



**MARYLAND
FOOD BANK**

2021 Public Perceptions Survey

November–December 2021

Final Report

Conducted by



www.OpinionWorks.com

November–December 2021

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH METHOD

The Maryland Food Bank commissioned this comprehensive assessment of perceptions and attitudes about hunger in Maryland, the third in a series that began in 2013. Through this latest survey, the Maryland Food Bank sought to understand the public’s perceptions of hunger, their level of experience and personal contact with the problem, and their willingness and motivations to be engaged. The survey measured support for public policy proposals, the impact of messages and ideas about hunger, and the standing of the Maryland Food Bank itself.

OpinionWorks LLC, an independent research organization based in Annapolis, Maryland, developed and conducted this survey research in discussion with Maryland Food Bank staff, led by Joanna Warner and Anne Wallerstedt. Steve Raabe was the study author for OpinionWorks. The survey questionnaire was designed to update findings previously collected for the Maryland Food Bank in 2013 and 2017, and added new material, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The geographic footprint for this survey is the service area of the Maryland Food Bank. In other words, residents were interviewed in 22 of the State’s 24 jurisdictions, excluding Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties. Despite the exclusion of two counties, in this report survey participants are often called simply “Marylanders.”

To better understand the views of residents surrounding the Maryland Food Bank’s facilities in Washington and Wicomico Counties, additional survey interviews were added in those two areas of the state and adjacent counties to raise the confidence in that regional data. Oversample interviews were added in the Lower Eastern Shore counties of Wicomico, Worcester, Somerset, and Dorchester, as well as in the Western Maryland counties of Washington, Allegany, Garrett, and Frederick.

After the full survey sample was collected, statistical weights were applied to bring the sample into close compliance with the characteristics of the Maryland’s population across the 22 jurisdictions, based on population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

OpinionWorks conducted these interviews November 5-December 12, 2021. The randomly sampled survey was conducted using two methods:

- The vast majority of interviews were collected online by accessing consumer “panels,” which are databases of consumers who have agreed to take surveys from time to time across a wide variety of subjects in exchange for small incentives. OpinionWorks subscribes to an online dashboard that gives us access to over 60 such panels, allowing very broad reach into the population and a mechanism that prevents individuals who belong to multiple panels from taking the survey more than once.
- To fill out the sample, additional interviews were collected by telephone from a call center. These calls were made to both wireless and landline phones by trained and supervised live interviewers, according to opinion research best practices.

Altogether, this method produced a total of 844 interviews. Sixty-three interviews were conducted in Spanish, and 781 were conducted in English. This combined, multi-modal survey sample produced a margin of sampling error of no more than $\pm 3.4\%$ at the 95% confidence level, meaning that if every resident within the Maryland Food Bank service area had been interviewed, the actual results would differ by no more than that margin at least 95% of the time.

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In the analysis that follows, comparisons will be made to the prior surveys conducted in 2013 and 2017. Where there are significant or noteworthy differences, observations will be made in this narrative about subgroups within the overall population based on gender, race and ethnicity, age, household income, the presence of children in the household, political party affiliation, or region of the state.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2021 perceptions survey conducted for the Maryland Food Bank shows a public that is more aware and more impacted by the problem of hunger than ever before, dating back to our first survey in 2013.

The 2021 survey consists of a representative sample of 844 adult residents who live in the 22 jurisdictions served by the Maryland Food Bank. They were interviewed online and on wireless and landline telephones between November 5 and December 12, 2021. This representative survey sample has a potential margin of sampling error no greater than $\pm 3.4\%$ at the 95% confidence level.

The survey paints a picture of Marylanders' relationship with the problem of hunger:

- Nearly four out of five people surveyed (79%) are aware that “there are people that regularly go to bed hungry in Maryland because they can’t afford to buy food.”
- More than one-third of Marylanders (35%) believe “hunger is a problem that affects a lot of people in Maryland.”
- Forty-one percent (41%) said hunger *definitely* exists in their own community, and another 34% said it maybe exists – totaling three-quarters of all people surveyed.
- Almost half the survey sample (48%) said they have “known someone personally who has been affected by hunger.”
- And an astonishing one-third of residents (33%) said they have been affected by hunger or food insecurity *themselves* – a number that has risen steadily from 21% in 2013 to 27% in 2017 to 33% today.

This survey indicates that residents want their policymakers to rise to the task of addressing the widespread problem of hunger in Maryland.

- Tackling hunger is a high personal priority for Marylanders. Nearly six in ten Marylanders (57%) consider hunger to be at the top of their priority list, or an above-average priority, when considering “all the issues and challenges that need to be addressed,” which is the highest level measured across the three surveys.
- An overwhelming majority (82%) said the State of Maryland should invest in programs that address the root causes of hunger. In fact, a large 61% majority said they feel *strongly* about that.
- Three-quarters (74%) would like to see *more* of their tax dollars go to help address the problem of hunger in Maryland.

As demonstrated throughout the survey, there is ample evidence that Marylanders are more motivated now than at any time in recent years to help tackle the problem of hunger.

- More than half (53%) of all residents surveyed would “like to be more engaged in the effort to end hunger in Maryland,” an astonishing jump from the 35% who said so in 2013 and the 42% in 2017.

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- Almost half (47%) would be highly motivated by the goal of eliminating hunger in Maryland. And nearly four out of five residents (78%) believe eliminating hunger in Maryland is possible.
- Eliminating hunger among children and senior citizens is particularly motivating, survey respondents said.

The pandemic appears to be a major factor driving some of these numbers. In this survey, 55% said they needed financial assistance during the pandemic, and about one-third of them said they could *not* get the help they needed. In fact, there is ample evidence throughout our other work that the pandemic is animating residents and fundamentally changing their expectations of what their government should be delivering to them, and what their communities need, due to the pressing disruptions they have seen all around them, and experienced themselves.

When it comes to the organization itself, the Maryland Food Bank is well-situated to help meet this need and tap into the public's energy. The profile of the organization remains solid, with nearly four out of five residents saying they have heard of it. In terms of the specifics of its profile:

- Residents are just as likely to think the Maryland Food Bank provides direct assistance to individuals as they are to think it works through local partners across the state to deliver that help.
- For support, they are most likely to think the Food Bank relies on donations from individual Marylanders and somewhat less likely to realize it receives large-scale food donations from wholesalers, retailers, and farms.
- In terms of the amount of State support, people's guesses vary widely, with the average guess being 31% of the organization's budget.

In the final analysis, people overwhelmingly agree with the statement, "I would like Maryland to strive to be the kind of a state where hunger does not exist." Nine out of ten Marylanders agree with this aspiration, and two-thirds of the State's residents *strongly* agree with it.

Detailed findings available upon request.