

# THE STATE OF WOMEN & HUNGER IN LOUISIANA

In Louisiana, food is love. In our own families, women often make the decisions around where to buy food, what foods to buy, and how to prepare them; food security and the female identity are deeply entwined. Women disproportionately experience hunger and poverty at higher rates than men in the United States. These rates are even higher for women of color. Food insecurity has detrimental impacts on the health and well-being of any individual but these adverse effects hit women, especially mothers, extremely hard. Mothers often sacrifice their own quality of nutrition to protect their families from hunger. Mothers who are food insecure while pregnant also face a serious risk of maternal depression, gestational diabetes, iron deficiency, and low birth weight. All of this increases their risk of obesity and other chronic diseases.

## THE SITUATION

Louisiana has faced some of the highest rates of poverty and hunger for decades, with women and children especially vulnerable to feeling their effects. Households with children are much more likely to experience food insecurity than those without children; at the height of the pandemic as many as 1-in-3 Louisiana children were experiencing food insecurity. Women have also felt severe consequences from the pandemic, losing jobs at higher rates than men while also often bearing child care responsibilities.

**47.4%**

of single women households with children in the state live **below the federal poverty line.**

**15.3%**

of single women households with no children in the state live **below the federal poverty line.**

**33.2%**

of single women households with children in the state **receive SNAP.**

**41.8%**

of single women households with no children in the state **receive SNAP.**

**WOMEN WHO RECEIVED SNAP BENEFITS WERE LESS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES THAN THOSE WHO DID NOT.**

## OUR RESPONSE

The five major Louisiana food banks provide millions of meals to Louisianans in need through a network of more than 900 community- and faith-based partners. As unprecedented levels of food insecurity persist in our communities, so does the need for assistance. In 2019, the five food banks provided approximately 58.5 million meals. In 2020, in response to the pandemic, Louisiana food banks grew to provide more than 95.8 million meals.



## POLICY SOLUTIONS

The emergency food system and anti-hunger advocates across the country have been working for years to alleviate food insecurity. However, advocacy and charitable food alone are not enough to serve this overwhelming need for assistance. Federal programs such as SNAP, WIC, and TEFAP, are proven to be the most effective methods in combating food insecurity for millions, especially women.

### STATE ACTIONS

- Utilize Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility flexibilities to raise the gross income limit for SNAP applicants to 185% of the Federal Poverty Line.
- Raise the state-level income eligibility to participate in TEFAP to 200% of the Federal Poverty Line.
- Establish a permanent Louisiana Hunger Task Force within the state legislature with representation from legislators, state agencies, the Governor's office, and community partners.

### FEDERAL ACTIONS

- Extend the temporary 15% increase to SNAP benefits for the full duration of the economic downturn.
- Increase the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 for all SNAP households.
- Allocate additional funding for TEFAP food purchase and storage/distribution for the duration of the economic downturn.
- Waive TEFAP program requirements to collect client names, addresses, and verify income eligibility for clients receiving USDA Foods through TEFAP for the duration of the public health crisis.