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TWO MILLION OHIOANS SEEK EMERGENCY FOOD EACH YEAR – MORE THAN ONE IN SIX
Hunger in America 2014, issued once every four years, provides in-depth profile of Ohio's hungry families

COLUMBUS, Ohio – More than one in six Ohioans, or more than 2 million people, stand in the state's emergency food lines each year, according to a new study released today by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks (the association). Ohio data from Feeding America's *Hunger in America 2014 report*, available only once every four years, was the subject of a press conference held today at the Ohio Statehouse that included state and local hunger and poverty advocates.

"The *Hunger in Ohio 2014* study reveals alarming data about the reality that many Ohioans face," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the association. "Despite slight improvements to the economy since the Great Recession, hundreds of thousands of Ohioans remain food insecure. What are even more troubling are the coping strategies and spending tradeoffs these Ohio households often make to survive."

Among the key findings of the study are:

- Each year, approximately 2 million unduplicated individuals, or 662,000 households, receive food assistance through Ohio's emergency food network.
- In the past year, 81 percent purchased inexpensive, unhealthy food as a coping strategy; and
- Sixty-six percent had to choose between food and medicine or medical care as a spending tradeoff decision made to make ends meet.

Demographic makeup of the households served

Of the 2,007,500 Ohioans served by the network each year, more than 83 percent report living in food insecure households, meaning that they were without reliable access to adequate amounts of affordable, nutritious food at some point during the past year. Additionally, 16 percent of study respondents reported they were responsible for the care of grandchildren in their household.

In addition:

- Seventy-one percent of client households are living with annual incomes at or below the federal poverty level. Overall, the study found that the median monthly household income was only \$813 (\$9,760 annually). One in ten households reported having no monthly income.
- Fifty percent of households had a member that was employed in the past year.
- For eligible Ohioans receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamp) benefits, half of the households reported exhausting their monthly benefits within two weeks or less, and 85 percent reported exhausting them within three weeks or less.

Brenda Adkisson, of Columbus, worked as a nurse before becoming disabled. Although she lives on a tight budget, she brings in slightly too much income to be eligible for SNAP.

“I never thought I would be in this situation,” said Adkisson. “As a diabetic, I need proteins and vegetables. I crave dark green vegetables. Rice and potatoes are not good for diabetics. I’m able to sleep at night when I know there’s food in my fridge.” Adkisson said that the food pantry she visits is a community of people who try to help each other out.

Coping strategies and long-term health implications

The study reveals that purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy foods or even watering down food and drinks are common coping strategies – strategies that directly impact health and nutrition.

Specifically, the study found that in an effort to make ends meet, Ohioans have used the following coping strategies in the past year:

- Fifty-five percent receive help from friends or family;
- Fifty-five percent eat food past the expiration date;
- Forty-one percent water down food or drinks;
- Thirty-eight percent sell or pawn personal property; and
- Thirty percent grow food in a garden.

In addition, due to tight budgets, Ohio households are forced to make tough decisions regarding spending tradeoffs. In the past year, Ohioans have had to choose between the following:

- Seventy percent had to choose between food and utilities;
- Sixty-eight percent had to choose between food and transportation;
- Sixty-six percent had to choose between food and medicine or medical care;
- Fifty-five percent had to choose between food and housing; and
- Twenty-nine percent had to choose between food and education.

The study reveals that the coping strategies and spending tradeoffs have a lasting impact on household health status. In the past year, 62 percent of Ohio households had a member with high blood pressure; 35 percent of households had a member with diabetes; and 59 percent of households had unpaid medical bills.

“The *Hunger in Ohio 2014* findings demonstrate the urgent need for all of us as individuals, policymakers and industry leaders to address hunger in our communities,” said Hamler-Fugitt. “This data provides a factual basis for decisions about how we as a state approach hunger relief and protect our most vulnerable residents.”

As the 50th anniversary of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food assistance or food stamps), the first line of defense against hunger, is recognized this year, the need for a strong nutrition safety net has never been greater. From November 2013 to August 2014, Ohio lost more than \$235 million in direct food assistance (SNAP) benefits.

In light of these losses in food purchasing dollars and rising demand for help from Ohio’s emergency food network, the association is requesting a state appropriation of \$20 million per year over the 2016-17 state biennium.

“The long-term impact of poor health and nutrition are indeed difficult for the families experiencing food insecurity, but are paid for by all Ohioans through increased health costs and lower productivity,” said Hamler-Fugitt.

“Reducing hunger and increasing access to quality nutrition and healthy food is a sound policy for Ohio’s children, seniors and our neighbors in need, and is the right medicine for Ohio’s future.”

Hunger in Ohio 2014 is the sixth and most comprehensive study in the *Hunger in America* series, which provides comprehensive demographic profiles of people seeking food assistance through the Feeding America network. The study includes interviews with 6,694 clients and 1,829 partner agencies in Ohio.

For more information about the *Hunger in Ohio 2014* report, visit www.ohiofoodbanks.org.

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About the Ohio Association of Foodbanks

The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio’s largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2014, the association and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute over 186 million pounds of food and grocery items. The association also serves as the home of The Ohio Benefit Bank and operates the state’s largest navigator program for the Affordable Care Act. Follow the association on Twitter, stay connected on Facebook and visit them on the web at www.ohiofoodbanks.org.