

Policymakers Must Provide America's Latinos with Affordable and Secure Access to Healthy Food

Many Latinos cannot afford to provide their families with nutritious meals

Nearly two in five Latinos* reported that their families did not have enough food to eat in 2023—more than any other racial or ethnic group and significantly higher than in the past.

The end of pandemic benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has taken a terrible toll in Hispanic communities. Each year, SNAP helps put food on the table for [10 million Latinos, including 5 million children](#). But when enhanced SNAP benefits during the pandemic ended in early 2023, families lost between \$95 and \$260 a month. The proportion of counties where SNAP was not enough for families to buy and prepare low-cost, healthy meals [skyrocketed from 21% to 98%](#).

No one in America should have to go into debt to feed their family. But **the combination of high food prices and the end of pandemic assistance** has forced that grim choice on hard-working Hispanic families. **More than one in eight Latino adults has now gone into debt to feed their families**—more than any other racial or ethnic group.

Without affordable access to healthy food, Hispanic communities face an epidemic of diet-related illness. Latinos are nearly [70%](#) more likely to suffer from diabetes and [30%](#) more likely to die from it, compared to non-Hispanic whites. Hispanic adults are [20%](#) more likely to be obese, and obesity is [50%](#) more common among Latino children and youth (26% vs. 16% for non-Hispanic white youngsters). These problems reflect a broad range of social and economic risk factors that disproportionately harm Latino families, including multiple challenges to achieving a healthy diet.

Hard-working families trying to lead healthy lives, including millions of Latinos, need policy change

This issue is a top priority for Latino voters. According to UnidosUS [polling](#) fielded in August 2024, Latino voters rank inflation and the cost of living as the most important issue elected officials must address. And the single most important concern expressed by those voters involved the cost of “food and basic living expenses,” cited as a priority by nearly four in five of them—more than housing, gasoline and all other costs.

* 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.

Latinos need five policy changes to achieve the health and financial benefits of nutrition security:

- 1. Cut paperwork and bureaucracy that stop eligible Latino families from participating in federal food programs.** In Hispanic communities, [more than 1.5 million](#) pregnant women, new mothers, infants and pre-school children qualify for but do not participate in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Another 6 million Latinos are eligible for SNAP but not enrolled, according to UnidosUS research. During the worst of COVID-19, these programs facilitated participation by dramatically cutting paperwork and bureaucratic requirements. Such streamlining should remain a permanent feature of America's nutrition programs.
- 2. Increase SNAP benefits so families can afford to buy healthy food.** The country's most important anti-hunger program should provide enough financial help for people to buy healthy food.
- 3. Guarantee WIC benefits for all eligible families.** For 2024, Congress almost cut WIC funding to the point where millions of pregnant women, new mothers, babies and young children who qualified for help would have been turned away, for the first time in a generation. Similar underfunding is again a risk in the 2025 budget. To ensure that WIC-eligible families get the food their children need to grow up healthy and strong, all who qualify for WIC should be guaranteed assistance, shielding vulnerable families from Congress's ever-changing politics.
- 4. Require simple, graphically compelling front-of-package labels (FOPL) that help Latino families make informed food choices.** To protect themselves from diet-related disease, many Latino families face challenges using an essential tool for guiding healthy food choices—the back-of-package nutrition facts panel. Those challenges reflect entrenched inequities, as [31%](#) of Latinos have low literacy levels compared to 12% of non-Hispanic whites, [28%](#) of Latinos have limited English proficiency compared to 1% of non-Hispanic whites and [45%](#) of Latinos have limited skill at understanding and manipulating numbers compared to 20% of non-Hispanic whites. By contrast, a well-designed FOPL system uses clear graphics to effectively communicate key information to all. Providing usable information in this way [changes](#) families' food choices to improve health. It also gives consumers new, healthy options as food companies develop and market healthier products to Latinos and people in low-income communities. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is currently developing a FOPL proposal, which must be structured to meet Latinos' needs.
- 5. Extend SNAP to American citizens who live in Puerto Rico.** Instead of SNAP, Americans who live in Puerto Rico qualify for an underfunded nutrition block grant program that provides [41% less](#) help than SNAP offers to people who live in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands and Guam. Puerto Ricans are American citizens, yet they experience more widespread hunger and poverty because SNAP is denied them. It is time to end this inequity.

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