



RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK

2022 STATUS REPORT on Hunger in Rhode Island

Food is Unaffordable for Thousands of Rhode Islanders

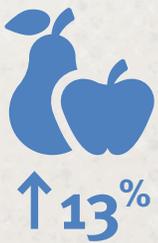
MAJOR FINDINGS

- ★ Soaring food prices burden families still recovering from the effects of COVID-19.
- ★ Nearly one in three Rhode Island households can't afford adequate food.
- ★ The risk of hunger is highest for low-income families with children and for communities of color.
- ★ Demand for food assistance is increasing as critical COVID-19 relief programs and emergency benefits end.



The state's economy rebounded this year with lower unemployment and higher wages for many workers. But household budgets were stretched thin by rapid inflation in rent, fuel, and food.

From July 2021 to July 2022, food costs in Rhode Island went up 13 percent.¹ At the national level, the Consumer Price Index for food at home similarly grew by 13.1 percent, the largest twelve-month increase in 40 years.² Rising prices make it harder for low-income and even moderate-income families to purchase all the food that they need.



Food prices went up 13% from 2021 to 2022



Heating oil prices went up 43% from 2021 to 2022³

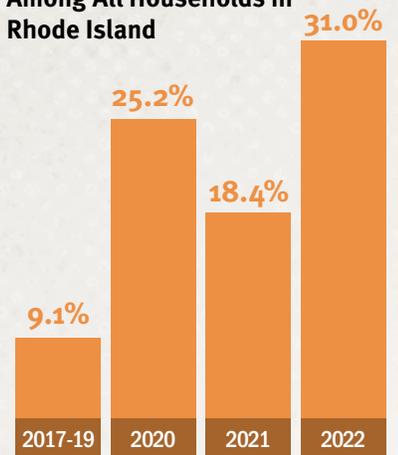
Food Inflation Adds to Food Insecurity

High prices mean less food on the table for thousands of Rhode Island families. According to findings from the latest RI Life Index, conducted between April and June 2022, 31 percent of households were food insecure and unable to afford adequate food.⁴

The RI Life Index surveys a random sample of more than 2,000 households in the state. It is an initiative of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and the Brown University School of Public Health.

Food insecurity is now three times more prevalent than before the pandemic.

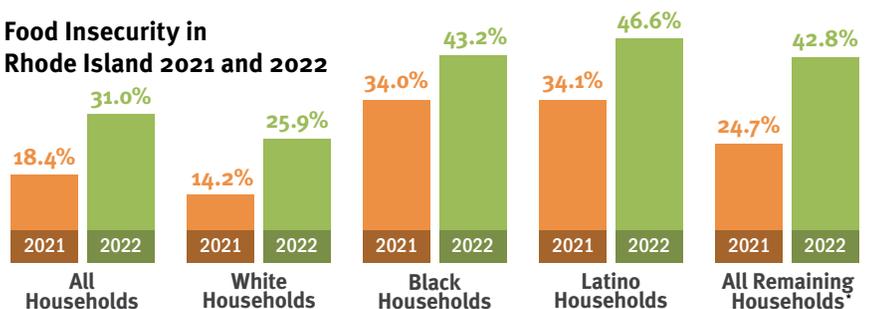
Prevalence of Food Insecurity Among All Households in Rhode Island



Disparities Persist

Results from the RI Life Index show that people of color are much more likely to be food insecure than White people. These racial and ethnic disparities reflect the recent toll of COVID-19 on the health and economic well-being of communities of color, as well as long-standing barriers to economic opportunity in Rhode Island.

Food Insecurity in Rhode Island 2021 and 2022

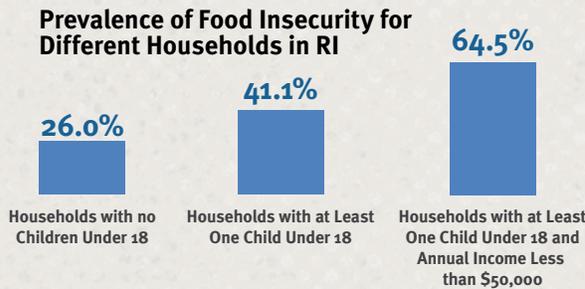


*All remaining households includes Asian, Native American/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander, and more than one race/ethnicity.

Children at High Risk of Hunger

The RI Life Index identified 41 percent of households with children as food insecure in 2022, as compared to 25 percent in 2021. These households ran out of food and didn't have money to buy more, placing their children at risk of hunger.

The rate of food insecurity is even higher among families at the lowest rungs of the income ladder. The inability of so many low-income families to meet their basic food needs has serious consequences, since poor nutrition adversely impacts children's health, growth, and learning.⁵



Emergency COVID-19 Relief Programs End

At a moment when an unprecedented number of Rhode Island households are struggling to afford adequate food and food prices are historically high, key federal programs that were initiated in response to COVID-19 are ending.

School Meals for All

For the past two school years, school breakfast and lunch were offered to all students free-of-charge, regardless of the income-level of the student's household.

Status: Free school meals for all students ended in September 2022.

Enhanced Child Tax Credit

In 2021, the child tax credit was expanded to parents with low or no earned income and was fully refundable. Children ages 6 to 17 received a credit of up to \$3,000. The credit amount was \$3,600 for children under age 6.

Status: Monthly child tax credit payments ended in December 2021.

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) for Families with Children

School-aged children from low-income families were given a one-time food purchase benefit of \$391 this past summer when schools were not in session and school meals were not available. Children under age six enrolled in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) were issued the same amount in October. The Rhode Island Department of Human Services estimates that parents of 80,000 children received these P-EBT benefits, for a total of \$33 million.⁶

Status: P-EBT benefits will be available again next summer for school-aged children, but not for children under age six.

Extra WIC Benefits

During the past year, benefit levels were increased for the purchase of fruits and vegetables for all participants in WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children).

Status: Extra WIC benefits for fruit and vegetable purchases ended in September 2022.

Emergency SNAP Benefits

In Rhode Island, approximately 85,000 low-income households are enrolled in SNAP and receive benefits for the purchase of groceries. The average SNAP benefit per household is \$277 per month. In addition, enrolled households have been issued emergency SNAP benefits since March 2020 through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This year, households in Rhode Island received on average \$153 per month in emergency benefits.⁷

Status: Emergency SNAP allotments end when the public health emergency is lifted either by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or by the state.

Average Monthly SNAP Benefits: 2022

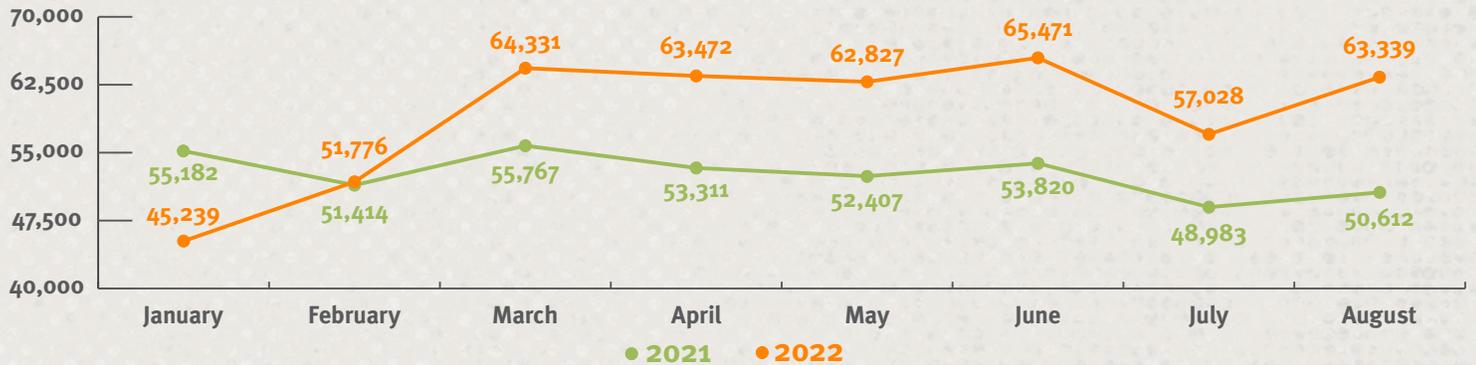
	Rhode Island	Per SNAP Household
Emergency Allotment	\$12,990,000	\$153
Regular Issuance	\$23,454,000	\$277
Total Monthly	\$36,444,000	\$430

When the public health emergency ends, SNAP households lose on average \$153 per month

Growing Demand for Food Assistance

More Rhode Islanders are seeking food assistance as food costs go up. Food pantries that are part of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank's statewide network of 140 member agencies are now serving, on average, 10,000 more people each month than in 2021. To meet the high need, the Food Bank is distributing 1.2 million pounds of food each month to its member agencies.

People Served at Food Pantries in Rhode Island



High food costs are sending more Rhode Islanders to food pantries

2022 Legislative Accomplishments

The Rhode Island General Assembly enacted significant legislation in its 2022 session that will improve access to healthy food and support families with children.

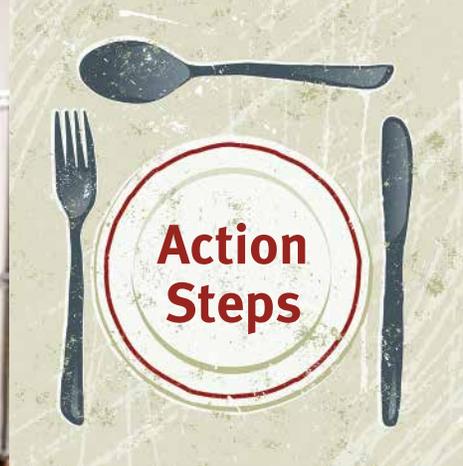
- Established the SNAP Incentive Program, providing \$11.5 million to double the buying power of SNAP benefits when used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at the supermarket.
- Funded a one-time State Child Tax Credit of \$250 per child.
- Increased annual state funding for the Rhode Island Community Food Bank by \$100,000.

Federal Program Brings Local Fresh Food to People in Need

Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management recently received a federal grant to purchase locally grown food for distribution to people in need through the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Program (LFPA). Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Southside Community Land Trust, and the African Alliance of Rhode Island will share \$690,000 to purchase fresh produce from local growers over the next two years. The food will be provided at no charge to community-based organizations for distribution to individuals and families seeking food assistance.

The goal of LFPA is to make the local food system more resilient and strengthen the agricultural supply chain that was disrupted by COVID-19. The project will be evaluated by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council.





The Rising Risk of Hunger

In the past, the high cost of living in Rhode Island made it difficult for low-income families to afford basic household expenses, including food. Now, rapid inflation is causing nearly one in three Rhode Island households to experience these same challenges and hardships. Thousands are seeking food assistance at food pantries and meal sites each month, approaching levels not seen since the beginning of the pandemic.

The risk of hunger for low-income families with children and for communities of color is rising as important federal benefits end. The expanded Child Tax Credit significantly reduced child poverty, with the greatest gains realized by children in Black and Latino families, but it was not renewed by Congress this year. When the public health emergency is lifted, Rhode Island will lose \$13 million per month in emergency SNAP benefits. Benefits will go down sharply for all households enrolled in SNAP, triggering a crisis for the most vulnerable families in the state.

The Rhode Island General Assembly can be commended for taking several steps to reduce hunger and poverty in 2022, including implementing a state-level child tax credit. But with food insecurity reaching a record-high level and federal support decreasing, the state must do more.

Free School Meals for All a Priority

For the past two years, public schools received federal funds to provide lunch and breakfast to all students free-of-charge. Several New England states, including Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont, have continued this program with state funding after the federal mandate ended in September. By joining these other states and enacting school meals for all students, Rhode Island can ensure that children have access to the nutritious food necessary for good health and academic achievement.

For Endnotes, please visit the Food Bank website at rifofoodbank.org/status-report

★ Urge Rhode Island's Congressional Delegation to reinstate the expanded Child Tax Credit and increase SNAP benefit levels in the upcoming Farm Bill.

★ Call on the Governor to use state funds to make school lunch and school breakfast free for all students.

★ Thank legislators in the General Assembly who voted this year to enact the state Child Tax Credit, fund SNAP incentives, and boost funding for the Food Bank.

For more information on these Action Steps, and how to contact your elected officials, visit www.rifofoodbank.org/advocate.

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RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITY
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OUR MISSION

To improve the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders by advancing solutions to the problem of hunger.

OUR VISION

We envision a state where no one goes hungry.



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2022

STATUS REPORT ON HUNGER IN RHODE ISLAND

Endnotes

1. **Rhode Island Food Cost Study**, July 2022, available at rifoodbank.org.
2. **Consumer Price Index Summary**, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2022.
3. **Heating Oil Energy Prices**, Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, October 2022.
4. **RI Life Index**, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and Brown University School of Public Health, November 2022.
5. Pai, S. and Bahadur, K., **The Impact of Food Insecurity on Child Health**, Pediatric Clinics of North America, April 2020.
6. **P-EBT Data**, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, September 2022.
7. **SNAP Data**, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, September 2022.