

## **Massachusetts Annual Statewide Food Access Report**

### **2025 Survey Methodology**

This survey was initially developed in 2020 in partnership with the National Food Access and COVID Research Team (NFACT), which was made up of researchers from 15 states across the country. The original goal of this study was to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and food access across the state. At the time, GBFB was one of only two food banks conducting this type of research, and we remain leaders in this work today.

Since its inception, this survey has evolved with input from state, community, and healthcare partners, including the members of the [GBFB Health and Research Council](#). In addition to tracking food insecurity rates, the study also explores barriers and facilitators to food assistance program participation (e.g., food pantries, WIC, SNAP, Universal School Meals). We seek to capture and amplify the experiences of populations with high rates of food insecurity – including the LGBTQ+ community, college students, seniors, and veterans – and highlight solutions to food insecurity proposed by those with lived expertise. This year, we sought to better understand the economic, health, and social costs of food insecurity at the household and community level.

#### *Survey Design and Development*

Each summer, the GBFB and Mass General Brigham (MGB) for Children data and research teams collaborates with key partners—including representatives from Department of Transitional Assistance, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) and community food pantries—to update the survey's themes and content. Revisions are based on partner feedback and what questions matter most to them, and drafts are reviewed prior to finalization. The survey is also reviewed by GBFB's unique Health and Research Council, a group of 30 experts in research, policy, and community advocacy representing multiple institutions and organizations.

#### *Recruitment and Data Collection*

Each year, over 3,000 adults across Massachusetts complete our anonymous, online survey, administered by a survey research firm. Demographic quotas (age, race/ethnicity, gender, income, education, region) are based on the American Community Survey, with

oversampling of low-income households to better represent those most likely to experience food insecurity.

Statistical weighting, conducted by research partners at MGB, ensures that survey results reflect the overall Massachusetts population using U.S. Census estimates.

### *Measuring Food Security*

A core function of this survey is to measure rates of food security across the state of Massachusetts annually. Prior to 2022, we measured food insecurity prevalence using the USDA's validated Six-Item Short Form Food Security Survey Module. Since 2022, we began using the full 18-item USDA Household Food Security Module, which allows us to additionally measure both the severity of household food insecurity as well as child-level food insecurity.

Notably, the GBFB statewide survey consistently measures annual rates of food insecurity in Massachusetts that are far higher than national estimates.<sup>1</sup> This gap likely reflects methodological differences as well as our larger sample sizes. GBFB's survey is anonymous and online—reducing stigma and encouraging honest responses. In contrast, the USDA conducts its survey through the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, using phone and in-person interviews, which may lead to underreporting. Importantly, GBFB's estimates are consistent across survey years and align with estimates from other organizations using similar online methodologies<sup>2,3</sup>.

### *Data Cleaning and Analysis*

After data collection, a two-stage cleaning process is conducted by both the survey research firm and the GBFB and MGB data and research teams. Erroneous responses—such as those from bots, incomplete submissions, and entries that fail internal quality checks—are removed. Once cleaned and analyzed, final results are reviewed by the Health and Research Council to ensure methodological rigor and accurate interpretation before publication.

For more information about the design, implementation and presentation of the survey, please reach out to our team at [DATA@gbfb.org](mailto:DATA@gbfb.org).

### **References:**

1. Rabbitt, M.P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L.J., & Burke, M.P. (2024). Household food security in the United States in 2023 (Report No. ERR-337). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

2. “2024 Hunger Report: Insights on Food Insecurity and Inequity in Greater Washington.” capitalareafoodbank.org, September 2024. <https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/report-2024/>.
3. Gonzalez, Dulce, Michael Karpman, Poonam Gupta, and Elaine Waxman. “Households Faced Persistent Challenges Affording Food in 2024.” Urban.org, March 2025. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/Households-Faced-Persistent-Challenges-Affording-Food-in-2024.pdf>.