

Hunger, Nutrition and Health for CHWs and their Communities is a Priority for NACHW: How About You?

Authors: NACHW Executive Director Denise Octavia Smith, CHW, PN, MBA and NACHW Data and Evaluation Manager Allison Joslyn, MA

Access to nutritious and affordable food should be a human right – but it is not. COVID-19 resulted in more than [53 million people](#) seeking food assistance in pantries and soup kitchens. Long before COVID-19 disrupted supply chains, closed restaurants, and placed grocery store, factory and farm workers at increased risk for infection, children and adults across the globe were going hungry.

Wars, famines, and natural disasters rightly command high profile responses for food and water delivery, but what about the hunger that is hidden in plain sight on every continent every day?

- Rising food prices, political instability and stagnant wages result in [over 800 million people worldwide](#) who go to bed hungry every night.
- U.S. veterans, who experience service-related disability and are [more likely to have psychological challenges](#) than the general population are going hungry.
- Formerly incarcerated persons are [twice as likely to suffer food insecurity](#) and face barriers to available food benefits due to their background.
- An estimated [1 in 5 Native Americans](#) suffers from hunger every day.

From the heartland to main street, to the pueblo and the block – people struggle to find nutritious and affordable food.

Community health workers – frontline public health professionals who leverage their trusting relationships and shared life experiences, culture, faith and language, to serve as bridge builders for people to access a range of medical, behavioral health and social services – often address nutrition and

hunger as a social determinant of health - in their diabetes and heart disease and stroke prevention programs, oral health and maternal and child health initiatives."

The NACHW joined the [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health](#) to learn about their [national strategy](#) and commitments. The last White House conference of this size, scale and scope took place 50 years ago, and resulted in what we have come to take for granted: free school breakfasts and lunches (originating from the [commitment to community health](#) of the Black Panthers), the SNAP program, WIC program and improvements on transparency in food labeling, etc.

In preparation for our attendance, NACHW implemented a survey to CHWs – members and non-members, in our distribution list.

A total of 294 CHWs from 42 states responded to our survey which was made available for 72 hours. The survey included basic demographic questions and 6 questions from a validated [USDA U.S Household Food Security survey module](#) to help us identify CHWs' level of food security.

Highlights from this survey of CHWs are concerning:

- 23% of CHWs answered in the affirmative to 3 of the 6 USDA questions, indicating that they have LOW food security
- 9% of CHWs answered in the affirmative to all 6 of the questions, indicating that they have VERY LOW food security

The message is clear! As a national member organization whose vision is to unify CHWs and support communities to achieve health, equity and social justice, we must RESPECT, PROTECT AND AUTHENTICALLY PARTNER WITH CHWs. Many of you have heard this phrase referenced in our national CHW [policy platform \(en Español\)](#). Now we must use these words as a call to action to fight hunger among CHWs.

The White House challenged each organization in attendance to identify areas of commitment that can support and complement their [priorities to eradicate hunger](#). In the coming month, NACHW will share our national strategies and invite your partnership to ensure that every CHW – AND every

person and family in the communities where they live and serve - has access to safe, nutritious and affordable food.

We need your commitment and partnership to ensure that CHWs and their communities do not suffer from hunger, malnutrition or food related preventable diseases!

- We want to thank every CHW (members and non-members) who responded to our survey. Your continued support of this and related data collection helps us to describe the problems that CHWs and their communities are facing.
- We invite the leadership of CHW Networks to join this important cause – to consider how you can support CHWs in your membership who experience hunger, directing them to social supports and advocating for policies and employment practices that ensure a thriving wage.
- We call on public and private employers and funders to build in required protections for CHW employment, in wages, access to self-care and affordable health benefits to prevent hunger, [poverty](#) and food related preventable chronic diseases for CHWs they work with.
- And we ask EVERYONE to join CHWs in advancing a world in which every individual and family can access CHWs services and supports if they want them – as the CHW workforce is trusted, culturally aligned, and committed to the health and well-being of local communities.

Read more about the White House [Conference](#) on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, review the [Pillars](#) of their initiative and get inspired to [create and commit to your own bold ideas](#) to eradicate hunger and food related diseases.