

A decade later, older Americans are still going hungry

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Hunger does not respect age. A recent report comparing data from 2007 to 2015 finds 5.4 million people age 60 or older in the U.S., or 8.1 percent, are food insecure. Although this percentage went down from 2014 to 2015, it's still unacceptable, according to a University of Illinois economist.

"After six consecutive years of increased hunger in seniors since the Great Recession began, the slight drop in 2014 is good news, but not good enough," says Craig Gundersen, who coauthored the report. "And it's important to remember that the decrease is in hunger on the national scale. Some individual states saw an increase."

The report identifies the top 10 states in terms of [senior food insecurity](#) rates. "Seven of those 10 states are in the South, plus New Mexico, New York, and Indiana," Gundersen says. The report states that when seniors who experience marginal food security are included, the rates vary from 6.1 percent in North Dakota to 24.3 percent in Mississippi.

Gundersen says seniors who reported a disability were disproportionately affected, with 25 percent reporting food insecurity and an additional 13 percent reporting marginal food security.

"Food insecurity is known to adversely affect a person's health, and the implications can be particularly problematic for seniors," Gundersen says. "Compared to food-secure seniors, food-insecure seniors consume fewer calories, vitamins, and other key nutrients. They are also more

likely to experience negative health conditions, including depression, asthma, and chest pain."

Gundersen says the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) has been demonstrated to reduce [food insecurity](#). He recommends that policymakers and program administrators pursue efforts to increase participation in SNAP, with a particular emphasis on older adults.

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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