

## **HUNGER IN SAN DIEGO**

### **March 2022 Data Release**

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#### **Background: What is Hunger Free San Diego?**

Hunger Free San Diego is a multi-year, collaborative and cross-sector initiative to apply a data-informed and community-driven approach to ending hunger in our region. The research in this issue brief was conducted by San Diego Hunger Coalition with input and guidance from the Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board, a table comprised of leaders representing all aspects of hunger relief in San Diego County. Launched in 2016, Hunger Free San Diego is led by San Diego Hunger Coalition and is a member of the national Hunger Free Communities Network. This March release is the latest analysis from San Diego Hunger Coalition and Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board using shared data and metrics.

**Please cite this report as: San Diego Hunger Coalition. March 2022 Nutrition Insecurity Data Release. San Diego, CA; September 2022.**

## Hunger in San Diego, March 2022 Data Release: Summary of Key Findings

- Similar to the recovery post-Great Recession, economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic has been uneven, with the people who suffered the most during the crisis often being the last to benefit from any economic gains made after the crisis. Long-standing economic disparities by race/ethnicity and gender were exacerbated by the pandemic and continue to persist.
- Low-wage jobs remain the primary reason for nutrition insecurity. The minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour still does not equate to a livable wage in San Diego County.
- Rising prices and household debt accrued during the pandemic are also hurting individuals and families that were already struggling financially. 30% of Americans report that they had to take on credit card debt during the public health emergency to stay afloat, and inflation has risen to the highest point in the last 40 years.
- As of March 2022, nutrition insecurity in San Diego County is impacting an estimated:
  - 28% of the total population: 905,000 people (more than 1 in 4)
  - 35% of children and youth: 251,000 kids (more than 1 in 3)
  - 26% of older adults: 119,000 seniors (more than 1 in 4)
  - 39% of people with disabilities: 126,000 people (nearly 2 in 5)
- Nutrition insecurity continues to disproportionately impact people of color in San Diego County, perpetuating racial inequities. As of March 2022, nutrition insecurity in San Diego County is impacting an estimated:
  - 39% of Hispanic/Latino people
  - 37% of Black people
  - 29% of Native American people
  - 26% of people who report race/ethnicity as “Other”
  - 20% of Asian people
  - 18% of White people
- In March 2022, the hunger relief sector in San Diego County provided over 33.5 million meals across all programs, meeting 74% of the estimated need for food assistance. Another 11.9 million meals would have been needed in the month of March for San Diego County’s population to be nutrition secure.
- In March 2022, CalFresh emergency allotments comprised 23% of all food assistance, providing nearly twice as much food as was supplied by food banks and pantries in the same month. This federal pandemic aid is slated to expire in early 2023, leaving the rest of San Diego County’s food assistance programs to increase output or face intensifying hunger in the County.

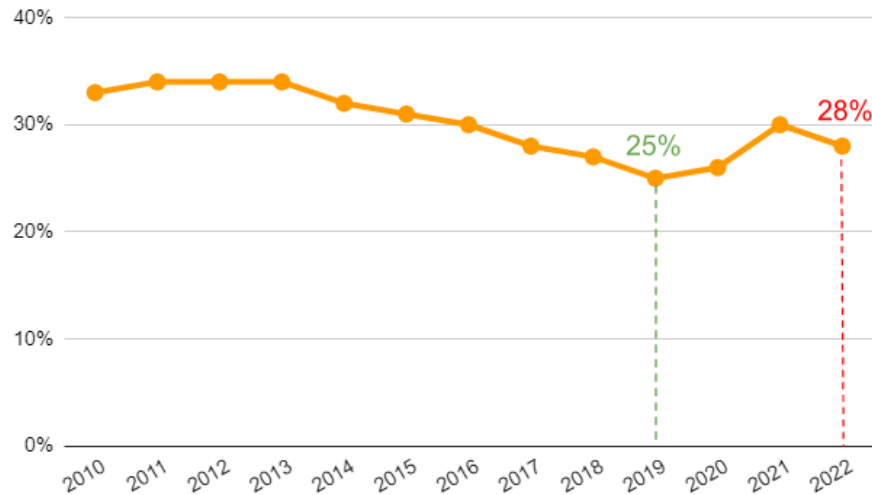


## Nutrition Insecurity in San Diego Remains above Pre-Pandemic Levels

San Diego County and the state of California continue to face nutrition insecurity rates above pre-pandemic numbers. While rates in San Diego County have declined as the economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall nutrition insecurity rate remains higher than the decade low achieved in 2019 of 25% of the population.

San Diego Hunger Coalition and the Hunger Free San Diego Advisory Board identify the population in San Diego County with household income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) as nutrition insecure. Consumer spending data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that households below 200% FPL do not have sufficient income to purchase three healthy meals per day as defined by the USDA’s Moderate Food Plan Cost. **For more information about the Hunger Free San Diego methodology, please see Appendix D.**

**Figure 1) Estimated Nutrition Insecurity Rate by Year in San Diego County, March 2022**



**Figure 2) Nutrition Insecurity by Year & Population in San Diego County, March 2022**

| Year       | Total Population                      |                | Children & Youth                      |                | Older Adults                          |                | People with Disabilities           |                             |
|------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|            | Rate                                  | Est # People   | Rate                                  | Est # Kids     | Rate                                  | Est # Seniors  | Rate                               | Est # People w/Disabilities |
| March 2022 | <b>28%</b><br><i>More than 1 in 4</i> | <b>905,000</b> | <b>35%</b><br><i>More than 1 in 3</i> | <b>251,000</b> | <b>26%</b><br><i>More than 1 in 4</i> | <b>119,000</b> | <b>39%</b><br><i>Nearly 2 in 5</i> | <b>126,000</b>              |
| 2021       | 30%                                   | 985,000        | 37%                                   | 270,000        | 28%                                   | 129,000        | 42%                                | 136,000                     |
| 2020       | 33%                                   | 1,116,000      | 43%                                   | 307,000        | 31%                                   | 157,000        | 47%                                | 154,000                     |
| 2019       | 25%                                   | 820,000        | 31%                                   | 225,000        | 24%                                   | 111,000        | 36%                                | 116,000                     |

**A map of the estimated nutrition insecure population in San Diego County by zip code can be found in Appendix A.**



## Nutrition Insecurity Impacts Some Populations More than Others

Nutrition insecurity in San Diego County disproportionately impacts Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. To examine nutrition insecurity from a standpoint of racial equity, it is important to look at the *prevalence of nutrition insecurity within each race/ethnic group*, as well as a demographic breakdown of the total nutrition insecure population.

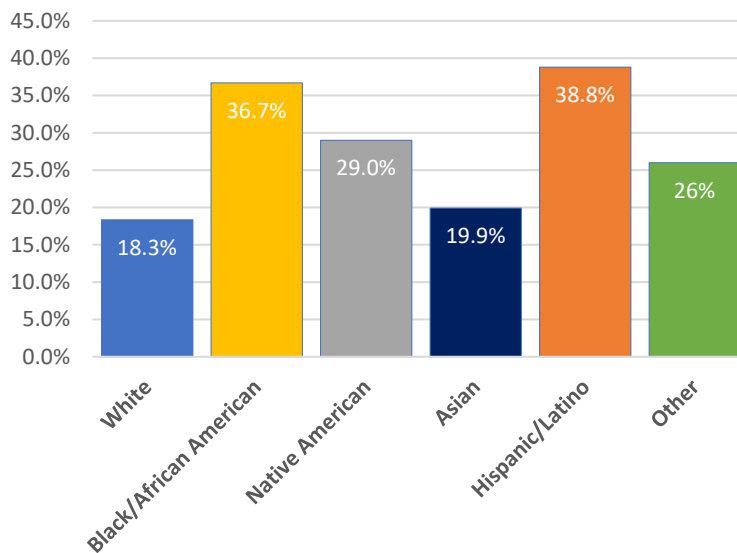
### Nutrition Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity

The nutrition insecurity rate for each race/ethnicity gives the percentage of each race’s population that is nutrition insecure. In San Diego County, as of March 2022:

- Hispanic/Latino people have the highest nutrition insecurity rate of almost 39%, meaning that 39% of Hispanic/Latino people in San Diego County are estimated to be nutrition insecure.
- The second highest rate is the Black/African American population with a rate of almost 37%.
- The Native American population has the third highest rate at 29%.

All three of these groups are above the county’s average nutrition insecurity rate of 28%, showing clearly that communities of color experience nutrition insecurity at higher rates.

**Figure 3) Nutrition Insecurity Rates by Race/Ethnicity in San Diego County, March 2022**



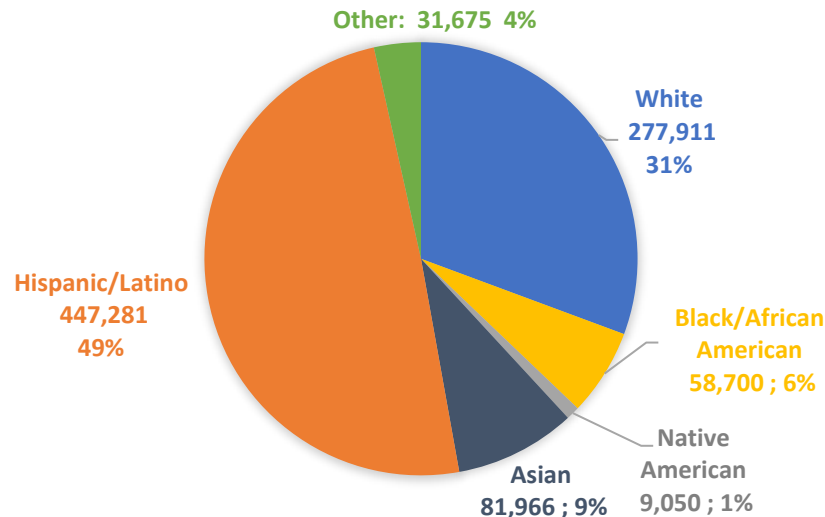
### Demographic Breakdown of the Nutrition Insecure Population

By analyzing the racial makeup of the nutrition insecure population, we can see if there are any disparities among the racial makeup of this population. The pie chart in Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the nutrition insecure population by race/ethnicity. While most ethnicities shown here have similar representation in the county’s population data, there is a clear disparity in the Hispanic/Latino population. Hispanic/Latino people make up 50% of the nutrition insecure population despite only making up 33% of the County’s



population. On the other hand, the white population makes up about 44% of the population in the County, but it only accounts for 31% of the nutrition insecure population. This breakdown, along with the nutrition insecurity rate analysis, clearly demonstrates that Hispanic/Latino people are disproportionately affected by nutrition insecurity in San Diego County.

Figure 4) Nutrition Insecure Population by Race/Ethnicity in San Diego County, March 2022



## Economic Impacts: Why are so many people facing nutrition insecurity?

- Uneven recovery from pandemic.** Similar to the years after the Great Recession, economic recovery from the pandemic has been uneven, with the people who suffered the most during the crisis often being the last to benefit from economic gains made after the crisis. The economic impacts of Covid-19 disproportionately impacted women<sup>1</sup>, non-white workers, workers in low-wage industries, and those with less education. Lower-income families with children 12 or younger were also among those hardest hit.<sup>2</sup> Disparities in unemployment rates by race/ethnicity continue to persist. According to the Center on Budget Policies & Priorities, as of August 2022, “Black unemployment was 6.4 percent and Latino unemployment was 4.5 percent, while white unemployment was 3.2 percent.”<sup>3</sup>
- Low-wage jobs.** In addition to overall employment in low-wage industries remaining below pre-pandemic levels, wage growth has not kept up with inflation. In San Diego County, the purchasing power of workers at the bottom of the pay scale remains too low to cover their household’s basic needs.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. “Bearing the Cost: How Overrepresentation in Undervalued Jobs Disadvantaged Women During the Pandemic.” March 15, 2022. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation and Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison. “The Impact of the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Recession on Families With Low Incomes.” September 2021. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-09/low-income-covid-19-impacts.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Center on Budget & Policy Priorities. “Chart Book: Tracking the Recovery from the Pandemic Recession.” September 22, 2022. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/tracking-the-recovery-from-the-pandemic-recession>.

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While minimum wage in California will increase statewide in 2023 to \$15.50 hourly (\$32,240 annually, if full-time), a living wage calculator from Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimates that a single adult working full-time in California would need to earn at least \$21.82 hourly (\$45,382 annually) to fully support themselves.<sup>4</sup> In San Diego County, an estimated 30% of full-time workers in San Diego County earn less than \$35,000 per year, well below a living wage for our region, *and this has not changed in the past decade*.<sup>5</sup> The impact of low wages is demonstrated by the fact that one in three people in San Diego County are currently enrolled in one or more public benefits programs, with income eligibility capped at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.<sup>6</sup>

- **Inflation:** According to the Congressional Research Service, as of May 2022, inflation has risen “to a level last seen in the early 1980s.”<sup>7</sup>
  - **Higher food prices.** According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s monthly Cost of Food reports, the average cost of a meal in the United States has increased by 18.4% from November 2019 to May of 2022.<sup>8</sup> With many families already limited by low wages, this increase in food prices further reduces the purchasing power of their income as well as any potential EBT non-cash food benefits (e.g., CalFresh/SNAP, WIC, and Pandemic EBT).
  - **Housing.** The price of a home in San Diego rose 28.5% from April of 2021 to April 2022.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, since the start of the pandemic, monthly rents in San Diego have increased 24.4%.<sup>10</sup>
  - **Fuel & Energy.** The price of gasoline increased 43.3% in San Diego from May 2021 to May 2022. During this time, electricity prices rose 18.3%, and natural gas prices also increased 18.1%.<sup>11</sup>
- **Increased household debt.** As low-wage workers lost their jobs during the early stages of the pandemic, many were forced to go into debt to continue to meet their basic needs. Household debt has increased by \$1.7 trillion in the US since the end of 2019<sup>12</sup> with 30% of Americans reporting that they took on credit card debt during the pandemic. Of those who took on credit card debt, 48% of them cite inflation as the main reason, and 34% of them cite income loss as the main driver. Of note, parents with children under the age of 18 were the most likely group to take on new credit card debt.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Data obtained from calculation tables found at <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/06>.

<sup>5</sup> Determined from using data from the American Census Survey’s 5-year Estimates Table S2001: EARNINGS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov>.

<sup>6</sup> Determined from Eligibility by the Numbers report from the County of San Diego. Report obtained from [https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/ssp/documents/Eligibility\\_by\\_the\\_Numbers.pdf](https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/ssp/documents/Eligibility_by_the_Numbers.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Congressional Research Service. U.S. Economic Recovery in the Wake of COVID-19: Successes and Challenges (R47115). May 31, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

<sup>8</sup> Calculated from the monthly USDA food plan costs. Data obtained from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/usda-food-plans-cost-food-reports-monthly-reports>.

<sup>9</sup> Determined from the Case-Shiller Index from the FRED website. Data obtained from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SDXRSA#0>.

<sup>10</sup> Data obtained from San Diego Business Journal interview with Apartment List housing economist. Obtained from <https://www.sdbj.com/news/2022/jun/24/san-diego-apartment-rents-soaring/>.

<sup>11</sup> Data obtained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index, May 2022. Retrieved from [https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex\\_sandiego.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/consumerpriceindex_sandiego.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Data obtained from the Federal Reserve May 2022 Press Release. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorkfed.org/newsevents/news/research/2022/20220510#:~:text=The%20Report%20shows%20a%20solid,before%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic>.

<sup>13</sup> Data obtained from a Lending Tree report based on COVID-19 and credit card debt. Retrieved from <https://www.lendingtree.com/credit-cards/study/covid-19-and-credit-cards-inflation-debt/>.

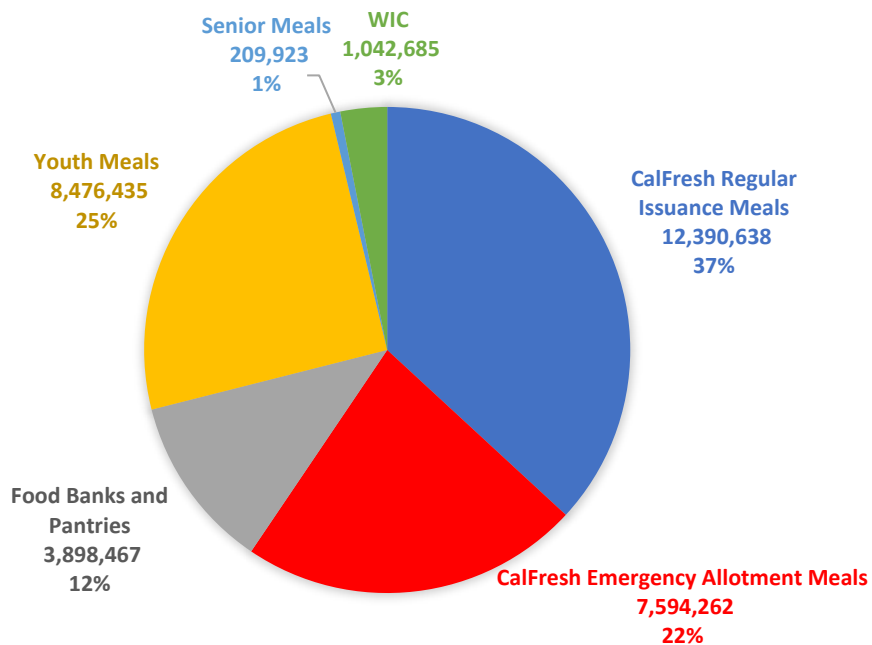


## Bottom Line: Are we meeting the need?

### Food Assistance Meals Provided – March 2022

Food assistance in San Diego County comes in different forms (e.g., funds on an EBT card, free school meals, bags of free food, etc.) and is provided through many different government and charitably supported programs. In the month of March 2022, all food assistance combined provided 33.6 million meals to San Diegans, meeting approximately 74% of the need.

Figure 5) Food Assistance Meals Provided By Type in San Diego County, March 2022



*A map of where food assistance meals were provided in March 2022 across San Diego County can be found in [Appendix B](#).*

### Remaining Meal Gap – March 2022

In a Hunger Free San Diego, all residents of San Diego County will have access to three nutritious meals each day. While roughly 70% of San Diegans have income high enough to purchase enough healthy food, about 30% of the population is likely to need food assistance at some point during the month to meet their daily nutrition requirements. The Hunger Free San Diego meal gap methodology uses consumer spending data to estimate how many “self-purchased” meals individuals and families experiencing nutrition insecurity are able to provide with their own money.

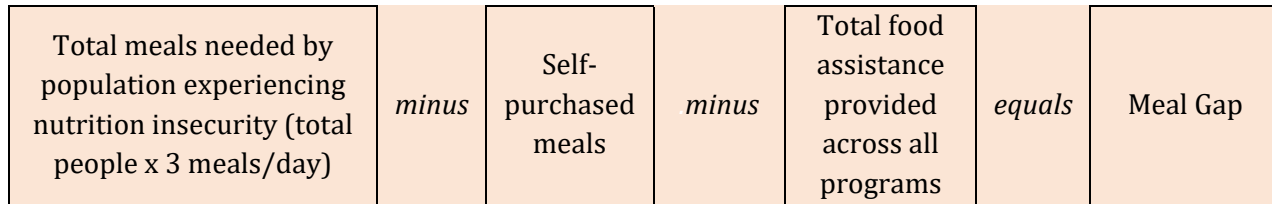
To calculate the monthly demand for food assistance, the Hunger Coalition assumes all people need three meals and then subtracts the calculated “self-purchased” meals for that month. The meal gap is the



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difference between the number of food assistance meals needed and the number of food assistance meals provided, as shown in the diagram below.



**In the month of March of 2022, there was an estimated monthly meal gap of 11.9 million meals.** Stated another way, San Diego County would need to increase the total amount of food assistance provided by about 12M meals per month to ensure all residents are nutrition secure.

*A map of the March 2022 meal gap in San Diego County by zip code can be found in [Appendix C](#).*

## Conclusion: Progress Toward a Hunger Free San Diego

As we look toward the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023, there are some final factors for providers, residents and other key stakeholders to consider as we continue our collaborative work together to create a Hunger Free San Diego.

### Economic Impacts on Hunger Relief Providers

While households struggle with rising costs and decreasing purchasing power due to inflation, San Diego’s food banks, pantries and other organizations providing food are struggling to keep up with the levels of elevated need as they too face increased costs. San Diego’s two largest food banks, Feeding San Diego and San Diego Food Bank (which operates the North County Food Bank), are reporting that higher food prices and the increased cost of fuel for transporting food are making it harder for them to keep up with the demand for food assistance around the County.

### Pandemic Aid is Ending

The pressure on hunger relief providers will soon be compounded as federal pandemic aid in the form of CalFresh/SNAP emergency allotments is expected to end in early 2023. These emergency allotments increased each household’s monthly benefit to the maximum amount during the public health emergency, and these issuances currently account for 38% of all CalFresh issuances in San Diego County. From January to March of 2022, CalFresh emergency allotments totaled over \$105M in pandemic aid that was provided directly to people in need and spent at local grocery stores and markets.

In terms of the number of food assistance meals that will be lost, CalFresh emergency allotments provided more than 7.5 million meals in March 2022 – roughly double the amount of food provided by both food banks and their 500+ partners in the same month.

With the CalFresh emergency allotments likely ending in early 2023, CalFresh recipients losing this additional support will likely turn to free food distributions to replace at least some of those meals, putting



further pressure on hunger relief providers and likely intensifying nutrition insecurity, at least in the short term, across San Diego County.

**We're on the right track but more investment and work is needed.**

While the COVID-19 pandemic has touched every community in San Diego County, the pandemic's economic impacts have been, and continue to be, disproportionately harmful to people of color, women, parents of young children, and lower-wage workers.<sup>14</sup> The successful mobilization of resources to address hunger during the COVID-19 crisis provides valuable precedent as we continue to support those most impacted and work toward undoing generations of systemic inequalities and structural racism that pervade even our food assistance system.

As we apply lessons learned in building more equitable and sustainable responses to nutrition insecurity, we have seen that even traditionally slow-moving, bureaucratic systems have the capacity for immediate action. Temporary federal and state policy changes that increased benefit amounts and made programs like CalFresh, WIC and school meals easier to access have demonstrated the power of federal nutrition programs to reduce the meal gap. However, federal nutrition programs continue to be underinvested in and underutilized in San Diego County.

San Diego County could make significant progress in closing the meal gap by focusing more resources and attention on increasing utilization of federal nutrition programs. In addition to bringing hundreds of millions of additional federal dollars to our community each year to fight hunger and nutrition insecurity, the additional meals coming into our hunger relief system would relieve some of the burden on food banks and pantries. Increased use of federal nutrition programs would also enable our sector to be as strategic as possible in using charitable food distributions to fill the gaps left by federal nutrition programs, such as in rural communities, food deserts, and for individuals and families in need who are ineligible for state or federal assistance due to income level or other factors.

**Understanding the landscape is the first step in developing data-informed recommendations to guide our region towards a Hunger Free San Diego. To learn more about Hunger Free San Diego, please visit [www.sdhunger.org/hunger-free-sd](http://www.sdhunger.org/hunger-free-sd).**

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<sup>14</sup> The Impact of the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Recession on Families With Low Incomes. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning & Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. September 2021. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/covid-19-impact-low-income-families>



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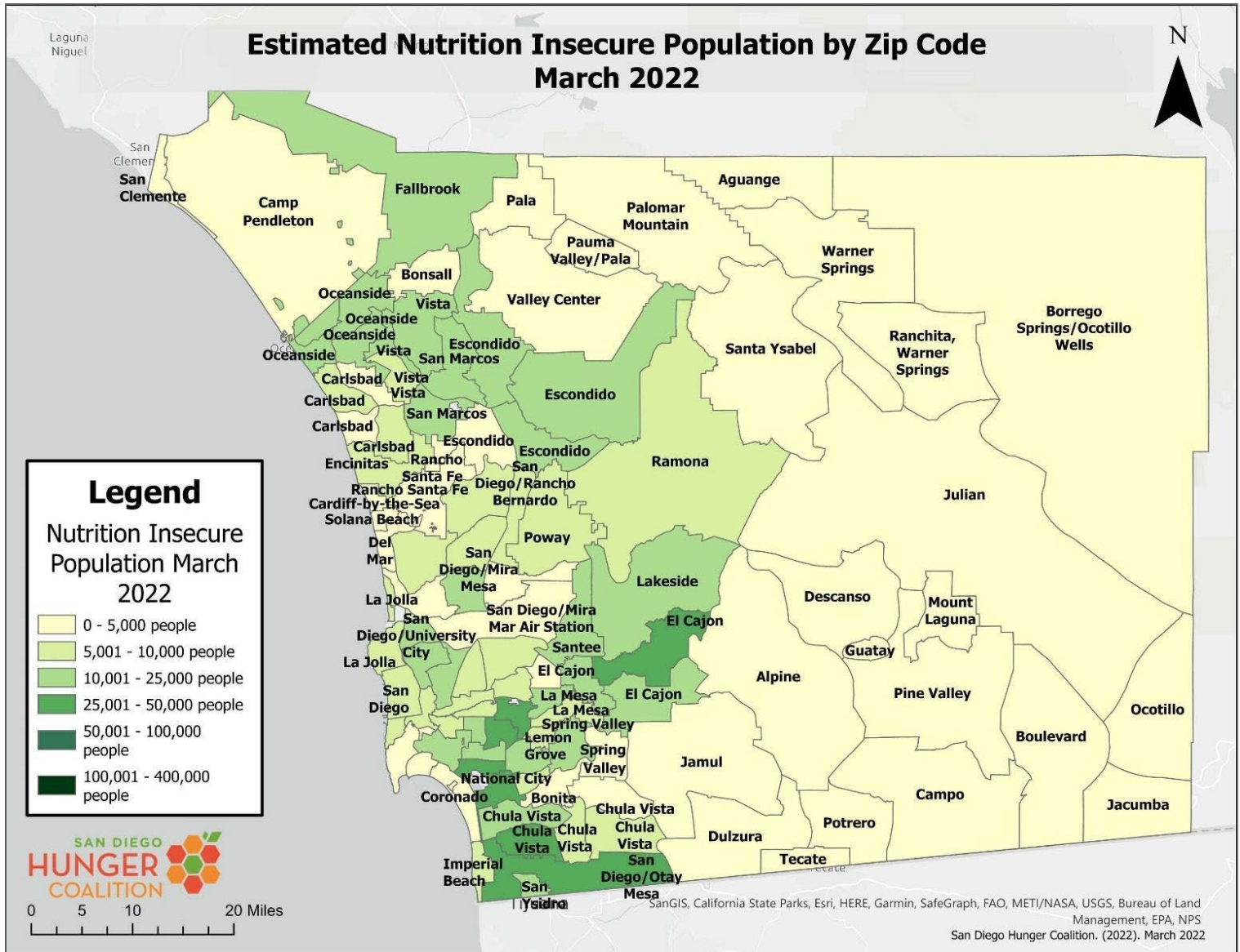


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## Appendix A: Map of Nutrition Insecurity in San Diego County by Zip Code



To download this map, a map of the nutrition insecure population by city, or the data tables used to create them, please visit [www.sdhunger.org/maps-tables](http://www.sdhunger.org/maps-tables).



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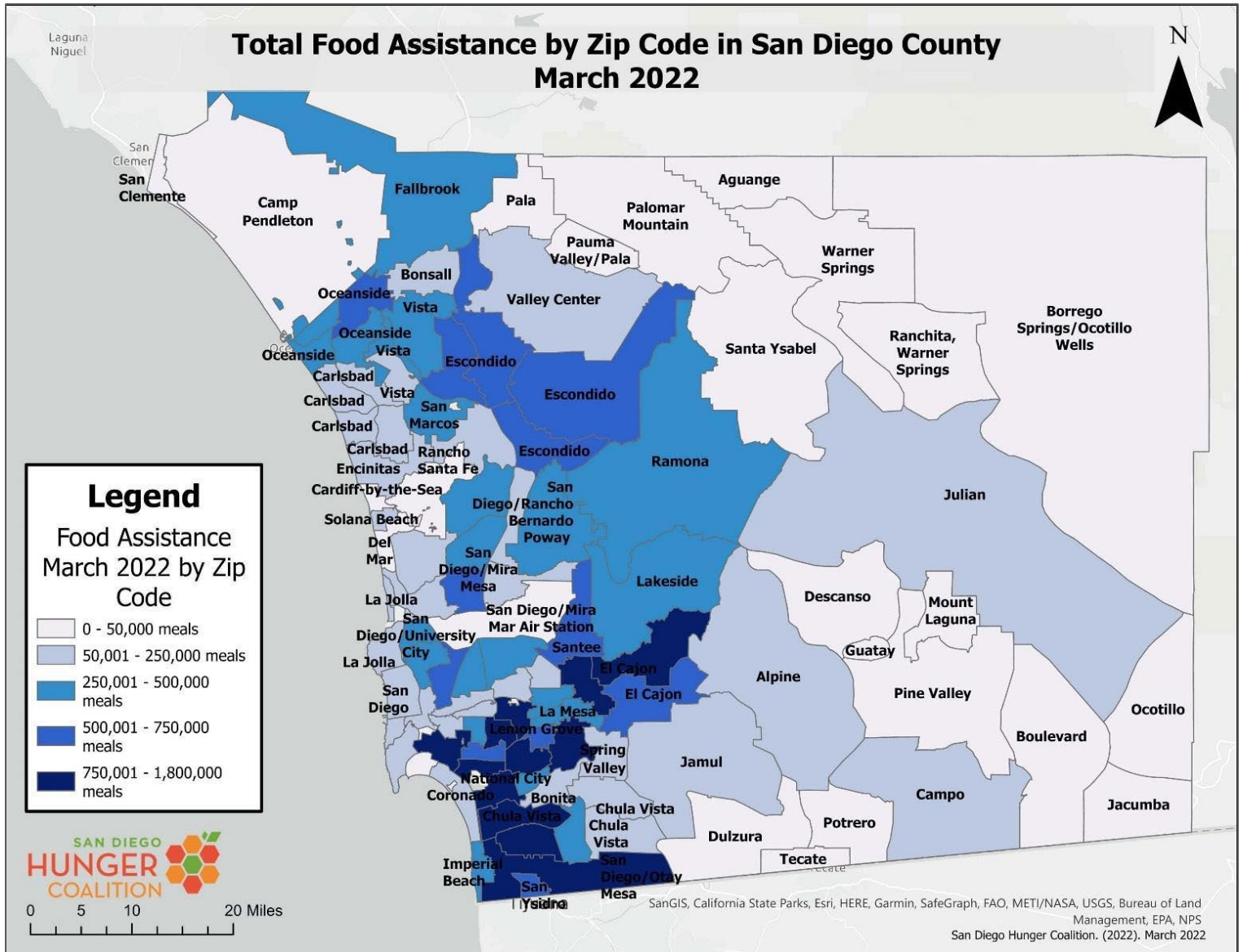


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## Appendix B: Total Food Assistance Meals Provided in San Diego County by Zip



To download this map, or the data tables used to create them, please visit [www.sdhunger.org/maps-tables](http://www.sdhunger.org/maps-tables).



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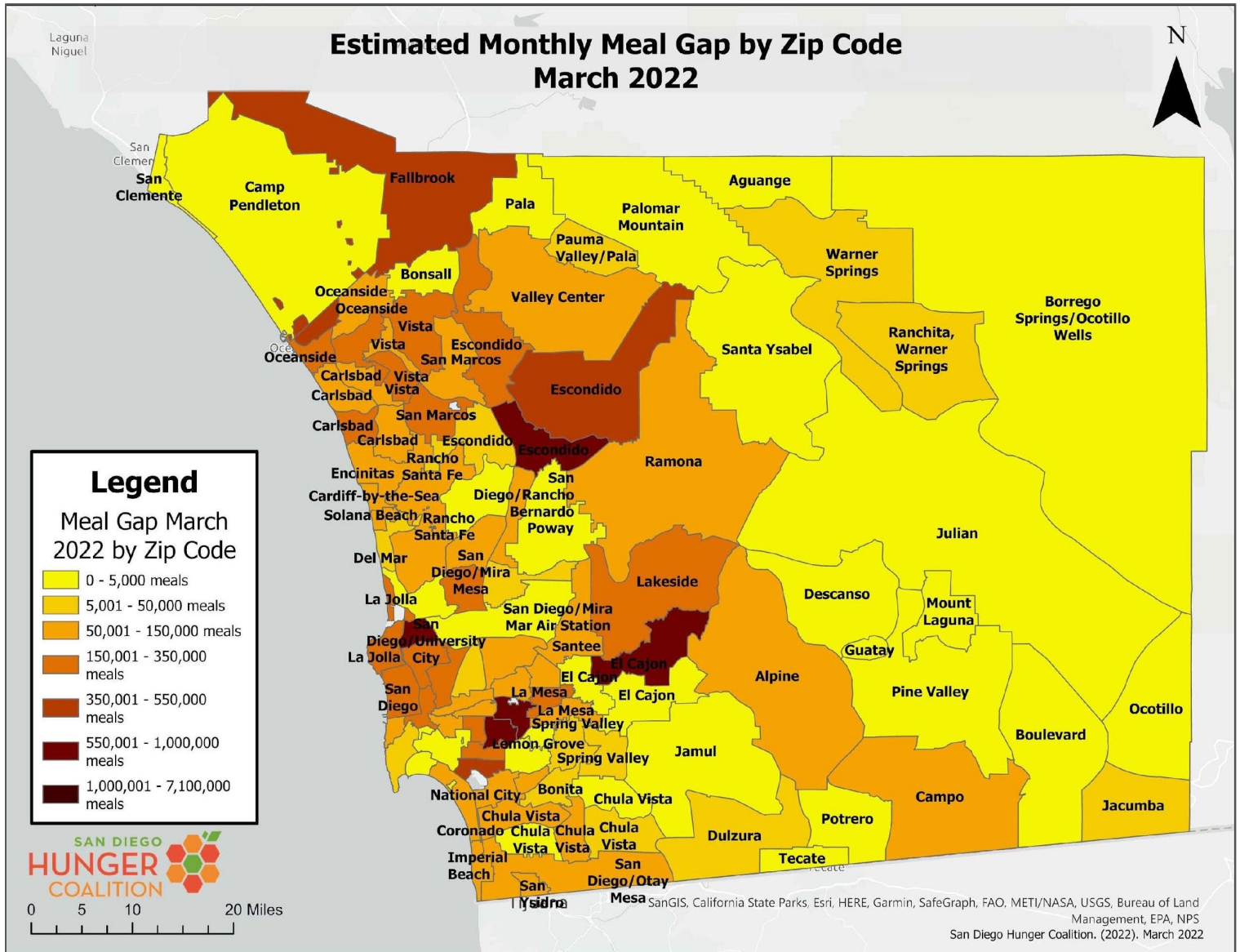


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## Appendix C: Meal Gap/Missing Meals in San Diego County by Zip



To download this map, a map of the meal gap by city, or the data tables used to create them, please visit [www.sdhunger.org/maps-tables](http://www.sdhunger.org/maps-tables).

## Appendix D: Hunger Free San Diego Methodology to Estimate Nutrition Insecurity

In 2020, the HFSD Advisory Board adopted a new, more timely and reliable measure of the need for food assistance in our region. Instead of using food insecurity survey data, which notoriously underrepresents the population in need, the methodology now analyzes economic conditions to assess the needs of the people of San Diego County. An economic definition of nutrition security provides a wider view of the interconnected trade-offs between major household expenses, including housing, healthcare, and healthy food, without the social stigma and bias of self-reporting. While food insecurity surveys are an invaluable tool for understanding the lived experiences of people facing food and nutrition insecurity, using economic indicators such as income level center nutrition insecurity as an economic issue tied to wages and purchasing power.

**Read more about the importance of changing the narrative on hunger by moving away from the goal of *hunger relief* toward the goal of *nutrition security* in the Hunger Coalition's October 2021 issue brief: [The State of Nutrition Security in San Diego County: Before, during and beyond the COVID-19 Crisis](#).**

The Hunger Coalition uses over a decade of Census data to calculate the Nutrition Insecurity Rate. The nutrition insecure population includes people with incomes less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. In 2022, 100% of the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four is an annual income of \$27,750, meaning a household of four earning less than that amount would be considered to be in poverty. In 2022, 200% of the Federal Poverty Level is double that amount, which is an annual income of \$55,500 or below<sup>15</sup>. Using recent population data, SDHC uses the San Diego County unemployment rate along with the most recent published poverty rates and Census data to predict how many people in San Diego County fall below the 200% Federal Poverty Line. SDHC recognizes that many families above the 200% poverty line are also facing issues with nutrition security, which means the estimates in this report are on the conservative side.

**For additional information about the methodologies used in this report, please visit [www.sdhunger.org/sdhc-research-reports](http://www.sdhunger.org/sdhc-research-reports).**

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<sup>15</sup> Obtained from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/4b515876c4674466423975826ac57583/Guidelines-2022.pdf>.