



## Hunger in America, and Its Solutions

### Basic Facts

- **Hunger and food insecurity have been growing.** Nearly 35 million people – including 13 million children – in the United States were hungry or living on the edge of hunger in 2002 (the most recent year for which data are available). Since 1999, food insecurity has increased three years in a row, in total by 3.9 million individuals – 2.8 million adults and more than one million children. Overall, 11.1 percent of U.S. households (12.1 million households) experienced food insecurity or hunger in 2002, and black (22 percent) and Hispanic (21.7 percent) households suffered from food insecurity or hunger at double the national average.
- **Food stamps are the nation’s leading defense against hunger, but many people who are eligible do not receive them.** Food stamps are a crucial support for millions of low-income people, but they should be reaching millions more. Families with parents working at or near the minimum wage need both food stamps and the Earned Income Tax Credit to lift their total incomes above the poverty line. In 2003, 21.2 million individuals participated in the Food Stamp Program in an average month, a 24.1% increase from 2000. But only about 60% of those eligible for food stamps were receiving them. Eligible seniors and working families were even less likely to be receiving benefits. The average monthly food stamp benefit per person is \$83.77.
- **School breakfast is great for hungry children and schools, but only about 4 in 10 low-income children who receive school lunch also get school breakfast.** A good breakfast is essential for children to be alert and ready to learn. In the 2002-03 school year, 8.2 million children participated in the School Breakfast Program on an average day, and 6.8 million of them were from low-income households. This is only 42.3 percent of the 16 million low-income children who participated in the National School Lunch Program that year.
- **Only 2 in 10 low-income children who receive school lunch also receive summer food when school is out.** During the summer, low-income children lose their access to regular daily school meals – the Summer Food Service Program is intended to help fill this nutritional gap. In 2003, 3.2 million low-income children received summer meals, which is only 20 percent of the low-income children who received school lunch during the preceding school year.
- **Participation in federal nutrition programs can combat childhood obesity as well as hunger.** A peer-reviewed, ground-breaking 2003 study shows that participation in the child nutrition programs and food stamps can reduce childhood obesity. The paper reports that girls in food insecure households had a significantly lower risk of being overweight if they participated in any or all of three programs – School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Food Stamps. The best evidence now is that the federal nutrition programs are not a part of the problem, but rather part of the solution to the obesity epidemic.