

NEW JERSEY FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE



What Is the New Jersey Food Security Initiative?

Led by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the New Jersey Food Security Initiative (NJFSI) is a three-year cross-sector, collaborative, community-centered effort to increase food security and good nutrition, and advance health equity, in New Jersey.

NJFSI aims to increase food security, equitable access to healthier food options, and community purchasing power in New Jersey through enhanced infrastructure, coordination across systems, advocacy, and leveraging of federal, state, and local resources, assets, and opportunities. NJFSI seeks to support and uplift existing initiatives and collaborations across New Jersey by providing additional funding opportunities, capacity-building, resources, and technical assistance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

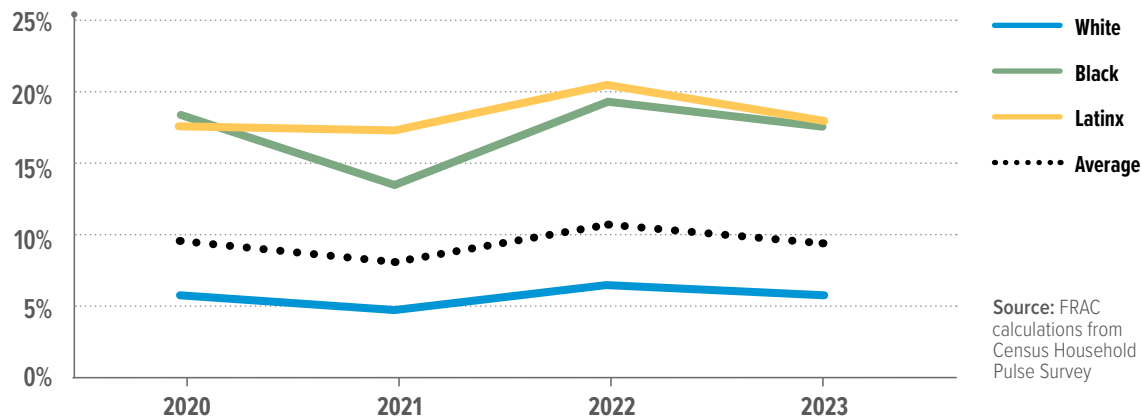
JACKIE BAVARO, Program Manager
NJ Food Security Initiative

Email: JBAVARO@FRAC.ORG | Cell: 908-670-2477

Food Insecurity in New Jersey

Food insecurity is a significant social determinant of health that affects far too many people in New Jersey. In 2023, one in 10 households have experienced food insufficiency, a measure similar to food insecurity that means households sometimes or often did not have enough to eat.¹ Food insecurity and insufficiency have serious health repercussions across the lifespan, negatively impacting the ability of children to develop and learn, as well as fueling harmful and chronic health conditions, costing New Jersey an estimated \$1.3 billion each year. A mass of research provides evidence that food insecurity is associated with costly chronic diseases and unfavorable health outcomes, including diabetes; hypertension; poor mental health; poor birth outcomes such as low birth weight; iron deficiency; cost-related medication underuse; and increased health care utilization and costs.

Rates of Food Insufficiency in New Jersey



Source: FRAC calculations from Census Household Pulse Survey

There are stark disparities that exist within the state that must be addressed to create an equitable opportunity for good health for all. In 2023, Black and Latinx households have reported food insufficiency at more than twice the rate of white households. Community disinvestment and systems of oppression, like systemic racism, result in disproportionate burdens of food insecurity in New Jersey along geographic lines and by race and ethnicity.

¹ Estimates were generated using data from weeks 53–61 (Jan–Sept 2023) of the Census Household Pulse Survey. Survey weights were used to generate representative estimates and were divided by 9 to adjust for pooling data together across multiple weeks.

A Path Forward

In response to the significant issue of food insecurity and the opportunity costs of not comprehensively addressing it, RWJF and FRAC embarked on an assessment of the landscape of hunger and its solutions in New Jersey. The final report, *Hunger and Its Solutions in New Jersey: Landscape Analysis of Current Initiatives, Recommended Action, and Emerging Opportunities for Further Investment*, outlines key policies, systems changes, cross-sector outreach, and programmatic initiatives to be implemented in the next three years to create more equitable and accessible food access across New Jersey.

NJFSI GOALS

Through cross-sectoral partnership engagement, grant-making, and technical assistance offerings, NJFSI aims to:

- ▶ Enhance cross-sector coordination.
- ▶ Expand community outreach.
- ▶ Maximize equitable food purchasing power and procurement systems.
- ▶ Build infrastructure necessary to leverage policy and program opportunities.

NJFSI FOCUS AREAS

To achieve increased food security, equitable access to healthier food options, and community purchasing power in New Jersey, NJFSI activities will prioritize the support of:

- ▶ Streamlined state/local benefits outreach, application, and recertification practices and processes that enhance customer service, increase accountability to residents, and improve community purchasing power.
- ▶ Enhanced benefits infrastructure, coordination, and data sharing in interagency/state systems.
- ▶ Increased equitable food access and food security through policies, systems, and environmental changes.
- ▶ Enhanced equitable implementation of current federal/state/county anti-hunger policies that center equitable food access and food security.

NJFSI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NJFSI will provide responsive technical assistance to grantees and partners across New Jersey to improve community health and advance health equity. Technical assistance and training can increase organizational capacity and enable communities to plan and implement interventions and programming that reflect their lived experience, needs, goals, and vision. NJFSI technical assistance activities include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Needs assessment, policy analysis, and data use.
- ▶ Direct technical assistance and connection to experts and expert resources.
- ▶ Community engagement and strategic partnership networks.
- ▶ Assistance in applying for federal implementation grants.
- ▶ Implementation of best practices.
- ▶ Quality improvement activities to improve population health.
- ▶ Trauma-informed and community-informed approaches.

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM



Food Research & Action Center

FRAC improves the nutrition, health, and well-being of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. For more information, go to frac.org.



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

For more than 50 years, RWJF has worked to improve health and health care. RWJF works with others to build a national Culture of Health enabling everyone in America to live longer, healthier lives. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.



The Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN)

GSCN is a nonprofit research institute providing expertise in measurement and evaluation to help develop, enhance, and expand programs focused on healthy eating and active living, improving food security and healthy food access, and promoting local food systems. GSCN is a remote team geographically dispersed throughout the U.S., with strong roots in Omaha, Nebraska. For more information on GSCN, visit www.centerfornutrition.org.

Community Partners

NJFSI is a collaboration across New Jersey communities and partners. To ensure NJFSI efforts are community-based, NJFSI has convened an Advisory Committee to provide feedback and strategic direction on initiative implementation updates, plans, and evaluation, including helping to directly plan specific NJFSI deliverables such as requests for proposals and technical assistance materials. The Advisory Committee is a diverse group of partners comprised of leaders of state-level and grassroots organizations with research, policy advocacy, and lived experience with hunger and poverty in New Jersey, and residents/community advisors of grassroots/community-based organizations.

