



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Hunger and Poverty in the Indigenous Community

What's the Problem?

More than 5.5 million Indigenous people live in the United States¹ from more than 560 Indian Nations.² Many are part of federally or state recognized tribes. They include American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Indigenous communities live in pueblos, tribes, and communities, in rural reservations as well as cities, across 33 states, including Alaska.^{3 4}

Indigenous communities have some of the highest hunger rates in the United States. As a group, one in four Indigenous people are food insecure,⁵ defined as not having regular, reliable access to the foods needed for good health.

Hunger among Indigenous communities is a direct result of poverty and of systemic inequities through racial and gender discrimination. While the United States has a poverty rate of 12.3 percent, Indigenous communities have a higher poverty rate—25.4 percent.⁶ The poverty rates are even higher among female-headed households (54 percent)⁷ and on some reservations (almost 40 percent).⁸

Indigenous populations are more likely to lack access to nutritious food

- 90 percent of U.S. counties with the **highest Indigenous populations (40 percent Indigenous or higher)** are also among those with the **highest food insecurity** rates.⁹
- Many reservations are in rural food deserts, requiring indigenous people to travel to cities, sometimes a distance of 100 miles or more, to purchase food.

FOOD INSECURITY

	General Population	Indigenous Population
All households	11.8%	24.0%
Households with children	15.7%	28.0% ¹⁰
Female-headed household with children	30.3%	N/A*

Source: Household Food Security in the U.S. in 2017. US Department of Agriculture. September 2018.

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not provide disaggregated food insecurity data by race and household structure

INEQUITIES CONTRIBUTE TO HUNGER AND POVERTY IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- Unemployment and low wages
- Less access to education
- Poor health and limited access to health care
- Less access to credit
- Higher incarceration rates
- Impact of U.S. federal policies and Indian Nations sovereignty



Photo Credit: iStock

The median income of Indigenous households is **nearly \$30,000 less** than the median income of white households.

\$41,882
indigenous households

\$68,145
white households

As a result,

1 in 3

Indigenous children live in poverty.

Source: Poverty in the Past 12 Months by Sex. 2017. 2017 ACS 1-Year Estimates. Table B17001C.

ADDITIONAL INEQUITIES CONTRIBUTING TO HUNGER AND POVERTY:

Unemployment and low wages

Many Indigenous people living on reservations lack employment opportunities. Indigenous people are twice as likely to be unemployed as the general U.S. population, and more likely to hold low-wage jobs with few or no benefits.

- Many Indigenous people who do find employment earn below poverty wages. One in three Indigenous households live on less than \$25,000 a year.¹¹

MEDIAN INCOME

	General Population	Indigenous Households
Household Income (families)	\$61,372	\$41,882**
Men Workers	\$51,220*	\$27,874**
Female Workers	\$42,380*	\$23,214**

Source: Income, Poverty, and Health coverage in the United States: 2017. U.S. Census Bureau, September 2018.

*Calculated based on estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Table 3. 2018 Median Weekly Earnings.

**U.S. Census Data. Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months. Table B19013C; Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months. 2017. Table B20017C.

Less access to quality education

Education can predict a person's future earnings. Due to racially inequitable policies, Indigenous students are more likely to attend lower-resourced schools, with less support for their future success.

- Almost 40 percent of Indigenous students attend high poverty schools, compared to 8 percent of white students.¹²

Poor health and limited access to health care

Hunger damages health, and in turn, poor health makes it harder to become food secure.

- Almost one-third of all Indigenous people were uninsured as of 2013.¹³
- Indigenous women are 4.5 times more likely to die from

causes related to pregnancy and childbirth than white women.¹⁴

Less access to credit

Due to inequitable policies and practices, Indigenous people are more likely to have poor credit histories than whites. Less ability to access credit is a barrier to starting businesses or securing assets (e.g., homes).

- Few Indigenous reservations are within 30 miles of a financial institution such as a bank or ATM.
- People in Indigenous communities are less likely to get loans because few lenders and investors know how to navigate tribal government regulations.¹⁵

Higher incarceration rates

Indigenous communities are policed, sentenced, and incarcerated at higher rates, which deplete community resources and increase hunger.

- Nationwide, Indigenous youth are imprisoned in state prisons at twice the rate of white youth.¹⁶

U.S. federal policy and sovereignty

From 1887 to 1934, the United States acquired more than 90 million acres of Indian Nation land—leaving Indigenous communities with only one-third of their original land.¹⁷ The continuing struggle over land, as well as historic racial inequity and trauma, has strained the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous communities.¹⁸

The U.S. Constitution recognizes Indian Nations as sovereign governments, meaning that they have the power to self-govern. Indigenous people are citizens of their tribe, their state, and the United States.¹⁹

- Land and wealth loss has made Indian Nations vulnerable to hunger.
- Anti-poverty programs have had less success in Indigenous communities, partly because policies often do not consider geographic, cultural, and linguistic differences, historic trauma, or the implications of being a citizen of a sovereign nation.

Endnotes

¹ Comparative Demographic Estimates (2017). ACS 1-Year Estimate. Table CP05.

² National Congress of American Indians.

³ Ibid.

⁴ NOTE: Hawaiian Natives have a high food insecurity rate (23 percent), but consider themselves aboriginal because they migrated to Hawaii from Polynesia, rather than indigenous or native to the Hawaiian Islands.

⁵ RECEIPT OF SNAP IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. 2017 ACS 1-Year Estimate. Table B22005C.

⁶ POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. 2017 ACS 1-Year Estimate. Table B17001C.

⁷ POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. 2017 ACS 1-Year Estimate. Table B17010C.

⁸ Mapping food insecurity and distress in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Urban Institute.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Addressing Child Hunger and Obesity in Indian Country. Mathematica.

¹¹ Bread calculations based on U.S. Census Data. Household Income in the Past 12 Months. 2017. Table B19001C.

¹² The Condition of Education 2018. Page 82. U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education. May 2018. Statistics.

¹³ Healthcare Coverage and Care for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Kaiser Family Foundation.

¹⁴ American Indian and Alaska Native Maternal and Infant Mortality: Challenges and Opportunities. Center for American Progress, July 2018.

¹⁵ The Report of the Native American Lending Study. Community Development Financial Institutions Fund.

¹⁶ FOCUS Views from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Native American Youth and the Juvenile Justice System.

¹⁷ "Trust Land." National Congress of American Indians.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ National Congress of American Indians.