

Georgians Struggling to Survive: Basics of Rent, Utilities and Food Needed Most

Methodology

From August 28 to September 7, 2020, the SouthStrong campaign surveyed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants in 12 Southern states. The surveys used to collect the data shared in this report were written and analyzed by the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP), and the calls to action belong to the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

The data analyzed here rely on self-reported information from 209 anonymized surveys in Georgia. Respondents were invited to answer a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions about challenges and changes in the wake of the pandemic, experiences using and applying for government benefits and recommendations and requests for policymakers. Respondents were invited, but not required, to share their first names to be attached to quotes you see here.

The surveys were administered by Propel (www.joinpropel.com), the operators of a financial services app, Fresh EBT (www.freshebt.com). Fresh EBT, used by over 4 million households, is a smartphone app available at no cost to SNAP participants to track and manage SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. The survey, designed by SEAP, was made available through Fresh EBT to randomly selected individuals who opened the app between August 28 - September 7, 2020.

Summary of Findings

- **Finding #1:** Food insecurity and job loss have been the top challenges in the pandemic.
- **Finding #2:** Government aid made a real difference for many families, but much of it has expired.
- **Finding #3:** Help with the basics of food, housing, and utilities are needed now.

Call to Action

The COVID-19 crisis has already left too many children hungry in Georgia. Thousands of families have lost their jobs and cannot afford their food, rent or health care. Congress must pass a comprehensive COVID Relief bill that addresses the magnitude of this crisis. It is time for Congress to take action to provide necessary relief to our state.

We know what is needed in this bill—help putting food on the table, adequate benefits for the thousands who have lost their jobs and relief for states to fund critical programs and services that help families. Georgians need a strong federal relief package to help us weather the health and economic effects of COVID-19.

Please call Senator David Perdue's office at (202) 224-3521 and Senator Kelly Loeffler's office at (202) 224-3643 and ask that Congress pass a strong COVID relief package that keeps our economy going and keeps struggling families from going hungry or losing their homes. Tell them the relief package should:

- Provide a temporary 15 percent increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) benefits to help hungry families.
- Extend P-EBT through the 2020-21 school year, allowing states to help feed children who are missing meals that they normally receive in school during unexpected school closures.

The Governor's office can also help alleviate this crisis by allocating CARES funding to help with food, rent and utilities for families in need of support.

Finding #1: Food insecurity and job loss have been the top challenges in the pandemic.

“Challenges: Staying on time with rent, dealing with my children being out of school and not being able to keep my job.” –Monica in Chatham County, GA

53 percent of these struggling Georgians have had trouble buying enough food at some point during the pandemic. Job loss was the second most frequently mentioned challenge, followed closely by child care and housing issues. Respondents talked about the burden of higher food prices, hours being cut from their jobs, depression and stress.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (61 percent) have had problems applying for or receiving at least one type of assistance (unemployment insurance, stimulus check, SNAP, P-EBT, Medicaid). Among the 12 Southern states surveyed, Georgia had the worst results for issues in applying for aid overall, and in particular, the worst results for unemployment insurance and Medicaid. Challenges included busy phone lines, no responses from agencies, difficult websites, long wait times (weeks and months) and one benefit causing ineligibility in another benefit.

Georgians Worried About Housing Instability



53%
Trouble
Buying
Enough Food



39%
Loss of Job



35%
Childcare
Issues



33%
Housing
Issues

“How can we work when we have no one to take care of our children? Some people have no family or friends to help.” –Jade in DeKalb County, GA

61% of Respondents had a Problem Applying to or Receiving at Least One Type of Aid

Respondents had a problem with:



27%
Unemployment
Insurance



20%
Medicaid



19%
P-EBT



14%
Stimulus
Checks



12%
SNAP

“I have been waiting for a response from unemployment for over two months. Out of work with no income and no work. I have applied everywhere and anywhere.” –Diana in Warner Robbins, GA

Finding #2: Government aid made a real difference for many families, but much of it has expired.

In spite of challenges applying for or receiving certain aid, 57 percent of respondents said programs or assistance made a real difference for them and their family in managing the pandemic. Food assistance programs were the most frequently mentioned programs—with about half of respondents saying food programs made a real difference in the pandemic. Stimulus checks and unemployment insurance were the two other most frequently mentioned programs. While helpful, much of the aid has expired or will expire soon.

“Extra SNAP: The increase I received for food stamps. It was the only bright spot in all of this.” –Tammy in Covington, GA

aFamily and friends are a source of support for 55 percent of these struggling Georgians. Almost half (47 percent) have visited a food pantry or free food site since the pandemic began, according to a separate survey.

Extra SNAP Benefits Respondents Received



62%
Received extra SNAP in June



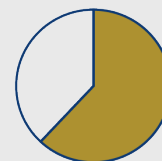
87%
Said additional benefits allowed them to purchase enough food to make it through the month

Source: Separate Propel/FRAC survey in Georgia.

“Please keep the P-EBT coming. It’s helping me a lot with food.” -Jennifer in Georgia

Finding #3: Help with the basics of food, housing and utilities are needed now.

Overwhelmingly, these struggling Georgians said they cannot pay for housing, electricity, water and food due to job loss, wage cuts and loss of work hours. At the same time, they spoke again and again about food price increases, rent increases and higher utilities due to being at home more. COVID-19 support and relief was the top concern.



61% of respondents are worried that they may not have stable housing in the next two months

What Issues are Respondents Most Concerned About?



71%
COVID-19
support and
relief



58%
Economy/Jobs



49%
Education



45%
Housing



43%
Health care

Respondents Have Chosen These Three Things as the Most Useful Way Georgia Could Spend Money to Help People During the Pandemic



Food
assistance



Help paying for
utilities



Help with rent

What Georgians Want Policymakers to Know

“Continue the programs while the pandemic is still in effect.” –Kenshea in Augusta, GA

“If you bring back the federal pandemic benefits, it would help 10 times everything else. I was able to pay my bills.” –Chanti in College Park, GA

"I am behind 3 months on my mortgage and 2 months on my truck payment; another stimulus check would help me get back on my feet. I lost my job and just recently found a new one." –Allison in Waycross, GA

"Help with child care because I had to quit my job to stay at home with my kids." –Lorinda in Dooley County, GA

"Help people who don't have the basic utilities. We cannot afford to get our water on." –Roni in Columbus, GA

"It's so sad how you have let us down. While you get richer, we grow poorer." –W. in Fulton County, GA

"We need help now. We are hopeless and suffering." –Wileen in Rome, GA

"Listen to your people and actually hear what we're saying." –Ashley in Rockmart, GA

“Have more resources available to help the people who need help with rent”. –Hannah in Snellville GA

“We need help financially so we don’t have to worry about our light and water getting cut off and getting thrown out of our homes with nowhere to go.” –Michelle in Hinesville, GA

“Single mothers need medical coverage too. One-income families should have access to Medicaid.” –Jennifer in Marietta, GA

“Keep giving senior citizens the \$194.00 in food stamps. It’s hard to buy food on \$16.00.” –Kathy in Jackson, GA

“We’re all trying to make the best out of these circumstances, but unfortunately it’s going to take some time and a lot of unity to fix this situation.” –Q.V. in Union City, GA
