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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### 2023 SURVEY DETAILS WHO EXPERIENCES HUNGER IN RHODE ISLAND

*The RI Community Food Bank and the Brown University School of Public Health Survey Research Center release new data on Rhode Islanders seeking food assistance.*

**Providence, RI** | For the first time since 2019, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, in partnership with the Survey Research Center at the Brown University School of Public Health, released the results of this year's Rhode Island Hunger Survey, creating a portrait of the people served by the Food Bank and its statewide network of member agencies. Since 1999, this survey has been conducted roughly every 4 years. Completing the Hunger Survey helps us understand who is experiencing hunger and details the challenges they face in making ends meet.

Since the last survey, the economic disruption caused by COVID-19 led to a dramatic increase in the number of people seeking food assistance in Rhode Island, from 53,000 people served on average each month in 2019 to **75,000 in 2023**.

#### Key Findings:

- **65%** of those receiving food assistance are adults (18 to 64 years old), while **21%** are children (0 to 17 years old), and **14%** are senior adults (aged 65 or older).
- **53%** of households surveyed identified as White, while **12%** identified as Black, **33%** identified as Latinx, and **20%** identified as Asian, Native American, or another race or ethnicity. By comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates the state's population to be 71% White, 6% Black, 18% Latinx, and 12% Asian, Native American, or another race or ethnicity, highlighting the disproportionate representation of minorities experiencing food insecurity.
- **54%** of households surveyed include someone who was employed in the last 12 months. Among households with children, **79%** include a working adult.
- **Two-thirds** of households surveyed said they would have to spend more money weekly to meet their food needs. For those households, the median estimated amount needed was **\$98 per week**. In 2019, the amount was \$66 per week, demonstrating the impact of food inflation and higher food prices on these low-income households.
- **70%** of SNAP recipients reported that their benefits only lasted two weeks or less in 2023, as compared to 49% in 2019.
- **45%** of low-income households reported having to choose between paying for housing or paying for food at least once in the last 12 months. **47%** had to choose between paying for utilities or paying for food.
- **47%** of the individuals surveyed rated their health status as "fair" or "poor," an indicator of poor nutrition. As many as 35% report having a family member with diabetes, compared to 11% nationally, according to the CDC. 57% experience high blood pressure, compared to 48% nationally. And 33% report having asthma, compared to 8% nationally.

[The full survey brief may be found here.](#)

The survey was administered at Food Bank member agencies, including food pantries and meal sites between April and June of 2023. Trained volunteers and Food Bank staff surveyed people receiving food assistance in one-to-one interviews in either English or Spanish. A total of 459 surveys were completed at 65 randomly selected member agency sites.

“The findings of this year’s Hunger Survey underscore the critical need for food assistance across the state,” said Andrew Schiff, CEO of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. “It’s becoming increasingly difficult for regular families to just get by and they’re having to make impossible choices as a result.”

“Collecting and interpreting this data is essential to understanding the specific needs of some of the most vulnerable populations in the state,” said Melissa Clark, the director of the Brown University School of Public Health’s Survey Research Center. “These data make it clear that advancing public health in Rhode Island means alleviating food insecurity.”

Schiff emphasized that while more and more people cannot afford adequate food, they are also facing hardships on top of food insecurity, such as health challenges. Additionally, several important COVID-19 relief programs, enacted by Congress to assist low-income families during the pandemic, ended in 2023 with the end of the federal public health emergency. While households faced the loss of these benefits, inflation rapidly increased the overall cost of living, creating a perfect storm for many Rhode Islanders. With this federal aid gone and high cost of living holding steady, Schiff urges the state to do more to reduce poverty, prevent hunger, and strengthen the safety net for low-income Rhode Islanders.

#### **About Rhode Island Community Food Bank**

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank distributes food to 75,000 struggling Rhode Islanders each month through a statewide network of 143 member agencies including food pantries, meal sites, shelters, youth programs and senior centers. Last year, the Food Bank distributed 16.2 million pounds of food, of which approximately 3.7 million pounds was fresh produce and 2.8 million pounds was culturally relevant foods. The Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization. To learn more, visit [rifoodbank.org](http://rifoodbank.org).

#### **About the Survey Research Center at the Brown University School of Public Health**

The Brown University School of Public Health Survey Research Center is an academic survey research center located in Providence, Rhode Island. The mission of the Survey Research Center is to provide survey research services and expertise to universities, hospitals, government agencies, and non-profit organizations; conduct methodological studies related to survey research in public health and medicine; and provide training opportunities in survey research design and data collection methods for members of the Rhode Island community. To learn more, visit [survey-research.sph.brown.edu](http://survey-research.sph.brown.edu).

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