



## **United Way of New York City 2011 Hunger Survey Executive Summary**

United Way of New York City commissioned Global Strategy Group to conduct a telephone survey of 700 New York City adults with oversamples of 100 African-American and 100 Latino adults. The survey was conducted between August 2 and 8, 2011 in both English and Spanish.

The base sample was fielded using an RDD methodology. The oversamples were conducted using targeted RDD sample for high density African-American and Latino census tracts. All interviews were conducted on landline telephones. The margin of error on the overall sample is +/-3.7%. The margin of error is larger at the subgroup level.

### Overview

Fully half (50%) of New Yorkers believe hunger and poverty is a major issue facing the city that the Mayor and City should make a top priority to address. But while most New Yorkers perceive hunger to be a real problem facing the city, there are substantial differences in perceptions along racial and socioeconomic lines. Throughout the survey, non-white and lower-income households not only express greater concern about the problem of hunger than their white and higher-income counterparts but are more personally willing to take action to address the issue of hunger than other adults.

For instance, sizeable numbers of New Yorkers have had personal or familial experiences with the issue and a majority worries someone they know will need help getting and paying for food in the next twelve months. But non-college-educated adults, households earning less than \$25,000 annually, and African-Americans and Latinos are significantly more likely to worry that someone they know will have problems affording food than New Yorkers as a whole.

Though New Yorkers acknowledge hunger to be a serious problem for the City, adults believe relatively little progress has been made in recent years to address the issue and that the number of people who go hungry has actually increased. Adults also believe the populations served by food pantries have shifted over the past few years. Whereas they might have seen mostly homeless individuals in line at food pantries a few years ago, New Yorkers rightfully assume these same organizations serve more families with children and working families today.

New Yorkers tend to think that funding for food pantries and soup kitchens comes from private donations, though they believe government – city, state, or federal – should bear the majority of responsibility for funding hunger-prevention efforts. Most adults believe the federal government has an obligation to help provide for New Yorkers who go hungry every year and support restoring federal funding for New York’s food pantries and soup kitchens.

### Detailed Findings

#### *Concern*

- **Many New Yorkers believe the issue of hunger and poverty to be a major problem facing New York.** Not surprisingly, the economy – specifically jobs and unemployment (95% net problem, 78% major problem) – tops New Yorkers’ lists of concerns. But a substantial number of New Yorkers – 84% – also view hunger and poverty as a problem facing the City, including half (50%) who consider hunger and poverty to be a major issue facing the City today.
- Bronx residents perceive hunger and poverty to be an even greater problem than residents of other boroughs, though majorities of residents across boroughs still perceive the issue to be a problem. Three in five (60%) of Bronx residents describe hunger and poverty as a major problem facing New York City compared to 44% of Brooklynites, 51% of Manhattanites, and 51% Queens residents.
- African-American and Latino New Yorkers are also more likely to describe hunger and poverty as a major issue facing New York City than their white counterparts. African-American (60% major problem) and Latino adults (64%) are significantly more likely than white adults (40%) to believe hunger and poverty is a major issue in New York City today.
- Lower income households perceive the issue of hunger as being an even greater problem for the City than their higher-income counterparts. Perceptions of hunger as a major problem decline as incomes increase – 59% major problem among New Yorkers with household incomes of \$25,000 or less, 50% among households earning \$25,000 to \$75,000, and 38% among households earning more than \$75,000 annually.
- **Adults are concerned about not just how much food people have to eat, but the quality of that food as well.** Two-thirds (62%) are very concerned to learn that in many low-income neighborhoods where there are higher rates of obesity and diabetes, there are few stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables. Interestingly, concern is highest in Manhattan: 67% of Manhattan residents are very concerned compared to 60% of Bronx, 60% of Brooklyn, and 63% of Queens’s residents.
- **Half of New Yorkers think addressing the issue of hunger and poverty should be a top priority for the Mayor and the City.** Again, adults place even greater emphasis on the need for the City to improve prospects with regards to jobs and unemployment (96% top or high priority, 71% high

priority) and New York City's schools (91%, 65%), but half of New Yorkers want the Mayor to make addressing hunger a top priority as well (85%, 51%).

### *Progress*

- **Relatively few New Yorkers believe significant progress has been made in addressing the issue of hunger here in the City over the past several years.** Only 13% believe major progress has been made, while the bulk of residents believe only some (42%) or a little (20%) progress has been made in addressing hunger. Just as many New Yorkers believe no progress (12%) as believe significant strides have been made. More than one in ten (14%) of New Yorkers just don't know what if any progress has taken place.
- **Adults believe the problem of hunger has grown worse in the past year or two.** Most New Yorkers – more than three in five – would assume that both the number of New Yorkers who go hungry (69%) increased a lot or a little and demand for food assistance at food pantries (63%) has increased in the past year or two. And fully half assume those numbers have increased a lot (49% and 46%, respectively), not just a little.
  - Relatively few New Yorkers believe the number of people who go hungry (5%) or demand at food pantries has decreased (13%) in the last year or two. Another 17% and 15% respectively think the number of those afflicted and demand have stayed the same in the past year or two.
- **New Yorkers rightfully assume the populations served by New York's food pantries has shifted in recent years and that food pantries are serving more families with children, including working families, than ever before.** If they were to walk into a food pantry today, relatively equal numbers of New Yorkers assume they would most likely see families with children (19%), homeless people (16%), non-working adults (14%), seniors (11%), working adults who cannot afford food (6%), or all of the aforementioned groups (24%).
- Conversely, if they were to walk into a food pantry a few years ago, many more New Yorkers would expect to see mostly homeless people (45%) as compared to families with children (13%), seniors (12%), non-working adults (8%), or working adults who cannot afford food (2%). Another 11% would have expected to see all aforementioned groups.

### *Personal Experiences*

- **The problem of hunger hits close to home for a number of New Yorkers who worry that someone they know will have difficulty affording food in the coming year.** Two-thirds of New Yorkers (67%) are concerned that someone they know will need help getting and paying for food in the next twelve months, including 44% who are very concerned about the likelihood of someone they know needing food assistance.
- **Just fewer than two in five New Yorkers have personally struggled to afford food or groceries over the course of the past twelve months.** The most common problem being that individuals have been

forced to buy less healthy foods because they are cheaper than buying fresh foods (38% personal or family experience) or have had difficulty paying for groceries (36% personal or family experience).

- **A sizeable portion of New Yorkers have limited access to healthy foods in their neighborhood.** Two in five (38%) New Yorkers surveyed have limited or no options for affordable, nutritious and healthy food, including low-fat dairy, lean meat, fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood. Three in five (59%) say they have a lot (38%) or some (22%) options for places to get healthy, nutritious food nearby.
- Access to affordable, healthy food differs significantly depending on socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Non-college educated, lower-income, and non-white households report less access to affordable, healthy food than their more upscale and white counterparts:
  - Forty-two percent (42%) of non-college educated adults say they have only a few or no options for affordable, nutritious food in their neighborhood compared to 32% of college-educated adults.
  - Forty-five percent (45%) of African-American and 46% of Latino respondents have little or no options for healthy food locally compared to 26% of white respondents.
  - Half (51%) of households with annual incomes of \$25,000 or less have little to no access to affordable, healthy food locally compared to 42% of households earning \$25,000 to \$75,000 and 24% of households earning \$75,000 plus annually.
- Access to affordable and nutritious food differs markedly by borough as well. Half (50%) of Bronx residents have limited access to healthy food compared to 42% of Brooklyn, 33% of Manhattan, and 34% of Queens' residents. (The sample size is too small in Staten Island to report out results there separately.)

#### *Funding*

- **Most New Yorkers assume private donations comprise the majority of funding for New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens but believe government – city, state, or federal – should bear responsibility for supporting emergency food suppliers.** Half of New Yorkers (47%) assume the majority of funding for food pantries and soup kitchens in the City comes from private donations. Roughly one-third think it comes from the federal (9%) or state (11%) or city (11%) government.
- That said, only 18% believe private donors should be responsible for funding emergency food suppliers while the vast majority – 76% – place responsibility with government (37% city government, 35% state government, and 31% federal government).
- **Adults believe the federal government has an obligation to help provide food for those in need.** Four in five (78%) of New Yorkers agree “the federal has an obligation to help provide for New Yorkers who go hungry every year,” including 55% who strongly agree. Another one in five (20%) disagree that the government is obliged to provide for those in need.

- **New Yorkers strongly support restoring federal funding to food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City in light of this year’s funding cuts.** In response to information that the federal government cut funding to New York’s food pantries and soup kitchens by 40% this past year, 80% of New Yorkers support restoring federal funding, including 60% who strongly support restoring federal funding. Only 16% of adults oppose restoring funding and 4% are unsure.

*Willingness to Act*

- New Yorkers would be personally willing to take a range of actions to address the issue of hunger in New York City, the most likely being signing a petition in favor of restoring federal funding to food pantries (85% net likely, 61% very likely). Two in five would also be very likely to donate money to a charitable organization working to address the issue (77% net likely, 44% very likely), contact their Congressperson asking them to restore federal funding (75%, 42%), or volunteer their time with a charitable organization working to address the issue of hunger (70%, 40%).
- With the exception of donating money to a charitable organization, lower-income and non-white households are more likely to personally take action to address the issue of hunger in New York City than their counterparts:

	Black	Latino	White	<\$25K	\$25-75K	\$75K+
Sign petition to restore federal funding	72%	64%	53%	66%	68%	62%
Donate money to charitable organization	47%	39%	47%	36%	44%	59%
Write letter to elected official	47%	55%	31%	47%	48%	39%
Volunteer time w/ charitable organization	54%	50%	21%	47%	43%	31%
Meet w/ member of Congress	43%	49%	17%	45%	38%	18%
Attend public meeting or rally	38%	51%	10%	37%	36%	19%
Contact the media	33%	42%	13%	35%	31%	17%