

How do I feed my family tonight? – Food Insecurity in Worcester County

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What is food insecurity?

The USDA defines **food insecurity** as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” Currently, 14% of Americans, and almost 11% of Worcester residents are food insecure¹, highlighting the importance of identifying and understanding this issue.

Food insecurity has been associated with various poor health outcomes including more instances of overweight and obesity, lower overall health status and poor management of chronic diseases, such as diabetes.² By identifying food insecure persons, we are more able to provide adequate nutrition to improve the health of the affected population and prevent the health conditions associated with poor nutrition.

Our goal was to raise awareness among the Worcester medical community of in-house and community resources available to help food insecure families.

A snapshot of our community

In Worcester County 13.95% of households are linguistically isolated compared to 5.7% in MA state.

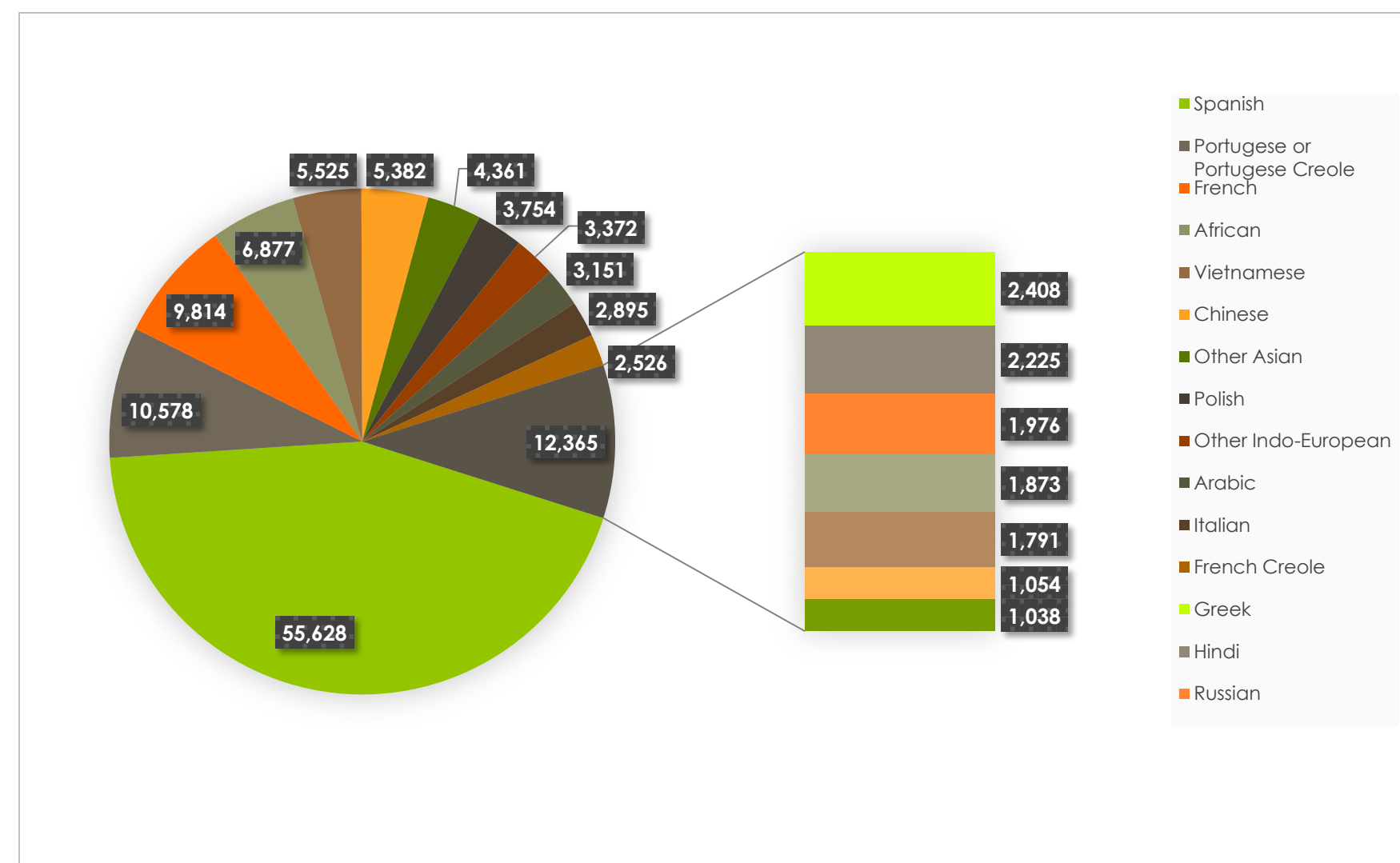


Figure 1. Popular non-English languages spoken at home in Worcester County.

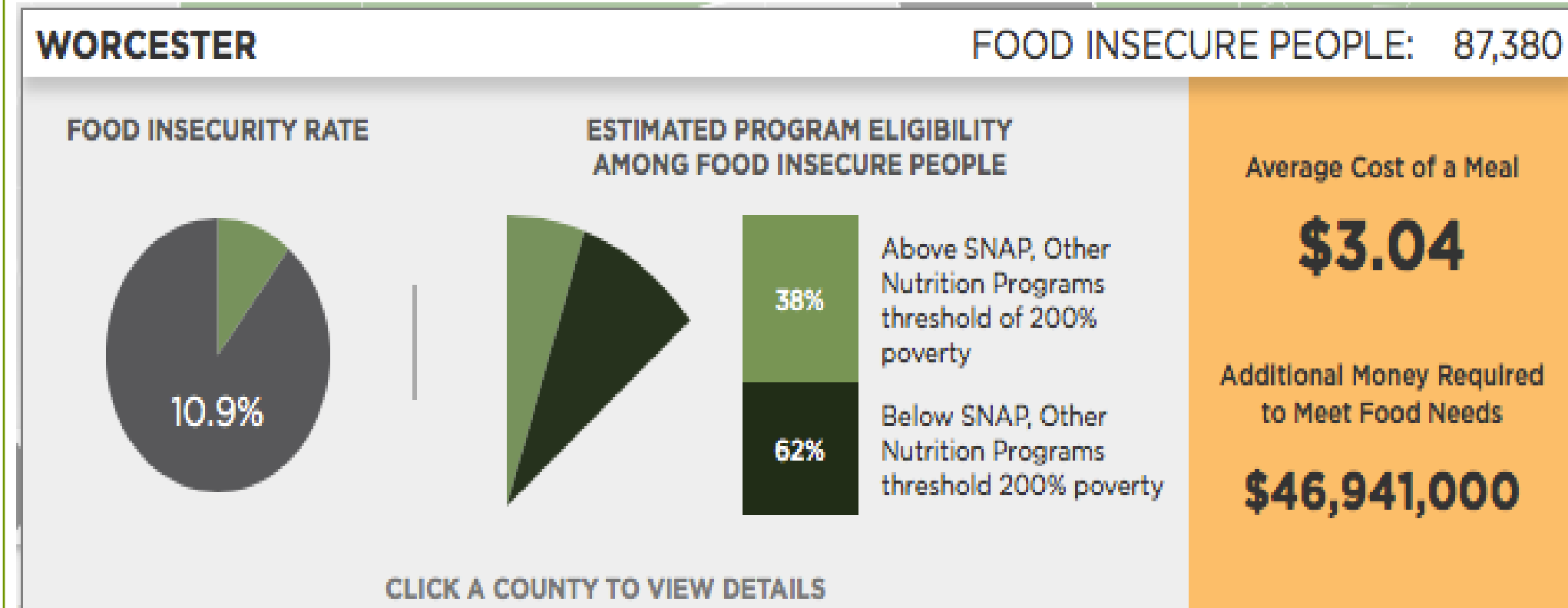


Figure 2. Food insecurity and SNAP statistics in Worcester County.

Health in Worcester

Obesity: 1 in 4

Only 24.3% get daily recommended **5 servings** of **fruits or vegetables**

Diabetes 8.6%

25% Hypertension

36% High Cholesterol

Time for Physical Activity: 72%

Food Access

A food desert is a geographic area where affordable and nutritious food is difficult to obtain. The wide distribution of these areas in Worcester makes it harder for residents to find food to feed themselves and their families.

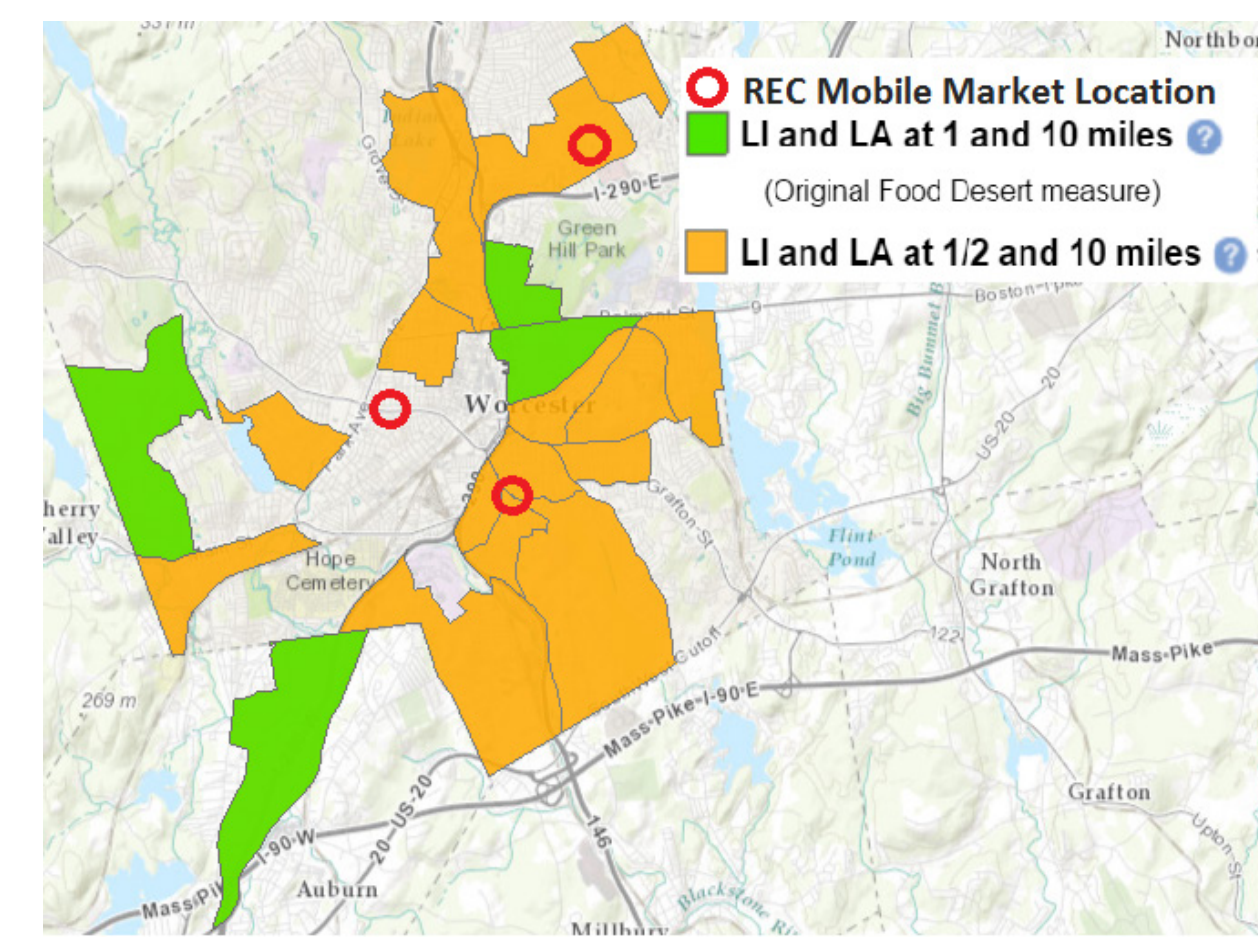


Figure 3. Representation of food deserts in Worcester. This takes into account both Low Income (LI) and Low Access (LA) residents who are more than 1 mile or ½ mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket in Worcester.

Policy

Food policy is an important way to make lasting change in the issues we face concerning food insecurity and hunger in our state and our country.

- *What important policy changes are happening now?*

- Greater Worcester Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)
 - Objective 1.1** Increase availability of and access to affordable fresh and local fruits and vegetables for low-income residents by 10% by 2015, as measured by walking distance.
- Proposed Massachusetts State Food System Plan Goal
 - Action 5.1.1:** Incorporate food insecurity screenings and referrals to food assistance resources into regular practice for visits to the doctor's office or clinic. Encourage health care institutions to partner with agencies that can provide SNAP enrollment assistance to patients, and encourage utilization of benefit enrollment centers to provide referrals for patients in need of additional services.

Underutilization of assistance programs

Program	Year	# of People	% of Population*	% of Eligible Population
SNAP	2009	76,512	9.52%	72%
SNAP	2014	104,124	12.8%	87%
WIC	2009	15,592	1.94%	**58.8%
WIC	2014	13,910	1.71%	-
NSLP	2009	66,707	8.3%	39%
NSLP	2014	61,417	7.55%	27%

Table 1. The utilization of supplemental food assistance resources in Worcester county, *Population of Worcester County: 2014 – 813,475. 2009 – 803,701. **Only data available from 2010

Hospitals are positioned to help. How can they be utilized?

The **Children's HealthWatch Hunger Vital Sign** is a two question screening tool used to identify families with children that are at risk food insecurity.

1. Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.

2. Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.

Our team created this flyer to educate physicians and patients about the available resources in our community

HOW do I feed my family?

Immediate Food Assistance

Find a food pantry near you - www.foodbank.org

- Click on "Receive Assistance"
- Enter zip code to find food pantries near you

Food Assistance Programs

1) Sign up for SNAP (Food Stamps)

- Hospital financial counseling:** Drop ins welcome!
Location: University campus lobby, across from gift shop
Hours: Mon – Fri 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM
Phone: (508) 334-9300
* Interpreters Available

- Project Bread - www.projectbread.org**
Hours: Mon-Fri 8:00 AM – 7 PM, Sat 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Phone: 1-800-645-8333
* 160 languages available

2) Sign up for WIC (Women Infants and Children under 5)

- Phone: 1-800-942-1007
www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/basic-needs/food/wic/

Healthy Habits

- Visit Cooking Matters - www.ma.cookingmatters.org**
Healthy affordable recipes, Opportunities for free cooking classes & grocery store tours
- Explore REC Mobile Market - www.RECworcester.org**
Double the value of SNAP dollars with the mobile market (Get \$10 worth of food, only spend \$5)

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