

## Highlights:

# Understanding Food Insecurity in Shawnee County Report

Eliminating food insecurity has been an ongoing priority for many partners in Shawnee County, especially now given the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic well-being and food access in the community.

To support and advance community efforts around food security, the Shawnee County Health Department, in collaboration with the Shawnee County Farm and Food Advisory Council and Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods, commissioned the Kansas Health Institute to develop the report, *Understanding Food Insecurity in Shawnee County*. The project was supported by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) Chronic Disease Risk Reduction Grant. The report development was informed by previous reports such as the 2020-2022 Community Health Improvement Plan<sup>1</sup> (CHIP) and the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment,<sup>2</sup> discussions with community stakeholders and available secondary data. This *Highlights* document is a summary of the [full report](#).

For the purpose of the report, **food insecurity** is defined as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.”<sup>3</sup> Food-insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Food insecurity can force families to make difficult decisions between buying food and paying for other essential household needs, such as medical bills, housing and utilities.<sup>4</sup>

The cost and consequences of food insecurity are substantial. Numerous studies have shown that food insecurity is associated with declines in health status and increased rates of chronic disease, anxiety and depression among adults. Children who grow up in food insecure homes are at increased risk for poor health and hospitalization, more likely to perform poorly in school, and more likely to exhibit behavioral problems than their food-secure peers.<sup>5</sup> Food insecurity is often associated with obesity, as food-insecure families struggle to maintain healthy diets.<sup>6</sup>

To achieve lasting reductions in rates of food insecurity, stakeholders in Shawnee County will need to continue focusing efforts on addressing the risk factors for food insecurity such as poverty, unemployment, lack of access to affordable housing and food,<sup>7</sup> and existing disparities by race and ethnicity.<sup>8</sup>

## Key Findings:

- In 2019, **more than 1 in 10 (11.6 percent) Shawnee County residents** were food insecure, which was similar to the food insecurity rate in Kansas overall (12.1 percent), but far from the Healthy People 2030 goal of 6.0 percent.
- Approximately **1 in 6 (16.7 percent) children in Shawnee County** were food insecure in 2019.
- The two ZIP Codes (66603 and 66612) with the highest rates of both food insecurity (29.2 percent and 28.9 percent respectively in 2019) and poverty (37.8 percent and 37.6 percent respectively according to 2015-2019 5-year estimates) were both **located in Central Topeka**.
- In 2019, 11 census tracts in Shawnee County were designated as **food deserts** (areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food).
- About half (52.3 percent) of all people eligible in Shawnee County received **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** benefits according to 2017-2019 3-year estimates.
- Nearly half of renters (45.7 percent) in Shawnee County **lacked affordable housing** according to 2015-2019 5-year estimates.
- As of 2017, approximately 1 in 10 (11.5 percent) Shawnee County residents reported that they have ever been **diagnosed with diabetes**.

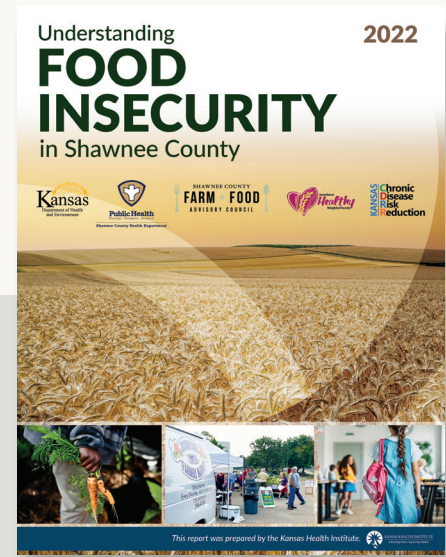
For full report, please visit Shawnee County Health Department website at [snco.us](http://snco.us)

## 2020-2022 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP): Status of Food Insecurity Related Objectives

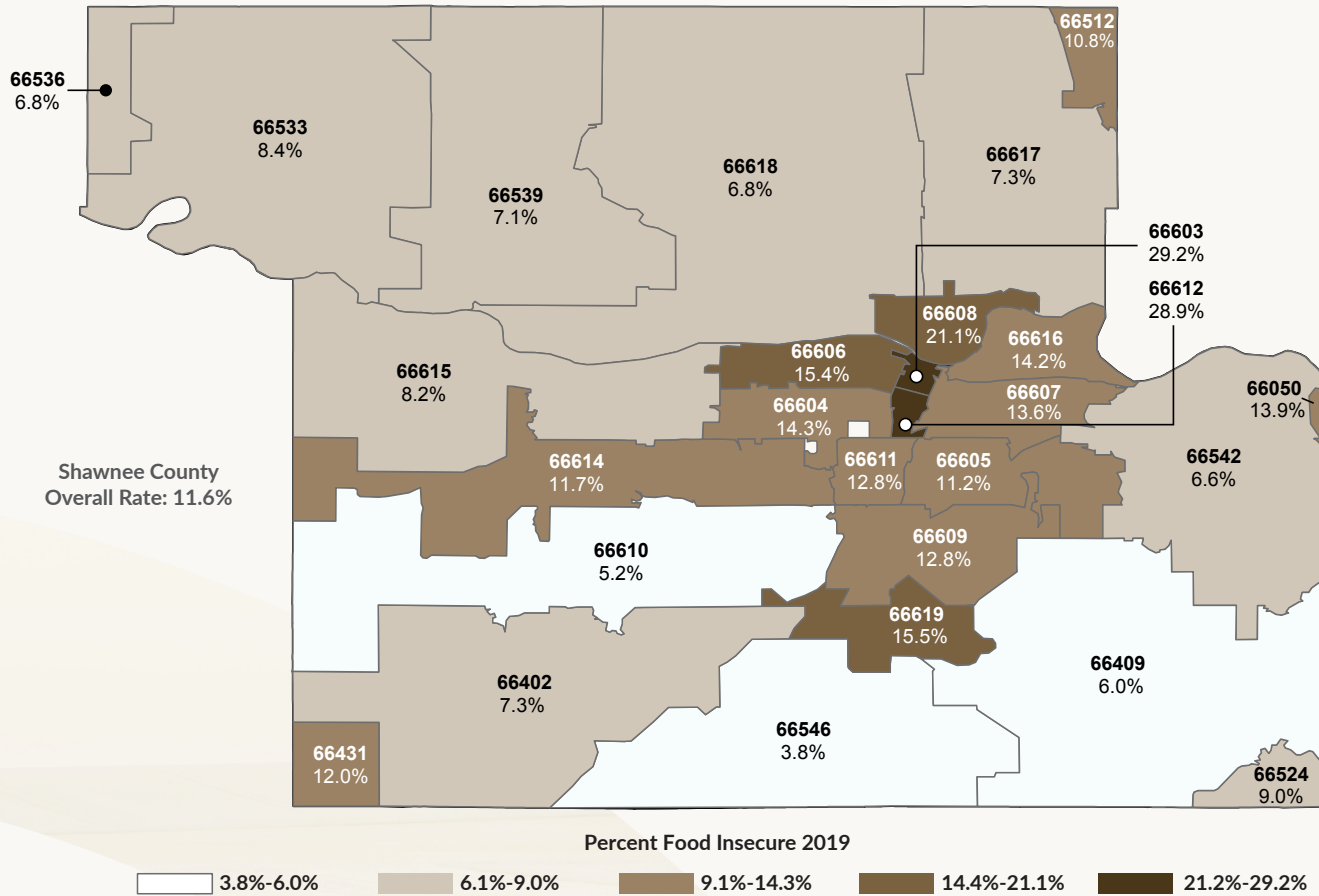
The CHIP included objectives related to access to food and listed several strategies that could help address some of the gaps that were identified in the report. The table included below (*Figure 1* in the Report) provides a status update based on the most currently available data.

Objectives	Status Update
2.1.1. Decrease the overall food insecurity rate from 13.3 percent to 12.0 percent by 2022	11.6 percent (2019)
2.1.2. Decrease the child food insecurity rate from 18.4 percent to 17.4 percent by 2022.	16.7 percent (2019)
2.1.3. Decrease the number of census tracts listed as “food deserts” by the USDA from 9 to 8 by 2024.	11 “food desert” census tracts (2019)

Note: Objectives in the 2020-2022 CHIP were set in 2019, using data from before 2019. The data included in this figure are from before COVID-19 and do not reflect potential pandemic implications on these measures.



## ZIP Code-Level Food Insecurity Rates Among Shawnee County Residents, 2019



Source: KHI analysis of data requested from Feeding America, 2019.

## Endnotes

- Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods (2019). *2020-2022 Shawnee County, Kansas Community Health Improvement Plan*. Retrieved from [https://www.snco.us/HD/Document/2020-2022\\_snco\\_chip.pdf](https://www.snco.us/HD/Document/2020-2022_snco_chip.pdf)
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## Acknowledgments

The project is supported by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) Chronic Disease Risk Reduction Grant. The Shawnee County Health Department would like to thank the members of the Shawnee County Farm and Food Advisory Council, Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods and stakeholders across Shawnee County for providing topic-specific expertise throughout the development of the report. Additionally, the Shawnee County Health Department would like to extend thanks to Samiyah Para-Cremer, M.Sc., Tatiana Y. Lin, M.A., and Wen-Chieh Lin, Ph.D., of the Kansas Health Institute for conducting the assessment, providing process facilitation and preparing the report.



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