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LONG ISLAND

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# Long Island food banks ramp up as SNAP benefits set to end Saturday

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Food shelves at Long Island Cares' Nassau Center for Collaborative Assistance in Freeport on Wednesday. Credit: Newsday/Alejandra Villa Loarca

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Long Island's two food banks, which supply hundreds of pantries and soup kitchens for the region's indigent, are ramping up efforts as a nearly monthlong government shutdown is set to cut off a critical federal food assistance program Saturday.

About 31,545 Nassau County households, or 43,404 individuals, received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits as of July, and in Suffolk County it was 78,939 households, or 124,604 individuals, according to the New York State [Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance](#).

Without SNAP, many of them are expected to turn to Long Island's food pantries. Officials say they will be trying to meet the need.

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"If people are hurting they can come to us, or they can come to our network [of food pantries]. We're happy to help," said Michael Haynes, vice president of government relations, advocacy and social policy at [Long Island Cares](#)/The Harry Chapin Food Bank, based in Hauppauge. "We have the food ... We're here to help and we know what we've got to do."

## WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** benefits are slated to be suspended beginning Saturday because of the federal government shutdown.
- **43,404 individuals in Nassau County and 124,604 individuals in Suffolk County** received SNAP, according to July data from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

- **Food banks and food pantries** across Long Island are gearing up to increase their efforts, anticipating that more people will seek out emergency food assistance.

But the need may be too great amid the shutdown.

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"For every meal that the food bank provides a community, SNAP can provide nine," Randi Shubin Dresner, president and CEO of Island Harvest, Long Island's other major food bank, said. "We can't compete with that — with food or with dollars. That's the government's promise to people who are struggling. We're just asking the government to support that promise."

Island Harvest, based in Melville, is looking to increase its supply to distribute to about 300

member agencies that help vulnerable Long Islanders.

"What we're doing is we've reached out to our board to identify funding to release so that we could be responsive to our community in need," Shubin Dresner said. "What we intend to do with this additional funding is purchase additional healthy food from our local community farmers so we can build up the reserves our pantry network has."

This year, the food bank has distributed "well over" 21.5 million pounds of food across Long Island, she said.

Long Island Cares supplies 366 member agencies, an assortment of food pantries run by religious groups, veterans service agencies, child care programs and shelters, Haynes said.

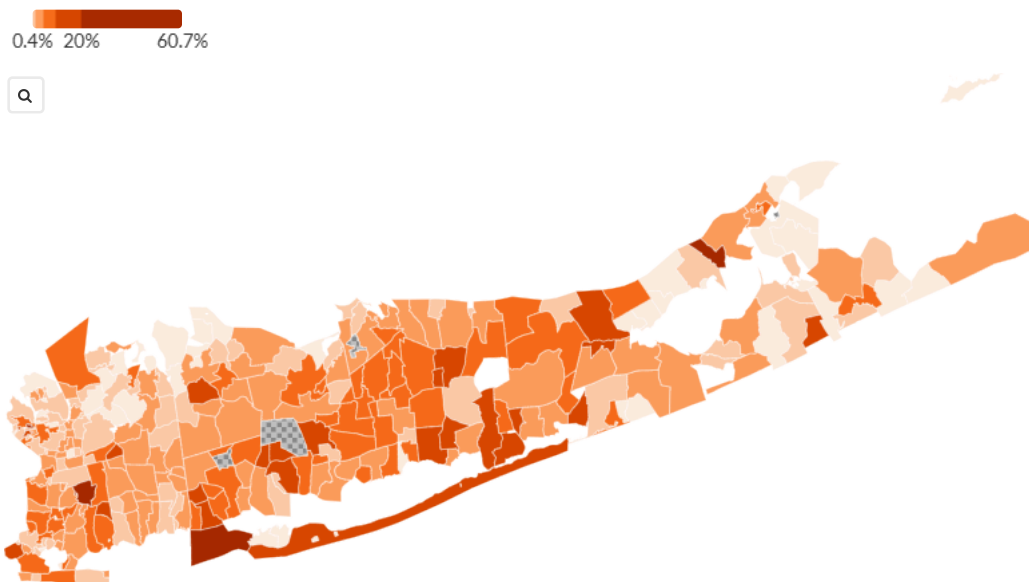
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It operates six food pantries stretching from Valley Stream to Hampton Bays, and distributes more than 1 million pounds of food each month, Haynes said. According to [Feeding America](#) and U.S. Department of Agricultural data,

an estimated 313,000 Long Islanders are food insecure, he said.

## Long Island communities with households receiving Food Stamp/SNAP benefits in the past 12 months

Tap to see the percent of total households in each community receiving the benefits



Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates by city/village/hamlet • There is no data for Brentwood and Wyandanch, because of a [data collection issue](#). The estimates for Dering Harbor and Stony Brook University could not be calculated due to sample size.



Lisa Sherred, a Freeport resident who was picking up food from Long Island Cares' Nassau Center for Collaborative Assistance in Freeport, said the suspension of SNAP benefits would hurt her. "That's not fair to senior citizens on a fixed income," she said.

"I don't like it because I'm going to have to choose between medication and food," Sherred said. "Right now, SNAP helps me make ends meet until the end of the month."

Officials at some Island food pantries reached Wednesday said they were anticipating increases in people coming to them.

"We're trying to be ready to do whatever we can do," said Bertha Del Carpio, parish social ministry director at St. Aloysius Roman Catholic Church in Great Neck, which operates the St. Aloysius Interfaith Food Pantry. It's open to Great Neck residents and conducted in partnership with Temple Beth-El in Great Neck.

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"We serve close to 100 families every time we open," which is every other Saturday, Del Carpio said. As the suspension of SNAP benefits loomed, she said, "We're hoping we will be able to meet the challenge."

The Rev. Catherine Wiczorek, the priest of Christ Episcopal Church in Babylon, considered the impact on clients who come to the church's Nourish Babylon feeding program.

"We host a three-course hot meal on Monday nights. What we are seeing already is an increased level of anxiety among our guests," the majority of whom are seniors, she said. "Many of them are really struggling as well. They are on fixed incomes and concerned about how they are going to manage in the next couple of weeks."

Anthony Achong, director of administration and operations for the Long Island Council of Churches, which operates a food pantry in Freeport for Nassau residents, said he was anticipating more than the 600 people that come to the pantry monthly. One organization, the Mental Health Association of Nassau County, had already reached out about sending food insecure clients to the Sunrise Highway pantry, he said.

"I think with them we will probably be receiving 10 to 30 families per week," Achong said of people from the mental health association. "I'm sure with the [SNAP suspension] we'll get other individuals as well. I'm pretty sure those numbers are going to grow next month. It's rough because it's the holidays as well. We are grateful for any donations people make to us, either food or monetary donations. We're just going to keep doing what we're doing. We're going to make sure our shelves are stocked."

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But Mireya Jacobs, outreach coordinator at St. Joachim Roman Catholic Church in Cedarhurst, was worried about being able to handle a large increase in the number of people coming to the food pantry.

"We get about between 40 and 50 a visit," she said. "We couldn't handle it if the amount of people doubled."

*Newsday's Tiffany Cusaac-Smith and Kendall Rodriguez contributed to this story.*



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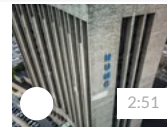


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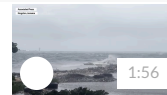
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