

Data: Hunger a concern

23.1% in Suffolk,
21.1% in Nassau
are food insecure

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More than 1 in 5 Long Island adults said they worry about having enough money to buy nutritious meals, according to a report released Wednesday by the state Department of Health.

Those numbers were slightly better than the state average, with nearly 1 in 4 New Yorkers reporting food insecurity. In Suffolk, 23.1% of residents said they were food insecure. In Nassau, it was 21.1%, according to the state report. Outside New York City, food insecurity was highest in upstate Montgomery County. Of New York City boroughs, the Bronx had the highest rate.

The numbers come from a 2021 national telephone survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a tool public health leaders use for planning health promotion and disease prevention programs. A state health department spokeswoman said the lag from then to now occurred because the CDC did not release the data until late 2022 and it took time to analyze.

Dismaying, not surprising

Long Island experts said the results were dismaying but not surprising.

"This data is appalling," said Sandra Lindsay, a registered nurse who is Northwell Health's vice president for public health advocacy. Food insecurity broadly tracks poverty, she said, because "when you have to choose between food



Over 20% of Long Islanders are worried about having enough money for nutritious meals, data shows.

and a kid going to school, or transportation, these are decisions people make every day" and nutrition may not be top of mind. It also correlates with bad health outcomes, Lindsay said, because people who are food insecure may rely on "cheaper, calorie-dense foods" that can increase the risk of conditions like diabetes, heart conditions and certain cancers.

In an emailed statement, Suffolk County Department of Health Services Commissioner Gregson Pigott said there were long-standing "pockets of food insecurity" in the county as far west as Amityville and as far east as Southampton. "Our staff is out in the community every day educating residents and connecting them to resources that will assist them in addressing their health care and nutri-

tional needs."

A Nassau County spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Only part of story

A 2021 report by Feeding America, a national network of food banks, put food insecurity at 5.2% in Suffolk and 4.4% in Nassau. But Paule T. Pachter, president and chief executive of Long Island Cares, said those numbers did not show the true extent of need on Long Island, because even households with multiple jobs and incomes above the federal poverty level may struggle with the area's high cost of living.

Pachter's organization started seeing greater need for its services around the start of the pandemic with little rebound even as conditions improved he said. Driving the

need now is "the cost of goods, in particular the cost of food." Another factor, he said: Some families served by Long Island Cares have grown in recent years, with recent immigrants swelling blended or multigenerational families.

Leaders of some hunger relief organizations said they hoped the report would highlight the need for continued federal and state funding for nutrition assistance programs, especially as pandemic stimulus money that some Long Island towns used to feed residents dries up.

"It gives credibility to the message that we've been sharing for some time now," said Randi Shubin Dresner, president of Island Harvest Food Bank. Her organization primarily serves Long Islanders who work — some with multiple

WHAT TO KNOW

- More than 1 in 5 Long Island adults said they worry about having enough money to buy nutritious meals, according to a new report by the state Department of Health.
- In Suffolk, the percentage of residents who said they were food insecure stood at 23.1%. In Nassau, it was 21.1%.
- Those numbers were slightly better than the state average, with nearly 1 in 4 New Yorkers reporting food insecurity.

jobs — but don't earn enough to support their families, she said.

A hunger spike

The need for some of the organization's programs has spiked in recent years, Dresner said, citing a mobile food market that got 1,100 visits in 2022 and 21,000 in 2023.

Island Harvest is one of a number of organizations advocating for increases to state initiatives like the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program and Nourish New York. "We are grateful we are getting this funding," but the "state needs to put more money into these programs so that they can grow," she said.

At the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, board chair Colleen Merlo said the numbers suggested that federal programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and others providing breakfast and lunch for children at school should be expanded. The report, she said, "helps paint the picture of what Long Island really is — people think of the Hamptons and the Gold Coast, and that's not the full picture."

LI coastal storm expected over weekend

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There is a "low probability" that Long Island will get 2 to 4 inches of accumulating snow or sleet Saturday evening into Sunday, the National Weather Service said, but some type of

heavy precipitation and strong winds are expected.

"With a marginally cold air mass in place, the exact storm track and intensity will be crucial to precipitation types and amounts, particularly for the city and coast," the weather service said in an advisory

Wednesday evening.

Forecasters said it is more likely that the Lower Hudson Valley and Southern Connecticut will get the snow, and Long Island will get rain from the coastal storm. But the weather service said, "These details are expected to become clearer

over the next 36 hours."

There's also a "slight chance" that the first snow of 2024 could begin to fall on Long Island Thursday morning. There's a 20% chance of snow before 10 a.m. The high temperature will be about 44, dropping to the low 20s at night with wind chills of

between 15 to 20 degrees, the weather service said. Friday is predicted to be sunny, with a high near 37 and a low in mid-20s. Saturday, there is a 40% chance of rain or snow after 1 p.m., rising to 80% in the evening as the coastal storm moves in and lasts through Sunday.