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Press Release

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Food Insecurity

By Patrice Mascolo

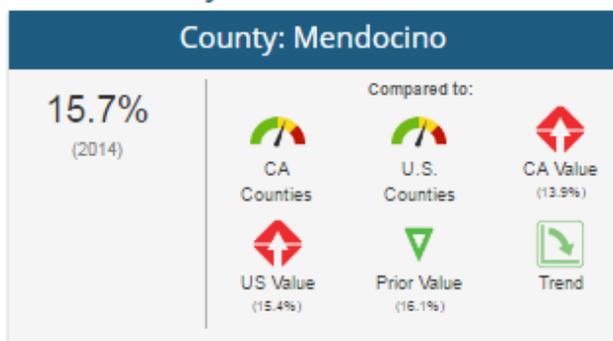
Ukiah, CA –

Background Facts and Data

According to HealthyMendocino.org, food insecurity is an economic and social indicator of the health of a community. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods or uncertain ability to acquire these foods in socially acceptable ways. Poverty and unemployment are frequently predictors of food insecurity as are the effects of housing problems. Residents who do not have a kitchen in their home are more likely to depend on unhealthy convenience foods. Research has found that young children who live in crowded housing conditions are at increased risk of food insecurity. ([Severe Housing Problems Indicator](#))

In adults, food insecurity is associated with chronic health problems including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, hyperlipidemia, obesity, and mental health issues including major depression. In Mendocino County 15.7% of the adult population experienced food insecurity at some point during the year compared to 13.2% of the population in CA. ([Food Insecurity Rate Indicator](#))

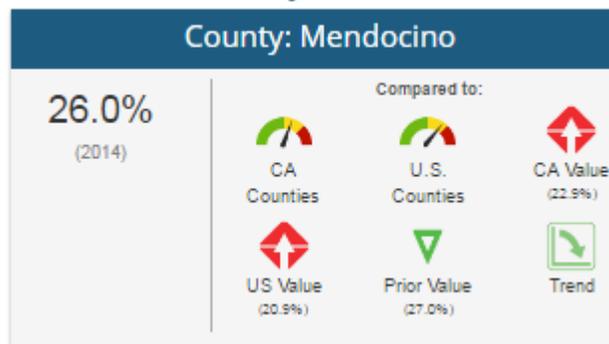
Food Insecurity Rate





In Mendocino County 26% of children under 18 live in households that experienced food insecurity at some point during the year compared to 22.9% of the population in CA. This is over a quarter of our kids! Children exposed to food insecurity are of particular concern given the implications scarce food resources pose to a child's health and development. Children who are food insecure are more likely to be hospitalized and may be at higher risk for developing chronic diseases such as obesity, anemia and asthma as a result of a lower quality diet. In addition, food-insecure children may also be at higher risk for behavioral and social issues including fighting, hyperactivity, anxiety and bullying. ([Child Food Insecurity Rate Indicator](#))

Child Food Insecurity Rate



The Latino population in the United States has nearly doubled in the past decade and continues to grow. Currently, Latino communities are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, poverty and unemployment. They are also less likely to receive support through federal nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and are at greater risk of developing diet-related illnesses.

Rates of food insecurity among rural households are generally higher than urban households. The irony is that many of these food-insecure households are in the very rural and farm communities whose productivity feeds the world and provides low-cost wholesome food for American consumers. According to USDA data, challenges facing rural areas differ from metro/urban areas in several significant ways. Employment is more concentrated in low-wage industries; unemployment and underemployment are greater; education levels are lower; work-support services, such as flexible and affordable child care and public transportation, are less available.

More than 5 million senior citizens age 60 and older face hunger. Seniors face a number of unique medical and mobility challenges that put them at a greater risk of hunger. After a lifetime of hard work, many find themselves struggling with health issues on fixed incomes. Many of these individuals are forced to choose between paying for groceries and buying medicine. The unique challenges of senior hunger take into account the health status, medication needs, transportation, physical limitations and dietary restrictions of older Americans.



Local Efforts Relating to Food Insecurity

This trend is showing a decrease as more non-profits and local agencies work on solutions. Mendocino County has many programs and agencies that help adults, families, children and seniors who are food insecure. In Ukiah, Plowshares Peace & Justice Center's dining room program offers two hot nutritious meals each weekday. The Meals on Wheels program delivers a hot lunch each weekday to home bound seniors. "These programs also offer an opportunity for social contact to folks who may be isolated due to age, health conditions, or low income," says Marlene Kurowski, Executive Director at Plowshares. It is an added benefit that a sense of community can strengthen better choices and health habits. According to Gayle Zepeda, at the Round Valley Indian Health Center, they administer a local food pantry. "Funding for that food distribution is from a private foundation and we currently spend about \$250 a month to distribute food to about 75 families. We're coming to the end of that grant so we're not sure if we can continue to provide free food to needy families/individuals."

School lunch programs are helpful to children that are food insecure, however, they do not cover all the food needs of growing children. The BackPack Program provides backpacks filled with non-perishable, child-friendly and nutritious food to children who are food insecure. The backpack is discretely distributed to students before weekends and school holidays so that children who have their nutritional needs met through other programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, do not go hungry when those resources are not available. Kids who are hungry have a hard time learning. Free and reduced school meals is a federally subsidized program that makes it possible for every kid to have access to a hot breakfast and lunch.

Thanks to federal food programs like CalFresh, the School Meal program, and WIC, thousands in our community receive a little help to ensure that they receive enough food each month. CalFresh is the California name for the Food Stamp Program, also known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. If a person is a CalFresh/SNAP recipient they can also take advantage of Market Match which doubles EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) shoppers' buying power at local farmer's markets.

Most of the communities in Mendocino County have a Senior Center that will provide a hot lunch, some for a minimal fee. There are also Meals on Wheels delivery programs for home bound seniors in some of our communities. The Indian Senior Center at 425 N. State, in Ukiah, delivers hot lunches to Ukiah, Hopland, Willits, and Laytonville. The Round Valley Indian Tribes Senior Center has a senior food program providing on-site and home delivery meals. The Tribe administers a senior food program providing meals on-site and home delivery. This is funded by the Area on Aging and supplemented by tribal resources.



The Commodity supplemental Food Program (CSFP) works to improve the health of low-income seniors by supplying a free box of food monthly that contains a variety of foods. This program is run by the Redwood Empire Food Bank in Santa Rosa and delivers monthly to inland and coastal locations throughout the county.

Click on these links for more information on resources in the county:

[Food for All: Mendocino Food Resource Guide](#)

[Commodity Supplemental Food Program \(CSFP\)](#)

[Round Valley Resources](#)

[Food Pantries](#)

[Mendocino Food and Nutrition Programs](#)

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Patrice Mascolo is the HealthyMendocino.org Coordinator and staff support for the Healthy Mendocino Community Health Improvement Project. She also works at Plowshares Peace & Justice Center working with food insecure individuals.

For information on Healthy Mendocino or to schedule a presentation, please contact Patrice Mascolo, Healthy Mendocino Coordinator, at 707-467-3228 or pmascolo@ncoinc.org.