



HUNGER FREE

K A N S A S

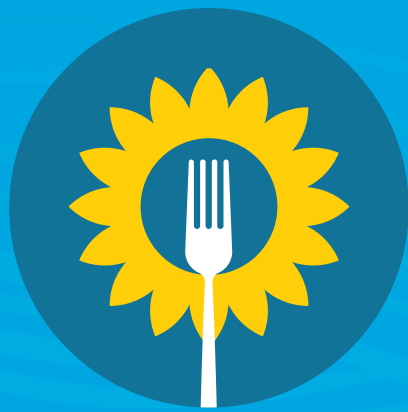
UNDERSTANDING HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY

..... **THOMAS COUNTY**

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WE ARE KANSAS, the breadbasket of the nation. The people who live in this great state are the same people responsible for putting food on the plates of millions around the globe. So how is it that so many of our neighbors go home at the end of the day only to find that their own pantries are empty?

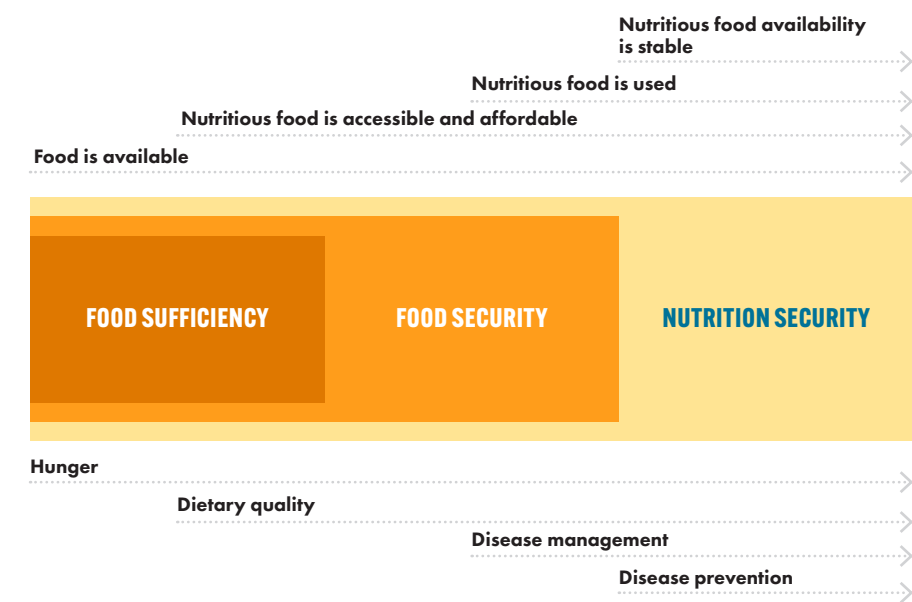
THOMAS COUNTY COALITION is working at the local level with the Hunger Free Kansas Initiative and Kansas Food Action Network to address policies, systems and environmental barriers at the root of hunger. For more information about the initiative, visit hungerfreekansas.org.



WHAT IS HUNGER

- **Hunger** exists on a continuum and is measured as a lack of food sufficiency, food security or nutrition security. **Food insufficiency** is sometimes or often not having enough food to eat. **Food insecurity** is not having enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle. This includes being able to access and afford nutritious food. **Nutrition security** goes a step further and measures equitable access to affordable, nutritious foods that prevent and treat chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.ⁱ

Figure 1. **DEFINITIONS AND OUTCOMES OF FOOD SUFFICIENCY, FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION SECURITY**ⁱⁱ



- **Food insufficiency:** In Kansas, nearly 1 in 10 adults reported food insufficiency (June 2024).ⁱⁱⁱ
 - 8.9 percent of all Kansas adults.
 - 9.6 percent of Kansas adults with children under age 18.



RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HUNGER

Latino and Black Kansans experience higher rates of food insecurity than the overall population. Past policies and systems, such as redlining and sundown towns, contributed to inequitable health outcomes. Community conversations about the current and historical context can help identify opportunities to address structural racism.^{iv}



Figure 2. FOOD INSECURITY IN THOMAS COUNTY AND KANSAS, 2022^v

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	OVERALL	CHILD AGE <18	LATINO	BLACK
Thomas County	10.8%	15.1%	Data unavailable	Data unavailable
Kansas	13.1%	19.1%	22.0%	28.0%

Data unavailable means the estimate was not published due to the small sample size. This is a common challenge in rural counties. However, this does not mean these populations are not experiencing food insecurity. It's still essential to explore as a community what health disparities your neighbors may be experiencing.



FEDERAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS HUNGER

People experiencing hunger have access to federal nutrition programs, as well as community resources like food pantries. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food benefits to low-income families to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford nutritious food that is essential to health and well-being.^{vi} Access to economic resources, such as through the SNAP program, in early childhood has been found to reduce medical conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes later in life.^{vii}

- **SNAP Eligibility and Participation (2022)**^{viii}

Thomas County

- 8.7 percent of the population is potentially eligible.
- 2.8 percent of households participate.

Kansas

- 15.3 percent of the population is potentially eligible.
- 7.0 percent of households participate.

Schools participating in programs like the National School Lunch Program also provide vital support to these families. This allows them to provide free or reduced-price lunch to all students who qualify. In low-income areas, schools and districts can participate in the Community Eligibility Program (CEP) to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students without requiring students to apply.^{ix}

- **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (2023-2024)**^x

- Two in five (40.5 percent) Thomas County students receive free (32.9 percent) or reduced-price (7.5 percent) lunch.
- Half of Kansas students (47.6 percent) receive free (40.6 percent) or reduced-price (7.1 percent) lunch.

- **CEP (2023-2024)**^{xi}

- There are six schools in Thomas County. All Thomas County schools are eligible or potentially eligible to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students. None participate.
- There are 1,336 schools in Kansas. Most (85.5 percent) Kansas schools are eligible or potentially eligible for CEP. Currently, fewer than one in five (14.5 percent) eligible Kansas schools participate.



NAVIGATING COST TRADEOFFS

Hunger is often exacerbated by low wages and high costs of household necessities like housing, health care and child care.^{xii} Families experiencing food insecurity sometimes need to decide between paying for groceries or housing. Understanding the existing infrastructure and cost of these resources can help communities identify opportunities to better support families experiencing hunger.

Families without affordable housing spend **MORE THAN 30 PERCENT** of their gross income on housing costs, including utilities.

- **Low-income, low-access census tracts (2019)**^{xiii}

Sometimes referred to as “food deserts,” are low-income areas where people live more than one mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

- No Thomas County residents live in a food desert census tract.
- Nearly one in five (17.2 percent) Kansans live in a food desert census tract.

Figure 3. PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THOMAS COUNTY AND KANSAS, 2022 5-YEAR ESTIMATE^{xiv}

	THOMA COUNTY	KANSAS
With Mortgage	16.7%	20.9%
No Mortgage	4.1%	11.1%
Rent	44.0%	43.7%
Overall	19.7%	25.3%

- **Child care availability and cost (August 2024)**^{xv}

41.8 percent of Thomas County children under age 6 with working parents are without child care options compared to half (54.6 percent) of Kansas children. In Thomas County, child care for one child under age 3 costs a family on average \$7,056 annually or 9.7 percent of the county median income. The average cost for Kansas overall is \$11,141 annually or 16.0 percent of the state median income.



ⁱ Mozaffarian, D. (2023). Measuring and Addressing Nutrition Security to Achieve Health and Health Equity. Health Affairs. Retrieved from <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20230216.926558/>

ⁱⁱ Mozaffarian, D. (2023). Measuring and Addressing Nutrition Security to Achieve Health and Health Equity. Health Affairs. Retrieved from <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20230216.926558/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Kansas Health Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey Data, May 28-June 24, 2024.

^{iv} Hswen, Y., Yang, F., Le-Compte, C., Hurley, M., Mattie, H., & Nguyen, T. T. (2023). Structural Racism through Sundown Towns and its Relationship to COVID-19 Local Risk and Racial and Ethnic Diversity. Preventative Medicine Reports, 35. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10207838/>

^v Feeding America, 2022.

^{vi} U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2024) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>

^{vii} Hoynes, H., Whitmore Schanzenbach, D., & Almond, D. (2016). Long-Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net. American Economic Review, 106(4), p. 903–934. Retrieved from <https://gspp.berkeley.edu/assets/uploads/research/pdf/Hoynes-Schanzenbach-Almond-AER-2016.pdf>

^{viii} Kansas Health Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018–2022 5-Year Estimate, Tables S2201 and S1701.

^{ix} U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2023). Community Eligibility Provision: Implementing the New Minimum and Identified Student Percentage. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/cep-new-minimum-isp>

^x Kansas Health Institute analysis of Kansas State Department of Education Students Approved for Free- or Reduced-Price Lunches – Headcount Enrollment, 2023-2024.

^{xi} Kansas Health Institute analysis of Kansas State Department of Education, Child Nutrition & Wellness Reports, School Nutrition Program: Site Notification of Eligibility for the Community Eligibility Program, 2023–2024.

^{xii} Kansas Action for Children. (2023). What is Food Insecurity? Retrieved from https://www.kac.org/what_is_food_insecurity#:~:text=Around%20one%20in%2010%20Kansans,children's%20behavioral%20and%20educational%20development.

^{xiii} USDA, Economic Research Service, Food Access Research Atlas, 2019.

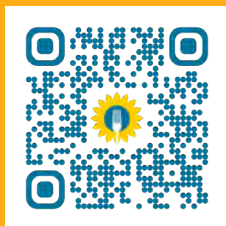
^{xiv} Kansas Health Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (2018–2022) 5-Year Estimate, Table DP04.

^{xv} Kansas Health Institute analysis of August 2024 data from Childcare Aware of Kansas.



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Learn more by scanning the code above or by visiting HungerFreeKansas.org.