

Food Security



Photo provided by The Sophia Way.

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Themes

Both the community engagement and qualitative benchmarking data suggest additional needs around food security. As one marker, Bellevue residents accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits increased in 2021 (most recent data available), after a 5-year period of decline prior to the COVID pandemic (**Figure 30**, data was not available for 2020). **There are significant racial disparities in food security in Bellevue, as indicated by SNAP program utilization (Figure 31).** Non-Hispanic Black residents are receiving SNAP benefits at a rate that is nearly five times greater than their Non-Hispanic White counterparts. Both Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian and Hispanic Latino residents also receive SNAP benefits at a higher rate than the population overall, indicating significant food needs. Like SNAP program utilization, data on the percentage of Bellevue School District students qualifying for free and reduced lunch demonstrates increased need following the COVID-19 pandemic, with the rate increasing from 15.5% in 2019 to 19.9% in 2023.¹¹ Of note, the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch in 2023 is likely an undercount, as three schools in the district are providing free meals to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision. Under this provision, families are not required to complete an annual application for school meal benefits and therefore eligible families may be undercounted in these schools.¹²



Figure 30. Percent of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Recipients in Bellevue (American Community Survey, 2011-2021)

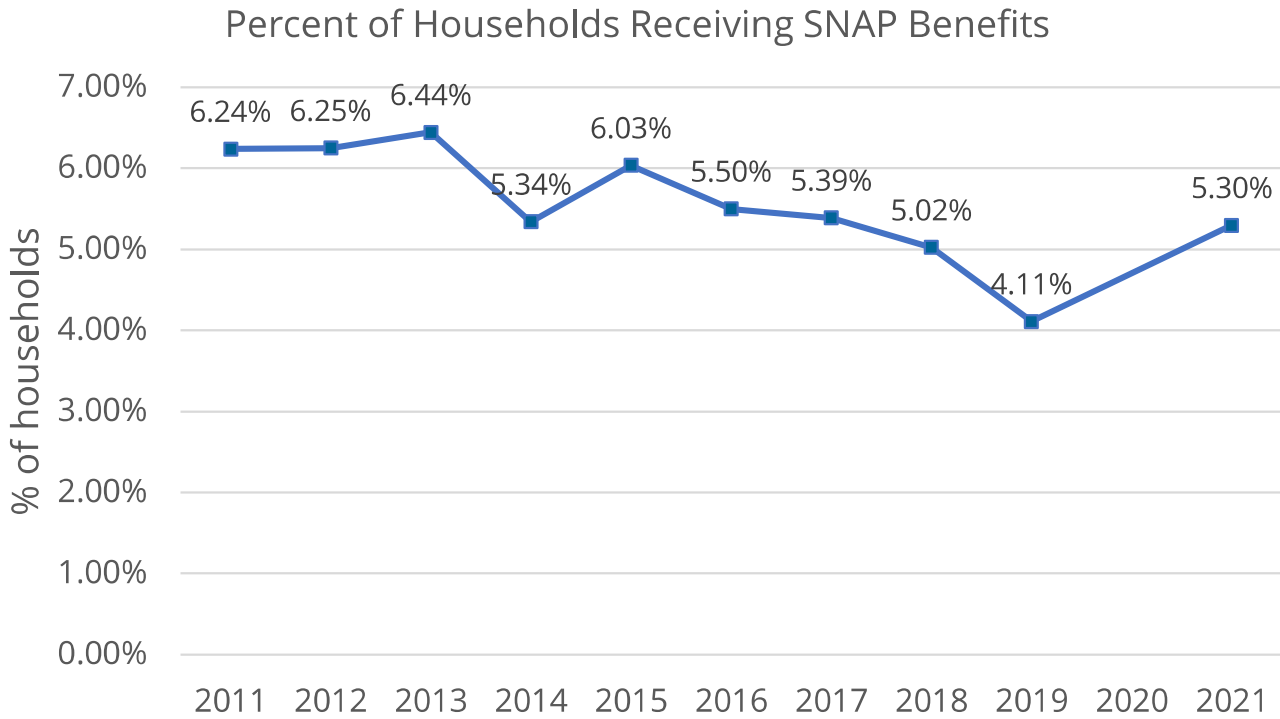
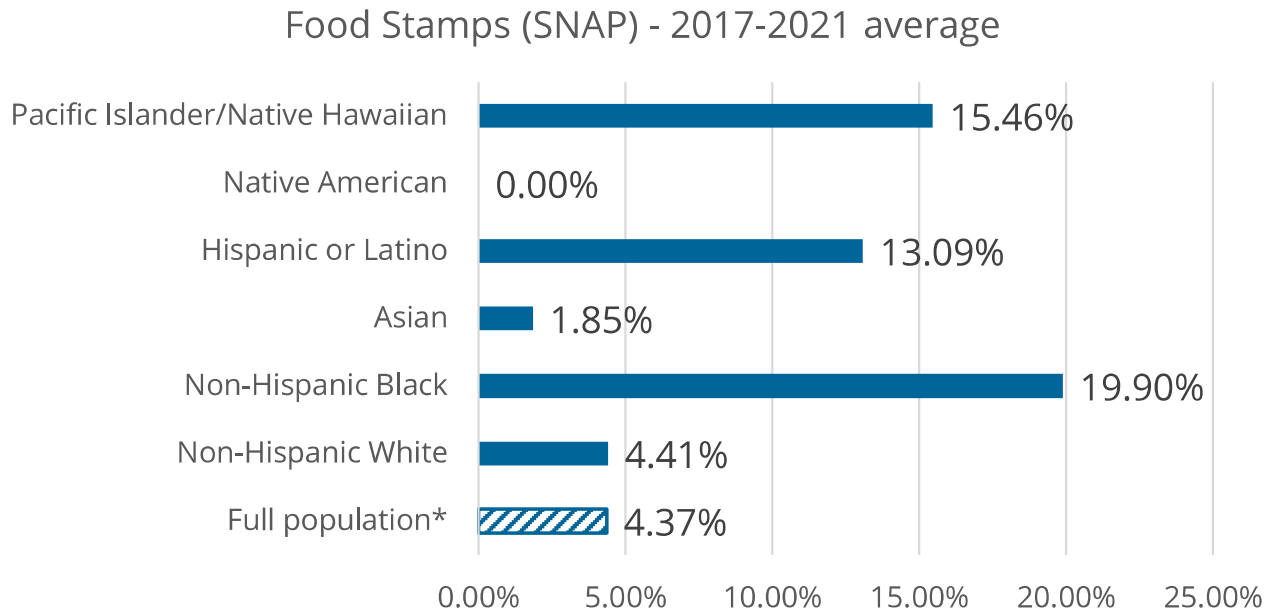


Figure 31. Percent of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Recipients in Bellevue, by race/ethnicity (American Community Survey, 2017-2021 Average)



Of the community members who received support to access food in times of need, nearly two-thirds (60%) said that they were able to find the service in their community, and 63% reported that they were able to find the service in a place that they could travel to in a reasonable amount of time. Slightly more than half (54%) of individuals were satisfied with the quality of support they received. Of note, there have been recent changes (March 2023) in SNAP eligibility and benefits, resulting in a decrease in benefits following the COVID pandemic. Providers of food support noted that they are seeing the impact of these changes in the communities they serve. As one provider stated, they are “trying to make up for the difference (due to decreased benefits) and what’s not there,” but they have difficulty filling the gap.



Service Trends

Below are examples of service trends in the area of food security. These examples are intended to provide a snapshot of this service area and are not a comprehensive reflection of available services in Bellevue.

- **Nourishing Networks** is a collective of Eastside providers focused on food insecurity that come together regularly to share and coordinate resources, increasing their collective impact. As one member of the network noted,

“Nourishing Networks does a good job at collaborating to answer needs quickly.”

- **Muslim Community Resource Center** provides an example of meeting individuals’ food needs in a way that aligns with their cultural practices and religious beliefs, through culturally appropriate care kits and food cards.

