

Hunger in Orange County

- Orange County's reputation for being affluent, makes it challenging to address issues such as Hunger in Orange County
- Hunger in Orange County is not the result of shortage of food, hunger is a symptom of poverty
- Terms such as 'hunger,' "food insecurity' and "nutrition insecurity" refers to people having uncertain access to adequate, nutritious, and affordable food.
- Orange County is one of the most expensive housing markets in the nation. All Orange County residents spend a larger percentage of their income on housing than do people living in most every housing market in our nation. This leaves less income to address other basic needs. This affects low-income people most dramatically.
- Orange County's large tourism and hospitality industries contribute to this economic condition because many people working in these professions are paid a minimum wage, but not a living wage.
- Contrary to the stereotype, food insecure people are not different that "us."
- In fact, 54% of Orange County school children financially qualify to participate in free and reduced priced school nutrition programs.
- People in need include persons who are homeless, people experiencing unemployment, those suffering the separation of a relationship, persons with a disability, and people experiencing a short-term illness or recovery from an injury. The largest number of people in need are seniors on fixed incomes, and the working poor.
- Federal nutrition programs that assist people include WIC, school nutrition programs, SNAP (CalFresh), congregate meals at senior centers, and home delivered meals.
- Many people qualify for, but do not benefit from these programs for a variety of reason that include lack of funding, institutional barriers, misinformation, and stigma.
- CalFresh is the most underutilized federal nutrition program.
- CalOptima identified 344,000 members eligible for but not enrolled in CalFresh.
- The average CalFresh benefit in California is \$231 per person per month.
- A family of 4 could receive over \$900 each month. This can be life-changing for a low-income family.
- CalOptima members miss out on \$79,000,000 worth of CalFresh benefits each month.
- CalOptima members miss out on \$949,000,000 in CalFresh benefits annually.
- 90% of all subsidized meals consumed by vulnerable Americans come from one of our federal nutrition programs.
- There are also two Food Banks and 400 emergency feeding organizations in Orange County.
- Food Banks supply food to churches, soup kitchens, shelters, senior centers, community centers, and family resource centers.
- The OC Food Bank distributed 26,000,000 pounds of food during 2025, but the quantity and variety is inadequate to satisfy the demand.
- The OC Food Banks relies primarily on the donation of food from the food industry, food drives, and volunteer labor to fulfill its mission.
- These efforts are band aids until we address the underlying causes of poverty.
- Advocacy is critical to address the root causes of poverty.
- Evidence of the inequitable distribution of resources is that people living in one Orange County city have a 12-year greater life expectancy than people living in another Orange County city just 13 miles apart, but a world apart in terms of their health outcomes.