

# **Spotlight on Food Insecurity among Senior Americans: 2011**

Prepared for the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger (NFESH)

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Food insecurity is a serious problem facing tens of millions of Americans every year. Due to the number of people experiencing food insecurity and its associated health and other consequences, food insecurity is one of the leading public health issues in the United States today. In *The Supplement to The State of Senior Hunger in America 2011: An Annual Report* we concentrate on one demographic group that is especially vulnerable to food insecurity and its consequences – those over the age of 60. In particular, we provide an overview of the extent and distribution of food insecurity in 2011, along with trends over the past decade using national and state-level data from the December Supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

In this spotlight we concentrate on the category of food insecurity established by the USDA. A household is food insecure if they respond in the affirmative to 3 or more questions out of 18 taken from the Core Food Security Module (10 questions for households without children).

Based on the findings of this study and the broad patterns that have emerged in our previous three studies on food insecurity among Senior Americans, we emphasize six main points.

- In 2011, 4.8 million Americans over the age of 60 were food insecure. This constitutes 8.4% of all seniors.

That millions of Senior Americans are experiencing food insecurity is a long-standing concern, even in good economic times. As seen in Figure I, for example, even in 2006, nearly 6% of seniors were food insecure.

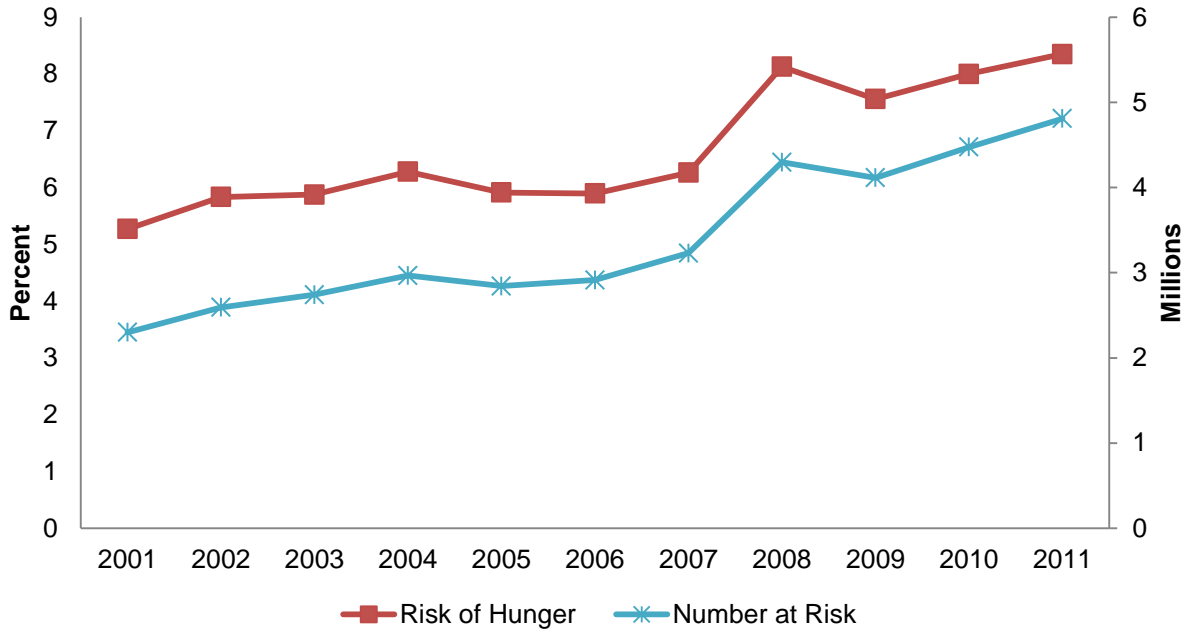
- As seen in Figure I, the extent of food insecurity has increased dramatically from 2001 to 2011. The number of food insecure seniors has more than doubled from 2.3 million to 4.8 million over the decade.
- The negative effects of the Great Recession persist through 2011 as senior hunger continues to rise. The number of seniors facing food insecurity is 50 percent higher in 2011 compared to 2007.
- The post-2007 increase in food insecurity was especially pronounced among those seniors with incomes above the poverty line, those divorced/separate or never-married, the disabled and unemployed, those under age 70, women, and those with resident grandchildren.

- Consistent with what has been found in other populations, seniors with low-incomes, those who are racial or ethnic minorities, the unemployed, the disabled, and the unmarried are all more likely to be food insecure than their relevant counterparts. What is perhaps surprising is that, as seen in Figure II, the probability of food insecurity declines with age. The lower food insecurity rates for younger seniors holds in every year from 2001 to 2011.
- While, as expected, food insecurity rates are higher among those poor seniors, our work demonstrates that, out of those who are facing food hardships, a high proportion have incomes above the poverty line. In 2011, out of those reporting incomes in the CPS, 60.1 percent of food insecure seniors are not poor.

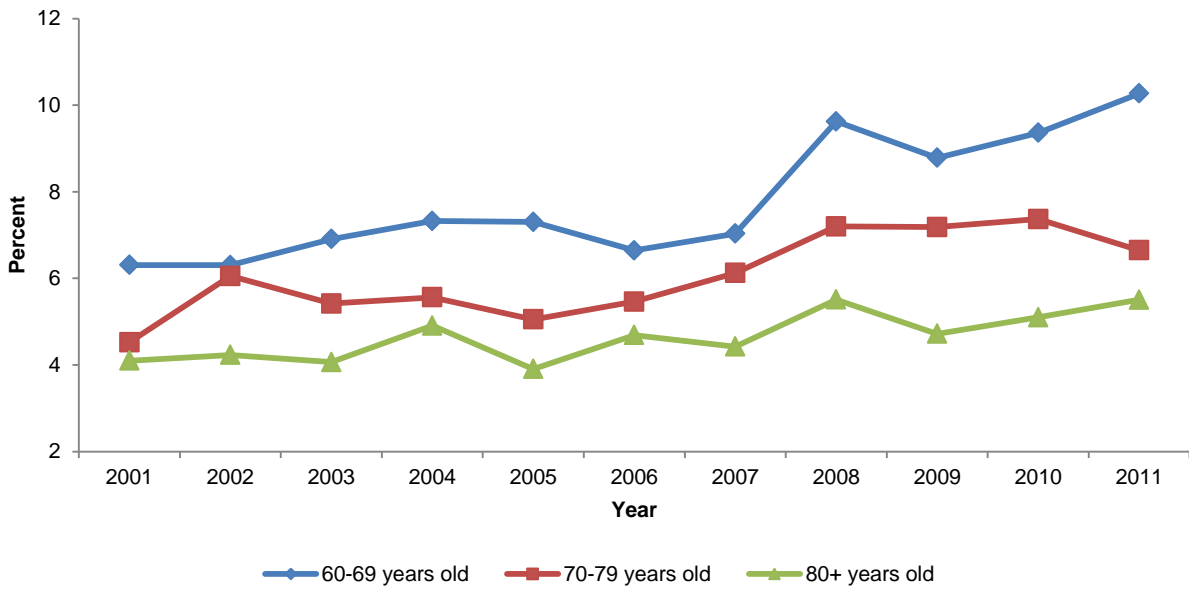
The large and growing number of food insecure seniors in the United States, combined with the serious health consequences facing these seniors, constitutes a major public health challenge. In response, we encourage continued efforts by USDA to increase participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) among seniors in light of the fact that only about one-third of those eligible receive assistance.

Consistent with recent recommendations of an Institutes of Medicine (IOM) report on SNAP, we also encourage increases in benefits for at least a subset of SNAP recipients. Insofar as millions of food insecure seniors are not eligible for SNAP other approaches to alleviating food insecurity are also needed.

**Figure I. Trends in Food Insecurity Among Senior Americans**



**Figure II: Trends in Food Insecurity among Senior Americans, by Age**



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State-Level Estimates of Risk of Hunger (Food Insecurity) of Senior in 2011

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AL	11.15	MT	7.26
AK	6.27	NE	6.42
AZ	6.33	NV	10.36
AR	12.90	NH	5.06
CA	9.54	NJ	8.43
CO	5.98	NM	7.96
CT	6.79	NY	7.23
DE	5.47	NC	9.54
DC	6.18	ND	4.11
FL	8.88	OH	7.05
GA	8.26	OK	6.79
HI	7.01	OR	7.90
ID	4.44	PA	8.69
IL	8.61	RI	10.36
IN	6.64	SC	9.29
IA	6.00	SD	5.41
KS	6.45	TN	11.82
KY	8.00	TX	10.36
LA	9.44	UT	6.32
ME	7.11	VT	4.79
MD	6.25	VA	3.71
MA	6.18	WA	7.58
MI	6.91	WV	7.62
MN	4.75	WI	6.19
MS	11.62	WY	6.76
MO	11.43		

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## Extent of Food Insecurity (Risk of Hunger) in Seniors in 2011

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Overall	8.35%
By Income	
Below the Poverty Line	27.72
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	16.24
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	3.09
Income Not Reported	5.44
By Race and Ethnicity	
White	7.30
Black	17.22
Other	9.36
Hispanic	18.24
Non-Hispanic	7.54
By Marital Status	
Married	5.72
Widowed	9.73
Divorced or Separated	15.89
Never Married	13.14
By Metropolitan Location	
Non-Metro	8.59
Metro	8.29
By Age	
60-64	10.79
65-69	9.56
70-74	7.55
75-79	5.51
80 and older	5.51
By Employment Status	
Employed	5.76
Unemployed	24.70
Retired	6.24
Disabled	26.12
By Gender	
Male	7.41
Female	9.12
By Grandchild Present	
No Grandchild Present	7.80
Grandchildren Present	19.56

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## Distribution of Food Insecurity in Seniors in 2011

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By Income	
Below the Poverty Line	31.94%
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	33.08
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	16.92
Income Not Reported	18.05
By Race	
White	74.45
Black	19.54
Other	6.01
By Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic	83.56
Hispanic	16.44
By Marital Status	
Married	41.25
Widowed	24.08
Divorced or Separated	26.29
Never Married	8.38
By Metropolitan Location	
Non-Metro	19.90
Metro	80.10
By Age	
60-64	39.13
65-69	25.62
70-74	14.81
75-79	8.60
80 and older	11.85
By Employment Status	
Employed	18.99
Unemployed	5.18
Retired	45.67
Disabled	30.16
By Gender	
Male	40.14
Female	59.86
By Grandchild Present	
No Grandchild Present	89.15
Grandchildren Present	10.85

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Source: Authors' calculations from 2001-2011 December Current Population Survey. The numbers in the table sum to 100 percent within each subcategory.

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Percentage Point Changes in the  
Composition of Food Insecurity in Seniors  
from 2007 to 2011

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Overall	2.09***
By Income	
Below the Poverty Line	1.22
Between 100% and 200% of the Poverty Line	2.29***
Above 200% of the Poverty Line	0.82***
Income Not Reported	1.69***
By Race and Ethnicity	
White	2.45***
Black	-1.17
Other	0.91
Hispanic	3.59**
By Marital Status	
Married	1.77***
Widowed	1.55***
Divorced or Separated	3.09***
Never Married	2.67**
By Metropolitan Location	
Non-Metro	2.87***
Metro	1.89***
By Age	
60-64	3.14***
65-69	3.37***
70-74	1.00*
75-79	-0.11
80 and older	1.08**
By Employment Status	
Employed	2.24***
Unemployed	9.35***
Retired	1.22***
Disabled	4.16***
By Gender	
Male	1.78***
Female	2.35***
By Grandchild Present	
No Grandchild Present	2.00***
Grandchildren Present	3.08*

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Source: Authors' calculations. The numbers in the table reflect percentage point changes from 2009-2010. The asterisks denote statistical significance at the following levels: \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.1