

Fact Sheet

Over 9 Million Adults Ages 50 and Older Faced Food Insecurity in 2020

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In 2020, nearly 9.5 million (or about 8 percent of) Americans ages 50 and older were food insecure, meaning they had limited or uncertain access to adequate, nutritious food. The data reveal significant differences by state, age, race and ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics.

Every year, millions of Americans ages 50 and older experience food insecurity, meaning they have limited or uncertain access to adequate, nutritious food. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread job loss that hit older workers particularly hard.¹ However, perhaps resulting in part from short-term pandemic-related policy, the overall share of older Americans experiencing food insecurity did not change significantly from 2019 to 2020, according to annual data from the United States Department of Agriculture.² Nevertheless, food insecurity has not been hitting everyone equally.

This *Fact Sheet* describes trends in food insecurity and selected characteristics of food-insecure adults ages 50 and older. State-level data are included in the appendix.

Trends in Older-Adult Food Insecurity

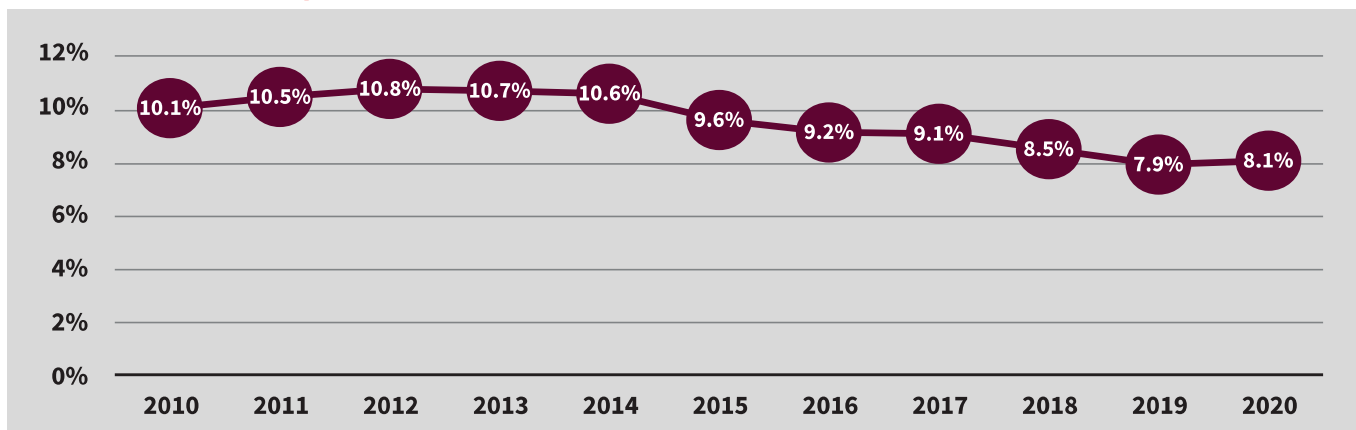
Over the past decade, food insecurity among adults ages 50 and older has roughly remained between 8 and 11 percent of the population (figure 1). After peaking at 10.8 percent in 2012,

Key Takeaways

Food insecurity is most prevalent among older adults who:

- ✓ Are younger (i.e., ages 50–59)
- ✓ Are Black, Native American, or Hispanic
- ✓ Are lower income
- ✓ Have lower levels of educational attainment

FIGURE 1
Food Insecurity among Adults 50+, 2010–2020



Source: AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of 2020 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS)

food insecurity prevalence among adults ages 50 and older dropped to a low of 7.9 percent in 2019. Between 2019 and 2020, food insecurity among this age group did not change substantially (7.9 to 8.1 percent).

Among adults ages 50 and older, food insecurity prevalence decreases with age. Adults ages 50 to 59 experience food insecurity at nearly twice the rate of those ages 70 and older (figure 2). From 2019 to 2020, food insecurity prevalence increased by about 1 percentage point among the 50–59 age group and stayed basically the same among adults ages 60 to 69 and 70+.

State-Level Differences in Food Insecurity among Older Adults

Food insecurity among adults ages 50 and older differs widely by state (figure 3). All top 10 states with the highest rates of older-adult food insecurity are southern states. In 2020, New Hampshire had the lowest prevalence of food insecurity among this age group

(3.0 percent); the District of Columbia had the highest (13.4 percent; see appendix).

Demographic Characteristics Linked to Older-Adult Food Insecurity

In 2020, certain subgroups of adults ages 50 and older experienced considerably higher levels of food insecurity than others.

- Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic:** Nearly one in five Black and American Indian/Alaska Native adults ages 50 and older experienced food insecurity in 2020. Among this age group, 14.6 percent of Hispanic adults were food insecure, compared with 5.6 and 5.2 percent of Asian and White adults ages 50 and older, respectively (figure 4). Racial and ethnic disparities in food insecurity also widened between 2019 and 2020 (figure 5). Food insecurity increased among older Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, and Asian adults, while it decreased slightly among older White adults.

FIGURE 2
Food Insecurity Prevalence by Older Age Group, 2010–2020

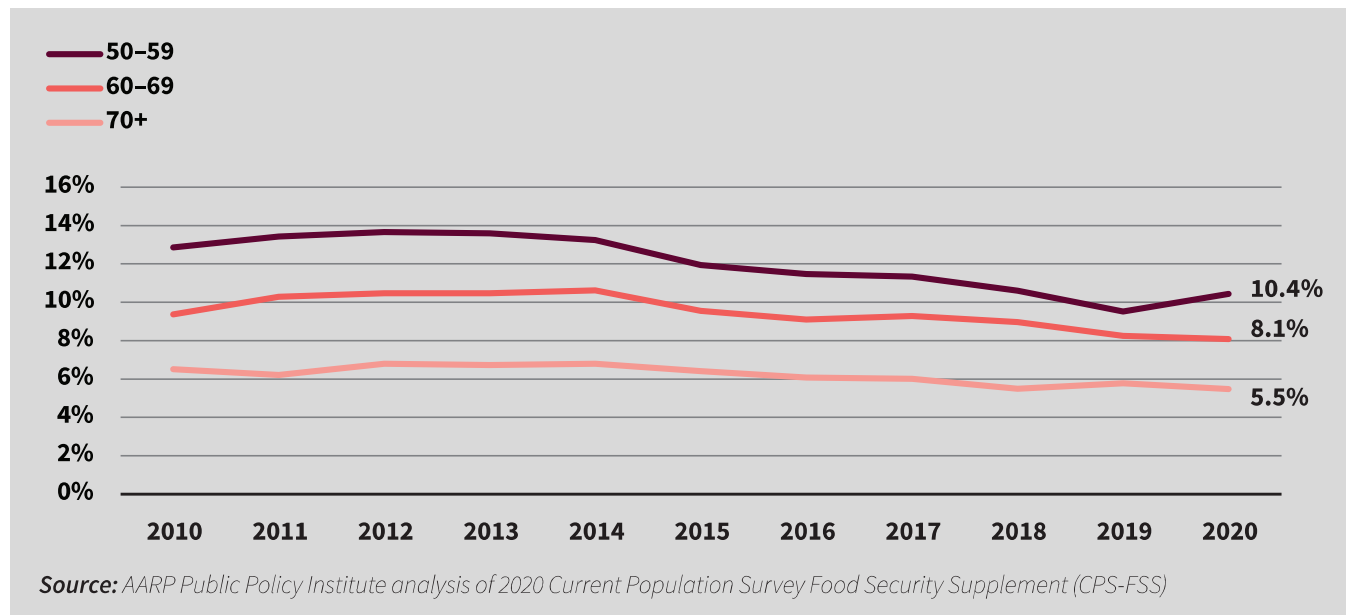
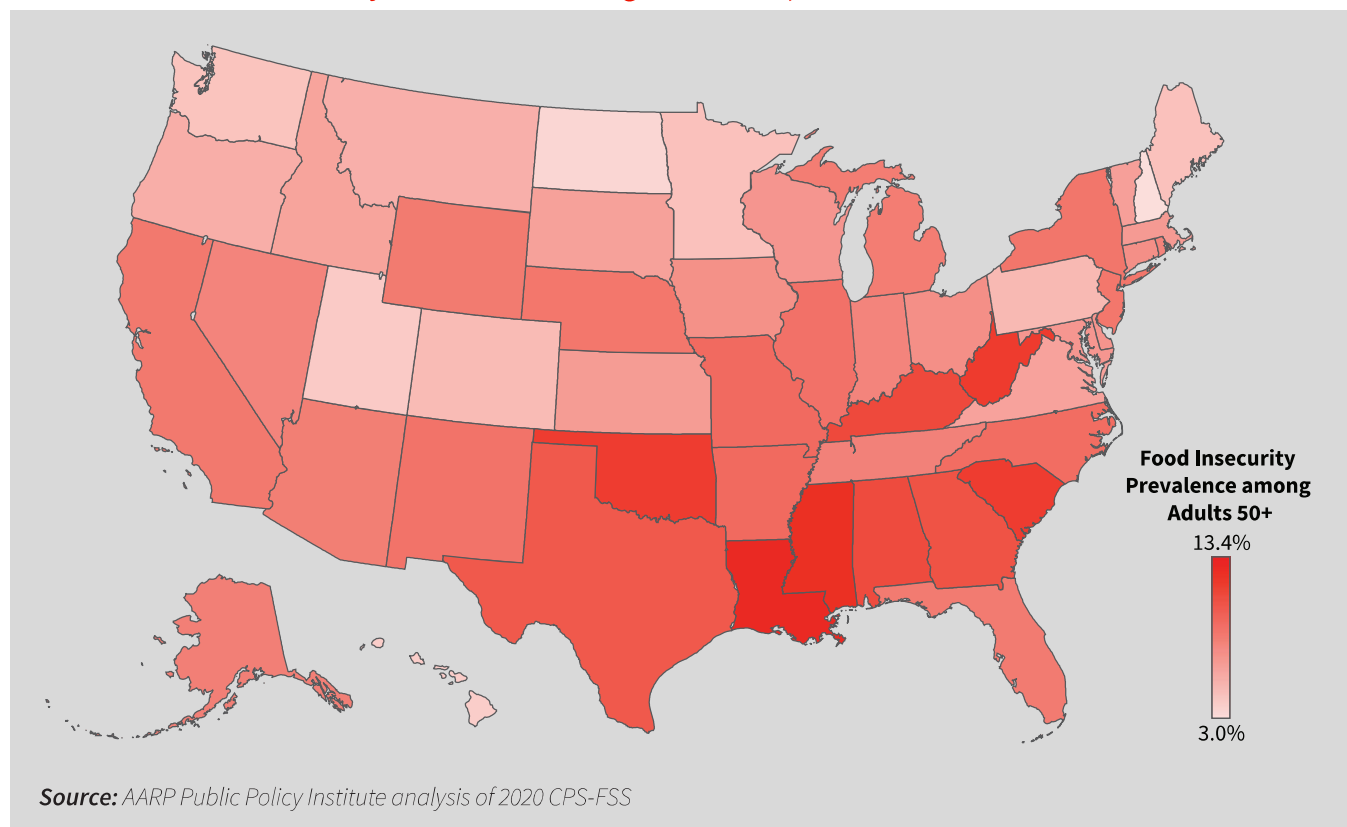


FIGURE 3

State-Level Food Insecurity Prevalence among Adults 50+, 2020

- Low Educational Attainment:** Food insecurity prevalence was highest among adults ages 50 and older without a high school diploma (20.4 percent) and decreased with increasing levels of educational attainment (figure 4). Fewer than 4 percent of adults ages 50 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher were food insecure.
- Low Income:** Unsurprisingly, food insecurity prevalence decreases with increasing income. One fifth of adults ages 50 and older with household incomes below \$30,000 were food insecure, compared with less than 2 percent of those earning \$100,000 or more (figure 4). Nearly one quarter (22.7 percent) of adults in this age group with household incomes below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level³ were food insecure.
- Women:** Women ages 50 and older were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to be food insecure, but the difference was small (8.4 versus 7.7 percent; figure 4).
- Living Alone:** Adults ages 50 and older who lived alone were more likely to be food insecure than those living with others (10.5 versus 7.4 percent; figure 4).
- Nonmetropolitan:** Adults ages 50 and older living in nonmetropolitan areas were slightly more likely to be food insecure than those living in metropolitan areas (8.8 percent versus 8.0 percent; figure 4).⁴

FIGURE 4
Food Insecurity Prevalence among Adults 50+ by Demographic Characteristics, 2020

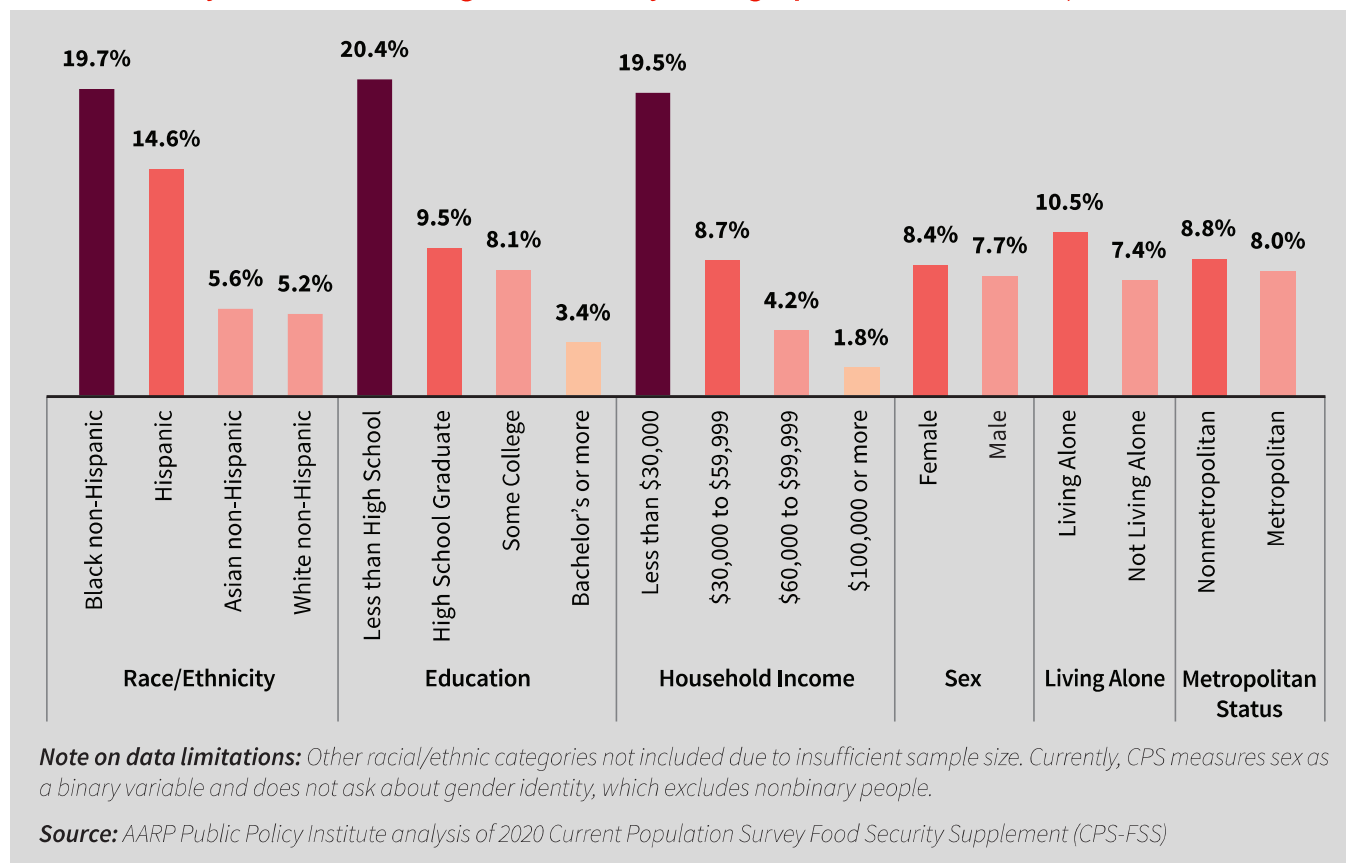
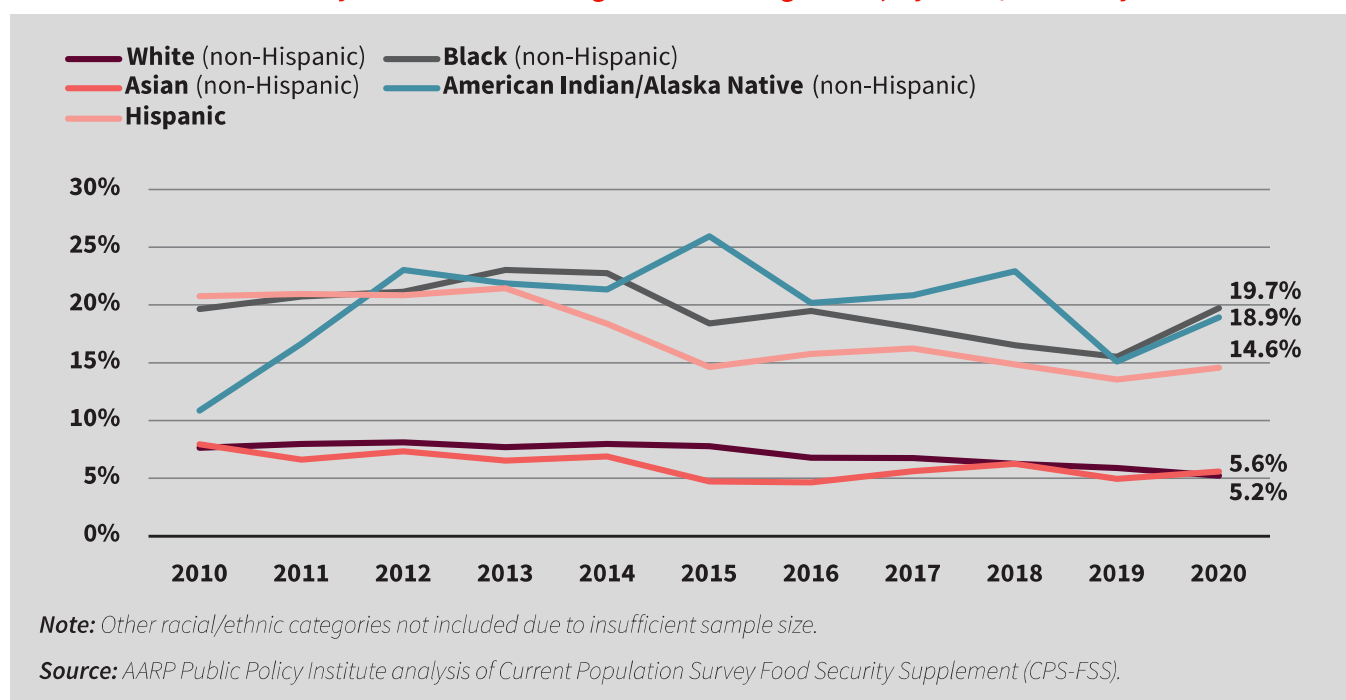


FIGURE 5
Trends in Food Insecurity Prevalence among Americans Ages 50+, by Race/Ethnicity



Conclusion

Over 9 million Americans ages 50 and older (about 1 in 12) were food insecure in 2020, a number that did not change substantially from 2019 despite a pandemic that caused widespread unemployment. This finding suggests that congressional actions such as boosts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)⁵ may have helped

millions of older adults put food on the table in a time of need and prevented overall increases in food insecurity. However, these findings masked considerably higher food insecurity among various demographic groups, likely due to longstanding inequities across domains, such as employment, housing, and health care, that the pandemic exacerbated.⁶

Appendix

Food Insecurity Prevalence by Age Group, 2020

State	50–59		60–69		70+		50+	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Alabama	13.1%	92,534	11.3%	63,140	7.7%	46,712	10.8%	202,386
Alaska	9.3%	8,088	7.4%	5,661	6.9%	3,860	8.0%	17,608
Arizona	11.5%	98,560	10.1%	87,051	2.8%	24,989	8.0%	210,600
Arkansas	17.7%	60,233	5.8%	21,711	4.6%	16,617	9.2%	98,562
California	10.7%	507,584	8.5%	373,109	5.5%	219,814	8.4%	1,100,507
Colorado	4.1%	29,450	6.5%	53,132	3.1%	13,895	4.8%	96,477
Connecticut	10.2%	55,936	5.9%	28,880	4.7%	18,636	7.2%	103,452
Delaware	12.9%	17,940	4.7%	6,014	3.1%	4,541	6.9%	28,495
District of Columbia	12.2%	7,982	15.2%	9,065	13.1%	7,654	13.4%	24,701
Florida	7.6%	212,117	9.5%	269,793	7.8%	252,006	8.3%	733,915
Georgia	13.3%	184,590	8.4%	98,565	9.0%	89,425	10.5%	372,579
Hawaii	6.3%	10,629	4.4%	7,373	1.3%	2,536	3.9%	20,539
Idaho	10.1%	21,905	2.9%	6,266	5.0%	8,802	6.1%	36,973
Illinois	10.4%	150,859	9.4%	142,431	6.4%	91,396	8.8%	384,686
Indiana	10.6%	93,760	5.7%	41,427	6.1%	40,117	7.7%	175,304
Iowa	7.8%	30,116	6.2%	19,979	7.1%	29,314	7.1%	79,410
Kansas	10.7%	35,373	7.3%	24,656	1.5%	5,152	6.5%	65,182
Kentucky	14.5%	84,936	11.4%	66,194	5.9%	27,968	10.9%	179,097
Louisiana	10.2%	52,066	16.3%	93,821	11.2%	58,265	12.7%	204,152
Maine	2.2%	3,561	5.0%	9,447	5.7%	13,883	4.5%	26,891
Maryland	7.6%	59,750	8.1%	56,012	4.2%	28,522	6.7%	144,284
Massachusetts	8.1%	74,567	8.3%	67,963	3.5%	30,101	6.6%	172,632
Michigan	11.1%	150,006	10.3%	136,902	2.2%	25,736	8.1%	312,645
Minnesota	5.1%	42,039	3.9%	25,958	4.3%	23,289	4.5%	91,286
Mississippi	12.8%	49,781	13.4%	46,920	10.4%	31,712	12.3%	128,412
Missouri	13.6%	122,540	6.5%	43,541	5.5%	35,218	9.1%	201,300
Montana	10.1%	13,264	4.7%	6,109	1.9%	2,891	5.4%	22,264
Nebraska	13.2%	31,898	7.9%	16,398	3.7%	7,868	8.5%	56,164
Nevada	10.9%	43,383	7.9%	28,042	4.2%	15,606	7.7%	87,031
New Hampshire	2.9%	6,568	4.4%	7,902	1.6%	2,617	3.0%	17,086
New Jersey	11.8%	146,834	6.4%	69,372	6.5%	64,369	8.4%	280,576
New Mexico	16.2%	39,610	7.0%	18,575	3.5%	9,228	8.7%	67,413
New York	11.7%	275,167	7.2%	179,477	6.7%	163,313	8.5%	617,958
North Carolina	12.4%	158,398	8.9%	115,883	6.0%	81,151	9.0%	355,433
North Dakota	6.8%	5,857	2.7%	2,422	0.4%	328	3.4%	8,607
Ohio	12.4%	191,922	6.4%	94,098	2.5%	36,618	7.2%	322,638

State	50-59		60-69		70+		50+	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Oklahoma	16.2%	78,915	9.1%	41,351	8.5%	33,123	11.5%	153,389
Oregon	6.9%	34,466	6.4%	32,863	3.4%	17,984	5.5%	85,313
Pennsylvania	6.9%	108,737	4.1%	65,971	3.9%	65,954	5.0%	240,663
Rhode Island	9.6%	13,041	7.2%	10,009	6.6%	8,102	7.8%	31,152
South Carolina	13.2%	80,655	12.8%	89,623	8.5%	56,941	11.5%	227,218
South Dakota	9.5%	10,613	5.4%	5,535	3.4%	3,281	6.2%	19,429
Tennessee	10.2%	90,411	8.1%	68,086	5.1%	39,471	7.9%	197,969
Texas	12.7%	433,132	10.3%	286,699	6.4%	160,269	10.1%	880,100
Utah	6.1%	21,354	0.9%	2,148	4.2%	9,951	4.0%	33,454
Vermont	10.0%	8,022	4.8%	3,822	4.4%	4,294	6.3%	16,138
Virginia	9.0%	92,141	3.7%	40,348	5.8%	54,300	6.1%	186,789
Washington	7.5%	61,011	4.9%	45,302	1.0%	9,012	4.4%	115,325
West Virginia	15.5%	31,605	11.9%	30,297	8.3%	21,831	11.6%	83,732
Wisconsin	6.3%	56,067	10.7%	77,855	3.0%	19,293	6.8%	153,215
Wyoming	7.8%	5,133	11.6%	9,027	5.1%	3,405	8.3%	17,565
United States	10.4%	4,295,109	8.1%	3,152,227	5.5%	2,041,359	8.1%	9,488,694

Source: AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement (CPS-FSS).

- Jennifer Schramm, “Devastating Job Losses May Be Pushing Older Workers into Retirement,” AARP Public Policy Institute, June 8, 2020, <https://blog.aarp.org/thinking-policy/job-losses-may-be-pushing-older-workers-into-retirement>.
- Difference was not statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. The US Census Bureau for the US Department of Agriculture conducted the 2020 CPS-FSS in December 2020.
- In most states, the Federal Poverty Level was \$12,760 for a one-person household in 2020. (See Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), “2020 Poverty Guidelines,” <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references/2020-poverty-guidelines>).
- Metropolitan areas have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants.
- SNAP is a federal program that provides benefits to low-income households to buy food. More information is available at www.aarp.org/SNAP.
- Kendal Orgera, Rachel Garfield, and Robin Rudowitz, “Tracking Social Determinants of Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Kaiser Family Foundation, December 15, 2021, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/tracking-social-determinants-of-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

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