



Survey of Food Assistance Need in Marion County, Indiana  
Co-sponsored by City of Indianapolis  
February 2017  
Summary of Key Findings

**Survey Design**

Survey instrument very similar to study done in summer 2014.

- Increased oversample of those with a food need (No Need: n=126, Food Need: n=760)
- Added questions about why winter is a particular problem, what types of nutritious foods they lacked, and why they did not always eat nutritious meals
- Included web-based this time as well as phone

**Extent of Need for Food Assistance**

Marion County residents with a food need (defined as using food assistance and/or low food security score) essentially unchanged at 22% of residents (vs. 21% in 2014).

- 17% of residents had food needs which were fully met with assistance (Met Need)
- 5% of residents reported missing meals (Unmet Need) the prior week (vs. 6% in 2014) which equates to 47,000 people in a given week

**Meal Gap / Missed Meals**

The meal gap was estimated to be 5-6 million meals per year (vs. 9-10 million in 2014).

- On a base of approximately 150 million meals provided this represents 4% of demand
- This improvement was realized despite the loss of several million meals per year from a tightening of SNAP restrictions in 2015

Among those who missed meals, the average # declined to 3.3 meals/week (vs. 4.1 in 2014).

Families missing meals were distributed across incomes from deep poverty to > 185% of poverty level.

- A smaller percentage of people with a food need were in deep poverty than in 2014, and more were above the limits for Federal food assistance.

For those in deep poverty with unmet need, average missed meals per person was 5.3 meals/week.

Hispanics missed about the same numbers of meals as other ethnicities.

Half of households that missed meals included school aged children, but they missed fewer meals than households without school aged children.

## **Nutrition**

The number of missed meals, degree of food insecurity, and poorer nutrition are strongly associated.

Types of nutritious foods reported lacking were: fruits (78%), vegetables (70%), protein (42%), dairy (25%), whole grains (21%) (new question in 2017)

Reasons given for not always eating nutritious meals: (new question in 2017)

- Can't afford 80%
- Don't always have access 40%
- Lack time to prepare 25%
- Like comfort foods (10%), Children won't eat them (9%), Don't like them (3%)

## **Use of Food Assistance Services**

Most households in food need (83%) use 1-2 services (17% use 3 or more).

Nearly all senior households with unmet need were not receiving home delivered meals.

Only 6% of food need households consisted of seniors only.

- Senior only households were more likely to be using services

Substantially lower participation in SNAP was reported by people who were income eligible (vs 2014).

- Perceived lack of eligibility was by far the most common reason given for not applying.

Over one third are receiving food assistance from family or friends. (new question in 2017 survey)

The rate of WIC use was significantly higher among families below 130% of poverty, than for those between 130% and 185%.

Only ¼ of those with unmet need were using both SNAP and food pantries. 1/3 of them were using neither, similar to the finding in 2014.

The most common reasons cited by respondents for not using food pantries related to access (e.g. lack of transportation, limited hours of opening) and embarrassment about asking for assistance.

## **Seasonality of Food Need**

A much higher level of need in winter, and lack of difference between spring, summer and fall as seen in 2014 was confirmed in this study.

Reasons given for shortage in winter: (new question in 2017 survey)

- Other bills (e.g. utilities) are higher 88% of respondents
- Lower income from seasonal work 26%
- Access to reliable transportation more difficult 20%, Traveling to get food unsafe 10%