

Food Insecurity

MFAN has been studying food insecurity in the military population since 2017. MFAN's Military Family Support Programming survey aims to assess military food insecurity using the USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale.

In 2021, one in six military and veteran families experienced food insecurity or hunger

Of the **16.6% of military and veteran families that experienced food insecurity or hunger**, 9.0% were "hungry" or had very low food security, and 7.6% were "food insecure" or had low food security. There is a significant relationship between food insecurity and enlisted rank, geography, race, and ethnicity.

Enlisted ranks

23.3% of military and veteran families were experiencing food insecurity or hunger. This is striking in comparison to the 4.4% of food insecure or hungry families at the officer ranks.



Geography

Military and veteran families in the following states reported the highest frequencies of food insecurity: **TX, VA, WA, NC, CA, FL, HI, IL, GA, AZ.**



Race

American Indian or Alaskan native respondents experience hunger at higher levels than any other demographic, with >20% identifying as hungry. An additional 16.5% were food insecure, and 8.3% experienced marginal food security.



Ethnicity

Of the 1,249 respondents identifying as **Hispanic or Latinx in 2021, 13.2% of this population were experiencing hunger**, and an additional 12% were experiencing food insecurity.



White, non-Hispanic respondents were statistically less likely to be hungry or food insecure than non-white, Hispanic respondents.

More than 95% of food insecure families used support resources including federal benefits and community resources

Respondents who did not utilize support resources did so for three main reasons:



Did not need support (45.7%)



Support access struggles (34.6%)



Stigma (16.4%)

Support access struggles: "Options are not available here. My spouse's income is too much to qualify for any assistance as well as his rank. When we are used to having more than double the income, finances become difficult."



Spouse of an active duty Army member

Those that did use food support resources used the following resources:

- WIC
- Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)
- Free or reduced school meals
- Family and community foodbanks

Supports used: "[The food drive] provided so much help, and the food really could last quite a while. The kids' free lunches really help, so we don't have to worry about what to pack the kids for lunch every day and know they are eating a good lunch. The P-EBT was the most helpful because we could grocery shop quite a few times without worrying."



Spouse of an active duty Navy member

Food insecurity fluctuated over time and was worsened by worldwide events such as the COVID-19 pandemic

Data was collected using the USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale in 2019, 2020, and 2021.



2019

One in eight military and veteran families were experiencing food insecurity.



2020

During COVID-19, one in five military and veteran families were food insecure.



2021

One in six military and veteran families are food insecure.