

Not Enough Food on the Table: Food Insecurity and the Latino Community

Food insecurity is a complex and systematic social challenge impacting hard-working families in the United States, especially racial and ethnic diverse populations. The pandemic created an unprecedented environment for all Americans, and its impact especially put at risk the health and economic security of Latinos, immigrants, and other groups.

Latinos are essential to our country's prosperity, with a rapid worker growth rate and a projection of accounting for one out of every five workers in the labor force by 2030. They energize the economy and strive to make better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities. However, prior to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), Hispanics* were already experiencing higher food-insecurity rates than the general population.

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

Food insecurity refers to the lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life.¹ Health and food insecurity are interrelated, as low access to healthy foods has a higher association with poor diet, nutrient deficiencies, impaired immune systems, and a higher risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

Studies show that:

- Food insecurity impacts 40 million Americans.
- 1 in 5 Latino households have at least one person being food insecure.
- Latino children and adults are more than twice as likely to face hunger as white children and adults.
- In 2021, 18.5% of Latino children experienced food insecurity.

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout our materials 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. Our materials may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions present in the community.

ROOT CAUSES AND BARRIERS

It is important to acknowledge and address the systemic racism and inequalities present that lead to health disparities.

Food insecurity is a result of various root causes and barriers, including:

- Food supply chain
- Increasing costs of food
- Economic and physical access to food
- Lack of quality health care
- Disinvestment in quality education
- Wage discrimination
- Poverty or unemployment

The COVID-19 pandemic increased levels of unemployment and poverty rates while disrupting community social support networks, which aggravated food insecurity across the nation, including in Latinx communities. **Latinos were reported to be 2.5 times more likely to experience food insecurity than white individuals in the year 2021.**

The following strategies and recommendations stem from implementing the multiple food and nutrition security programs with local community-based organizations serving Latino and other diverse populations.



STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AS A NATIONAL PRIORITY

The 2022 [White House Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) provided a national strategy to address challenges on the food and nutrition security and commits the federal government and public/private organizations to shift the country's food, nutrition, and health policies to end hunger by the year 2030.⁴

Recognizing that disparities are rooted in long-standing structural inequalities, the Food and Nutrition Service in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is leveraging the White House support to advance nutrition security while applying an equity lens. This comprehensive approach will promote sustainable food systems that are meant to address the unique and multifaceted needs of all, including historically underserved populations.

2. EXPANDING THE USE OF A CULTURALLY HUMBLE AND RELEVANT MODEL

According to a UnidosUS survey, 44% of Latino parents received some form of food assistance during the pandemic (including food banks, schools, churches, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps), and nearly 80% reported that this assistance helped a great deal.

UnidosUS's ***Comprando Rico y Sano*** (Buying Healthy and Flavorful Food) is a national program funded by No Kid Hungry and the Walmart Foundation, which seeks to address food insecurity through culturally relevant nutrition education and enrollment assistance in SNAP and other federal nutrition programs for eligible Latino households. It is currently implemented by 25 community-based organizations (CBOs) across the country.

Comprando Rico y Sano
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This program is a prime example of how a human-centered approach where a mutual relationship between a national organization like UnidosUS and local community-based organizations and local agencies can be impactful in reducing hunger and food insecurity over the years. The program utilizes knowledgeable, resourceful, and trusted community messengers known as community health workers (*promotores de salud*) who deliver interactive nutrition education sessions known as *charlas* and are crucial in demystifying misconceptions and are sensitive to and aware of the challenges faced by the communities that they serve.

Between 2020 and 2022, the combined efforts of UnidosUS and subgrantees resulted in:



training for
157 *promotores de salud*



SNAP enrollment
assistance for
11,475 households
benefiting **26,629 Latinos**



distribution of
over 3.6 million
pounds of food

In collaboration with the White House's National Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, by 2030, UnidosUS commits to doubling the reach of *Comprando Rico y Sano* through the expansion of the program to 25 additional community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico—training 1,880 new community health workers, providing nutrition education to 84,000 more people, and facilitating SNAP enrollment for roughly 232,000 more members of the Latino community.

3. COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS TO ASSESS AND PUT IN PRACTICE SYSTEM CHANGES

Transformative change cannot happen in isolation. UnidosUS recommends stakeholders from various local, state, governmental, private, and public agencies work together to address:

Transformations in the food system:

- Adapt inclusive interventions to lower the high cost of nutritious foods and confront poverty and structural inequalities.

Improving access to nutritious food:

- Increase benefits and access to the SNAP and to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

UnidosUS, formerly the National Council of La Raza, is the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. The *Comprando Rico y Sano* program seeks to reduce hunger and instill healthy shopping and eating habits among Latinos through nutrition education and enrollment assistance in the SNAP and WIC.

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SOURCES

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2. **Shining a Light on *Promotores de Salud* during the COVID-19 Pandemic:** [UnidosUS Fact Sheet](#)
3. **U.S. Food Insufficiency Rates by Race/Ethnicity:** [Food Insufficiency During COVID-19 | Food Research and Action Center \(frac.org\)](#)
4. **Biden-Harris Administration National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health:** [White-House-National-Strategy-on-Hunger-Nutrition-and-Health-FINAL.pdf \(whitehouse.gov\)](#)
5. **Hispanics in the Labor Force: 5 Facts:** [Hispanics in the Labor Force: 5 Facts | U.S. Department of Labor Blog \(dol.gov\)](#)
6. **Latino Hunger Facts, Feeding America:** [Food Insecurity in Latino Communities | Feeding America](#)