texas, growing from 6.2% of Texas adults in 2000 to 11.3% in 2015, which includes 12.7% of Latino adults.<sup>17</sup>

## A REGIONAL SNAPSHOT OF HEALTH DISPARITIES IN TEXAS

Latinos in Texas face disparities in terms of healthy food access and health outcomes in large urban areas and in South Texas:



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

## Federal nutrition programs help alleviate the burden of hunger for millions of Texans, 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.

**ENROLLMENT IN SELECT FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS\***

Program	National Enrollment	Texas Enrollment	Texas Latino Enrollment
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	47.6 million <sup>24</sup>	3.82 million <sup>25</sup>	616,072 <sup>†26</sup>
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	9.73 million <sup>27</sup>	1.04 million <sup>28</sup>	750,668 <sup>29</sup>
National School Lunch Program (NSLP)	31 million <sup>30</sup>	3.4 million <sup>31</sup>	N/A <sup>‡</sup>
School Breakfast Program (SBP)	14.09 million <sup>32</sup>	1.9 million <sup>33</sup>	N/A
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	3.4 Million <sup>34</sup>	212,000 <sup>35</sup>	N/A

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

† Latino participation only measured at household level, not individual participants.

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

- Texas's SNAP program, one of the largest in the nation, serves 3.8 million Texans each month, including more than two million children.<sup>36</sup>
- Significantly more Latinos in Texas are eligible for SNAP than Whites (54.5% vs. 45.5%).<sup>37</sup>
- A state's SNAP participation rate, measured by the number of enrollees compared to the eligible population, is an important indicator of how effective a state is at reaching its most vulnerable residents. Texas continues to rank among the lowest in the nation with 77% compared to 85% nationally in 2013.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Texas's Latino community will have an increasing role in shaping the health and socioeconomic wellbeing of the state and the nation. Latinos in Texas 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 Texas, more must be done to improve access to healthy food for more Texans. 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: TEXAS'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.<sup>39</sup> In 2012, over 750,000 Texas Latinos were enrolled in the WIC program, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all Texas enrollees.<sup>40</sup>

### *National School Meals Programs*

In Texas, 3.4 million children participate in the National School Lunch Program, and nearly 1.9 million children participate in the School Breakfast Program. Of these children, 81% qualify for free and reduced-price school meals.<sup>41</sup>

### *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, one-half of CEP-eligible schools in Texas participated in the program, providing free school meals for over one million students in Texas.<sup>42</sup>

### *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.<sup>43</sup> Texas Department of Agriculture's Farm to Child Care Grant (FTC) Program provides resources for CACFP child care providers and growers to integrate more local and fresh produce into meals and snacks served to children.<sup>44</sup>



## Endnotes

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