



Issue Brief

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Where do Hungry San Diegans Get Food? An analysis of food assistance in San Diego County (2016)

This issue brief quantifies and describes the current output of food assistance in San Diego County for the population experiencing food insecurity and outlines the implications of this data for the hunger relief sector, policymakers and funders. This brief is part of a larger, collaborative effort to apply a data-driven approach to identifying the strategies, resources and solutions to achieve a Hunger Free San Diego. An analysis of whether current food assistance levels are meeting the needs of San Diego’s food insecure population will be presented in the next Hunger Free San Diego Issue Brief.

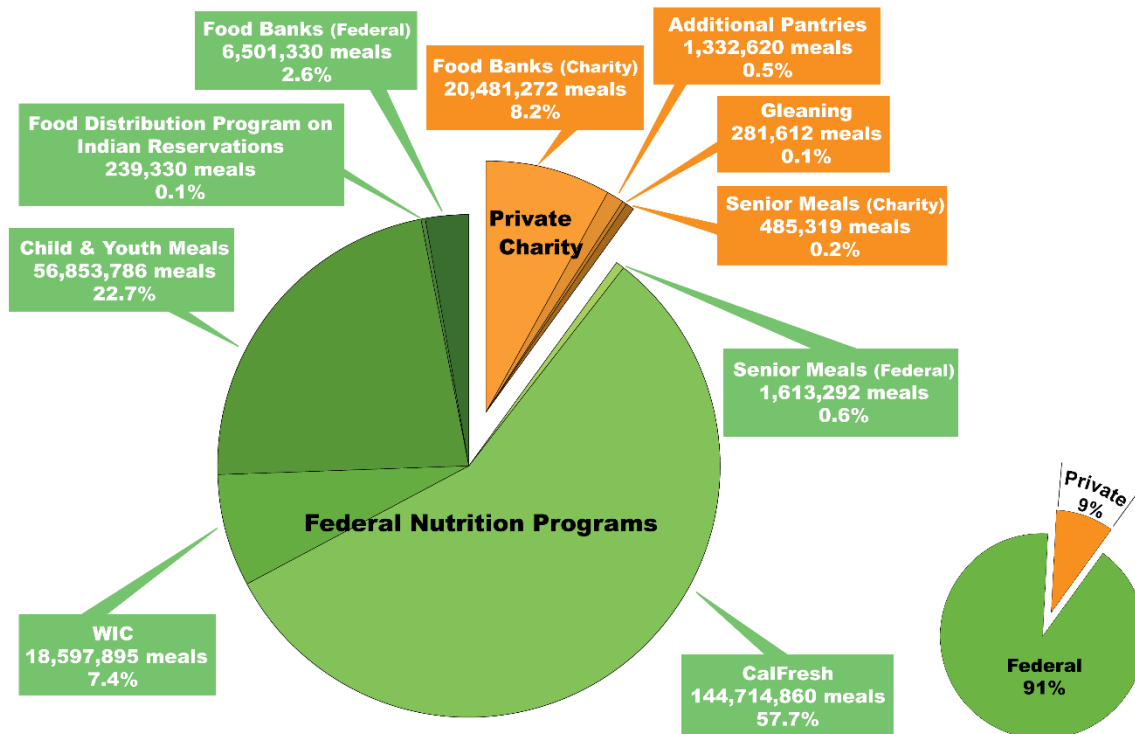
The research for this brief was conducted by San Diego Hunger Coalition with data, input and guidance from the Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board, a collaboration of agencies representing all aspects of hunger relief in San Diego County. For more information, please visit www.sdhunger.org.

Resource Mapping: San Diego’s Landscape of Food Assistance

In San Diego County, there are a number of types of food assistance for people facing hunger and malnutrition. This food assistance is provided through different delivery mechanisms including (but not limited to): community food distributions provided by food banks and pantries; WIC and CalFresh/SNAP monthly benefits to be spent on groceries; free and reduced price school meals; congregate meals served at churches; and home delivered meals for older adults. Funding for food assistance comes from two primary sources: federal nutrition programs and private charitable resources.

Where Hungry San Diegans Get Food (2016)

Program type, number of meals, percentage of total meals, and funding source



Implications for San Diego's Hunger Relief Sector

The various pieces of the pie chart illustrate the complexity of San Diego County's (and the nation's) food assistance system; one in which **the majority of food insecure households rely on multiple programs to meet their needs.**

Food assistance that is funded by private charitable resources (individual, corporate and foundation contributions) is delivered primarily through San Diego's two food banks and their estimated 500 community-based partners that host food pantries or food distributions for the people they serve. **Privately-funded food assistance is a vital source of nutrition** for hundreds of thousands of individuals and households, particularly in **cases where households earn a little too much** to qualify for federal nutrition programs but not enough to make ends meet, **or in cases where financial assistance from federal programs like CalFresh or WIC is inadequate** to purchase enough food to last through the month. For example, the average CalFresh benefit is \$4 per person per day in San Diego County.

Perhaps surprisingly, the overwhelming majority (91%) of food assistance serving San Diegans comes from federal nutrition programs. In 2016, federal programs brought 228.3 million meals to San Diego County, compared to 22.6 million meals paid for with private charitable resources. Stated another way, **for every 10 meals of food assistance in San Diego County, only one of those meals is provided by private charitable funding.**

This information has several implications:

- Cuts to federal nutrition programs through the Farm Bill and/or Child Nutrition Reauthorization would have devastating impacts on San Diego's population,** because food banks and pantries are not in a position to replace that loss in addition to what they already distribute.
Example: To make up for a 20% cut to SNAP (CalFresh), as proposed in 2018 at the federal level, San Diego's hunger relief system would need to provide the equivalent of \$92 million in grocery dollars, or an estimated 28.8 million meals. To fill that gap, our food banks and 500 organizations with food pantries would need to double the number of pounds they currently distribute.
- Privately-funded food assistance should be recognized and applied strategically as a precious and responsive resource that can fill the gaps left by federal food assistance.** To maximize the impact of their resources and to stretch our charitable dollars the furthest, funders and nonprofits should focus private charitable dollars on paying for food that cannot be provided by federal nutrition programs.
Example: Organizations that purchase snacks for kids in afterschool programs with private donations could instead serve fully reimbursed afterschool meals through the federal Child & Adult Care Food Program (reimbursed at \$3.31/meal in 2019), thereby freeing up private donations for other needs such as a weekly food distribution to help prevent hunger over the weekend.
- Individual donors and private foundations are encouraged to advocate for and invest in solutions that make federal nutrition programs easier for eligible people to access.** Investing in making government programs work better for the people they are meant to serve can exponentially leverage private charitable dollars and unlock permanent sustainable funding streams for local food assistance.
Example: A one-year grant of \$50,000 to support the salary of a person that helps people apply for CalFresh at a food pantry or community clinic could conservatively result in 240 households, or an estimated 500 individuals, receiving \$384,000 in CalFresh benefits in one year (approximately 120,000 healthy meals).¹ Every \$1 donated would provide \$7.68 in healthy food, in addition to supporting a job in our community.

¹ Assumptions based on 2018 data provided by County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency, Eligibility Operations Department: Avg household benefit in San Diego County = \$246/mo; avg household size is 2.1 people.

Methodology

The San Diego Hunger Coalition assembled data on the number of meals, pounds and dollars of food assistance distributed in San Diego County in 2016. Data were obtained from the local and state level agencies that provide each type of food assistance. Since the measure of output varies by type of food assistance, all output was converted to “meals” to provide a common unit of measure. For example, the total dollar amounts of non-cash benefits distributed through the CalFresh and WIC programs were converted to meals, and pounds of food distributed by a food bank or pantry were converted to meals. Programs that serve congregate meals or deliver meals to people’s homes report the number of meals they provide, thus no conversion was required.

The Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board chose to use the conversions within the Official USDA Food Plans weekly cost of food for the *Moderate-Cost Plan*, and the Hunger Coalition weighted the conversion amounts using San Diego County’s age and gender distribution (data from the California Health Interview Survey), divided by 21 to estimate the cost of a meal (\$3.20).² The Moderate-Cost Plan was also used to estimate the weight of a meal (1.79 pounds).³

In summary, the following values were used to convert all measures of output into meals:

1 meal = 1.79 pounds of food = \$3.20 in non-cash benefits on an EBT card or voucher

Data Sources

SDHC obtained data for the number of meals, pounds, or dollars distributed as food assistance from the following sources in San Diego County in 2016.

CalFresh

“CalFresh” is California’s name for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which was formerly known as food stamps. This is a USDA program that is administered by the states and provides monthly assistance on an EBT card to low-income families to purchase food. SDHC obtained reports from the California Department of Social Services on the dollar amount of benefit issuances by month in San Diego County in 2016.

WIC

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a USDA program that provides federal grants to states to provide food for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to their infants and children up to age five. Data were obtained from the California Department of Public Health on the WIC food vouchers redeemed by month in San Diego County in 2016.

Senior Meals (Federal and Private)

SDHC obtained data from County of San Diego Aging & Independence Services (AIS) on the number of meals provided through AIS contracts for the Congregate Nutrition Program and Home-Delivered Nutrition Program in 2016. In addition to meals provided through AIS contracts, several local organizations provide additional congregate and home delivered meals through private funding. SDHC contacted these organizations to determine the additional number of meals provided in 2016 by Meals on Wheels, Jewish Family Service, Neighborhood House Association, and North County Senior Connections.

² Official USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food at Home at Four Levels, U.S. Average, June 2016. Accessed at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov>

³ Carlson, A., Lino, M., & Fungwe, T. (2007). The Low-Cost, Moderate-Cost, and Liberal Food Plans, 2007 (CNPP-20). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

The Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is another USDA federal program that provides meals to older adults who receive care in nonresidential adult day care centers. SDHC obtained data from the California Department of Education on all meals served in 2016 through this program.

Child and Youth Meals (Child Nutrition Programs)

SDHC obtained data from the California Department of Education on the number of meals served by site by month in 2016 through each of the following programs.

School Meals (NSLP & SBP)

The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are USDA meal programs that operate in public schools, nonprofit private schools, and residential child care institutions. These nutrition programs offer free or reduced-price lunches and breakfasts to children of low-income households each school day.

Summer Child Meals (SFSP & SSO)

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) are USDA programs that operate when school is not in session. Meals are served free of charge to children, 18 years and under, in low-income areas.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides meals to children in early education and day care programs in low-income areas and emergency shelters, as well to youth participating in eligible afterschool care programs.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

FDPIR provides USDA Foods to income eligible households living on Indian reservations. Many households participate in FDPIR as an alternative to CalFresh, because they do not have easy access to retailers that accept CalFresh. The program is administered locally by Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) or an agency of a State government. USDA purchases and ships food to the ITOs and State agencies, which store and distribute the food, determine applicant eligibility, and provide nutrition education to recipients.

Food Banks (Private and Federal)

San Diego County has two major food banks: Feeding San Diego (an affiliate of Feeding America) and the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank (which also operates the North County Food Bank). Most food that is purchased or donated for charitable assistance passes through or is coordinated by one of these food banks before being distributed through a vast network of an estimated 500 community-based partners including nonprofit organizations, churches, schools, colleges, and community clinics. SDHC obtained data from each food bank on the number of pounds of food it distributed throughout its network in 2016.

Federal food distributions include food received and distributed through USDA's Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), as well as FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP).

Additional Pantries

The majority of donated food that is distributed in San Diego County is accounted for by the food banks, as described above. However, there are additional donation sources distributed by community-based partners that do not originate from the food banks. This includes food drives organized by pantries and other agencies, donations by stores and restaurants arranged through a direct relationship with a pantry (as opposed to a relationship coordinated by one of the food banks), and also non-donated food that is purchased by pantries.

SDHC worked closely with staff from the San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego to determine the best method of capturing additional food provided by pantries and other agencies. Building upon the work of the San Diego Food Security Network Collaborative, which was initiated and funded by Vince Kasperick and facilitated by

University of San Diego from 2012-2015, SDHC and the food banks developed a new series of questions for a pantry survey that was then fielded by the County of San Diego through the *Live Well Food System Initiative* in 2018. In addition to estimating the percentage of food provided by various categories (e.g. food bank, retail store, food drive, etc.), respondents were asked to identify the specific source (e.g. Vons, Walmart) so the food banks could determine whether the pounds were already included in their numbers and should not be counted again. SDHC analyzed the survey data and held meetings with the food banks and County to refine methodology and develop final estimates of the number of additional pounds provided by pantries and other agencies.

Gleaning:

Several nonprofit groups in San Diego County send volunteers to residential properties to harvest crops (mainly citrus) that would otherwise be wasted. In addition, volunteers collect food donations from farmers markets. SDHC obtained data from Backyard Produce, Produce Good, Harvest C.R.O.P.S., and Senior Gleaners to determine how many pounds were distributed by these organization in 2016 that were not already accounted for in food bank distributions (as some organizations deliver gleaned produce directly to food banks for distribution).