

# Many disabled Americans and single parents face hunger

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Many Americans went hungry in 2021, including disproportionate

numbers of people with disabilities and single parents, a new government report shows.

Experts are concerned that things may have only gotten worse.

"These data likely do not reflect what is going on currently as pandemic programs end and inflation is affecting [food prices](#)," explained [Linda Wilbrecht](#), a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley.

"In 2023, we should be concerned by other indicators that suggest a growing number of households are experiencing [food insecurity](#) and be especially concerned about households with children," said Wilbrecht, who has no ties to the new report.

In the study, 33.8 million Americans had trouble putting [food](#) on the table in 2021. Single parents were more likely to be hit by [food shortages](#), and adults with disabilities were three times more likely to live in households where there wasn't enough food to go around, according to the latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There were also disparities in the ability to put food on the table seen by race, with Hispanic and Black adults more likely to report trouble feeding themselves and their families. Women were also more likely than men to report food shortages.

"Since access to sufficient and [nutritious food](#) is a key social determinant of health, disparities in family food [insecurity](#) may contribute to inequalities in [health status](#)," said study author [Julie Weeks](#), a demographer with the CDC. "Research on the mechanisms that result in disparities in family food insecurity may help target interventions to reduce these disparities and promote positive health outcomes."

Going without food and proper nourishment has health consequences, added Wilbrecht.

"Even transient experience of food insecurity during development can have lasting effects on learning, decision-making, brain function, and increase adult body weight," she said.

The study revealed that women, communities of color, people living with disabilities and single-parent households are facing more burdens feeding their families and themselves, said [Kayla de la Haye](#), an associate professor of population and public health sciences at the University of Southern California. She was not part of the study.

Exactly how bleak the situation might be now is unclear.

"At a national level, the United States Department of Agriculture reported that food insecurity rates did not change significantly between 2019, 2021 and 2022, but some local studies did document spikes in food insecurity, especially in April and May 2020, that paralleled the long lines we saw at food banks and pantries," de la Haye said.

Things got worse in 2022 as pandemic-era benefits started to expire and inflation prompted food costs to rise. "We're worried that food insecurity may continue to get worse in 2023 because of these same issues," she said.

There's lots to do to help put food on people's tables.

"The United States is capable of feeding all of its residents: It's not that our country is food insecure, rather there are certain people who experience a lot of barriers to ... having the food they need to live a [healthy life](#)," de la Haye said.

There is not one "silver bullet" solution. "To be successful, we have to tackle multiple challenges that are a part of our food systems, like reducing poverty so people can afford the food they need; strengthening programs like SNAP [[food stamps](#)]; making healthy food available, accessible and affordable for everyone; and making sure our food supply supports these goals," de la Haye said.

Everyone can do something, including urging policymakers to prioritize this issue. "We can always support our local [food banks](#), pantries, and food justice programs that are critical to helping people fill their food gaps, especially during a crisis," de la Haye noted.

**More information:** [Volunteer at a food bank near you](#) through Feeding America.

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