

The Healthcare Costs of Food Insecurity

Exploring Geographic Variation by State and County

Each year, millions of Americans experience food insecurity - uncertain access to adequate food due to a lack of financial resources. On average, food-insecure individuals have higher overall healthcare costs when compared to food-secure individuals, likely due to the fact that food insecurity is associated with higher incidence of chronic disease including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, kidney disease, and depression.

While the high healthcare costs associated with food insecurity have been documented, this study demonstrates the substantial variation in those costs by state and county.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODS

To explore the geographic variations of healthcare costs linked to food insecurity, Feeding America partnered with research experts to generate estimates of these additional costs at the state and county levels using 2016 data from Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap*¹ study and other national datasets. The researchers have published the results in *Preventing Chronic Disease*², and Feeding America then created a [data visualization tool](#) to allow for deeper exploration of the information.

The estimates displayed reflect the additional healthcare costs resulting from food insecurity when compared to the costs incurred by food-secure adults. These costs include payments made by private insurers, Medicaid, Medicare, and other sources for clinic visits, emergency department visits, inpatient hospitalizations, prescription medications, and durable medical equipment.³

KEY FINDINGS

Additional annual healthcare costs associated with food insecurity, by level

LEVEL	ANNUAL TOTAL	LOW	HIGH
STATE	\$687 million [†]	\$57.6 million in North Dakota	\$7.2 billion in California
COUNTY	\$4.4 million [†]	\$29,813 in San Juan County, CO	\$2.3 billion in Los Angeles County, CA
ADULT	\$1,834 ^{††}	\$1,395 in Hawaii	\$2,083 in New Jersey

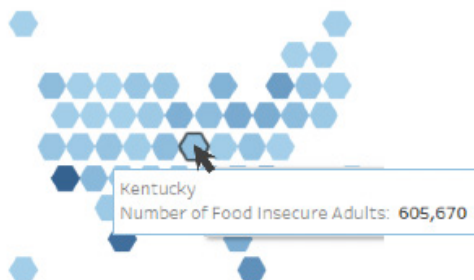
Notes: [†] The state and county level estimates represent the median annual total.

^{††} The adult estimate represents the adult per capita mean annual total.

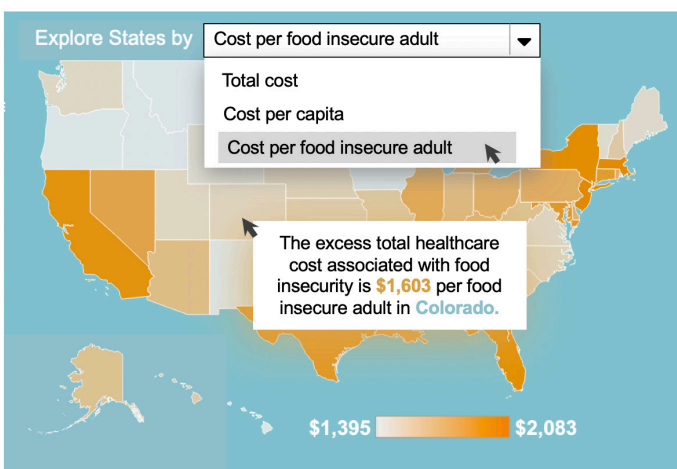
The geographic variation observed is due in part to differences in healthcare service pricing and intensity of health care use, but the primary driver of these differences is the number of food-insecure adults.

TO USE THE DASHBOARD, VISIT tinyurl.com/FeedingAmerica-HealthcareCosts AND FOLLOW THREE STEPS:

1 Hover over the shapes to see the number of food-insecure adults in each state



2 Toggle between total cost, cost per capita, or cost per food-insecure adult to see the impact of food insecurity on healthcare costs

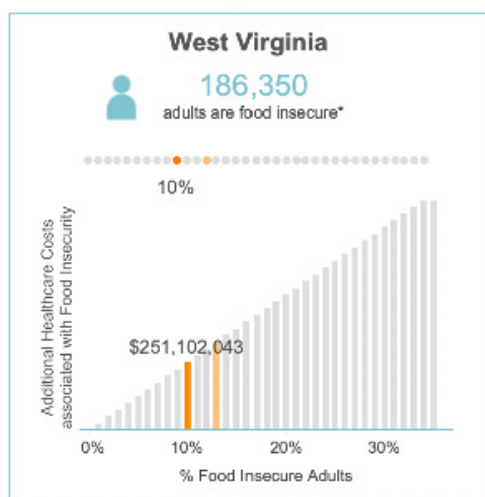



3 Use the slider to see how changes in the food insecurity rate affect healthcare costs at the state and county level

A Select a State

B Select a County

C Change the food-insecurity rate to see how healthcare costs will change:



CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Food insecurity is associated with higher healthcare costs across the U.S. and these costs vary widely by geography, suggesting that food security policies and practices at the state and local level can be leveraged to improve health and associated healthcare costs. There is great potential for the healthcare sector, community-based organizations, and the charitable food assistance sector to partner in reducing food insecurity in the United States, leading to improved health outcomes for low-income individuals and lower healthcare costs throughout the country.

Sources

For more information, email Research@FeedingAmerica.org

¹ Feeding America (2018). Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016. Available at: feedingamerica.org

² Berkowitz, S.A., Basu, S., Gundersen, C. & Seligman, H.K., (2019). State-Level and County-Level Estimates of Health Care Costs Associated with Food Insecurity. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 16:18549. Available at: cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2019/18_0549.htm

³ Berkowitz, S.A., Basu, S., Meigs, J.B. & Seligman, H.K., (2018). Food insecurity and health care expenditures in the United States, 2011–2013. *Health Serv Res*, 53(3), 1600–1620.