

## **Missed Meals Matter, Hunger Hurts, and It Hurts the Most Vulnerable**

Missed or incomplete meals matter; they are not just an inconvenience. Lack of full and filling meals have their greatest impact on growing children, veterans, and the elderly. Hungry children often worry more about empty stomachs and empty refrigerators than they do about finishing their homework.

Food insecurity affects almost one in six Arizonans, more than one million residents, according to the Arizona Department of Economic Security, higher than the national averages. Food insecurity means the lack of access to or the ability to afford enough food to feed the entire household. According to data released in 2016, more than one in four Arizona children worry about their next meal. Sometimes free school lunches are the most dependable food supply for children, a shocking fact.

Food banks in the metro areas collect and supply food the local needy as well as sending food supplies to rural areas to help meet the needs there. Apache County had the highest rate of food insecurity nationwide at 26.6% of the county's population, according to one study. Apache, Navajo, and La Paz counties had poverty rates higher than 20 percent according to U.S. Census Bureau information released in 2016, and the rate in Apache County was nearly 35%. Unfortunately, children live in poverty in disproportionate numbers compared to the general population. Apache, Navajo, and Coconino counties had the highest child poverty rates of 40.9%, 38.4%, and 34.5%, respectively, compared to 25.5% in Maricopa County.

For additional information follow this link to the Association of Arizona Food Banks page on hunger: <http://www.azfoodbanks.org/index.php/hunger/index/>

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