

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food insecurity affects at least 7.1% of residents in Arlington according to recent estimates. This means that over 16,670 of our neighbors are uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all members of their households at some point during a year.

Food insecurity rates within Arlington vary significantly. Who you are and where you live affects your ability to find and afford healthy food for your family. The highest rates of food insecurity are found in the Glencarlyn neighborhood at 14.6% and Buckingham/Ashton Heights neighborhoods at 14.5%, compared with

other parts of Arlington with nearly 0% food insecurity.¹ Black and Hispanic Arlington residents access charitable and government food resources at significantly disproportionate rates to their share of the population.²

The level of food insecurity and its disparities affect the health and well-being of Arlington residents and cannot be left to continue unchecked. Food insecurity is associated with chronic diseases, cognitive deficits, stress, and mental health challenges.

What are the factors that contribute to food insecurity? Structural inequities, low

wages, and an extremely high cost of living in Arlington prevent many residents from thriving economically. This forces them to live paycheck to paycheck and to make difficult choices between paying rent, paying bills and buying the food that they need.

The good news is that Arlington County Government, Arlington's non-profit and faith organizations, and Arlington Public Schools (APS) are committed to ensuring that all populations have access to the resources and opportunities that they need to thrive. Much good work is being done to this end, and more can be done.



For some Arlington residents, supports such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and food pantries provide enough food to feed their families. However, for others, barriers such as conflicting schedules, lack of transportation, strict program requirements and low-income limits, or pride and fear make access to enough food more difficult. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent

inflation have increased the fragility of the budgets of those living paycheck to paycheck. More so than ever before, these individuals and families are leaning on public assistance benefits, food pantries, and meal programs to provide nutritious foods for their families.

Spurred to action by Covid-19, Arlington County formed a Food Security Task Force in 2021, with the goals of identifying current needs and gaps in existing services and developing a strategic plan to guide action in the coming

years. This is Arlington's first strategic plan related to improving food security. It reflects a concerted effort to ensure that investments and efforts are coordinated to meet the community's food needs. The DHS Food Security Coordinator will oversee implementation of this plan through coordination with Arlington's food assistance providers. The plan is intended to help Arlington address current challenges and be prepared to confront those that will affect food security in the future.

This strategic plan includes 28 strategies grouped into five categories.

The strategies for each category are designed to help meet the corresponding objective listed below. The implementation of these strategies will take place over the course of three years, after which a new plan will be developed.

CATEGORY	OBJECTIVE
Systemic Change	Implement policies and processes to reduce structural inequities that perpetuate food insecurity and health disparities within the community.
Food Access	Increase availability of affordable and free food through retail, school, and charitable partners.
Outreach & Education	Improve access to information about available resources and build knowledge for increased nutrition security.
Capacity Building	Strengthen food assistance providers' ability to best address the needs of those accessing their services.
Informed Decision Making	Leverage data, collaborations, and participant feedback to monitor the needs, progress, and evolution of food security in Arlington.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS



Systemic Change

- 1.1. Advocate for federal, state, and local policies that reduce food insecurity and support efforts promoting inclusive economic opportunity.
- 1.2. Improve nutrition equity by working to eliminate, reduce, and prevent disparities in food security policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that all those in need of food assistance receive the support they need.
- 1.3. Support the development of a standardized process for county funding to support food security efforts.



Food Access

- 2.1. Enhance school-based supplemental food offerings, including food pantries, in-school snacks, and weekend food support.
- 2.2. Establish new charitable food distributions in neighborhoods with unmet need.
- 2.3. Increase capacity to deliver charitable food to those unable to access available resources.
- 2.4. Establish a WIC clinic on the western side of the county.
- 2.5. Increase food rescue & redistribution operations.
- 2.6. Implement incentives and other supports to bring and preserve affordable and ethnically relevant retail grocery options to Arlington.
- 2.7. Pilot universal free breakfast and/or lunch at select schools with high percentages of low-income students.
- 2.8. Support the expansion of local and regional pilot programs offering discounted public transit fares to low-income individuals and students.



Outreach & Education

- 3.1. Promote food assistance resources and assist residents with enrolling in programs for which they may be eligible.
- 3.2. Diversify the ways that DHS shares information and engages with the community.
- 3.3. Increase presence of DHS staff at food distribution locations to facilitate access to DHS services.
- 3.4. Implement a coordinated SNAP outreach campaign.
- 3.5. Increase nutrition education opportunities for residents of all ages.
- 3.6. Partner with resident community leaders to share information about resources in key languages and provide compensation for their work.



Capacity Building

- 4.1. Develop training materials to inform social services staff and volunteers about food assistance programs, specifically SNAP and WIC, and help residents apply.
- 4.2. Provide trauma informed care training for staff & volunteers working with food insecure residents.
- 4.3. Create a cultural foods guide for charitable food providers with partners from the region.
- 4.4. Increase the capacity to share locally-grown produce from gardeners and farms with food pantries through expanded donation processing infrastructure.
- 4.5. Increase capacity within the DHS Customer Service Center to continue to meet expanded requests for service.
- 4.6. Collaborate with APS through its forums to review existing programs and practices and address food equity.



Informed Decision-Making

- 5.1. Create a food security coalition to oversee the implementation of this strategic plan, continue to monitor needs, and periodically reassess priorities.
- 5.2. Create channels for food assistance participant feedback allowing for varied levels of engagement.
- 5.3. Collect data from food assistance organizations that provides information about usage trends and services provided.
- 5.4. Publish and annually update a food security dashboard showing progress towards strategic plan implementation and food assistance program trends.
- 5.5. Establish a food security Performance Measurement Plan to track achievement of DHS food security goals.

These strategies, developed by the Food Security Task Force, address the gaps and barriers that residents face when accessing the food they need, improve the experience of accessing food assistance, and help those providing assistance to improve their coordination and service delivery.

