

Food & Nutrition

FACT SHEET - FOOD & NUTRITION

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Sufficient and nutritious food is important because it can improve health and be a factor in preventing disease. Good nutrition contributes to lower infant mortality, better health for people of all ages, and improvement in school performance for both children and adults.

Poor nutrition has been linked in low-income populations to increased rates of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Low-income people, including elderly people on fixed incomes, spend a greater percentage of their resources on necessities such as food, but often live in places where fresh nutritious food is not readily available.

As part of the 2009 Community Needs Evaluation, 1,736 people in Nashville (including clients of DHS, Catholic Charities, MAC, MSS, etc.) and 627 social service professionals were surveyed, and more than 100 consumers participated in focus groups, to help identify the greatest needs in Nashville. In addition, research findings from existing data were included about the areas of Food & Nutrition, Workforce & Economic Opportunity, Housing & Related Assistance, Home & Community Based Services and Transportation.

Key Findings

Community food security is a condition in which all community members are able to consume a fresh, local, healthy diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice. An increasing number of households in the nation, Tennessee, and Davidson County are experiencing food *insecurity* (some for the first time) and now rely on outside sources for assistance.

General food insecurity is increasing in Davidson County, causing some residents to seek food assistance who have never before done so. Some studies show that as many as 40% have reported often skipping meals or worrying about food.

Tennessee has the seventh-highest rate of child food insecurity in the nation. The *Child Food Insecurity in the United States 2005 – 2007* (sponsored by the ConAgra Foundation), reported that more than 20% of all children in Tennessee live in food-insecure households, which means they do not always know where they will find their next meal.

An increasing number of households in Davidson County, including those with wage earners, are experiencing food insecurity (some for the first time) and are relying on outside sources for assistance.

Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee conducted a survey that found that people living in urban Nashville had an 80%-90% rate of access to tobacco and alcohol products, compared to only a 25% rate of access to fresh produce.

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In Davidson County, many low-income families live in “food deserts,” where nutritious food is not available. In many low-income areas, families have much greater access to tobacco and alcohol in small corner markets than they have to grocery stores with fresh food and vegetables.

The cost of food is increasing, making it even more difficult for families in poverty.

Following the economic downturn, calls to 2-1-1 (Nashville’s community resource hotline) have reached record call volume. In February 2008, total calls increased 35%, while calls about resources for food were up 90%. The chart shows that calls to 2-1-1 about Food+Food Stamps combined were highest in frequency.

The all-food Consumer Price Index increased 5.5% between 2007 and 2008 (the highest annual increase since 1990). The cost of food is expected to continue to rise at least through 2015.

In *Families’ Food Stamp Benefits Purchase Less Food Each Year*, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities indicated that the purchasing power of most households’ food stamp benefits is eroding in value each year. It projected that by 2017, the food stamp value received in a year by a typical working parent of two will be less than current value by more than one and a half months’ worth.

The annual U.S. Conference of Mayor’s Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness for 2008 noted that Nashville has seen a 13% increase in emergency food assistance requests and a 40% decrease in the total quantity of food distributed. Nashville reported an increase both in the number of persons requesting food assistance for the first time and in the frequency of persons visiting food pantries or emergency kitchens each month. The survey estimates that 40% of the overall demand for emergency food assistance in the Nashville area during the past year went unmet.

Formerly known as the federal Food Stamp Program, USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) focuses on nutrition and on putting healthy food within reach for low-income households. Nationwide, it puts healthy food on the table for 28 million people each month. More than half of Davidson County’s households with children under age 18 (59%) and almost 20% of households with someone over age 60 receive food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

The Women-Infants-Children Program provides food assistance to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. Approximately 20% of the children in Davidson County are eligible to receive food assistance through this program, and in 2006, 10,047 of Nashville’s children participated in the program.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program, established in 1948, that provides low-cost or free nutritionally balanced lunches to children each school day. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals, and those with incomes 130-185% of poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals (no more than 40 cents).

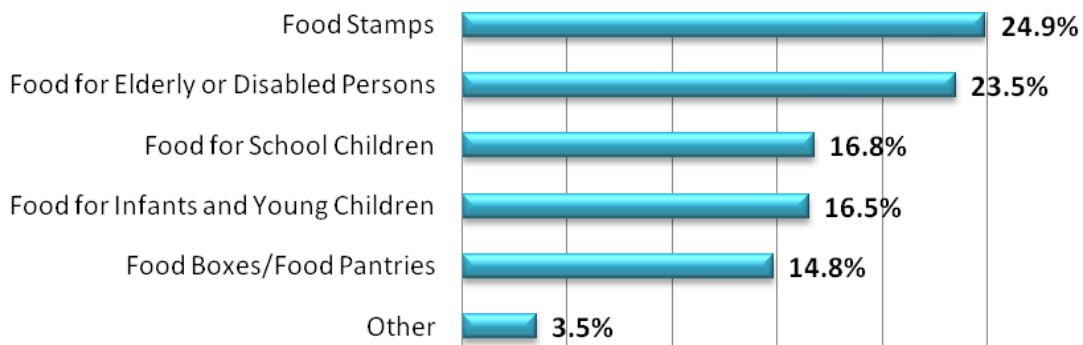
According to Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, in school year 2008-2009, out of more than 75,000 students, 72% of the students qualified for free- and reduced-price school lunches (compared to 39.1% in 2002). Children spend the majority of their waking hours at school and many eat breakfast, lunch, and snacks at school, consuming at least 35%-50% of their daily caloric intake there.

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Grassroots Community Survey participants most frequently identified Food Stamps as the greatest need (24.9%), with Food for Elderly or Disabled Persons a close second (23.5%). Many comments from participants related to the need for healthy/fresh foods and the need for additional food sources for low-income, elderly, and/or disabled persons.

Greatest Need in Food & Nutrition

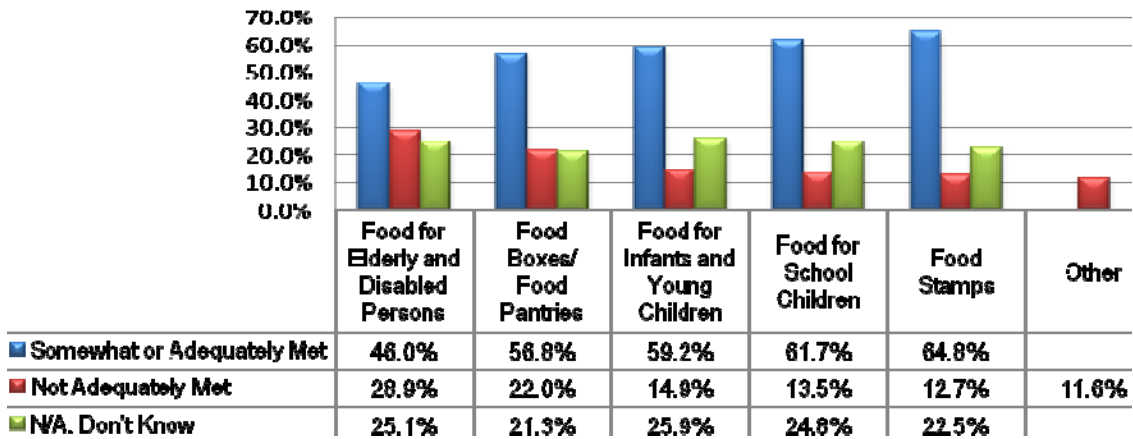
Grassroots Community Survey



Professional/Agency Survey participants identified Food for Elderly and Disabled Persons as the highest category Not Adequately Met (28.9%), which was second-highest in the Grassroots Community. In contrast, most respondents to the Professional/Agency Survey indicated that the need for Food Stamps was Somewhat or Adequately met (64.8%). Comments indicated the need for increasing the affordability of fresh food for low-income persons and related issues.

Greatest Needs in Food & Nutrition

Professional/Agency Survey

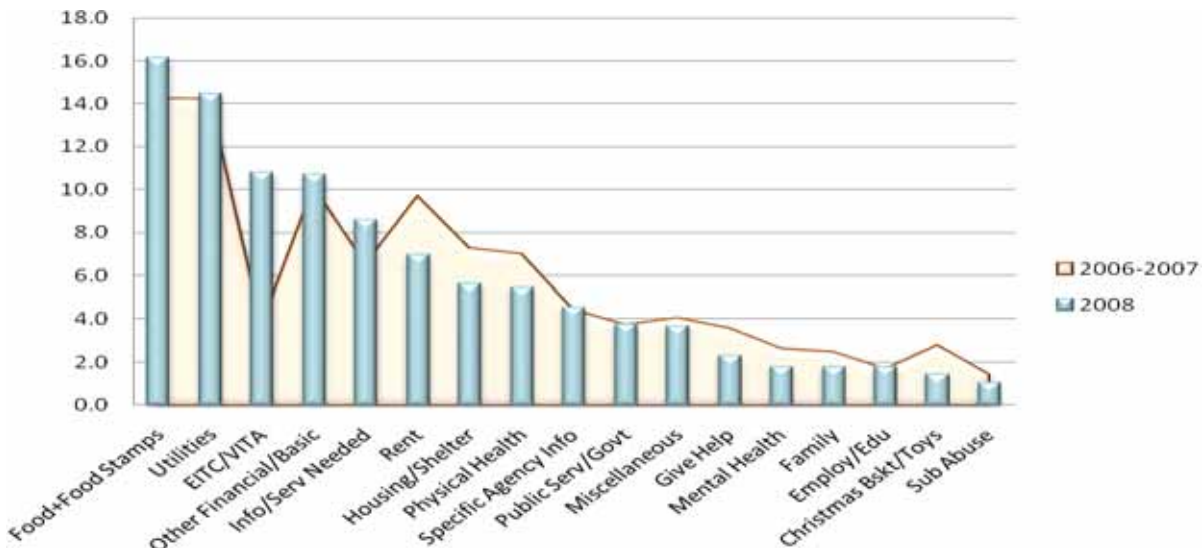


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Focus Group comments included:

- There is a need for better quality and more fresh food for children, in schools and after-school programs, and from food programs and food banks. They noted that low-quality food is not suited to people with special dietary needs, such as diabetics, and that food to meet special dietary needs is often unavailable.
- Elderly and disabled people should have priority for food programs and food stamps.
- Transportation is a barrier in accessing food sources and in carrying groceries home.
- Food stamp amounts are not sufficient for those with special diets, disabilities, or low-income jobs (suggesting that the benefit scale may need revision).
- “We should set up and target the elderly more with Food Stamps.”
- Poor service, long waits, and complicated requirements for food stamps and other food resource
- Food banks offer unhealthy selection of foods
- Need for documentation of legal status at food banks and programs
- Unhealthy food of low quality served in schools

Calls to 2-1-1 for Categories Over 1% of Calls, Ranked by Percentage
2006-2007, 2008



For additional information, please see the 2009 Community Needs Evaluation at:
<http://www.nashville.gov/sservices/docs/2009CNER.pdf>