

# 1 out of 10 Long Islanders seek aid in hunger fight

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One out of 10 Long Islanders seeks relief from hunger each year at food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters, according to a new report by national and local hunger-relief organizations.

The report, "Hunger in America 2010: The Local Report for Long Island," is issued by Chicago-based nonprofit [Feeding America](#) in conjunction with Hauppauge-based food bank Long Island Cares and hunger-relief organization Island Harvest of Mineola. It aims to create a broad picture of the face of hunger on Long Island in 2009 through surveys of food-relief organizations and the people they serve.

In all, 609 of the 702 food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters that receive food from Long Island Cares and Island Harvest were surveyed, along with 614 people who go to pantries, kitchens and shelters for food.

As with any survey, the way questions are phrased, unintended variations in the way workers conduct the interviews, and reliance on participants' answering questions truthfully all contribute to error rates.

So while the report estimates 283,700 people on Long Island seek food assistance every year - a 21 percent increase from revised numbers issued for 2006 - it also says the actual number could be anywhere from 178,100 to 389,200 due to sampling and other errors.

However, hunger agencies and government officials here say the report's findings chime with their observations, and that the numbers of hungry Long Islanders could even be greater than what the report cites.

Among the report's findings:

About half the clients interviewed had at least one child under 18. A quarter of those with children said their children had gone hungry at least once in the past year because they didn't have money to buy food.

Many had to choose between food and other necessities, with half saying they had to choose between buying food and paying the rent or mortgage in the past year. Forty-four percent said they had to choose between buying food and paying for utilities during that time.

About 20 percent of those seeking food assistance were homeowners.

Most Long Island food pantries - about 80 percent - reported an increase in the number of



people they serve since the last report in 2006.

Randi Shubin Dresner, president and chief executive of Island Harvest, said she believes the one in 10 figure is probably on the low side.

"I am pretty comfortable that the number is not lower. It's going to be higher," Dresner said. "Because we see it, we hear it. Our agencies are calling us every single day."

The report's figures also resonated with government officials who see the face of hunger at their agencies.

John Imhof, commissioner of the Nassau County Department of Social Services, said he believes even larger numbers of Long Islanders could be going hungry each year. In the last 18 months, Imhof said, his agency has seen a 40 percent increase in the number of applications for government food assistance. "It's a very, very serious public health emergency," he said.

Suffolk County Social Services Commissioner Gregory Blass said food assistance cases in that county have gone up by 46 percent between 2008 and 2009. "We haven't seen any breaks in this climb," said Blass, who agreed with the report's findings. "It is an alarming and very troubling rate of increase in the families that have needed assistance."