

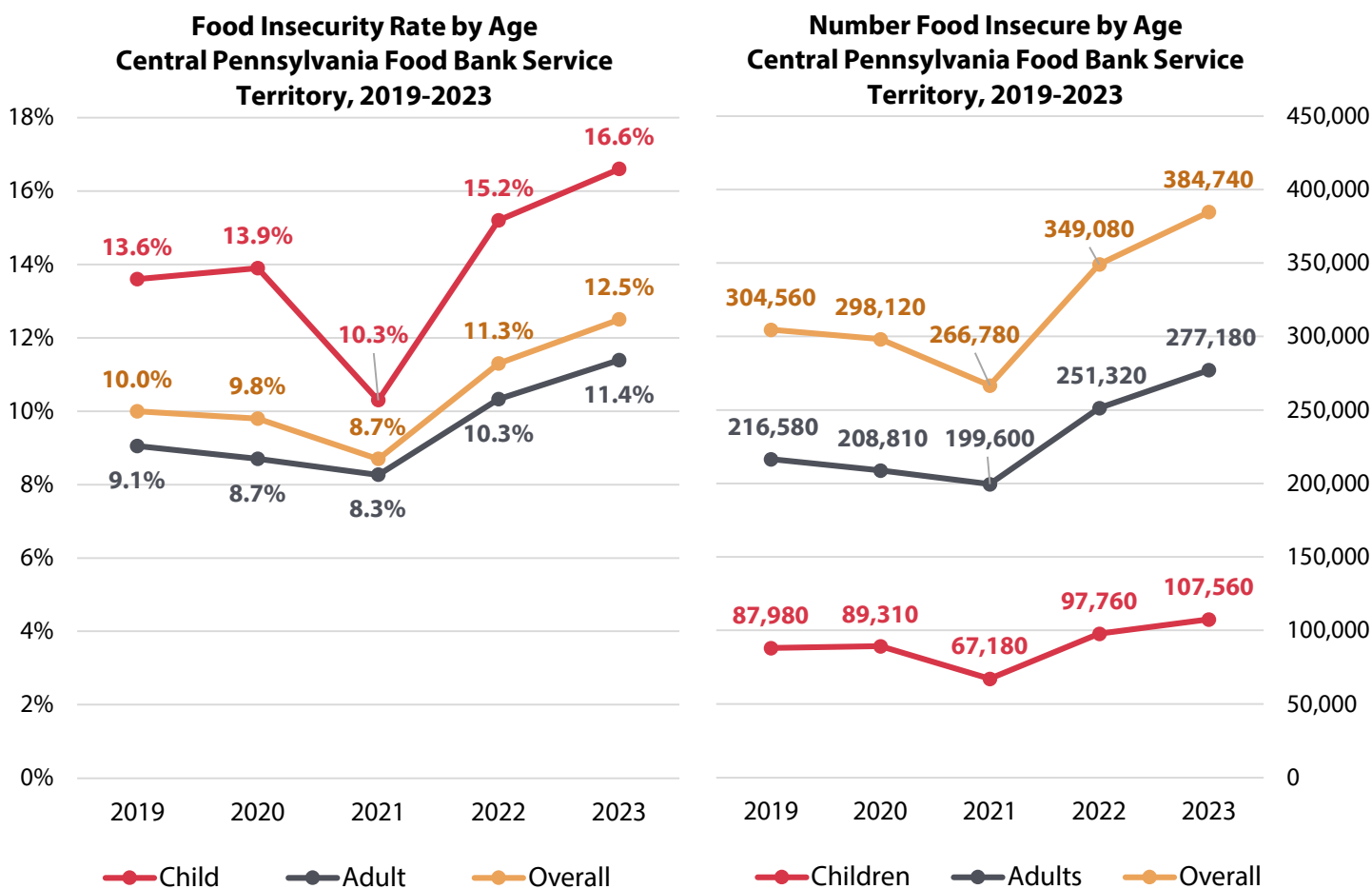


Policy Blog: 2023 Map the Meal Gap Food insecurity Estimates for Central Pennsylvania

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Today, May 14, 2025, Feeding America released updated Map the Meal Gap localized food insecurity estimates for the United States using 2023 data. In this policy blog, CPFB Impact and Policy Research takes a brief look at the data for the Food Bank's 27-county service territory in advance of a more comprehensive report to be released this summer.

The overall food insecurity rate in the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank's service area rose more than a percentage point, or about 10%, from 11.3% in 2022 to 12.5% in 2023. This increase is a continuation of the trend seen in the last several years, though at a slower pace than seen between 2021 and 2022. More than 35,000 people across central Pennsylvania were newly food insecure in 2023, including about 10,000 children.



Food insecurity continued to have a disproportionate impact on children in central Pennsylvania in 2023, even though the percent increase in child food insecurity was slightly smaller than the overall rise at 9.2%. With food insecurity rates of 16.6%, children and youth were about 30% more likely to be unsure where their next meal would come from than were adults, who had an 11.4% food insecurity rate.

It is important to note that Map the Meal Gap is by nature a backwards-looking resource, as data lags from the Census Bureau and other sources mean that it cannot provide an up-to-the-minute picture of the national food insecurity landscape. However, CPFB partner agency statistical reporting data updates more frequently and, because service trends generally align with trends in the food insecurity data, can be used to understand more about the present.

Indeed, CPFB internal data from 2022 and 2023 shows similar trends to those seen in Map the Meal Gap. CPFB and its network of more than 1,200 partner agencies and programs served about 20,000 more unique households in 2023 than in 2022, which was a 14% increase. Though Map the Meal Gap estimates for 2024 will not be available until next year, it is worth noting that in 2024, CPFB served another 15,000 new unique households for a 9% increase over 2023. Overall, CPFB's agency data indicates that the current food insecurity situation in central Pennsylvania is likely even more severe than reflected in the most recent Map the Meal Gap estimates.

The increase in food insecurity and charitable food demand in central Pennsylvania between 2022 and 2023 is the result of a complex web of factors; however, two key issues are especially likely contributors: the end of pandemic-related programs and grocery inflation. The most relevant wind-down of a pandemic related program to the food insecurity landscape in 2023 is SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs), which expired at the end of February 2023. When EAs were in place, SNAP-participant households received the maximum benefit amount for their household size, while under ordinary circumstances SNAP benefit amounts vary depending on a household's income. After the EA program ended, average benefits per person per month in the CPFB's service area dropped \$86, or 33%. Many households likely made up for this shortfall by turning to the charitable food network, especially since the cost of food at home (groceries) increased 12% nationwide between January 2022 and December 2023, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.