

Elevating Voices:  
Insights Report

# Executive Summary

2023

ENDING HUNGER TOGETHER



FEEDING  
AMERICA

# Ending Hunger Together

While there has been some progress since the pandemic peak on levels of food insecurity, the reality for tens of millions of people in this country is that hunger remains an urgent crisis. Approximately 1 in 6 people in the U.S.—49 million people—turned to charitable food assistance for support in 2022. They are the real experts on how to end hunger and their voices must be at the table when designing solutions.

For the second year, Feeding America sought input from people facing hunger across the country to better understand their experiences and to have their insights inform policy recommendations to end hunger now and forever.

Feeding America’s 2023 *Elevating Voices: Insights Report* was generated from a nationally representative survey of more than 1,000 people who have received charitable food assistance and/or experienced food insecurity in the past two years. Additionally, we gathered further firsthand context and accounts from neighbors at the first-ever [Elevating Voices: Power Summit](#)—a forum co-created with people with lived experience of food insecurity for them to hear from, learn from and forge community with each other, and to share their informed views directly with federal policymakers.

America can choose to end hunger. It will take all of us together, and with the lived expertise of our neighbors—some of which is summarized in this report—we know how. Or we can choose to let hunger persist. The collective efforts of many across public and private sectors helped make some

progress against unprecedented levels of need during the height of the pandemic, but we can and must do more—and do it together.



“The experience of living with food insecurity, it’s embarrassing, it’s hurtful, it makes you feel less than a mom when you can’t feed your children. It takes a lot out of you to have to go and ask for help to be able to feed your children, and, another thing about food insecurity is that people may not always look like you’d think they would look if they’re food insecure. They might be well-dressed, they might be well-spoken, they may even be educated, but they can still be experiencing food insecurity.”

— Keisha Williams, Oklahoma

Neighbors reported seeking support in several different areas, which the report uses to categorize neighbor insights and Feeding America’s resulting policy recommendations:

## Prioritizing Dignity

Everyone deserves dignified access to food. Neighbors are overwhelmingly looking for policymakers to dismantle barriers to government programs—technological, bureaucratic and otherwise—to facilitate better, faster and more comprehensive access to food assistance in ways that reduce stigma. Almost all (92%) of neighbors said that if Congress passes policies to reduce hunger, it’s important that these policies make it easier for children and adults to qualify and enroll in food assistance programs when they need help.

## Increasing Access

Similar to last year, neighbor insights reinforce that getting healthy foods remains a significant challenge. Neighbors also reiterated that food insecurity is connected to many other issues, such as cost of living, housing and health care. To promote equitable food access across race, geography and background, neighbors said decision-makers must invest in policies that make it easier for everyone to receive food assistance and access locations where food is readily available. One in three neighbors identified access to grocery stores (31%), food banks (31%) and food assistance (29%) as factors impacting food insecurity.

## Expanding Opportunity

Food security is directly tied to economic well-being, and the majority of neighbors (67%) said inflation and rising food costs are factors impacting food insecurity. Neighbors also cited a number of other issues that impact hunger in America, including high cost of rent or buying a home (55%), losing a job and being unemployed (44%), too many low-wage jobs (42%) and having a chronic health condition or disability (32%). Neighbors recommended lawmakers address all the factors that impact hunger, further demonstrating that it will take more than food to end hunger in America. It requires economic security for all.

## Improving Health

The majority of neighbors (93%) agreed that “food is medicine” and reminded us that the movement to end hunger must be rooted in improving access to nutritious food choices that meet dietary needs and prevent and manage diet-related diseases. Neighbor insights reminded us that people should have access to fresh, healthy foods that boost physical, emotional, and mental well-being without having to sacrifice necessities like medications or doctors’ appointments. More than a third (39%) of neighbors highlighted that they want to eat healthier but can’t afford it now.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The movement to end hunger in the U.S. can succeed when all of society, from policymakers to the private and nonprofit sectors, local institutions like schools and churches, communities and citizens, work together alongside our neighbors to create anti-hunger policies and programs. As Congress continues to negotiate the 2023 Farm Bill and other legislation that will impact hunger in our country for years to come, we must ground our work in the following neighbor-informed policy recommendations.

- Congress should set SNAP benefits at an adequate level to ensure individuals and families can purchase enough nutritious foods.
- The USDA, including through its work with states, should reduce barriers to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) eligibility by making it easier for working families to receive TEFAP foods and reducing paperwork requirements for food banks and neighbors receiving TEFAP foods.
- Congress should increase funding for TEFAP for food purchases and storage and distribution costs through the 2023 Farm Bill.
- Congress should improve and simplify access to the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program by allowing more schools to offer free meals to all students by expanding community eligibility and increasing opportunities to directly certify children for free meals.
- Congress should adequately fund and improve state employment and training programs, ensure SNAP recipients are offered training opportunities that align with best practices and remove the time limit on SNAP benefits to support participants as they find work.



- Congress should improve the SNAP benefit-taper structure to reduce the “benefits cliff.” Raising income thresholds to phase out benefits more gradually, as individuals receiving SNAP benefits begin to earn more income, will provide people with more stability on the path toward self-sufficiency.
- Congress should support and fund produce prescription initiatives through U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) programs. Produce prescription programs allow physicians to immediately provide patients with diet-related diseases—as well as people facing hunger—with fresh produce and other nutritious foods to improve these patients’ health.
- Congress should support and provide funding for food pantries located in health care settings. These pantries help medical staff immediately provide healthy food to patients facing hunger who are also at risk of readmission for nutrition-related reasons.

These are highlights from the 2023 *Elevating Voices: Insights Report*. To read the full report, please visit [FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices](https://FeedingAmerica.org/ElevatingVoices).

## Elevating Voices Platform Overview

Elevating Voices is Feeding America’s platform for consistently engaging with and amplifying the experiences and expertise of neighbors and advancing new understandings, ideas and narratives informed by the people closest to the issue of hunger. The platform currently comprises the annual *Insights Report* and the Elevating Voices: Power Summit. Pictures in this report were gathered at the Power Summit.



### About Feeding America

Feeding America is committed to an America where no one is hungry. We support tens of millions of people who experience food insecurity to get the food and resources they say they need to thrive as part of a nationwide network of food banks, statewide food bank associations, food pantries and meal programs. We also invest in innovative solutions to increase equitable access to nutritious food, advocate for legislation that improves food security and work to address factors that impact food security, such as housing, health, cost of living, and employment.

We partner with people experiencing food insecurity, policymakers, organizations and supporters united with them in a movement to end hunger. Visit [FeedingAmerica.org](https://FeedingAmerica.org) to learn more.