



Report:
Food Insecurity in Southern Arizona
Among Older Adults

Needs Analysis for the Services Provided by
Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona

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Executive Summary

Following the financial crisis brought on by the Great Recession of 2007, food insecurity among older adults rose significantly, from roughly 18.9 million or 6.3% of older adults, to over 7.1%. This percentage has held consistent since 2007, meaning that today there are more than 36 million adults over the age of 50 who are food insecure.

What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity is when a person is unable to attain sufficient nutritious food for themselves or household. Reasons they may not be able to acquire enough food include:

- Unable to afford food due to low income or rising costs
- Physical limitations that prevent them from shopping for themselves
- Lack of family or local support

Overview of National Statistics for Food Insecurity

Nutrient Intake

Older adults who are food insecure tend to consume less essential nutrients and vitamins. Of the 11 nutrients included in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 3 were particularly noteworthy among seniors (age 62 and older).

- Seniors report consuming 8.5% fewer calories (energy intake)
- Seniors consume 9.2% less protein
- Seniors consume 9.7% less calcium
- Seniors consume 13.3% less iron

Physical Health

Significant health effects due to lack of nutritious food was also evident among those surveyed.

- 56% more likely to be in poor health (only 19% reported being in good health)
- 2 times more likely to suffer heart failure
- 64% more likely to suffer from asthma
- 61% more likely for gum disease
- 74% more likely to be diabetic

Mental Health

In addition to the severe health consequences due to lack of nutrients, there was a measurable difference in the state of mental health for food insecure adults.

- More than twice as likely to have limitations performing activities of daily living
- 2-3 times more likely to struggle with depression

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Overview of Food Insecurity in Southern Arizona

Due to our demographics, Arizona is a critical state for providing services to the elderly. In Arizona, there are an estimated 204,030 adults, age 50 or older, who are food insecure.

In Tucson

- Population over 50: 169,055
- Adults 50 and older who are food insecure: 7,744*

In Pima County:

- Population over 50: 405,006
- Adults 50 and older who are food insecure: 31,746*

In Southern Arizona:

- Population over 50: 729,042
- Adults 50 and older who are food insecure: 57,019*

* *Estimates are based on national averages (FeedingAmerica.org, 2021)*

Outlook for Southern Arizona

Arizona, in terms of population, was the third fastest growing state in the United States (Schwarz, 2021), increasing by 1.7% from 2021-2022 (US Census, 2020). This growth is especially evident among the 65 and older population, which has been Arizona's fastest growing demographic since 2010 (Arizona Is Getting Older. . . But so Is the U.S. – Arizona's Economy, 2020). With the recent pandemic, an aging population, and the current economic pressures, it is possible that we could see the first significant increase in food insecurity among older adults in nearly 15 years.

While the future is not certain, anecdotal evidence based on conversations with our clients is that the need for support and services provided by Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona is growing. Rising costs of living, including housing, rents, food, and gas, have significantly impacted the clientele we serve, especially those living on a fixed income. Mobile Meals of Southern Arizona's mission to deliver meals, provide comfort, and nourish friends, is a critical component of caring for Southern Arizona's older adult population.

We depend and count on the support and generosity of individuals and organizations to make our mission possible.

National Food Insecurity Among Adults Ages 50-59

- This is a growing segment of concern
- 31,529,906 are food insecure (9.5% of people ages 50-59; 1 in 11)

(Gundersen & Ziliak, 2021)

Nutrient Intake of Food Insecure Adults Ages 50-59

- Consumption of 11 essential nutrients was included in the survey
- For 8 of these nutrients, food insecure individuals have a significantly lower intake
- Especially in the areas of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, and iron

(Gundersen & Ziliak, 2021)

Physical Health of Food Insecure Adults Ages 50-59

- 56% more likely to be in poor health
- Only 19% of food insecure individuals report being in good health
- 2 times more likely to suffer from heart failure
- 64% more likely to suffer from asthma
- 61% more likely to have gum disease

Note: Married couples tend to fare worse than those who are single, divorced, or widowed.

(Gundersen & Ziliak, 2021)

Mental Health of Food Insecure Adults Ages 50-59

- More than twice as likely to suffer limitations performing activities of daily living (ADL)
- 200% more likely to suffer from depression

(Gundersen & Ziliak, 2021)

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National Food Insecurity Among Seniors (Age 62 and above)

- 5.2 million seniors are food insecure (7.1% of seniors; 1 in 14)
- There was a significant increase in senior food insecurity in the Great Recession
- Before the Great Recession (2007) 6.3% of seniors were food insecure
- Since then, levels have held consistent

(Gundersen & Ziliak, 2021)

Nutrient Intake for Seniors Who Are Food Insecure

- 8.5% fewer calories consumed (energy intake)
- 9.2% lower in protein
- 9.7% lower in calcium
- 13.3% lower in iron

(Ziliak & Gundersen, 2021)

Physical Health of Seniors Who Are Food Insecure

- 74% more likely to be diabetic
- 19% more likely to have high blood pressure
- 71% more likely to have congestive heart failure
- 64% more likely to have a heart attack
- 89% more likely to have gum disease
- 78% more likely to have asthma

Overall, seniors who are food insecure are more than twice as likely to report poor health.

(Ziliak & Gundersen, 2021)

Mental Health of Seniors Who Are Food Insecure

- 20% more likely to struggle with regular daily tasks (Activities of Daily Living or ADL)
- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression
- Surveyed daily, food insecure seniors report on average 3 days more a month of depression or poor mental health

(Ziliak & Gundersen, 2021)

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Food Insecurity in Arizona

- Populations based on US 2020 Census as reported on censusreporter.org
- Food insecurity estimates from 2016 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey and the State of Senior Hunger in America published Aug. 2021 by FeedingAmerica.org

Arizona (median age: 37.9)

Population	7,174,064		
Persons age 50-59	860,888	12.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	81,784	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	1,721,775	24.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	122,246	7.1%	*

Population over 50	2,582,663	36.0%	<i>of state population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	204,030	2.8%	<i>of state population</i>

Tucson (median age: 34)

Population	545,340		
Persons age 50-59	59,987	11.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	5,699	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	109,068	20.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	7,744	7.1%	*

Population over 50	169,055	31.0%	<i>of city population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	13,443	2.5%	<i>of city population</i>

Southern Arizona (median age: 37.3) - totals are of counties included below

Population	1,918,771		
Persons age 50-59	219,042	11.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	20,809	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	510,000	23.9%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	36,210	7.1%	*

Population over 50	729,042	38.0%	<i>of So. AZ population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	57,019	3.0%	<i>of So. AZ population</i>

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Southern Arizona by County

Cochise County (median age: 41)

Population	126,442		
Persons age 50-59	13,909	11.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	1,321	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	37,933	30.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	2,693	7.1%	*

Population over 50	51,841	41.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	4,015	3.2%	<i>of county population</i>

Pima County (median age: 38.7)

Population	1,038,476		
Persons age 50-59	124,617	12.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	11,839	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	280,389	27.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	19,908	7.1%	*

Population over 50	405,006	39.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	31,746	3.1%	<i>of county population</i>

Pinal County (median age: 39.8)

Population	447,559		
Persons age 50-59	49,231	11.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	4,677	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	120,841	27.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	8,580	7.1%	*

Population over 50	170,072	38.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	13,257	3.0%	<i>of county population</i>

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Greenlee County (median age: 35.7)

Population	9,465		
Persons age 50-59	1,136	12.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	108	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	1,514	16.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	108	7.1%	*

Population over 50	2,650	28.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	215	2.3%	<i>of county population</i>

Graham County (median age: 33.7)

Population	38,304		
Persons age 50-59	3,830	10.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	364	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	7,278	19.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	517	7.1%	*

Population over 50	11,108	29.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	881	2.3%	<i>of county population</i>

Santa Cruz County (median age: 37.2)

Population	46,594		
Persons age 50-59	5,125	11.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	487	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	11,183	24.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	794	7.1%	*

Population over 50	16,308	35.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	1,281	2.7%	<i>of county population</i>

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Yuma County (median age: 34.8)

Population	211,931		
Persons age 50-59	21,193	10.0%	
Food insecure persons age 50-59	2,013	9.5%	*
Persons age 60 and older	50,863	24.0%	
Food insecure persons age 60 and older	3,611	7.1%	*

Population over 50	72,057	34.0%	<i>of county population</i>
Adults over 50 who are food insecure	5,625	2.7%	<i>of county population</i>

* Percentages of food insecurity (9.5% for adults 50-59, and 7.1% for adults 65 and older) are based on national averages (FeedingAmerica.org, 2021).

General population statistics (Census Reporter, 2020)

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