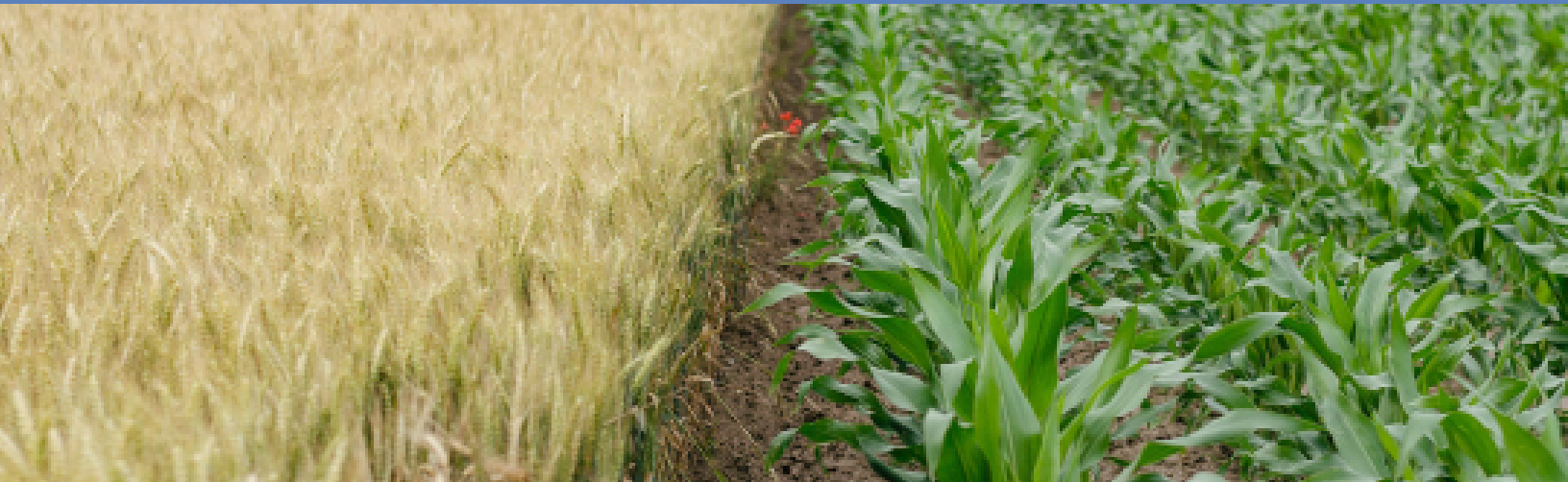

COVID-19 EQUITY SNAPSHOT

FOOD SECURITY AS EQUITY

APRIL 17, 2020



The Public Health Alliance of Southern California (Alliance) launched **“The COVID-19 Equity Snapshot”** to support our partners in advancing equity in response to COVID-19. The COVID-19 Equity Snapshot is meant to serve as a consistent, curated resource, aimed at elevating a few key in real time equity-focused resources, tools and best practices (both here in California and nationally).

This week’s snapshot will focus on one of the most critical emerging equity challenges we are facing as a result of COVID-19, food insecurity; specifically, the economic and racial inequities emerging for frontline workers responsible for ensuring we are fed. COVID-19 has changed America’s perception of what “essential” truly means. It’s an opportunity to advance equity for food insecure families, and workers who are part of the national effort to secure America’s health and safety.

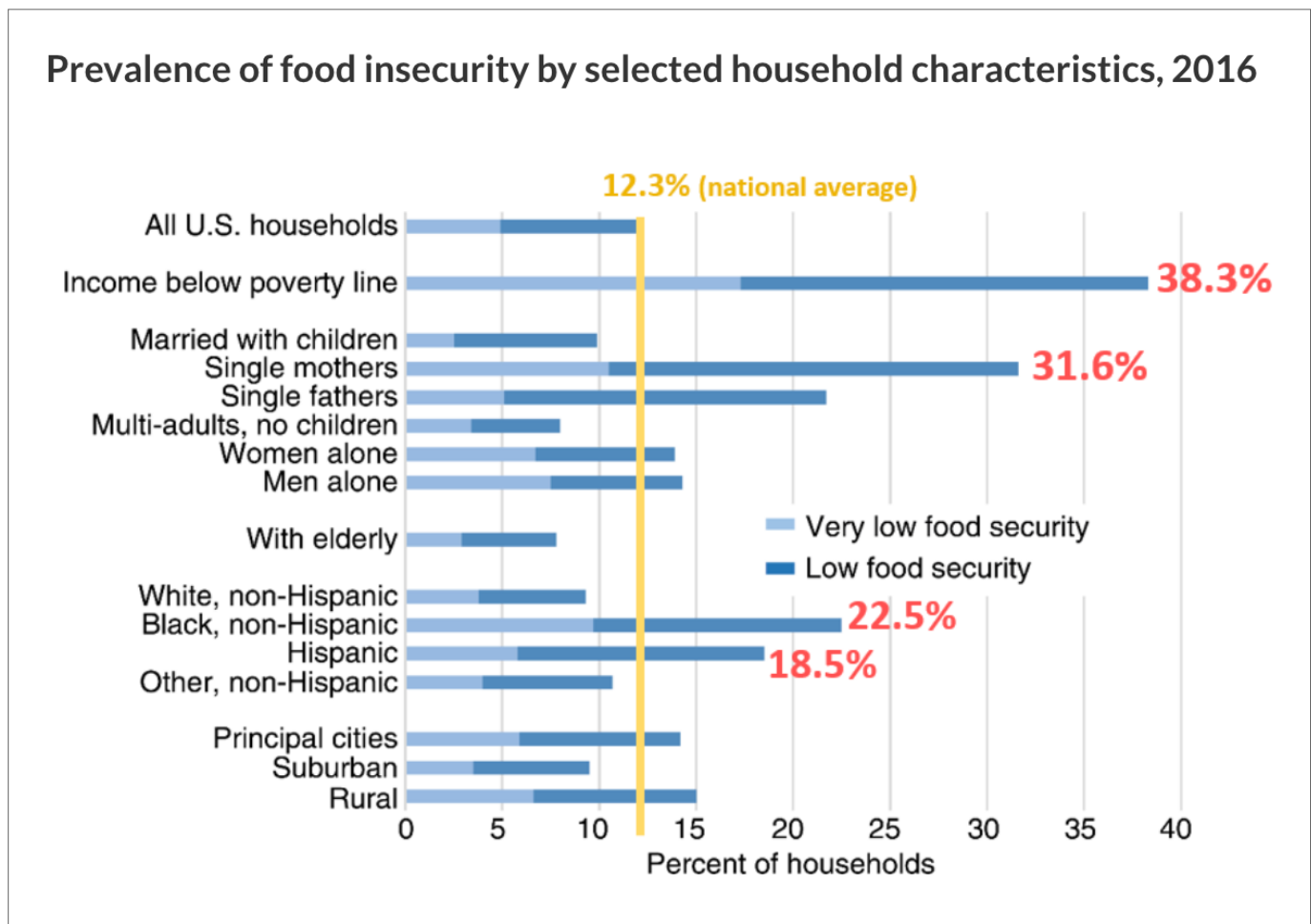
This snapshot includes analysis, resources, and best practices to assist public health departments with identifying and addressing the multiple equity challenges related to food security during COVID-19, including a focus on:

- » [Food Security as Equity: How COVID-19 Amplifies A Critical Equity Challenge](#)
- » [What Essential Truly Means: The Workers Risking Their Own Safety to Keep Americans Fed](#)
- » [Framing COVID-19: Let’s Work Together to Get the Future Right](#)
- » [Equity Spotlight: Santa Barbara County Public Health-Immigrant Health Rapid Response Task Force](#)



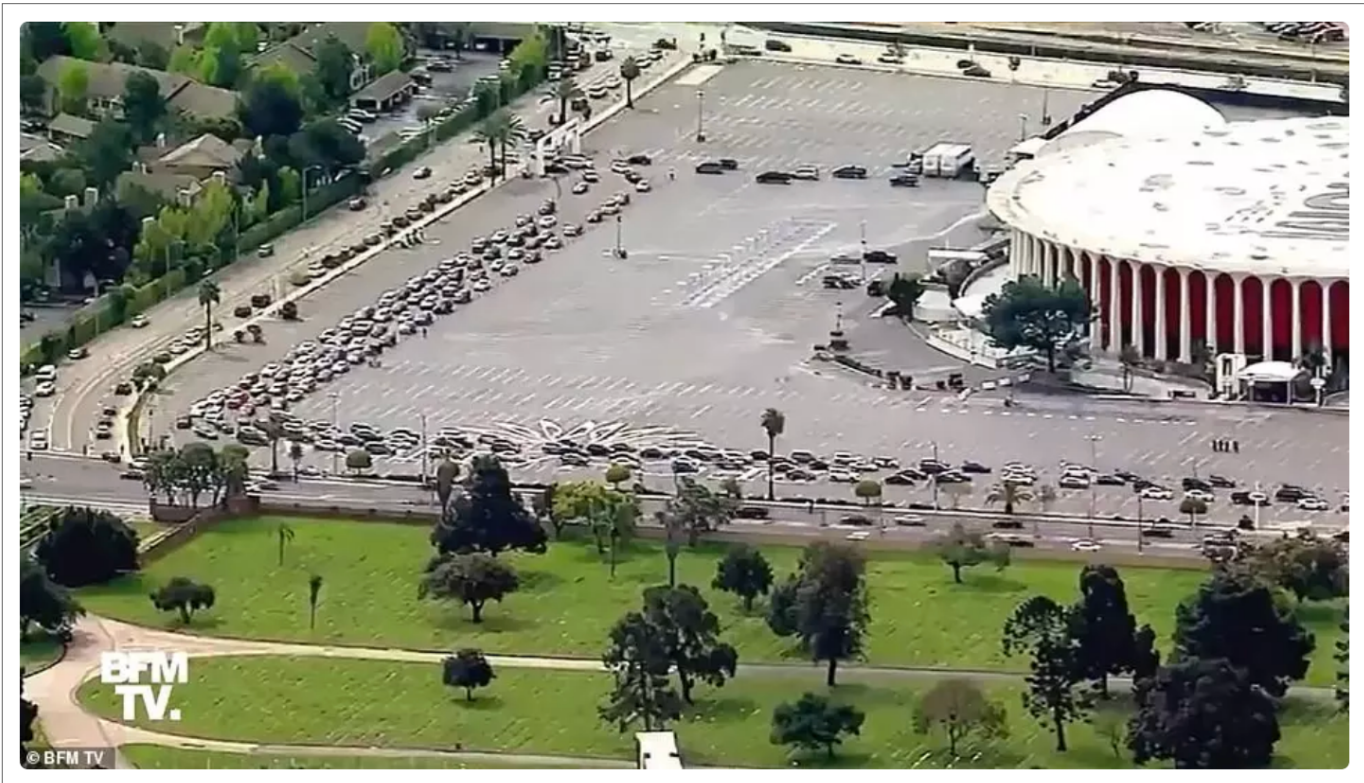
FOOD SECURITY AS EQUITY: HOW COVID-19 AMPLIFIES THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF A CRITICAL EQUITY CHALLENGE

Even before the coronavirus exacerbated an already dire reality for so many Californians, 37 million low-income Americans were already facing food insecurity, populations that are disproportionately people of color. Individuals who experience food insecurity are more likely to have poorer health, and to have diet-related conditions like diabetes, all risk factors for the negative health impacts of COVID-19. In addition, structural racism and historic redlining, has meant that nearly 1 million Californians live in “food deserts,” where there is no nearby supermarket or large grocery store.



Note: Food-insecure households include those with low food security and very low food security.
 Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from 2016 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement, U.S. Census Bureau.
 Image Source: <https://www.faimproject.org/research/hunger/>

Rising unemployment and increased poverty as a result of the coronavirus, is also leading to an increase in individuals experiencing food insecurity. Food banks across the country are reporting a 40% increase in demand, while facing operational challenges, including declines in volunteers and retail donations. Disrupted food chains, empty grocery shelves, and closed restaurants are exacerbating already existing inequities related to food insecurity. Analysis from Map the Meal Gap study shows us that as unemployment increases, so too will the number of Americans experiencing food insecurity.



Source: <https://www.newsbreak.com/california/los-angeles/news/001657CP/thousands-of-cars-line-up-to-get-into-a-los-angeles-food-bank-as-droves-of-desperate-americans-continue-to-wait-for-hours-across-the-country-amid-the-coronavirus-pandemic15-photos>

For millions of American children who rely on school meal programs, the pandemic has created a precarious situation. Before COVID-19, the [National School Lunch Program](#) provided free or low-cost meals to 29.7 million kids across the United States. More than 60% of students in California qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Continuing to provide food for Southern California's students has become a top priority for many jurisdictions throughout this crisis.

A deep understanding and analysis of [the structural inequities that have created food insecurity](#) and led to limited food access for thousands of Southern Californians, has never been more important.

RESOURCES FOR DEPARTMENTS ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY RELATED TO COVID-19

Below are a few resources to assist health departments in understanding and addressing the current and future impacts of COVID-19 on the food security of their community members:

1. Feeding America's [Map the Meal Gap Study](#) can be used to predict changes in food insecurity based on projected changes to unemployment and poverty.
2. The Alliance's [The Healthy Places Index®](#) can support jurisdictions in identifying those neighborhoods in their City/County where the most students are eligible for the free and reduced meal program, as well as other factors related to food insecurity.
3. On April 8th, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture announced approval to expand the SNAP [online food purchasing pilot](#). This allows California to expedite the implementation of online purchasing which should be available widely at the end of April.
4. [Feeding America](#) can help community members find a local food bank. They have multiple efforts to address food insecurity, including a \$2.65 million fund for food banks and working with schools and governments to ensure children have access to meals.

WHAT ESSENTIAL TRULY MEANS: THE WORKERS RISKING THEIR OWN SAFETY TO KEEP CALIFORNIANS FED

The U.S. government labeled farmers, farmworkers, and other people involved in agriculture as “essential”, their roles deemed critical to keeping the nation fed. At the same time, many farmworkers are especially vulnerable to the health impacts of COVID-19 and risk their own health and safety to ensure Californians remain fed. Many farmworkers are low-income, with limited access to healthcare, have higher rates of respiratory illnesses that make them more susceptible to COVID-19, and live in crowded housing, making social distancing more difficult.

In the United States, about half of farmworkers are undocumented, making them ineligible for the employment relief offered by the CARES stimulus package, signed by President Trump on March 27. They’re also excluded from the expanded health care protections in the Family First Coronavirus Response Act.



The Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida has been using drawings to warn workers about coronavirus. This one aims to dispel myths that only older people are at risk. “All the scientists and doctors agree,” the drawing says. “The coronavirus is not playing, and it’s already here.”

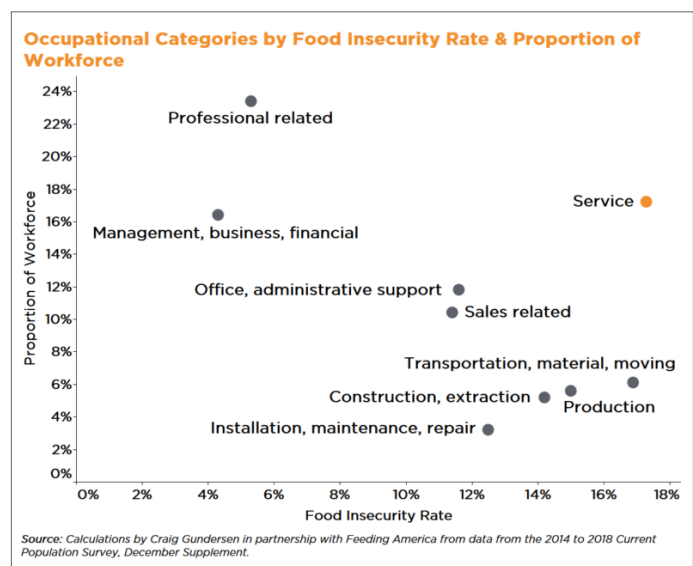
Source: <http://ciw-online.org/blog/2020/04/part-one-coronavirus-media-round-up/>

FRONTLINE FOOD WORKERS

As we elevated in last week’s snapshot, not all of us can work from home or effectively practice social distancing during this time; low-income workers and workers of color are more likely to work in the essential industries keeping food on American tables throughout this crisis.

Grocery, retail store and other food service workers are especially vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. These workers often work in tight working conditions, without the ability to follow strict social distancing guidelines. They are often among the lowest paid workers and are among the workers most likely to be food insecure themselves.

Health department strategies that focus on the health and safety needs of frontline workers, especially economically vulnerable food workers, will increase worker resiliency and decrease the short and long-term health impacts of COVID-19.



Source: Calculations by Craig Gundersen in partnership with Feeding America from data from the 2014 to 2018 Current Population Survey, December Supplement.

Source: <http://ciw-online.org/blog/2020/04/part-one-coronavirus-media-round-up/>

HEALTH DEPARTMENT EQUITY STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING FRONTLINE FARM AND FOOD WORKERS

Advocates for frontline farm and food workers critical to ensuring ongoing access to our region's food supply, are calling on jurisdictions to prioritize their health and safety, including:

1. Expanded access to free screening, testing and treatment.
2. Development and distribution of specific guidance on social distancing practices for essential workers in the food industry
3. Expanded access to PPE and essential hygiene
4. Language translation and interpretation to provide clear, consistent messaging, including partnering with community members most familiar with the language access needs of frontline farm and food workers
5. Engage with essential workers, experts in their own needs, in planning our food system's workplace emergency response
6. Support policies that expand paid sick leave and other protections, hazard pay, housing security and increased wages

CRITICAL UPDATES FOR ESSENTIAL FOOD WORKERS

*On April 15th, Governor Newsom announced the launch of a \$125 million disaster relief assistance fund, to offer additional assistance to undocumented workers impacted by COVID-19.

*On April 16th, Governor Newsom announced two weeks of expanded paid sick leave for California food workers during the crisis.

FRAMING COVID-19: LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO GET THE FUTURE RIGHT

The FrameWorks Institute's "Framing COVID-19" offers the following tips for how we frame the policies needed to advance equity during this moment:

"When we activate a sense of shared purpose and common identity, we make it less likely that people will revert to their familiar ideological or partisan corners. This helps our ideas for change gain mainstream traction and broad support."

Instead of "we must seize the moment or others will"

"The pandemic has caused a great deal of pain---- but it also presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity. This unprecedented social upheaval is potentially a game-changer. Policy options that previously seemed like pie-in-the-sky dreams could now easily move to the top of the political agenda. If we fail to capture this moment, others will."

Try "let's work together to get the future right"

"As we move through this moment of acute crisis, we lift up our shared values and use them as a guide for what comes next. Now is the time to choose to get this right. Every policy and funding decision should lead us to the future we want: a fair and just society where every one of us can thrive. As we rebuild, let's redesign our economy and systems so that they work for all of us."

EQUITY SPOTLIGHT

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY IMMIGRANT HEALTH RAPID RESPONSE TASK FORCE

The Alliance “Equity Spotlight” is intended to highlight in real time efforts from Cities and Counties both here in California and nationwide, that are working to advance equity in response to COVID-19

The Spotlights are meant to showcase (not promote), these efforts for departmental consideration and adaptation. The Alliance strongly recommends that any department wishing to launch similar efforts ensure efforts comply with the most recent local, state, and federal laws, policies and guidelines



In response to the need to provide translated language support to immigrant members of the Santa Barbara County community, the Santa Barabara County Department of Public Health (SBCPDH) worked with the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), as well as their organizing and academic partners, Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) and the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), to create a rapid response task force to address the COVID-19 related needs of bi-lingual and bi-cultural community members.

The task force partners with immigrant and indigenous communities in Santa Barbara County and provides critical translation and interpretation of important health updates related to COVID-19. The task force shares updates about new concerns, strategies and resources to take action, to strengthen community organizing efforts and services.