

MAYOR'S FOOD ACCESS AGENDA 2021-2023

Mayor's Office of Food Access
Health and Human Services Cabinet



Food Access

CITY of **BOSTON**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food insecurity is an issue that affects us all. Our neighbors who struggle to make ends meet should not have to choose between putting food on the table, paying rent, and heating their homes. Over the past decade, the number of families with young children in Boston who have limited or uncertain access to nutritious and safe foods, known as food insecurity, has increased significantly.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing food security issues, especially among communities of color, highlighting a need to re-assess any changes in food security needs in Boston. As the City responded to the pandemic, the Mayor's Office of Food Access (OFA) recognized a need for more coordination surrounding strategy moving forward in the recovery phase, but could not dedicate significant resources to a strategy-development process that engaged partners and community members. In August 2020, the Mayor's Office of Food Access (OFA) convened Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), health centers, and mutual aid programs in a collaborative effort to assess current food resources and needs in Boston. Through early discussions, it was determined that the non-profit [Health Leads](#) would lead a community-level needs assessment and subsequent proposal development to re-evaluate the 2019 Mayor's Food Access Agenda.

The goals of this project were to: review and reassess the goals (short and long term) of the Mayor's Food Access Agenda; identify the role of the City on achieving the new goals; identify emerging priorities and gaps during the COVID-19 pandemic; provide community-led recommendations to the City that would help OFA shepherd its implementation strategies.

Health Leads coordinated the Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem, a working group made up of more than 100 Boston community residents, community-based organizations, health systems, academic institutions, and local government staff. As part of this effort, a partner organization - Health Resources in Action consolidated neighborhood level data sources to gain a snapshot of food security needs during the pandemic. In addition to this, in collaboration with grassroots organizations, the workgroup conducted 3 design sessions, one-on-one interviews, surveys, and weekly project meetings with Boston residents impacted by food insecurity. A total of 92 Boston residents participated in either a one-on-one interview or design session. This process sought to center the voices with "lived expertise" as described by a community member.

With this information, the working group identified urgent priorities and gaps in the system as well as defined short and long term goals to help the City of Boston respond to the current crisis and work towards recovery. The complete report can be found [here](#).

The Mayor's Office of Food Access (OFA) of the City of Boston believes that food is a right, not a privilege. Because of this belief, OFA will take on a bold vision to recover from the

COVID-19 crisis and end food insecurity in Boston by 2030. Working towards equitable access to affordable, fresh, healthy, and culturally connected foods for every Bostonian is central to the Mayor's Food Access agenda.

The following strategic goals were developed through a thorough, comprehensive, and collaborative process which allowed feedback from the greater food access network in the City.

The six strategic goals that will get us to our bold vision are outlined below. They are:

1. Ensure food access issues are prioritized within community organizations, City agencies, and other key partners, emphasizing a racial equity and resilience lens
2. Strengthen the citywide food access network by developing shared resources, providing technical assistance, enabling strategic collaboration opportunities, and involving community leadership
3. Develop and support a policy and advocacy agenda to eliminate food insecurity
4. Build public awareness of food insecurity and available resources, programs, and services through a robust communication strategy
5. Implement strategies to make healthy, fresh, and culturally connected foods more affordable and accessible throughout Boston
6. Respond to the immediate food needs of Boston residents during COVID-19 by strengthening current programs and building an equitable food system that supports the hardest hit communities during their recovery

The strategic plan that follows will provide the background and context for how these goals were developed and how they connect to the larger vision for the Mayor's Office of Food Access.

THE OFFICE OF FOOD ACCESS

Food insecurity is an issue that affects us all. It is because of this reality that, in 2014, the Mayor's Office of Food Initiatives was reorganized into the newly created Health and Human Services (HHS) cabinet in the City of Boston.

In 2016, the Mayor's Office of Food Initiatives became the Mayor's Office of Food Access (OFA). The new name of the office signified a shift in mission to focus more intentionally on addressing the food access challenges that many low-income and otherwise marginalized Bostonians face on a daily basis.

VISION

The Mayor's Office of Food Access (OFA) of the City of Boston believes that food is a right, not a privilege. As such, our vision endorses a just, resilient, and robust food community in Boston that supports the wellbeing of all Boston residents.

2030 VISION

The Mayor's Office of Food Access will take on a **bold vision to end food insecurity in Boston by 2030**. Along with the ideas within the Imagine Boston 2030 plan to make Boston the healthiest City, OFA will work towards the strategic goals outlined in this plan to reach this bold vision.

COLLECTIVE VISION

As a part of the strategic planning process, stakeholders and key OFA staff were asked what success looks like with respect to food access in Boston. It's important to know what we are all working towards. It became clear that there is general agreement on our collective vision. **We are working towards equitable access to affordable, fresh, healthy, and culturally connected food for every Bostonian.**

MISSION

The mission of the Mayor's Office of Food Access of the City of Boston is to improve equitable access to nutritious food with respect to affordability, physical accessibility, and cultural connectedness. In pursuit of this mission, OFA will foster a more food secure community with a vibrant, inclusive food culture, reflective of the diverse residents of the City.

DEFINITIONS

Food Access

The Mayor's Office of Food Access defines food access as having adequate access to fresh, healthy food through affordability (Do I have enough money to buy the food I need and want?), physical accessibility (Do I have the means to get to the food I need and want?), and cultural connectedness (Can I access the culturally relevant food products that I need and want?).

Food Security

The Mayor's Office of Food Access uses the USDA definition of food security which is "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life."

CURRENT FOOD INSECURITY LANDSCAPE

OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, the number of families with young children in Boston and Massachusetts with food insecurity, or those who have limited or uncertain access to safe and nutritious foods, has increased significantly. Food is a basic necessity. The World Health Organization and the United Nations consider access to safe and nutritious food a basic individual right, but many urban residents have limited access to fresh produce and other healthy foods. Low-income community members face greater barriers in accessing healthy and affordable food, which negatively affects their diet and food security.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity rates significantly impacted communities. In 2017, the food insecurity rate in Massachusetts was 27% higher than it was 10 years ago. Food security is directly tied with financial security, which is affected by both cost of living and employment status. Even with low pre-pandemic unemployment rates, Massachusetts residents could not keep up with basic costs of living, such as housing and child care, and too many households were forced to cut back on consistent, nutritious meals.

In 2019, the annual price of center-based child care for two children cost a married-couple family living at or below the federal poverty line over 100% of annual household income.¹ Additionally, there is a shortage of rental homes affordable and available to extremely low income households (ELI), whose incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of

¹ Child Care Aware of America, "The US and the High Price of Child Care: An Examination of a Broken System", Child Care Aware of America, 2019, <https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/research/the-us-and-the-high-price-of-child-care-2019/>

their area median income (AMI). 58% of ELI households pay more than 30% of their income on housing.²

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 10 households in Massachusetts were food insecure.³ In an October 2020 report, Feeding America projected that this number would jump to 1 in 7 in 2020 for Massachusetts.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing food insecurity gap, especially for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other communities who already faced health and wealth disparities prior to the pandemic due to systematic racism. Initial estimates from a Census Household Pulse Survey suggest that food insecurity among all U.S. households doubled nationally from 10.5% in 2019 to 23% in 2020.⁵ The same survey, conducted in April-May 2020, showed that 36% of Black and 32% of Hispanic respondents indicated experiencing food insecurity early on in the pandemic versus 18% of white respondents.⁶ Additionally, a recent study by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition demonstrates that immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, also disproportionately struggle with food insecurity.⁷ Out of a survey of 433 immigrant households, 59.3% of respondents reported food insecurity; out of undocumented households, that number was 77.8%.

Research has clearly demonstrated that food insecurity negatively impacts the health of children and adults. Research conducted in 2018 by Children’s HealthWatch and the Greater Boston Food Bank showed that hunger and food insecurity in Massachusetts led to increased health-related expenditures by an estimated \$2.4 billion at least, in 2016 alone. This reflects the avoidable costs of doctor’s visits, hospital stays, emergency room treatment, prescription medications, home healthcare, and many other health-related expenditures associated with food insecurity. It also includes lost work time, low productivity, premature death and special education expenditures—indirect costs that sap the economic health of our state.

Overall, the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of addressing food security with a holistic perspective.

FOOD INSECURITY IN BOSTON

- In 2018, the food insecurity rate in Boston was 15% on average, with wide ranges between neighborhoods and even within neighborhoods at the census tract level (see chart below for neighborhood detail).

² Warran, Elizabeth and Markey, Edward, “2020 Massachusetts Housing Profile”, National Low Income Housing Coalition, July 13, 2020, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/SHP_MA.pdf.

³ Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard, “Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016,” Feeding America, 2018.

⁴ Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard, “Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016,” Feeding America, 2018, https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf.

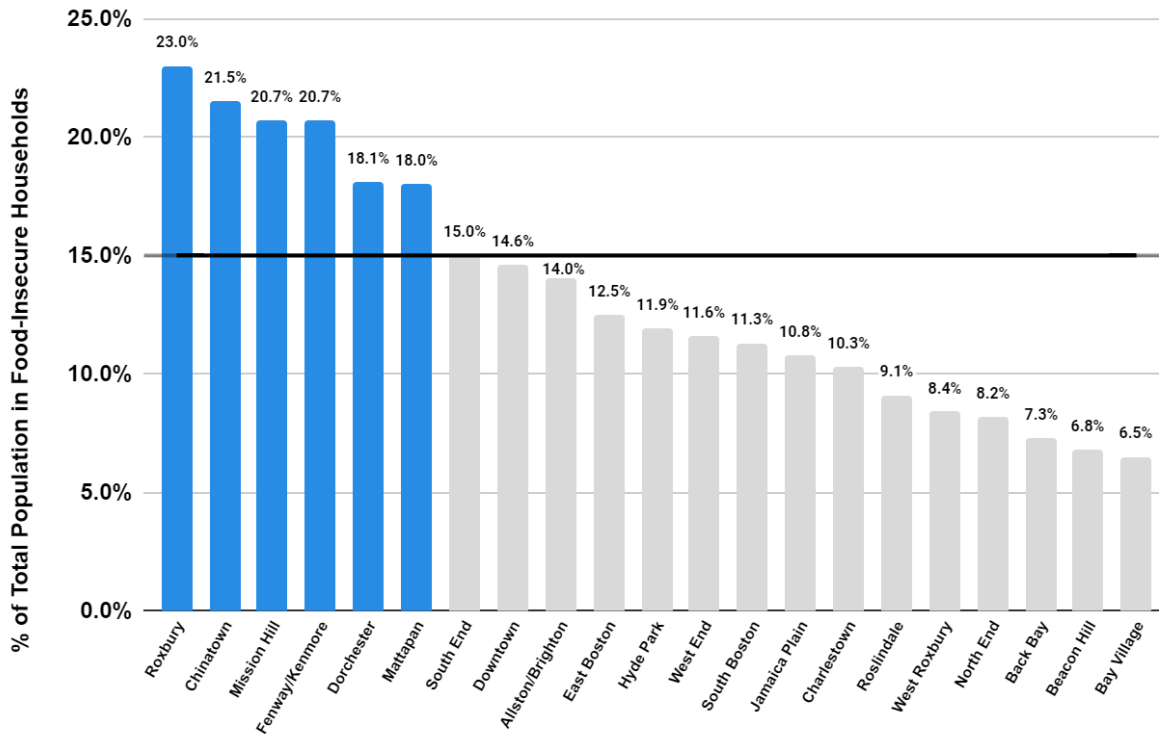
⁵ Schanzenbach, Diane and Pitts, Abigail, “How Much has Food Insecurity Risen? Evidence from the Census Household Pulse Survey,” Institute for Policy Research, June 10, 2020. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/reports/ipr-rapid-research-reports-pulse-hh-data-10-june-2020.pdf>

⁶ Schanzenbach, Diane and Pitts, Abigail, “How Much has Food Insecurity Risen? Evidence from the Census Household Pulse Survey,” Institute for Policy Research, June 10, 2020. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/reports/ipr-rapid-research-reports-pulse-hh-data-10-june-2020.pdf>

⁷ Davis, Marion, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrants in Massachusetts: Insights from our Community Survey,” Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Commission, <http://www.miracoalition.org/cvsurvey>.

- In 2018, low-income communities of color such as Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan had some of the highest rates of food insecurity at 23%, 18.1%, and 18% compared to the Boston average of 15%^{8,9}

Food Insecurity Rate by Boston Neighborhood (2018)



Source: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, E. Engelhard, M. Strayer & L. Lapinski. Map the Meal Gap 2020: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2018. Feeding America, 2020.

Socio-economic factors

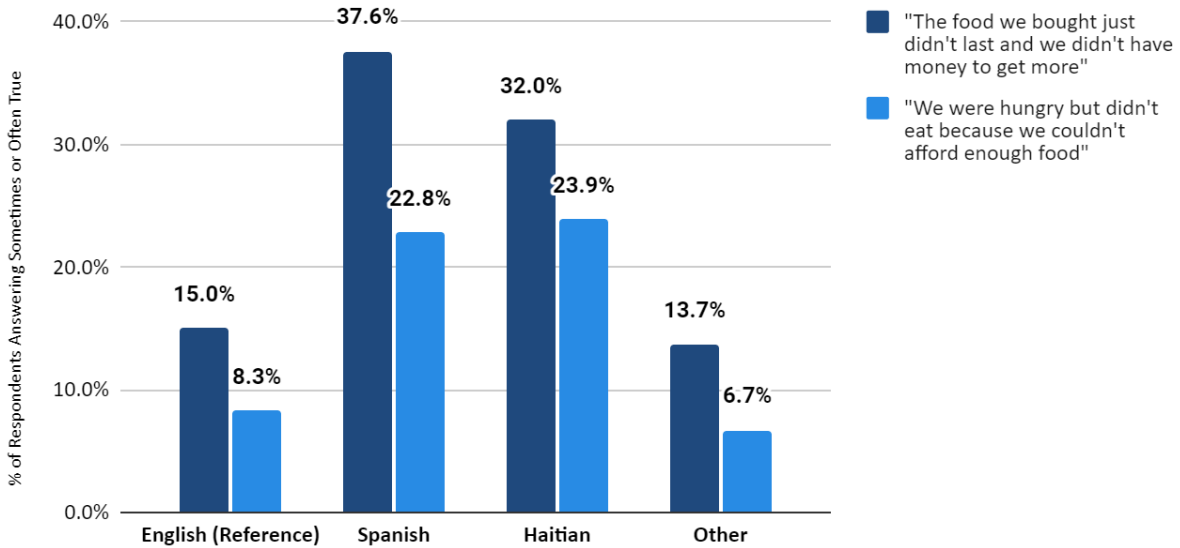
- Food insecurity rates differ based on demographic factors such as race/ethnicity, primary language used, employment status, and age.
- Below are a few graphs that visualize data from the Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), which is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey administered by the Boston Public Health Commission every two years in Boston. The charts represent 2015, 2017 and 2019 data aggregated. The BBRFSS survey includes two food access questions that assess food insecurity or risk of it. These two questions ask the participant to indicate how often (never, sometimes, or often) the participant experienced the following:

⁸ Gundersen, C., A. et al. "Map the Meal Gap 2020", Feeding America, 2020.

⁹ Boston Planning & Development Agency Research Division, "Neighborhood Profiles." BPDA, August, 2017, <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/7987d9b4-193b-4749-8594-e41flae27719>

- “Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more.”
- “Within the past 12 months we were hungry but didn’t eat because we couldn’t afford enough food.”
- A positive response (often or sometimes) to the first question indicates that the participant is at risk of food insecurity, and a positive response to the second question indicates that the participant is food insecure. This data is organized by neighborhood and is also cross-referenced with a number of socioeconomic data points that BPHC collected from BBRFSS respondents.
 - Spanish and Haitian-Creole speaking Boston residents were more than twice as likely to respond sometimes or often true to both questions, compared to residents whose primary language was English.
 - Compared to White residents, Hispanic/Latinx residents were nearly five times more likely to indicate food insecurity and Black residents were almost four times as likely to respond sometimes or often true to the prompt “we were hungry but didn’t eat because we couldn’t afford enough food”.
 - Low-income households, those with <\$25,000 a year, were more than 8 times more likely to be food insecure at 38.5% versus households with annual incomes >\$50,000 who reported food insecurity at 4.5%.
 - In Boston, residents 65 and older reported less food insecurity than other age groups (Appendix Figure 2). However, we know that need in this population remains high. Many elderly residents in listening sessions indicated that they feel a social stigma in asking for help. Additionally, many senior listening session participants cited significant transportation and mobility issues that impact their food access.

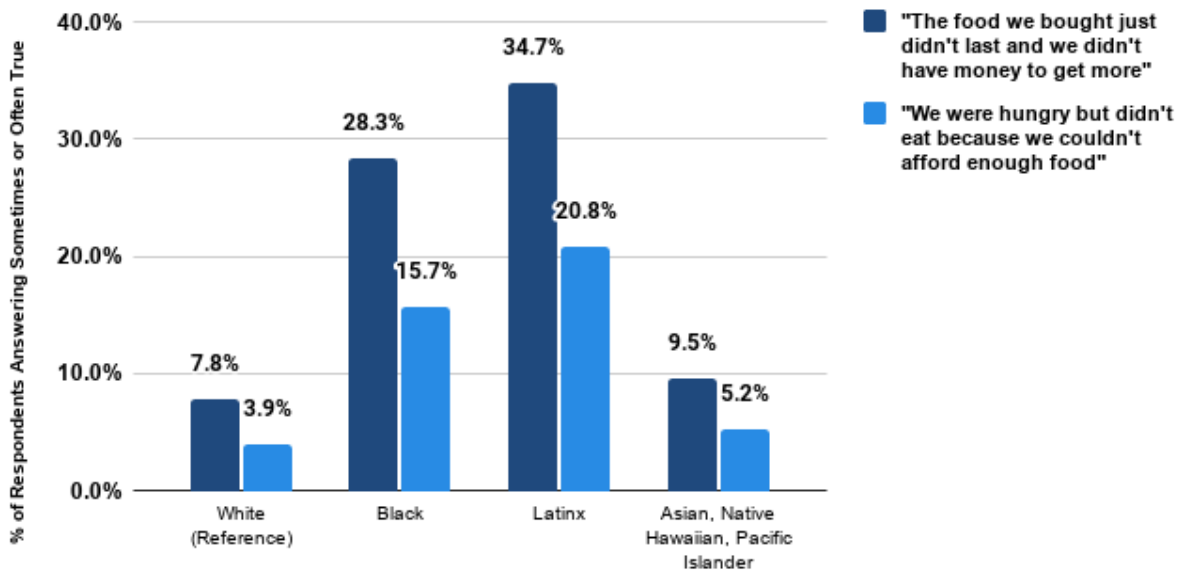
Food Access Survey Answers by Primary Language (2015, 2017, 2019)



DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), aggregated data from 2015, 2017, 2019 Boston Public Health Commission

DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

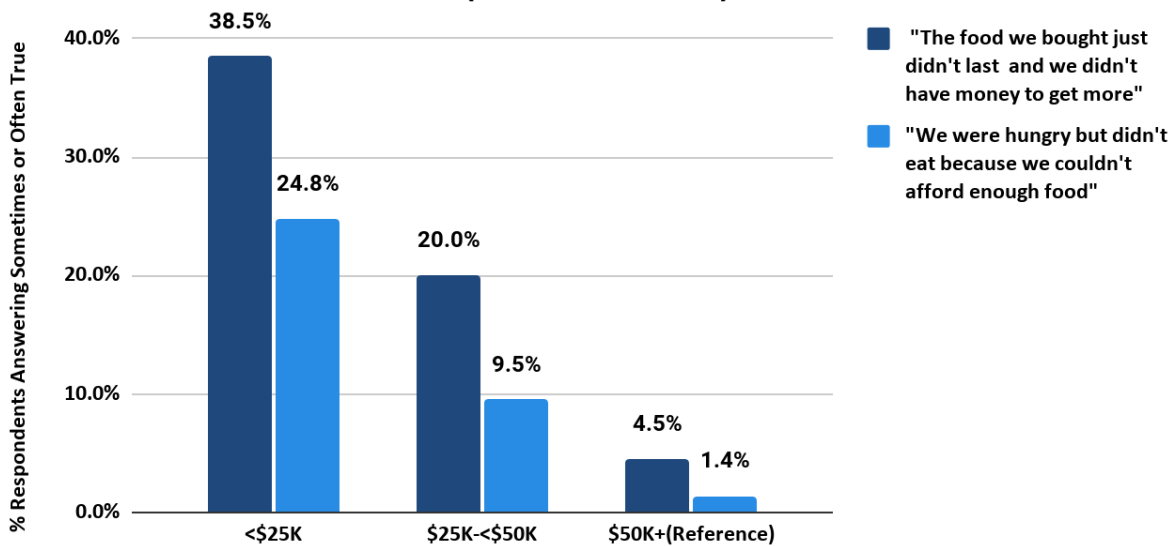
Food Access Survey Answers by Race/Ethnicity in Boston (2015, 2017, 2019)



DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), aggregated data from 2015, 2017, 2019 Boston Public Health Commission

DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

Food Access Survey Answers by Household Income (2015,2017,2019)



DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), aggregated data from 2015, 2017, 2019 Boston Public Health Commission

DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

Existing Need and Underlying Factors

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened existing food needs in the City, especially in lower-income communities of color, bringing to light the importance of inter-agency and community partnerships to address systemic challenges that impact food access.

- During the initial surge of the pandemic, March to May 2020, calls for food assistance to Project Bread’s Food Source Hotline in Boston, increased up 262% from 560 calls in March to 2,029 calls in May 2020.¹⁰ The number of total calls fell steadily from May to 435 calls in December 2020, suggesting that robust outreach by OFA, Project Bread and other partners may have helped Boston residents access SNAP.
- The Greater Boston Food Bank, the largest anti-hunger organization in the Boston Area, and its network saw a substantial increase in demand. For example, the First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain went from distributing 14,322 pounds of food from March 2019 to November 2019 to 380,035 pounds during the same period in 2020, which reflects an increase of 2,554%.¹¹ In addition, the percent of children served increased from 31% in March 2020 to 37% in October 2020 and the percent of seniors served increased from 17% in March 2020 to 20% in October 2020.¹² This

¹⁰ Project Bread, “Hotline COVID 19- Boston Call Report” (unpublished spreadsheet, January 7th, 2020), spreadsheet.

¹¹ Greater Boston Food Bank, “GBFB 2020,” (unpublished data, December 29, 2020), excel spreadsheet.

¹² Greater Boston Food Bank, “Food Pantry MSR by month,” (unpublished data, December 23, 2020), excel spreadsheet.

indicates that these two groups were vulnerable to food insecurity during the pandemic (See Appendix).

- Data from three Boston Neighborhoods (Allston-Brighton, Dorchester, East Boston) from the Expanded Jobs Action Network documented an increased food distribution to about 6,000 households a week as of July 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the pre-existing food access sites in these neighborhoods were relatively small, serving an estimated 2,000 households total a week.¹³
- SNAP recipients in Boston peaked in June 2020 at 128,744 up 19% from June 2019, with the increase occurring after March 2020.¹⁴

Neighborhood level and demographic disparities were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Communities with prior high rates of food insecurity, compared to other groups, experienced heightened need during the pandemic. The Maverick Landing Community Services survey conducted between April 2020 and October 2020 in East Boston, a neighborhood with a large Spanish speaking population, observed that out of the 455 respondents, more than 75% reported needing assistance with more food.¹⁵
- Boston's unemployment rate increased up to 18.9% in June 2020 from 2.4% in March 2020.¹⁶ Enrollment in social services such as SNAP sharply increased accordingly, by 21%, reaching a high of 128,744 enrollees in June 2020 compared to 106,333 in March 2020.¹⁷
- Industries with a high share of foreign-born workers in particular had large numbers of unemployed workers. Approximately 49% of Boston's foreign born are not U.S. citizens and about 17% of this group are undocumented¹⁸.
 - Foreign-born workers, especially those who are undocumented experience challenges accessing typical safety net services, suggesting that SNAP enrollment rates only reflect a partial picture of increased need
- The GBFB distributed 13.6 million pounds of food in Boston from April 2020 through September 2020, which was 51% more than the same time period last year¹⁹.
- Although unemployment rates have decreased since June 2020 to 6.6% in November 2020, the rate remains three times higher than baseline unemployment rates in

¹³ Action for Equity/Expanded Jobs Action Network, "Food Access Survey" (unpublished manuscript, July 19, 2020).

¹⁴ BPDA, "Social Assistance Briefing Note", (unpublished manuscript, Oct 2020), typescript.

¹⁵ Maverick Landing Community Services. "Food Insecurity Assessment Mar-June 2020" (unpublished data), "MLCS food insecurity assessment MAR - JUN 2020", October, 19, 2020, spreadsheet.

¹⁶ Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), "Labor Force and Unemployment Data", (unpublished data, Dec 4, 2020), chart.

¹⁷ Boston Planning Development Agency (BPDA), "Social Assistance during the COVID-19 Pandemic", (unpublished data, November 2020), powerpoint.

¹⁸BPDA, " COVID-19 in Boston: The Impact on Immigrant Communities" (unpublished data report, August 2020), powerpoint.

¹⁹ BPDA, "Social Assistance Briefing Note", (unpublished manuscript, Oct 2020), typescript.

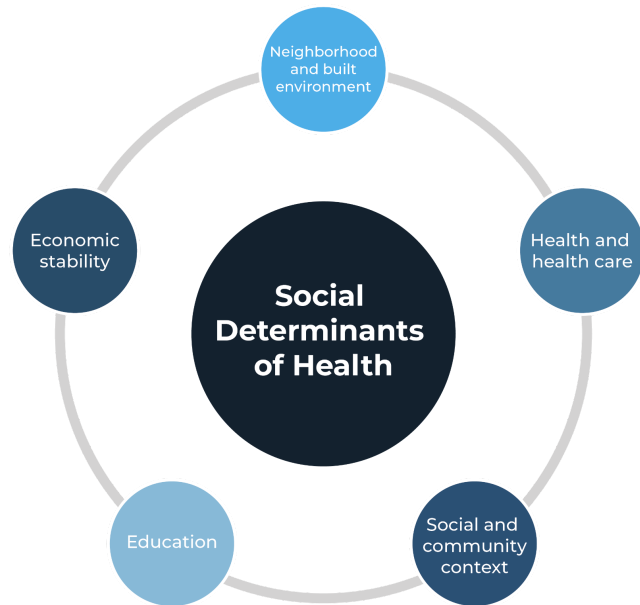
2019. Thus, noting the high need for short term safety net programs and services as well as long-term resilience planning.²⁰

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Access to nutritious food is a critical social determinant of health that has a direct impact on wellbeing across the lifespan of Boston residents. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. The five key areas of the SDOH are outlined and shown below, as created by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's Healthy People 2020 Plan.

These five key areas (determinants) include:

- Economic Stability
- Education Access and Quality
- Social and Community Context
- Health Care Access and Quality
- Neighborhood and Built Environment



The Mayor's Office and The Health and Human Services Cabinet are committed to addressing social determinants of health, especially with a racial equity lens. Health starts in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities. Our health is also determined, in part, by access to social and economic opportunities; the resources and supports available in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities; the quality of our schooling; the safety of our workplaces; the cleanliness of our water, food, and air; and the nature of our social interactions and relationships. The conditions in which we live explain, in part, why some Americans are healthier than others and why Americans more generally are not as healthy as they could be.

Many of the conditions that impact health also impact food security. Both the 2018 listening sessions conducted by the Office of Food Access and the 2020 listening sessions conducted by Health Leads highlighted poverty and environmental factors such as transportation and access to grocery stores as root causes of food insecurity.

²⁰BPDA, "Boston's Labor Market in 2020: Looking Back and Looking Ahead", (unpublished data report, January 2021), powerpoint.

Understanding the conditions that impact health and access to healthy food is critical to understanding the drivers of food insecurity and its economic impact.

CITY OF BOSTON'S COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY AND RESILIENCE

On June 12th, 2020, former Mayor Walsh signed an Executive Order Declaring Racism and Emergency and Public Health Crisis in the City of Boston highlighting how racism shapes access to resources that create opportunities for health, including public safety, housing, education and employment, and is a persistent barrier to health equity for all Bostonians. Mayor Janey in her swearing in ceremony on March 24th, 2021, pledged to continue the work of dismantling racism and rebuilding a just City for all Boston residents.²¹

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the importance of a racial equity and resilience approach to the City of Boston's work. Low-income communities of color disproportionately bore the brunt of the disease and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. In June 2020, cases where race and ethnicity was known, the rate of reported COVID-19 cases for Black Boston residents was 269.9 per 10,000 compared with 213.2 per 10,000 for Latinx/Hispanic residents and 89.8 per 10,000 for white residents.²²

This Executive Order set eight key strategies for the Mayor's Office of Health and Human Services to work on in partnership with the Boston Public Health Commission and all City departments. The Mayor's Office of Food Access will build on this commitment and apply a racial equity, social justice, and resilience lens as the implementation plan is built to meet the goals outlined in this strategic plan. This will require developing solutions in conjunction with historically marginalized communities to address root causes of inequities and develop data systems, programs, and policies to dismantle systemic racism.

DIGNITY

The Mayor's Office of Food Access aims to support dignity by promoting agency and choice. We believe our solutions must acknowledge our collective humanity, and take into account the fear and mental health impacts of facing challenges in finding the basic needs to live a healthy and thriving life.

Dignity was a theme that weaved throughout interviews and design sessions conducted in 2020. Residents expressed the importance of trust building, flexibility, and trauma-informed care throughout the entire food system.

²¹ Janey, Kim, "Mayor Kim Janey Swearing-In Ceremony Speech," Office of the Mayor. March 24, 2021. <https://www.boston.gov/news/mayor-kim-janey-swearing-ceremony-speech>

²² Walsh, Martin J., "An Executive Order Declaring Racism an Emergency and Public Health Crisis in the City of Boston," Office of the Mayor, June 12, 2020, <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2020/06/racism-as-public-health-crisis.pdf>.

As noted by one participant, “you have to keep coming back to prove your life hasn’t gotten better.”

OFA will continue to embed dignity in the work ahead by removing barriers and providing options to empower people to make their own choices. Additionally, OFA will continue to equitably engage residents with lived experience in further identifying and implementing community-driven solutions to food insecurity.

MOST PRESSING ISSUES

In 2019, the Mayor’s Office of Food Access engaged in a strategic planning process to help advise and set the Mayor’s Food Access Agenda for the City of Boston. Along with one-on-one interviews with key staff members, over 37 interviews were conducted with stakeholders and members of the Boston Food Access Council. The 2020 pandemic showed the need to urgently reassess the Mayor’s Food Access Agenda in order to identify the areas of greatest need, understand gaps in access to food, and create a roadmap to address the main causes of food insecurity in the City. In November 2020, the Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem held 59 additional one-on-one interviews as well as led three 2-hour design sessions with Boston residents, engaging 92 residents in total. After this process, the workgroup consolidated themes and voted on recommendations. Results from both of these processes were synthesized and included in this Strategic Plan. The Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem report has a full description of the recommendation process.²³

The questions asked during all interviews, design sessions and surveys focused on the food access system in Boston and opportunities for improvement. The information shared in 2019 and 2020 engagement processes showed that the food security issues discussed here existed before the COVID-19 pandemic but are now more amplified.

Four main themes emerged from this process:

1. Affordability and Quality
2. Accessibility and Choice
3. Underutilization, Communication and Awareness of Programs
4. Community Solutions and Insufficient Resources

Highlighted as an important concept across all themes was dignity. Dignity is an important factor for residents who encounter food security challenges. Residents expressed that being able to access services in a way that is respectful of their privacy, agency, and needs is critical to improving food access and creating a truly equitable food system in Boston.

²³ Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem “Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem Project”, Boston Food Access Council, Dec 23, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15kC1O2RcDva58eUhmJEdTnVvhAkl.9t2-/view?usp=sharing>.

AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY

Fresh, healthy foods tend to be more expensive than unhealthy foods. Fresh foods are not subsidized the same ways that unhealthy foods are. A 2013 study from Harvard School of Public Health found that eating a healthy diet (rich in fruits, vegetables, fish, and nuts) cost about \$1.50 more per day per person than eating an unhealthy diet (the kind full of processed foods and refined grains).²⁴ That's an extra \$2,200 per year for a family of four.

In addition, healthier foods are more expensive when compared to the cheaper alternative of hyper-processed, sugary, salty, additive-laden food. Those foods are more often subsidized, last longer, and are more available in low-income communities, which leads into the second issue of accessibility. Residents interviewed in 2020 shared that food subsidies did not fully cover the needs of families. Respondents from the 2019 listening sessions shared that good quality, healthy, and culturally connected food vary in price and availability at grocery stores across the City. Depending on farm practices of local farms (i.e. certified organic), produce at different farmers markets vary in price as well. Some residents also shared a desire to directly connect with farmers in order to mitigate varying prices throughout Boston. Respondents to surveys indicated having to visit multiple grocery stores and service sites to obtain enough food for their family at affordable prices.

ACCESSIBILITY AND CHOICE

The workgroup noted that availability of food through supermarkets and convenience stores varies across the City of Boston. The map in Appendix (Fig 1) shows the distribution of food retailers by type across the City of Boston in 2019. Primarily, sections of Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park are more than a ½ mile from a grocery store. This is a major barrier for those relying on public transportation especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although corner stores abound throughout the City of Boston, healthy, fresh foods are not available at most corner stores. This creates additional challenges for residents trying to access fresh food.

The main challenge underneath accessibility is transportation. The MBTA subway and bus system can be unreliable and difficult to utilize when carrying bags of groceries. Often, families have to take multiple bus lines to get to a grocery store that carries affordable and culturally connected foods. It creates an undue burden on those without access to a car. Transportation is just one factor that reduces food budgets. People spend part of their income on getting from their home to the stores, leaving less money available to buy their groceries. This issue was especially highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beyond getting to a physical location to access food, other challenges include eligibility requirements, language barriers, technology adoption, and lack of accommodations for people with disabilities. For example, due to eligibility requirements undocumented

²⁴ Rao, Mayurree et al, "Do Healthier foods and diet patterns cost more than less healthy options? A systematic review and meta-analysis", *BMJ Open*, 2013

immigrants are not eligible for SNAP, and some people that are over the income requirements for SNAP still cannot afford to buy food.

Additionally, residents mentioned communication and flexibility of food services impacts accessibility, especially in times of crisis. For example, residents highlighted limited availability of healthy foods year round due to seasonal closings of farmers markets. In addition to this, during the COVID-19 pandemic, residents discussed that a lack of consistent program hours & services created additional accessibility barriers. Further, some residents underlined the need for hot meals as food options, particularly for those experiencing homelessness. These responses indicate the importance of communication and flexible food services in times of crisis and beyond.

UNDERUTILIZATION OF PROGRAMS, COMMUNICATION, AND AWARENESS OF FOOD INSECURITY

There are a number of programs that exist for Boston residents to participate in to help them overcome the barriers to food security. Many of the programs suffer from underutilization for a variety of reasons. Either there isn't enough public awareness that the programs exist, there isn't enough education on who is eligible for the programs or what is allowable with programs, or there is stigma attached to accessing these programs.

In addition, while the individuals and organizations interviewed for the 2019 OFA Strategic Plan are all intimately aware of and well-versed in the issues surrounding food insecurity and food access, there was an acknowledgement that this awareness and education doesn't always extend out to other City departments and community organizations and agencies.

The programs mentioned during the strategic planning stakeholder interviews included:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** SNAP offers nutrition assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities.
 - There is a gap between individuals who qualify for SNAP and those who are enrolled. The SNAP Gap is the difference between the number of low-income Massachusetts residents receiving MassHealth who are likely SNAP eligible and the number of people actually receiving SNAP. In Massachusetts, the size of this gap was estimated to be 660,000 people in February 2020.²⁵ In Boston, the SNAP Gap was estimated to be 68,705 residents or 39%. This rate varies across neighborhoods - East Boston has 16,237 MassHealth recipients but only 5,178 residents signed up for SNAP, leaving a SNAP gap of 68%.
 - Respondents discussed how difficult it is to use SNAP benefits to meet different dietary restrictions as well as purchase culturally connected and

²⁵The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, "SNAP Gap for 2020", Jan 8, 2021, <https://public.tableau.com/profile/food.bank.of.western.ma#!/vizhome/SNAPGapfor2020/AllDistricts>.

healthy foods. This is an example of challenges around firstly, access to healthy food, but also lack of clear information of the food that is eligible to be purchased with SNAP

- o Only 42% of eligible seniors were participating in SNAP in 2014, compared to 85% of eligible non-elderly adults.²⁶ SNAP Gap estimates, however, do not include seniors who are ineligible for MassHealth because they are over age 65 and have an income above 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. Seniors in this non-MassHealth group who are low income would still likely be eligible for SNAP. As such there are likely many more seniors in Massachusetts who are not receiving SNAP but are eligible for it.
- **Boston Double Up Food Bucks:** Double Up Food Bucks is a SNAP incentive program. SNAP recipients can get a dollar-to-dollar match on fresh fruits and vegetables up to \$10 per day per customer if they use their EBT cards at participating corner and grocery stores. As of April 2021, there are 12 stores that participate in Double Up Food Bucks across Boston.
- **Healthy Incentive Program (HIP):** Healthy Incentives Program is a SNAP incentive program that provides a dollar-for-dollar match for each SNAP dollar spent on targeted fruits and vegetables from HIP farm vendors. Residents can receive up to a monthly cap of \$40, \$60 or \$80 when they use SNAP.
- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC):** WIC is a federal nutrition program that provides healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to healthcare and other services, free of charge.
 - o To qualify for WIC, households must be between 100-185% of federal poverty guidelines. 2018 data states that 25,223 Boston residents are eligible for WIC but only 15,054 are enrolled, giving a participation rate of 59.7%.²⁷
 - o WIC is not included in the federal government's public charge rule and is available regardless of immigration or citizenship status, making it a crucial program for Boston residents who do not qualify for other safety net support.
- **Boston Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services:** Nearly three-quarters of BPS students live at or below poverty, yet only 40% of students participate in school breakfast and only 68% in school lunch. Moreover, there are many anecdotes from the cafeteria and janitorial staff in schools of garbage cans full of food at the end of meal periods each day because students are taking meals but not eating them.

²⁶ Zillak, James P. and Gunderson, Craig, "The State of Senior Hunger in America", Feeding America and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, Aug 16, 2017, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/senior-hunger-research/state-of-senior-hunger-2015.pdf>

²⁷Population Health Information Tool (PHIT) Data: Select Women, Infant and CHildren (WIC) program data, "Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) Program Data, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Jan 11, 2021, <https://www.mass.gov/guides/phit-data-select-women-infant-and-children-wic-program-data#-explore-wic-data->

Underutilization of programs can be addressed by increasing communication around programs and making food insecurity and food access a priority outside of current food access partners.

Communication

Communication around available assistance programs is crucial to the utilization of programs. Workgroup members highlighted the importance of consistent, reliable and language-appropriate communication around food resources. The City of Boston should continue to use different mediums like neighborhood newspapers, WhatsApp, YouTube, and flyers to disseminate information. Community-based communication is seen as particularly important.

Organizations reported a lack of access to timely information, and at times throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, any information at all; making it difficult to consistently serve residents. *“Information has to be provided in a better way. Services need to be accessible to more of the people who are in need.”*²⁸

A Chinatown resident noted, *“More information should be given to let people know of the different food programs available - like advertising in the local Chinese newspapers”*

Awareness of Food Security

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light how coordination across agencies increases effectiveness of communication and service delivery. In addition to this, collaboration with other agencies helps address root causes of food insecurity such as economic stability, social and community context, and aspects of the built environment. Finally, engaging with other partners can integrate food relief with other social services, potentially reducing the stigma associated with asking for help repeatedly or stigma specifically from needing help with food.

Food insecurity is not an isolated issue. Working together to ensure that other departments and organizations understand the importance and magnitude of the problem will be critical as OFA works to implement the goals of this strategic plan and build an equitable food system in Boston.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS AND INSUFFICIENT RESOURCES

A major theme that was uplifted throughout the 2020 assessment was the importance of community-based solutions. Participants spoke on how having the community at decision making tables could increase effectiveness around communication and center dignity in the service experience. In addition to this, participants felt that empowering residents with

²⁸ Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem “Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem Project”, Boston Food Access Council, Dec 23, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15kC1O2RcDva58eUhmJEdTnVvhAkl9t2-/view?usp=sharing>.

lived experience could improve overall experiences with food insecurity and reduce trauma.

Residents discussed a desire for community-sourced solutions to help communities grow their own food, support local farmers, and increase access to healthy and fresh produce (ex. through SNAP and other programs). Residents felt that these types of initiatives could lead to more affordable, sustainable, culturally connected, and linguistically appropriate food systems that could address both food insecurity and economic empowerment concurrently.

Community-driven groups and networks of care have existed in communities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to this, mutual aid groups and new networks emerged to meet the needs that emerged during COVID-19.

“If I couldn’t use the food, I forwarded it to someone who could. I had a neighbor who went through COVID-19, this made a difference so that they could recover better. I was grateful I was a recipient and that my neighbor could then be a recipient as well.”²⁹

During COVID-19 many community-based organizations that responded to the need for food expressed challenges with maintaining consistent funding. Some organizations that were interviewed were not sure they could replenish their resources with additional funding and were rendered unable to assure residents how long their resources would last. To recover, it is known that support with the economic recovery will be needed for all of 2021. Funding for food and infrastructure must reflect this reality.

CURRENT FOOD ACCESS INITIATIVES

The Mayor's Office of Food Access offers a range of current programs, services and initiatives that meet many of the issues raised in community feedback sessions. These programs are part of OFA's mission to increase access for all Boston residents to nutritious and culturally connected foods.

ENSURE ACCESS TO FOOD FOR ALL BOSTON RESIDENTS

Boston Eats

This program increases access to free, healthy meals for children by increasing summer and afterschool meal programs and will support families by reducing their burden to provide food, thus allowing them to stretch their food budgets. The Boston Eats program

²⁹ Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem “Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem Project”, Boston Food Access Council, Dec 23, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15kC1O2RcDva58eUhmJEdTnVvhAkl9t2-/view?usp=sharing>.

aims to increase open meal sites in non-conventional settings such as Boston Public Libraries (BPL), Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF), Boston Housing Authority (BHA), and farmers' markets and Community Based Organizations (CBOs). In light of COVID-19, the program has been operating since March 2020 distributing more than 6.8M meals up to March 2021, helping families rest assured that kids had a healthy meal while schools are closed and allowing them to stretch the food budget. The program supports community partners to keep on building capacity to offer this meal program in non-traditional locations throughout outreach, education and administration.

BOSFoodLove

The goal of BOSFoodLove is to decrease food insecurity among Boston Public School (BPS) students and families. Nearly three-quarters of BPS students live at or below poverty, yet only 40% of students participate in school breakfast and only 68% in school lunch. BOSFoodLove aims to promote school meals but go beyond it by increasing access to affordable, healthy and culturally connected foods at schools and in the communities. BOSFoodLove will do this by increasing the number of programs where students can get food outside of school meals, increase number of BPS and Charter school families enrolled in Federal and State food aid programs, and establish relationships with parent councils, Wellness councils, and community partners to build trust around food access programs.

Farmers Markets in Boston

Farmers markets increase opportunities for all communities to access fresh, locally grown food, create stronger bonds between neighborhood residents, and connect them to other City and community resources. Additionally, farmers markets activate the local economy and support local agriculture.

INCREASE BUYING POWER FOR FOOD IN BOSTON

Boston Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb)

Double Up Food Bucks is a SNAP incentive program. If a Boston resident pays for fresh fruits and veggies with their EBT card at participating corner and grocery stores, they get a dollar-to-dollar match up to \$10 per day per customer.

Since the program was launched in 2018, DUFb has reimbursed nearly \$354,000 in SNAP fruits and vegetable incentives. Monthly incentive reimbursements have gradually increased since implementation across all stores and in 2020 the DUFb incentives on fruits and vegetables increased 64% compared to 2019. Furthermore, for the last 30 months, DUFb incentives increased SNAP fresh fruits and vegetable expenditure by 27%, total food spending by 15%, and customer shopping trips by 11%. As of April 2021, twelve stores are currently enrolled in the program serving as critical food access points in lower-income, and predominantly communities of color such as Roxbury, Dorchester, East Boston, Mattapan and Jamaica Plain. Our more recent evaluation found that store participants were

primarily African Americans (60%), Hispanic (17%), and predominantly female (70%), with distribution across age groups.

Farmers Market Coupons

In partnership with Mass Farmers Markets and with the financial support of the Boston Resiliency Fund, OFA launched a farmer's market coupon program pilot supporting 21 participating markets, distributing more than 36,000 coupons across the City, and reimbursing more than \$91,000. This program provided very important financial aid to Boston farmers and residents who were having a difficult time selling their produce and feeding their families.

For 2021, the Office of Food Access is launching the Farmers Markets Coupon Program, an incentive program that will both support families who experience challenges buying the food they need and want, and the small businesses participating in the farmers markets. The program is twofold. It provides households experiencing food insecurity with coupons to buy fresh produce, dairy products, eggs, meats, and baked goods, and it gives vendors mini-grants to participate in small farmers markets. Mini-grants can be used to pay for operating costs such as staff at small markets that the vendor does not currently attend.

Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)

The Healthy Incentives Program, or HIP provides a 100 percent incentive – a dollar-for-dollar match – for each SNAP dollar spent on targeted fruits and vegetables purchased at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs statewide. This is a state-run program, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). The Mayor's Office of Food Access works to promote this program to Boston SNAP beneficiaries.

SUPPORT FOOD ACCESS SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Urban Farming in the City

Urban farming gives residents better access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. It also cuts down on transportation costs and carbon emissions. The City passed Article 89 in 2013 to support commercial urban farming in the City.³⁰ OFA helps farmers to expand their business to stores and farmers markets, thus making farming a profitable profession. The Office of Food Access is also actively working on supporting farmers to navigate the system and remove some of the barriers to implementing Article 89.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are focal points in many Boston neighborhoods. The Department of Neighborhood Development's (DND) Grassroots Program works with community members and local organizations to identify sites for new community gardens on formerly vacant

³⁰ Boston Redevelopment Authority, "Article 89", Office of the Mayor, Dec 2013, <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/a573190c-9305-45a5-83b1-735c0801e73e>.

land, funds the development of such gardens, and preserves them as food-producing open spaces in perpetuity. These gardens are established primarily in low-income communities of color and play an important role in addressing inequitable access to affordable healthy food. The Grassroots Program also funds garden creation and expansion on private and public land beyond DND's inventory.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In March of 2020, immediately following the Stay-at-Home orders by Gov. Baker, it became clear that thousands of Boston residents were facing issues of extreme food insecurity. Increased calls to the Offices of Food Access, Age Strong, and Boston Public Schools indicated a radical uptick in demand, and with many residents in quarantine it was supposed that there was an even greater unseen demand for food.

Additionally, many groups experienced food insecurity at rates disproportionate to their peers, including people of color, women, immigrants, home renters and low-income households. Dorchester, East Boston, Mattapan and Roxbury all had higher than average rates of food insecurity prior to the pandemic. Early reports indicated that food insecurity in these communities was higher during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as stated in Section 3 of this document.

Local, state, and federal government initiatives as well as non-profit, grassroots and private partnerships came together to meet this unprecedented need. These initiatives are part of the COVID-19 emergency food response and will phase into sustainable solutions during recovery.

Targeted Grocery Deliveries

The Office of Food Access and Age Strong with help from other City agencies as well as non-profit partners such as the YMCA, ABCD Allston, Lyft, The Ride, and the Bike Brigade, quickly responded to the situation to set up an emergency food distribution and delivery system that served over 4,000 people over the course of the initial surge of the COVID-19 Virus.³¹ During this phase, the City of Boston mobilized 180 staff to support the effort in some way, totaling 900+ hours/week.³²

Youth Meal Sites

While schools were shuttered, the City of Boston collaborated with Boston Public Schools, the YMCA of Greater Boston, The Boston Center for Youth and Families (BCYF), and multiple Community-Based Organisations provided free breakfast and lunch meals for pick-up to all Youth (18 and younger). The City of Boston distributed 6.8M million meals between March 17, 2020 to March 15, 2021. These services will be extended through the 2020-2021 school year.

³¹ Mayor's Office of Urban Mechanics, "Food Emergency Playbook", (unpublished manuscript, Dec 23, 2020), typescript.

³² Mayor's Office of Urban Mechanics, "Food Access Analysis Powerpoint", (unpublished report, Dec 23, 2020), powerpoint.

Adult Meal Sites

Through the midst of the surge, the Office of Food Access with the support of the Boston Resiliency Fund and in collaboration with Commonwealth Kitchen distributed 175,000 meals at 26 meal sites across the City.

Emergency Feeding Program

The Emergency Feeding Program provides “Stay at Home” door-to-door grocery deliveries to high-risk and vulnerable populations in Boston such as older adults in Senior home settings or in their homes, those with an underlying health condition that make them high-risk for COVID-19, and/or those who have tested positive for COVID-19. This was initially piloted with About Fresh with support of the Boston Resiliency Fund. Since the beginning of this program in July we have served 3,116 households. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) covers 75% of the total cost of this program during the period in which Governor Charlie Baker maintains a state of emergency in Massachusetts, the City of Boston covers the remaining 25% of the cost of the program.

Immigrant Community Food Emergency Support

With the financial support of the Boston Resiliency Fund, 20 immigrant serving organizations in collaboration with Fair Foods distribute bags of produce or vouchers to be redeemed at one of the over 50 Fair Foods locations valued at \$15-20 for free. Between August and April 2021, 1,811,540 lbs pounds of fresh vegetables and fruits have been distributed to all partner organizations.

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)

43,077 P-EBT cards were distributed from April 2020 to December 2020. 35,890 of these were activated, for an activation rate of 83.32% across the City.³³ Although P-EBT was widely seen positively by Boston residents, many families experienced challenges receiving, activating and utilizing P-EBT cards. In addition to this, activation rates vary across Boston neighborhoods. Areas with historic need for food such as Charlestown, Jamaica Plain, and Roxbury had 72%, 71%, and 81% rates of P-EBT card activation compared to 83% across the City.

Boston Resiliency Fund

The Boston Resiliency Fund is the City of Boston’s effort to help coordinate fundraising and philanthropic COVID-19 relief efforts. Since Mayor Walsh launched the Boston Resiliency Fund on March 16th, 2020, the Fund has been fortunate enough to support over 360 Boston-based non-profits with \$30M in funding, with the goal of providing essential services to Boston residents whose health and well-being are most immediately impacted by COVID-19. Of those funds, \$17 million has been directed to ensure Boston’s children, families, and seniors have access to food and other basic needs. A map and a list of every

³³ Department of Transitional Assistance, “P-EBT Boston Rates”, (unpublished data, Dec 12, 2020), excel spreadsheet.

organization that has received funding from the Boston Resiliency Fund can be found [here](#). The Fund has supported organizations that reflect the City's dynamic and diverse population; 56% of grants were awarded to organizations led by people of color. Women lead 58%, and 27% are immigrant-serving organizations.

2021-2023 STRATEGIC GOALS

The Mayor's Office of Food Access' strategic goals shared here were developed out of the 2019 and 2020 strategic planning, collaborative processes which allowed for feedback from the greater food access network in the City. The strategic goals build on and amplify current OFA initiatives as well as offer new solutions enabling OFA to work towards the bold vision of ending food insecurity in Boston by 2030.

The six strategic goals are:

1. Ensure food access issues are prioritized within community organizations, City agencies, and other key partners, emphasizing a racial equity and resilience lens
2. Strengthen the citywide food access network by developing shared resources, providing technical assistance, enabling strategic collaboration opportunities, and involving community leadership
3. Develop and support a policy and advocacy agenda to eliminate food insecurity
4. Build public awareness of food insecurity and available resources, programs, and services through a robust communication strategy
5. Implement strategies to make healthy, fresh and culturally connected foods more affordable and accessible throughout Boston
6. Respond to the immediate food needs of Boston residents during COVID-19 by strengthening current programs and building an equitable food system that supports the hardest hit communities during their recovery

Below, each goal is expanded upon with the initiatives and objectives within them. Because so much of this work is collaborative, in nature, the goals and objectives will be classified according to which stakeholders will be leading and implementing them.

The below framework will outline **City-owned** initiatives which require the City to lead and implement them; **City-led** initiatives, with the City sharing ownership and implementation with partners; and **City-catalyzed** initiatives, where the City may endorse ideas and convene stakeholders, but the action plans will be owned and implemented by other partners because their strategic priorities and existing programming allows them to have greater impact. Objectives that correspond with the goals are broken up into **short-term** (30-90 days for implementation) or **long-term** (1+ years) efforts.

GOAL 1: Ensure food access issues are prioritized within community organizations, City agencies, and other key partners, emphasizing a racial equity and resilience lens

Long-term

City-led

- Use IB2030 platform to connect with other City departments about prioritizing food access services and addressing hunger and economic issues concurrently, especially in historically under-resourced neighborhoods
 - Connect the City of Boston Youth Engagement and Employment Office, Office of New Citizens, Office of Returning Citizens, Job Training Program, Serving Ourselves with anti-hunger initiatives, including farms
 - Provide TA to make the procurement process more equitable, increasing access for all Healthy Food Retailers (farmers, small businesses and grassroots organizations)
 - Provide opportunities for grocery stores, Food Co-op, corner stores and other food retailers to open in areas of Boston with no quality grocery options
- Work with meal sponsors, who serve all young Bostonians (<18 years old), to ensure all children have the food they need to grow, learn and reach their maximum potential
 - Support the expansion of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) across the City, especially in areas with high risk for food insecurity
 - Increase the participation in the National School Lunch Program, Fruit and Vegetables Program and Breakfast After the Bell Program, through education and engagement of the all-school community (students, teachers, principals, cafeteria staff, parents), ensuring all children have access to healthy, nutritious food
- Partner with community health centers and other partners to implement a comprehensive process for sharing resources with all Boston clients
 - Work with partners to develop a process and protocol for food access referrals
 - Ensure food insecurity screenings lead to referrals to food access resources and services

City-catalyzed

- Partner with community health centers and other partners to implement a comprehensive process for sharing resources with all Boston clients
 - Promote alignment with MassHealth ACO transition by including relevant stakeholders
- Collaborate with Boston area colleges and universities to eliminate food insecurity and hunger in those institutions

GOAL 2: Strengthen the citywide food access network by developing shared resources, providing technical assistance, enabling strategic collaboration, and involving community leadership

Short-term

City-owned

- Provide guidance and technical assistance for community-led initiatives, for example: Community Fridges, surplus produce sharing, and food distribution
- Connect local farmers, especially BIPOC and immigrant led, with resources that can improve their operation such as new funding and technical assistance

City-led

- Provide technical assistance to businesses, especially BIPOC and immigrant led organizations, to become SNAP retailers (including HIP and Double Up Food Bucks) and provide support for increasing SNAP sales by using different platforms (curbside pick up, internet purchases, and other system)

Long-term

City-owned

- Strengthen and connect existing programs to better serve the community, not overlap efforts and use resources more efficiently
 - Organize opportunities to convene and develop the food access network in Boston

- Develop a comprehensive database for partners and stakeholders that includes all organizations working on food access and all resources and services available to help identify gaps in services
- Make all data and research produced or compiled at OFA available to the entire food access network, including data from food insecurity screenings
- Develop understanding of the challenges with adhering to Article 89 and provide supportive services to overcome them, with particular attention to neighborhoods with higher food insecurity

City-led

- Strengthen and connect existing programs to better serve the community, not overlap efforts and use resources more efficiently
 - Provide ongoing professional development and skill-building opportunities to build on best practices as a network
 - Help organizations, farmers, restaurants, bodegas, etc with the coordination needed to source culturally connected and diet appropriate foods
- Invest in community-led and centered initiatives to increase access to healthy and affordable food for all Boston Residents
 - Advocate and require paid, equitable representation from every group of people, putting the most oppressed in the center and prioritizing those who have lived experience

City-catalyzed

- Incentivize businesses (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores, university and hospital cafeterias) to reduce food waste and supply food rescue programs
 - Provide technical assistance to increase businesses donating, maximizing efficiency and food donated
- Invest in community-led and centered initiatives to increase access to healthy and affordable food for all Boston Residents
 - Support the development of community kitchens

GOAL 3: Develop and support a policy and advocacy agenda to eliminate food insecurity

On-going

City-owned

- Fully support the Mayor’s legislative priorities that work to eliminate food insecurity and lend support to other advocacy efforts during the legislative process that arise around ending food insecurity

Short-term

City-led

- Work with the state to provide greater reach to people who can potentially qualify for state benefits such as SNAP, WIC and P-EBT

Long-term

City-catalyzed

- Advocate at the Federal and State Level to expand and strengthen SNAP, HIP, WIC, and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) to support increased access to healthy, affordable, and, when possible, local food

GOAL 4: Build public awareness of food insecurity and available resources, programs, and services through a robust communication strategy

Short-term

City-led

- Create a culturally connected food guide for the City of Boston, that can inform all the food retailers and food emergency partners about food preference to the population that they serve

Long-term

City-owned

- Increase awareness, education and trust about safety net programs and resources (SNAP, HIP, P-EBT, Double-Up Food Bucks) to increase enrollment and utilization of these programs
 - Leverage current communications channels in the City (311, HelpSteps)
 - Work with key partners like ethnic outlet media and community ambassadors to target communication channels to reach specific populations (homeless individuals, immigrant families, etc)
 - Utilize multiple communication methods with multi-lingual options, (text, robocalls, social media, direct mailing, flyers, 311)
- Provide education and resources around nutrition, cooking and budgeting.

City-led

- Increase awareness, education and trust about safety net programs and resources (SNAP, HIP, P-EBT, Double-Up Food Bucks) to increase enrollment and utilization of these programs
 - Provide multilingual interpreter lines
- Develop a campaign to destigmatize food insecurity
 - Tell the stories behind the issue and show faces of real Bostonians
 - Celebrate and share the success stories

City-catalyzed

- Highlight demonstrated connections between food insecurity and health outcomes, academic outcomes, and other issues

GOAL 5: Implement strategies to make healthy, fresh, and culturally connected foods more affordable and accessible throughout Boston

Long-term

City-owned

- Provide guidelines and non-financial incentives for farmers and corner stores to charge the same prices across the City
- Invest in local solutions so residents can access healthy, affordable and culturally connected food through opportunities to grow their food or through increased direct access to farmer's produce at farmers markets, mobile markets, grocery and corner stores
 - Increase outlets for farmers to sell locally grown produce and pair farmers with programs that makes their produce affordable for all Boston residents (HIP, Boston Double Up Food Bucks, SNAP, subsidized CSAs)

City-led

- Invest in local solutions so residents can access healthy, affordable and culturally connected food through opportunities to grow their food or through increased direct access to farmer's produce at farmers markets, mobile markets, grocery and corner stores
 - Increase opportunities for people to grow their food in different settings (ex. Boston Public Schools , healthcare systems, community greenhouses, public and private undeveloped lots, City properties and buildings)

- Revamp community garden efforts to emphasize a focus on increasing garden access to residents who are eligible for SNAP and/or are otherwise food insecure.
- Convene local gardeners and farmers to identify how the City can support access to land and pipelines to provide food to communities that they serve, grow in, or work with
- Expand availability of culturally connected fresh produce available through increasing outreach and support to diverse farmers, in particular BIPOC and immigrant farmers
- Provide incentives or create a program that equitably serves all residents in the City of Boston, especially those who don't qualify for federal and state safety net programs

GOAL 6: Strengthen current emergency response programs and build an equitable food system that supports the hardest hit communities during their recovery

On-going

City-owned

- Provide updated information on the City communication channels about food resources, funding opportunities and best practices regarding safety precautions
 - Provide access to mass telecoms opportunities (texting, robocalls) to update households available resources

Short-term

City-led

- Make a response plan
 - Assess currently committed food, max food need at height of pandemic, when resources run out, gaps (food or funding), and populations impacted
 - Convene Boston funders to learn of the urgent need and possibility of new round of resiliency dollars and/or other funding. Put a fundraising plan together
 - Convene food distribution network programs for coordination discussion

- Constantly monitor the change of food resources (food and funding), quickly identify gaps in the system and provide strategies to quickly cover these gaps
- Create a data collection system
- Advocate at the federal and state level for increased flexibilities that allow schools and direct assistance agencies to serve more people, including waivers for SNAP, WIC, CACFP as well as senior meals for the duration of the pandemic
- Provide resources
 - Allow people to pick up multiple days of food at meal sites
 - Supplement food distribution sites with additional essential products
- Strengthen public and private partnerships and potentially leverage more help from restaurants (post COVID) and larger corporations across the City in food assistance efforts

City-catalyzed

- Provide emergency funding and resources for organizations providing food for households through the City recovery phase
- Develop a locally organized neighborhood location where staffing, delivery and food resources can be shared and coordinated
 - Convene local organizations to implement a collaborative system that provides individuals with food, assistance with applying to safety-net programs, and other related information and resources.
- Advocate for the state to open state offices that service low income people when safely possible, particularly the DTA, even if on a limited basis to administer EBT and P-EBT cards

Long-term

City-led

- Support consistent delivery options for food pantries and services
 - Foster spaces for the development of food system deliveries for vulnerable populations
 - Create alternative transportation infrastructure to help with delivery when emergencies, lockdowns, and bad weather means food will often go to waste

City-catalyzed

- Community organizations will develop a screening process that will help them to identify the specific needs of each household so those needs can be met through the organizations

APPENDIX

2019 STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

The 2019 Strategic Plan was developed by Judy P. Neufeld Strategies in conjunction with the Mayor’s Office of Food Access. There were numerous opportunities for feedback and edits, particularly as the recommendations and goals were being developed. The plan was developed utilizing the steps outlined below:

1. Developed questions to be asked during one-on-one stakeholder and key staff interviews
2. Conducted interviews with 37 stakeholders, representing 30 organizations
3. Presentation and discussion with Boston Food Access Council (BFAC)
4. One on one interviews with key members of the OFA staff
5. Research and information collection on past OFA initiatives and food policy council models and successes from across the country
6. Synthesis of data and information from interviews and BFAC discussion
7. Food Access Map created for review at Citywide Food Summit
8. Strategic Plan drafted, with recommendations to review with stakeholders
9. Citywide Food Summit to present what we’ve learned, gather feedback, and develop an action plan
10. Feedback from the Citywide Food Summit incorporated; vision and goals revised and restructured
11. Video conference with food access stakeholders to gather additional feedback on the new vision and goals
12. Strategic Plan and Boston Food Access Map edited and finalized to be presented to OFA and HHS team

2020 STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

Community Member Participant:

“I gained such an awareness regarding an issue that is more complex than most realize. I found out I didn’t know as much as I thought I knew about hunger.”

The complete report from the Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem Project with a detailed description of methods and the process can be found here: [The Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem Project Report](#)

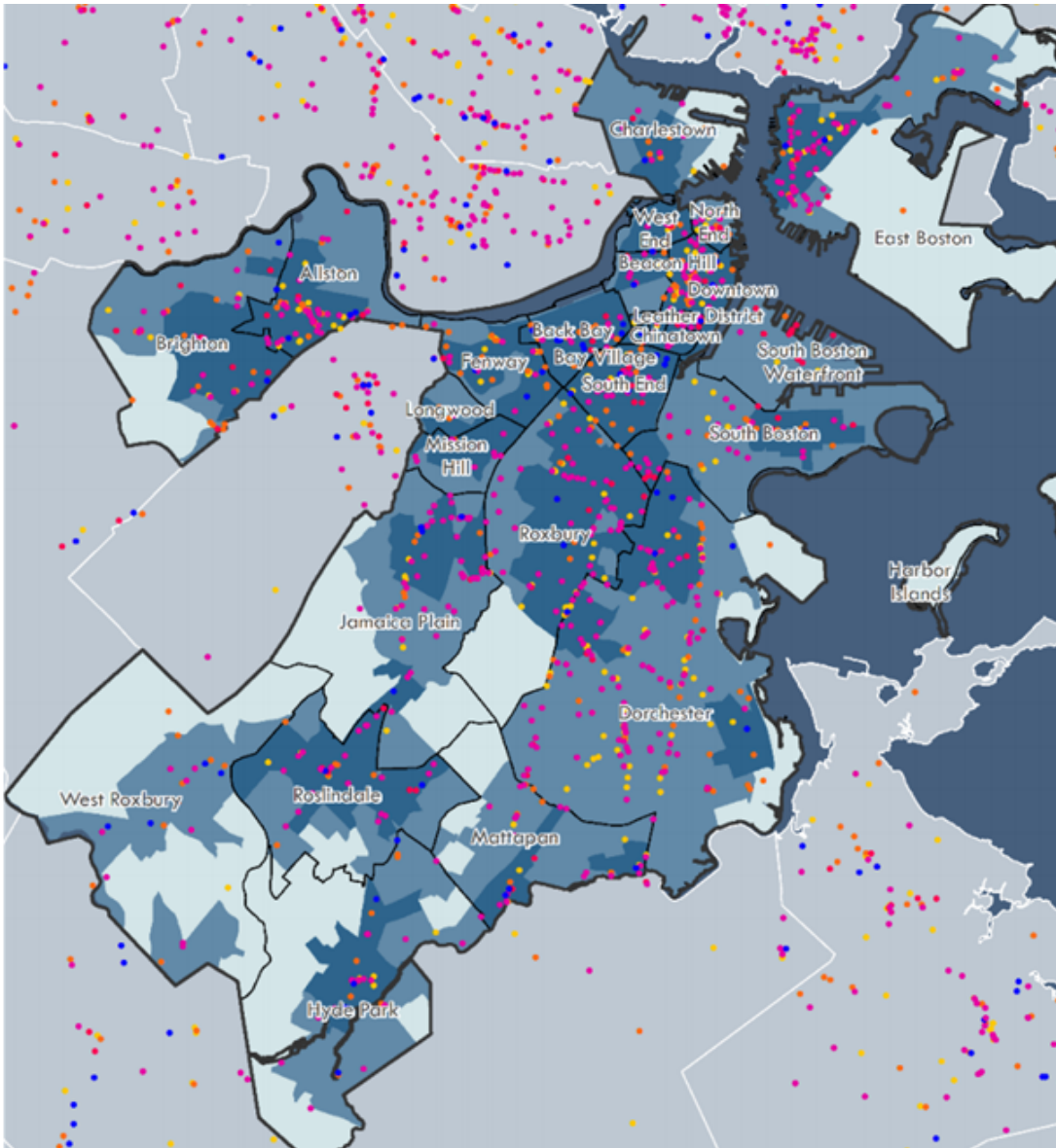
This Strategic Plan was developed in conjunction with the staff from the Mayor’s Office of Food Access. There were numerous opportunities for feedback and edits, particularly as

the recommendations and goals were being developed. The plan was developed utilizing the steps outlined below:

- Project goals defined by OFA
- OFA partnered with Health Leads to execute the project
- Health Leads invited an extended network of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), health centers, and mutual-aid programs and others) to participate in the project; several of these organizations (approximately 25) were actively addressing the emergency food needs of Boston residents (Full list Annex I)
- Health Leads hosted weekly meetings averaging 25-35 participants to discuss the development of the project's implementation. The group of participants unanimously named the project: Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem
- For three months, weekly meetings were hosted with the whole group to design the project; share new information and resources, and to hear from the various voices advocating for different aspects of the Boston food ecosystem
- Nine organizations (Annex II) recruited participants for design sessions, ensured technology and language barriers were eliminated, and conducted in-depth interviews for over 90 community members
- Common recommendations were presented at the Boston Food Access Council and focus groups for final feedback
- Themes and recommendations were shared and voted on by all participants on the call
- The final report was submitted on December 23rd, 2020 to OFA

DATA ON ACCESS TO FOOD RETAILERS

FIGURE 1. ACCESS TO FOOD RETAILERS, BY TYPE AND BOSTON NEIGHBORHOOD, 2019



Food Retailers

- Small Convenience stores
- Convenience stores, Pharmacies and Drug Stores
- Specialty Food Stores, Meat Markets, and Fish and Seafood Markets
- Small Supermarkets and Other Grocery, Farmers Markets, Fruits and Vegetable Markets
- Supermarkets and Other Grocery, Warehouse and Supercenter

□ Boston Neighborhoods

Access to a Grocery Store? (1/2 mile)

- No
- Unlikely
- Likely
- Yes

DATA SOURCE: Boston CHNA, 2019, data provided by Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2019

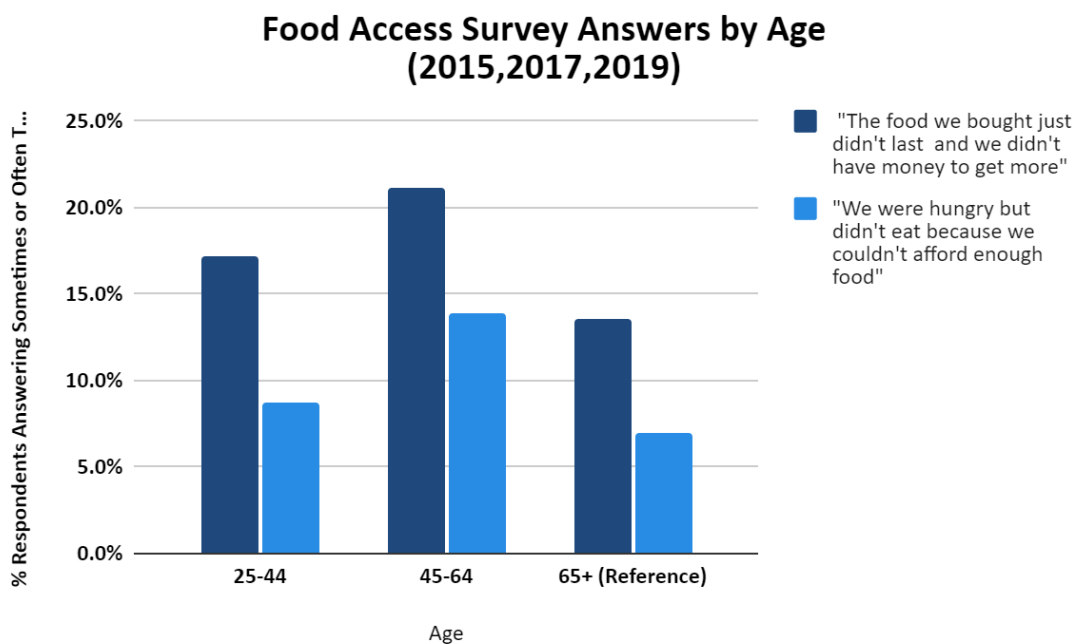
BOSTON BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM DATA (BBRFSS)

Dataset Context

The Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System is a system of telephone health surveys of adults living in non-institutional household settings ages 18 and over that collects information on health risk behaviors, preventive health practices, social determinants, and health care access primarily related to chronic disease and injury. The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) conducts an independent survey approximately every other year modeled after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS) survey.

In the Boston Food Access Assessment, the Boston Mayor’s Office of Food Access utilized BBRFSS data to further understand the connections between food insecurity and different demographic factors. While food security estimates have their own limitations, so does the BBRFSS; however, it was able to provide more contextual understanding than either dataset alone. For example, BBRFSS displayed that foreign-born individuals residing in Boston and that have lived in the United States for more than 10 years but not a lifetime were at increased risk of experiencing food than US-born individuals. There is limited data to understand where these individuals come from; however, we are able to understand food insecurity rates by primary language.

FIGURE 2. BBRFSS SURVEY ANSWER BY AGE



DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), 2015, 2017, 2019, Boston Public Health Commission
 DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

TABLE 1. BBRFSS SURVEY ANSWER TABLE A

Boston Adult Residents Who Said That it Was Often or Sometimes True that "the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more", by Demographics, 2015, 2017, and 2019

Year	2015, 2017, & 2019 Combined		
Characteristic	Percent	95% Confidence Limit	
Sex			
Female	19.4%	17.8%	21.0%
Male (Reference)	16.1%	14.3%	17.7%
Age			
25-44	17.2%	15.4%	19.1%
45-64	21.1%	19.2%	23.1%
65+ (Reference)	13.6%	11.4%	15.9%
Race/Ethnicity			
White (Reference)	7.8%	6.5%	9.1%
Black	28.3%	25.7%	31.0%
Latinx	34.7%	31.2%	38.2%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	9.5%	6.1%	12.9%
Place of Birth			
U.S. (Reference)	15.5%	14.2%	16.8%
All Others	22.7%	20.3%	25.0%
Primary Language			
English (Reference)	15.0%	13.8%	16.3%
Spanish	37.6%	33.1%	42.1%
Haitian	32.0%	20.8%	43.1%
Other	13.7%	9.1%	18.4%
Years in U.S.			
<10 Years	23.0%	18.8%	27.2%
> 10 Years, but not lifetime	22.2%	19.4%	24.9%
Always lived in U.S. (Reference)	15.5%	14.2%	16.8%
Marital Status			
Married or Unmarried Couple (Reference)	12.3%	10.7%	13.8%
Divorced/Widowed/Separated/Never married	21.6%	19.9%	23.2%
Marital Status			
Married (Reference)	10.8%	9.3%	12.4%
Divorced	26.1%	22.3%	30.0%
Widowed	19.5%	15.2%	23.7%
Separated	36.0%	28.7%	43.4%

Never married	19.9%	17.9%	22.0%
Member of Unmarried Couple	17.9%	13.2%	22.5%
Education			
< HS Grad	39.5%	34.9%	44.1%
HS Grad	25.2%	22.3%	28.1%
Some college	21.9%	19.2%	24.6%
College graduate+ (Reference)	6.4%	5.3%	7.4%
Employment			
Employed (Reference)	14.0%	12.6%	15.4%
Out of Work	36.3%	30.1%	42.5%
Homemaker	29.4%	21.3%	37.4%
Student	9.4%	6.0%	12.7%
Retired	12.7%	10.3%	15.1%
Unable to Work	47.2%	42.2%	52.3%
Household Income			
<\$25K	38.5%	35.4%	41.5%
\$25K-<\$50K	20.0%	17.1%	22.9%
\$50K+ (reference)	4.5%	3.5%	5.5%
Housing			
	Percent		
BHA Public Housing	44.3%	38.1%	50.5%
Rental Assistance, Sect 8	45.8%	40.8%	50.9%
Neither (Reference)	13.2%	12.0%	14.3%
Home Ownership			
Own (Reference)	6.0%	4.9%	7.1%
Rent	24.3%	22.6%	26.1%
Other Arrangement	20.1%	15.3%	25.0%

DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), 2015, 2017, 2019, Boston Public Health Commission
 DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

TABLE 2. BBRFSS SURVEY ANSWER TABLE B

Boston Adult Residents Who Said That it Was Often or Sometimes True that "We were hungry but didn't eat because we couldn't afford enough food", by Demographics, 2015, 2017, and 2019.

Year	2015, 2017, & 2019 Combined			
	Characteristic	Percent	Lower CL	Upper CL
Sex				
Female		10.3%	9.0%	11.5%
Male (Reference)		9.9%	8.5%	11.3%

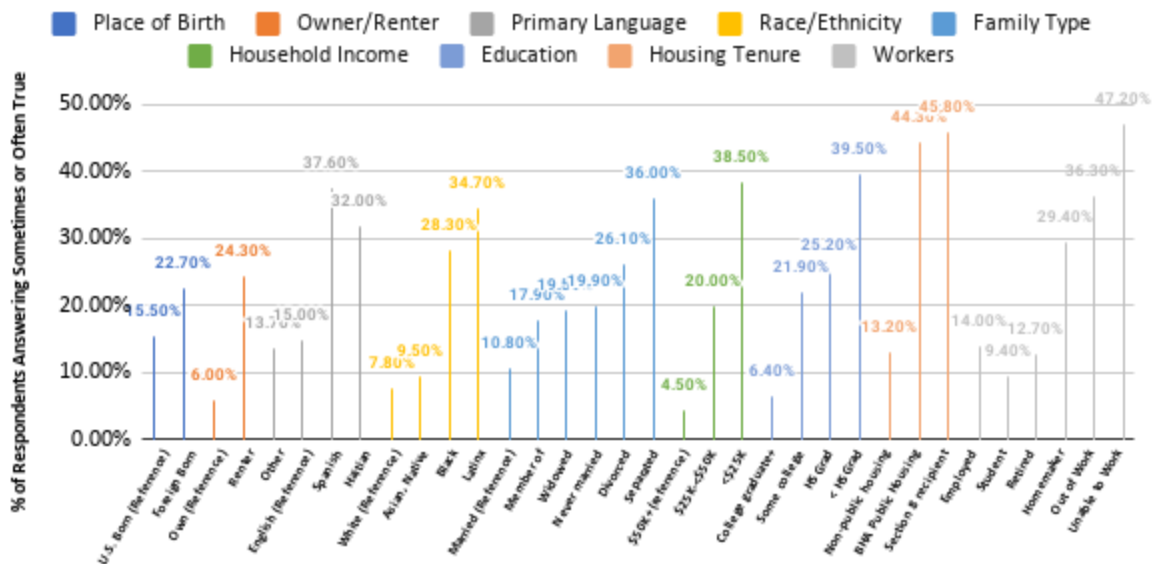
Age			
18-24	10.0%	7.1%	12.9%
25-44	8.7%	7.3%	10.1%
45-64	13.9%	12.1%	15.6%
65+ (Reference)	7.0%	5.3%	8.7%
Race/Ethnicity			
White (reference)	3.9%	3.0%	4.8%
Black	15.7%	13.5%	17.9%
Latinx	20.8%	17.8%	23.9%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	5.2%	2.5%	8.0%
Place of Birth			
U.S. (Reference)	8.3%	7.3%	9.3%
Foreign Born	13.6%	11.7%	15.6%
Primary Language			
English (Reference)	8.3%	7.3%	9.2%
Spanish	22.8%	18.9%	26.7%
Haitian	23.9%	12.9%	35.0%
Other	6.7%	3.3%	10.1%
Years in U.S.			
<10 Years	12.4%	9.2%	15.7%
> 10 Years, but not lifetime	13.8%	11.5%	16.1%
Always lived in U.S. (Reference)	8.3%	7.3%	9.4%
Marital Status			
Married or Unmarried Couple (Reference)	6.3%	5.1%	7.5%
Divorced/Widowed/Separated/Never married	12.6%	11.2%	13.9%
Education			
< HS Grad	26.8%	22.6%	30.9%
HS Grad	14.9%	12.5%	17.3%
Some college	12.3%	10.2%	14.5%
College graduate+ (Reference)	1.9%	1.5%	2.4%
Employment			
Employed (Reference)	7.3%	6.3%	8.4%
Out of Work	23.4%	17.9%	28.8%
Homemaker	14.1%	7.9%	20.2%
Student	5.0%	2.6%	7.4%
Retired	5.3%	3.9%	6.8%
Unable to Work	33.2%	28.4%	38.1%
Household Income			

<\$25K	24.8%	22.1%	27.5%
\$25K-<\$50K	9.5%	7.4%	11.7%
\$50K+(Reference)	1.4%	1.0%	2.0%
Housing			
BHA Public Housing	23.2%	18.0%	28.3%
Rental Assistance, Sect 8	28.9%	24.3%	33.6%
Neither (Reference)	7.1%	6.2%	8.0%
Home Ownership			
Own (Reference)	2.7%	1.9%	3.4%
Renters	14.1%	12.6%	15.5%
Other Arrangement	11.8%	7.9%	15.7%

DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), 2015, 2017, 2019, Boston Public Health Commission
 DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

FIGURE 3. BBRFSS DATA CONSOLIDATED GRAPH

Consolidated Graph "The food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more" (2015, 2017, 2019)



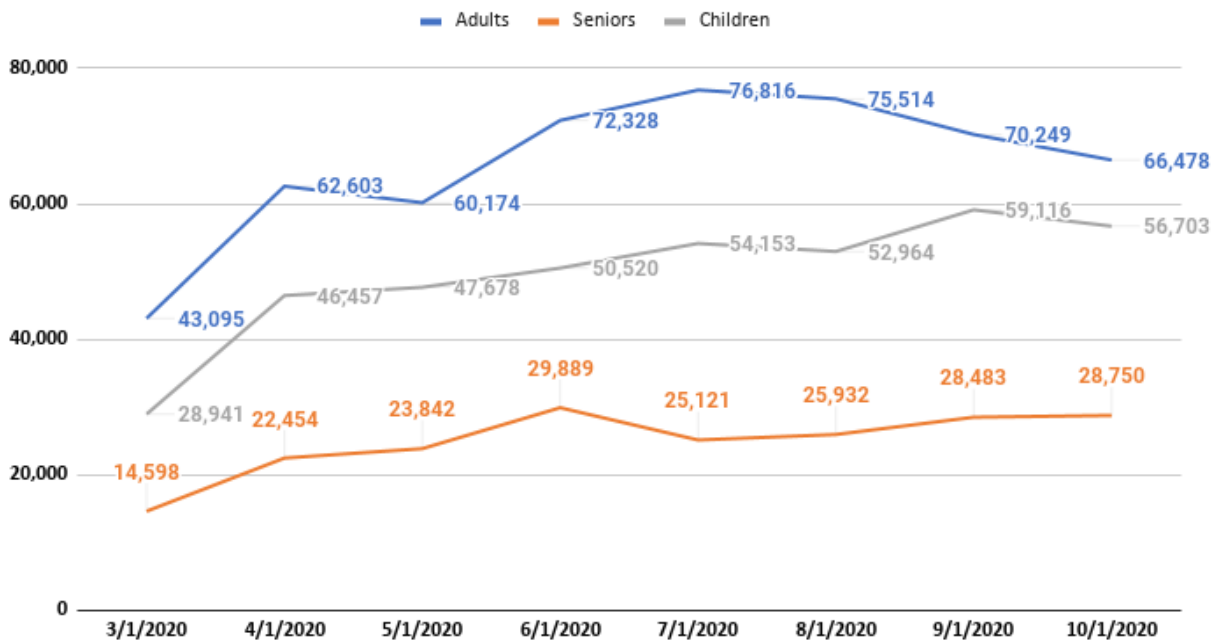
DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), 2015, 2017, 2019, Boston Public Health Commission
 DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

GREATER BOSTON FOOD BANK FOOD PANTRY DISTRIBUTION DATA

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND INDIVIDUALS SERVED

Report Period	Households	Total Individuals	Adults	Seniors	Children	Percent Adults	Percent Seniors	Percent Children
3/1/2020	42,463	86,634	43,095	14,598	28,941	50%	17%	33%
4/1/2020	54,330	131,514	62,603	22,454	46,457	48%	17%	35%
5/1/2020	59,957	131,694	60,174	23,842	47,678	46%	18%	36%
6/1/2020	78,608	152,737	72,328	29,889	50,520	47%	20%	33%
7/1/2020	71,332	156,090	76,816	25,121	54,153	49%	16%	35%
8/1/2020	74,165	154,410	75,514	25,932	52,964	49%	17%	34%
9/1/2020	71,395	157,848	70,249	28,483	59,116	45%	18%	37%
10/1/2020	68,320	151,931	66,478	28,750	56,703	44%	19%	37%

GBFB Individuals Served: Children, Adults (18+), and Seniors (65+)



Source: Greater Boston Food Bank, "Food Pantry MSR by month," (unpublished data, December 23, 2020), excel spreadsheet.

LIST OF RECRUITING ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE EQUITABLE BOSTON FOOD ECOSYSTEM REPORT

Recruiting Organizations recruited participants for design sessions, ensured technology barriers were eliminated and conducted in-depth interviews for over 90 community members:

- Boston LesBiGay Urban Foundation
- Brazillian Workers Center
- Chinatown Main Street Program
- Haitian Women of Boston
- Mary B. Lomax-Pam Health & Wellness By Design
- Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
- Maverick Landing Community Services
- Metro Boston Alive
- New England United 4 Justice

LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE EQUITABLE BOSTON FOOD ECOSYSTEM REPORT

Participating Organizations provided input at weekly meetings, answered surveys, brought their experience to the conversations and learned from community members:

- ABCD
- About Fresh
- Action for Equity
- Brookside Health Center
- Boston Medical Center, Pediatrics
- Boston Missionary Baptist Community Center, inc
- Brockton Public Schools
- Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospital.
- CAFE
- Center for Community Wellness @ Sportsmen's Tennis & Enrichment Center
- Chinatown Main Street
- East Boston Neighborhood Health Center
- Eastie Farm
- Everett Public Schools
- Farmers Collaborative
- Food Link
- FoodCorps Americorps Service --Member with the Office of Food Access
- In The Vine Ministries Church International
- JP/Roxbury Mutual Aid network

- LivelyHood
- Lovin' Spoonfuls
- Maverick Landing Community Services
- Mutual Aid Eastie (East Boston)
- Northeastern University, Office of City and Community Engagement
- Partners in Health
- Project Bread
- Roslindale Community Fridge
- Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center
- The Greater Boston Food Bank
- Ucbapp.org NOAH
- YMCA of Greater Boston