

Military Families and Nutrition Safety Net Programs

October 2024



TENNESSEE
JUSTICE
CENTER



INTRODUCTION

ANTI-HUNGER TEAM

Signe Anderson

Senior Director of Nutrition Advocacy

Anna Grace Breedlove

WIC Referral and Data Specialist

Crys Riles

Anti-Hunger Advocate

Anne Dobson Ball

WIC Partnership & Outreach Coordinator

Geraldine Hernandez-Marin

King Nutrition Fellow

TJC ANTI-HUNGER ADVOCACY

End hunger in Tennessee by protecting and strengthening the federal nutrition programs: SNAP, WIC, Child Nutrition Programs

- Improve access and remove barriers to programs
- Advocate for solutions to systemic issues
- Educate and inform
- Provide policy expertise
- Direct client work



FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

WIC: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program
for Women, Infants, and Children

NSLP: National School Lunch Program

SBP: School Breakfast Program

SEBT: Summer EBT

SFSP: Summer Food Service Program

CACFP: Child and Adult Care Food Program

CSFP: Commodity Supplemental Food Program

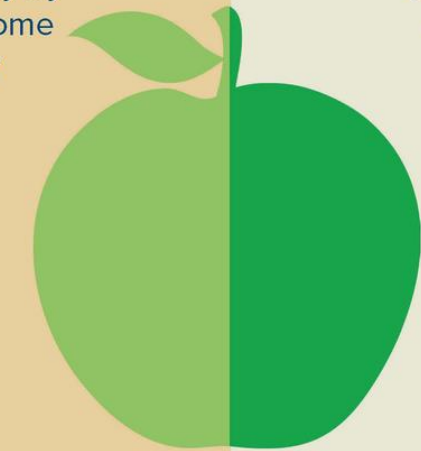
SNAP STRENGTHS

SNAP REDUCES HUNGER

and food insecurity by providing low-income people necessary food money.

SNAP IMPROVES DIETARY INTAKE

and health, especially among children and with lasting effects.



SNAP BOLSTERS LOCAL ECONOMIES

by increasing money spent for food at local retailers.

SNAP LIFTS MILLIONS OF PEOPLE out of poverty.



FRAC
Food Research & Action Center

HUNGER IN TENNESSEE

Hunger

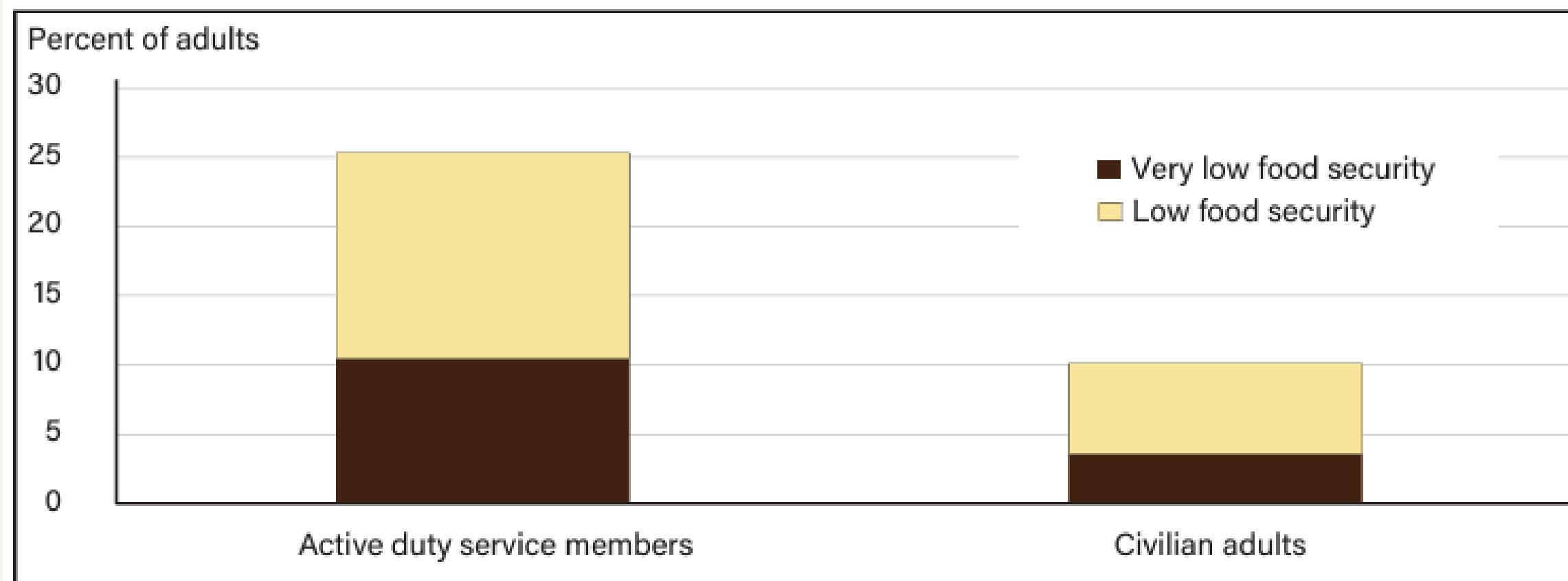
- **984,430** Tennesseans face hunger (1 in 7)
- **274,320** TN children face hunger (1 in 6)

In Tennessee, 984,430 people are facing hunger - and of them 274,320 are children.



MILITARY HUNGER

25.3%



10.1%

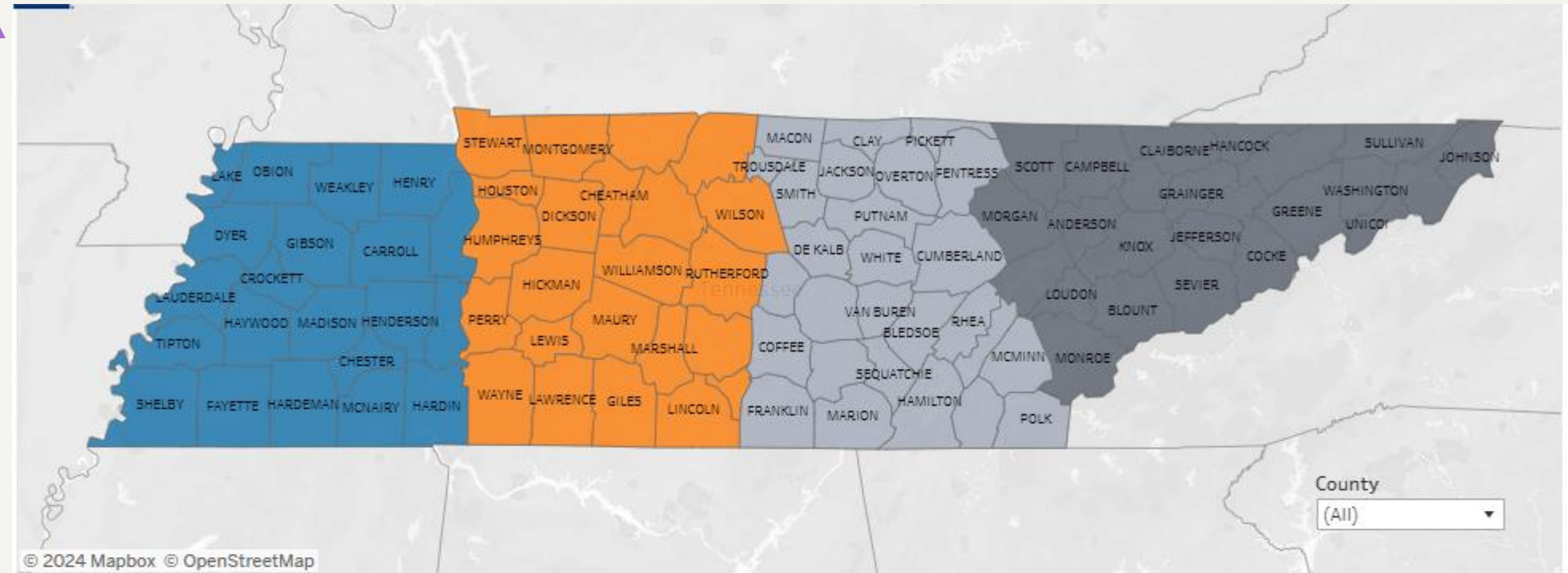
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Department of Defense, Office of People Analytics, Status of Forces-Active Duty Members and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement.

Military food insecurity was 2.5x higher than comparable civilian populations and across demographics from 2018-2022

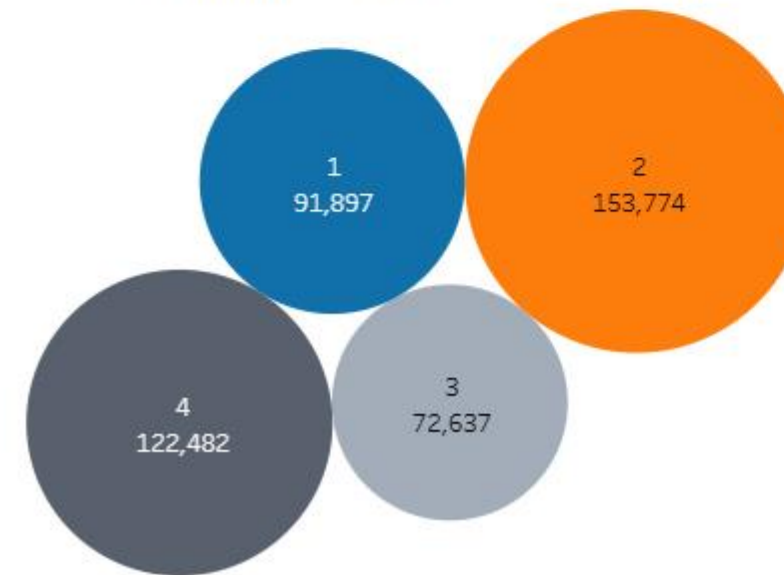
Source: [USDA](#)

VETERANS IN TN

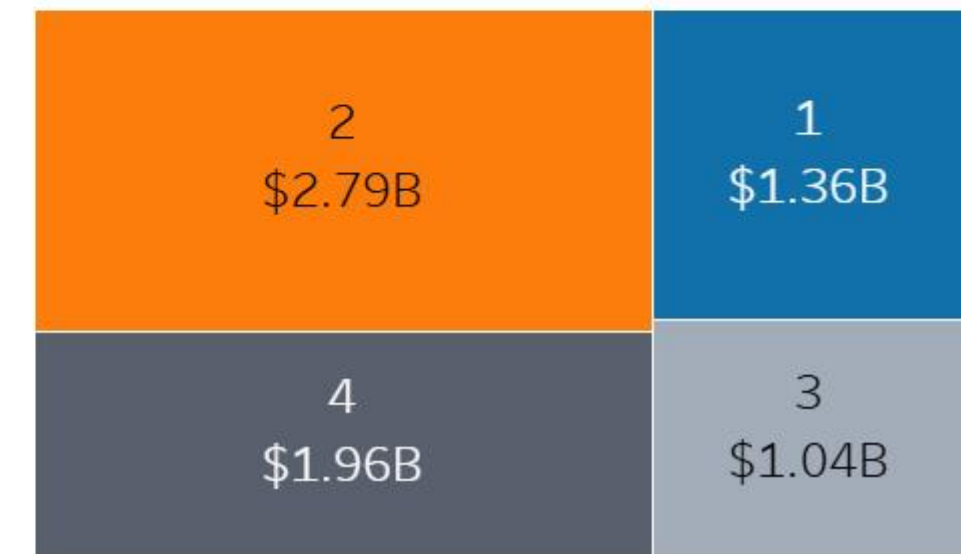
- 397,661 in Tennessee (2022)
- 7.2% of the state population
- 7.5% of veterans are below the poverty line (2022)
- 759 veterans were unhoused in 2023



Veteran Population Per Region



VA Expenditures per Region



Source: USAFacts.org, [HUD](https://HUD.gov)

VETERANS

Veterans can face lasting barriers

- Chronic unemployment or underemployment
- Service-acquired disabilities, injuries, or mental health issues
- Support in navigating these programs is often insufficient or under-resourced



NATIONAL SECURITY

“I won’t eat if it means my kids can eat. My husband is the soldier, and he needs the food more than myself as well.”

- Active duty military spouse
New York



Lower physical performance, increased stress, and distraction stemming from concern for family all contribute to lack of focus and reduced efficacy

GENERAL CHALLENGES

- Mental and physical health
- Adjusting to cultural and other factors upon return
- Finding and keeping employment
- Gender and racial disparities during active duty
- Constant relocation causes issues with gaining and keeping employment, professional licenses, and community building
 - 21% of active-duty spouses are unemployed



BASES AND ACCESS

Bases are often low-access areas (“food deserts/swamps”)

- Rural areas
- Low population density
- Transportation issues
 - One-car families
 - Lack of public transit
- Commissaries and convenience stores
 - High prices, low variety or stocking levels, inconvenient hours of operation, and far travel



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Food Assistance for Low-Income Tennesseans

- Provides modest benefits (~\$2.03/meal)
- Benefits loaded monthly on EBT card, used like a debit card
- Spent on food at authorized retailers
- [What can SNAP buy?](#)



SNAP AND INCOME

Programs that count as income for SNAP

- Veterans Affairs (VA) Pension and Disability benefits count as unearned income for SNAP
 - Puts many veterans over eligibility limits, making SNAP inaccessible
- SSI and SSDI affect income eligibility for SNAP and other means-tested programs
- Basic Housing Allowance (BAH)



SNAP 3-MONTH TIME LIMITS

- Some people must work 20 hours/week to keep SNAP
- Veterans are exempt from time limits, but spouses might not be
 - Non-veterans ages 18-54 may be subject to time limits



Dr. Shanna A. Smith, CTE, CTA
Associate Director of Research
Military Family Advisory Network





Military Family
Advisory Network

Causal Factors of Military & Veteran Family Food Insecurity

presented by

Dr. Shanna A. Smith, Associate Director of Research

Our Story

MFAN was founded in 2013 to meet a persisting need in the military community: the ability to quickly and effectively connect to military families.

We use a **peer-leader network**, **scientific research**, and **collaboration** to stay ahead of and respond to emerging needs. MFAN connects military families to the resources, people, and information they depend on to navigate all phases of military life.

Mission: To understand and amplify the needs of military-connected families and inspire data-informed change.

Vision: We envision a world where all military-connected families are empowered to thrive.



Food Security Research Timeline

2017 Support Programming Survey

15.0% of military families
experiencing food insecurity

2019 Support Programming Survey

1 in 8 military families
experiencing food insecurity

2020 Off-Cycle Survey (COVID-19 Pandemic)

1 in 5 military families
experiencing food insecurity

2021 Causal Factors & Support Programming Survey Studies

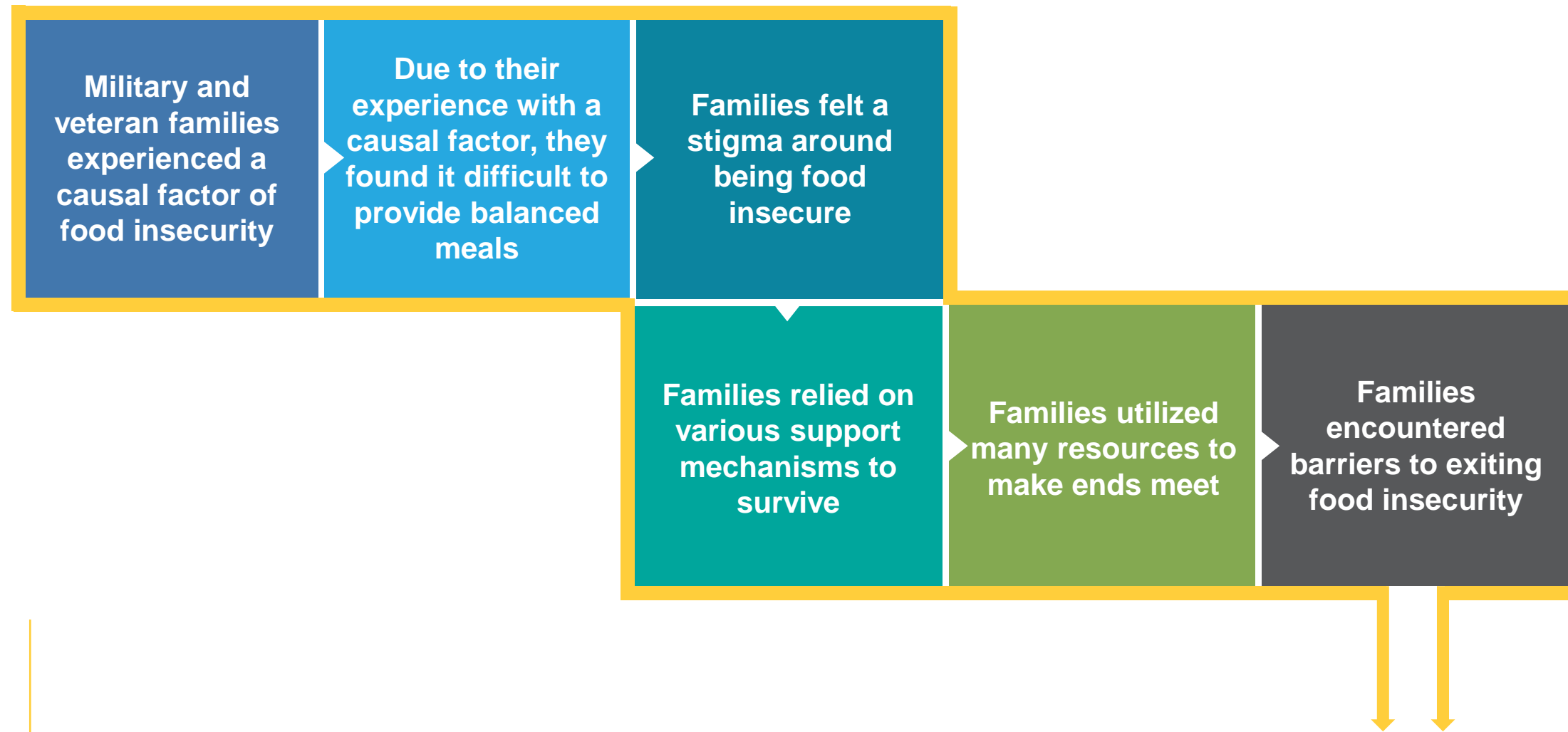
1 in 6 military families
experiencing food insecurity

USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale





**Military Family
Advisory Network**



312 Interviews

Military and Veteran families in Texas and Tidewater, Virginia



Measuring Food Insecurity

USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale

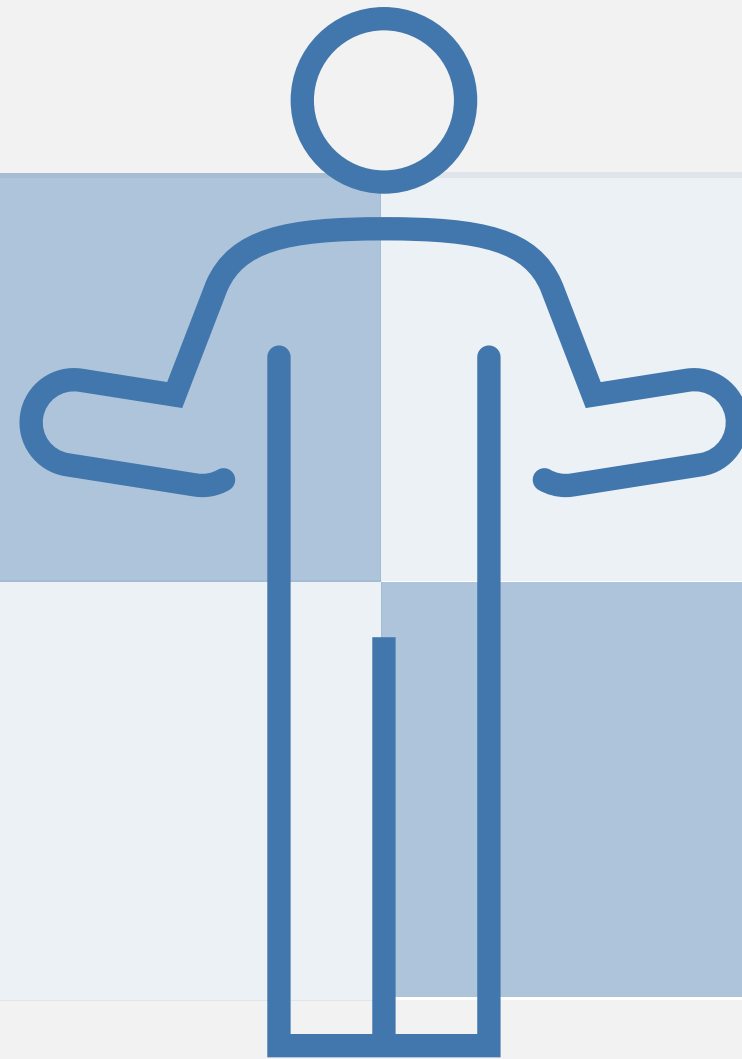


Sharing Their Journey

Qualitative interviews to understand the causal factor, and resultant journey, of their food insecurity



Persona 5: External Systems Shock
Families in Texas experienced an uncharacteristic ice storm that sparked food insecurity



**Persona 1: Military Spouse
Unemployment**

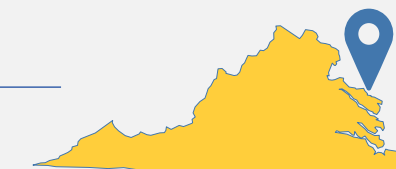
Military spouses faced unemployment due to PCS, COVID-19, and childcare responsibilities

Persona 3: Recent PCS
Families experienced a recent Permanent Change of Station (PCS)

Persona 2: Growing Families
Families' expenses grew exponentially after having kids

Persona 4: Unexpected Expenses
Families incurred unexpected expenses they could not be prepared for

Persona 6: Rising Cost of Living
For families in Tidewater, Virginia, military pay did not keep up with the rising cost of living



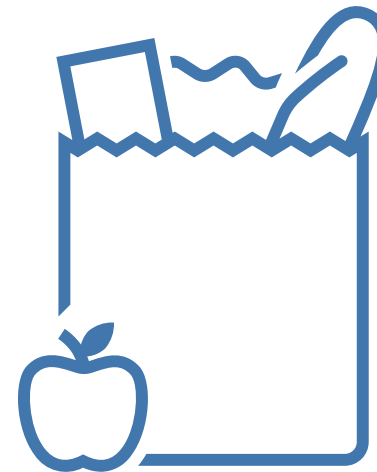
Families That Experienced Food Insecurity Asked for the Following Supports:



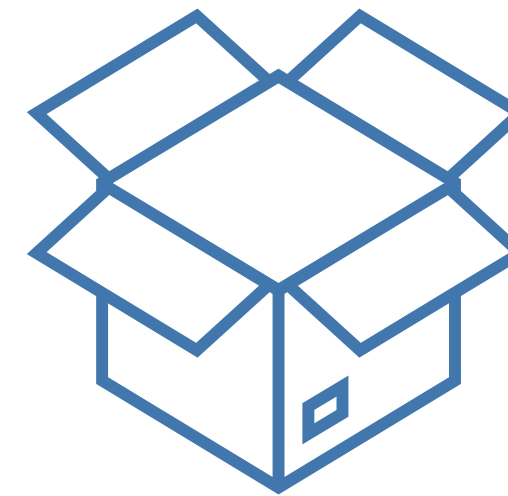
**Information on
Support
Systems and
Resources**



**Affordable
Childcare**



**Eligibility for
Benefits like
SNAP**



**Reduced
PCS Costs**



**Higher
Pay**



**Military Family
Advisory Network**

Military Family Support Programming Survey

2023 Report

PREPARED BY
ORACLE

Health

www.MFAN.org

Military Family Food Insecurity in 2023



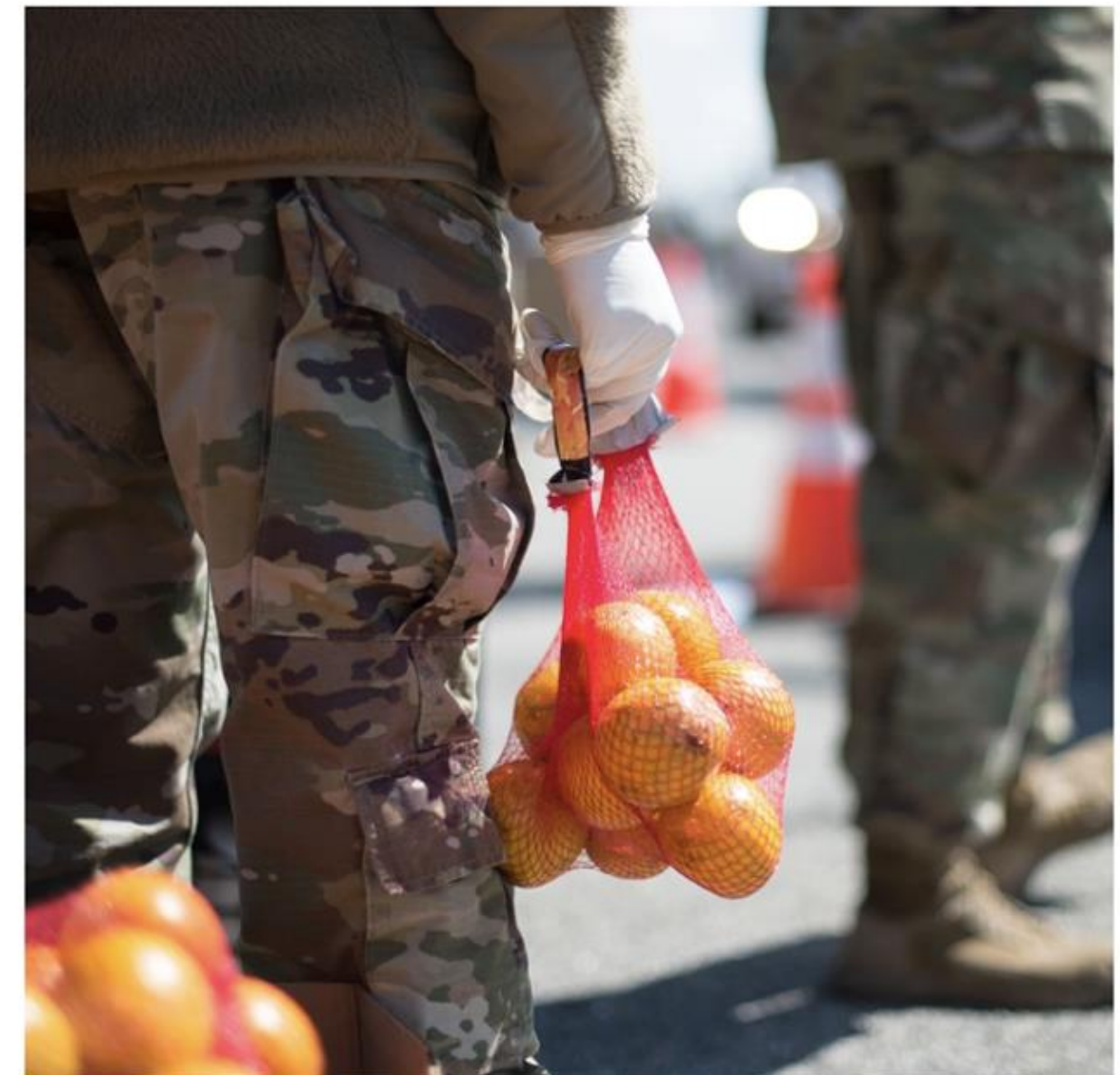
One in five military and veteran family respondents indicated some level of food insecurity



Slightly more than **one in four active duty family respondents** were experiencing some level of food insecurity

Personas Most Commonly Facing Food Insecurity

- Families who joined the military within the last 10 years
- Families who conducted a Permanent Change of Station within the last two years
- Families with children under the age of 18



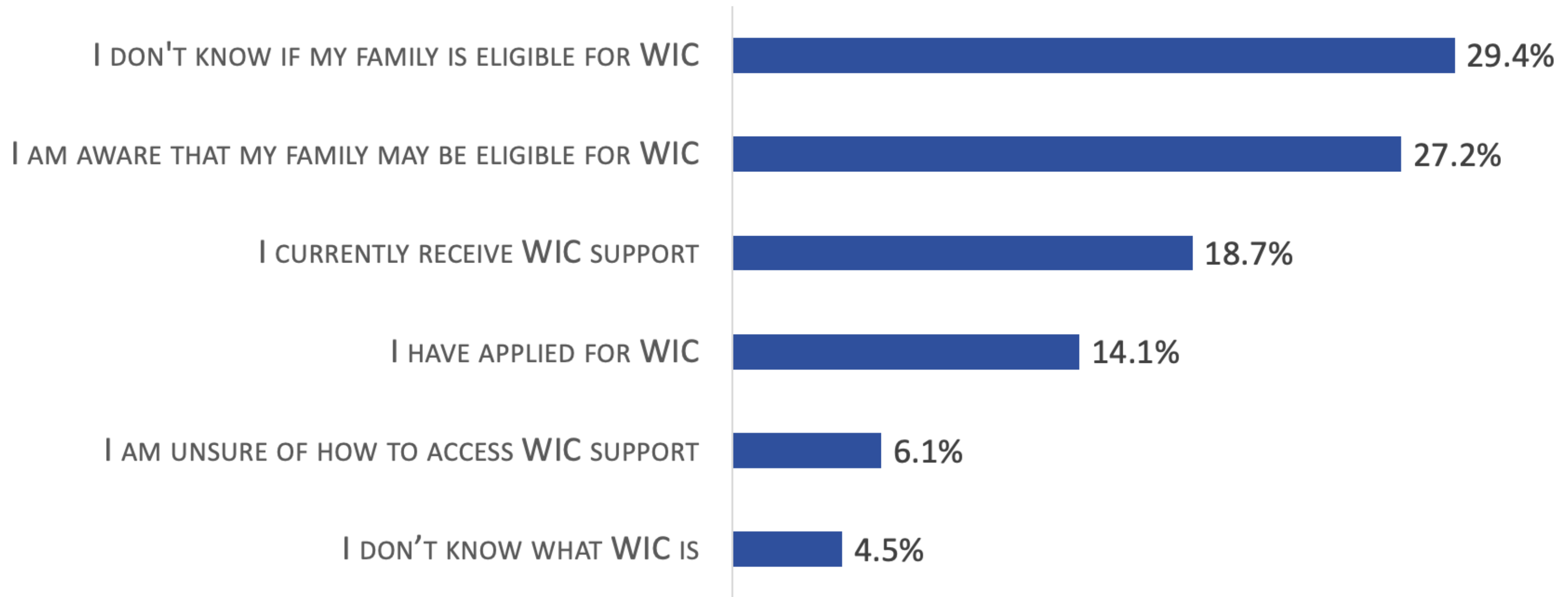
Balanced Meals

PARENT THEMES	MANIFEST EFFECT
Able to Access Food for Balanced Meals	50.0%
Barriers to Balanced Meals	48.4%
What Made a Difference	15.0%

Accessing Support

PARENT THEMES	MANIFEST EFFECT
Positive Experience with Food Support	66.0%
Negative Experiences with Food Support	29.6%
Barriers to Eligibility or Accessibility of Food	12.6%

WIC – Use and Awareness

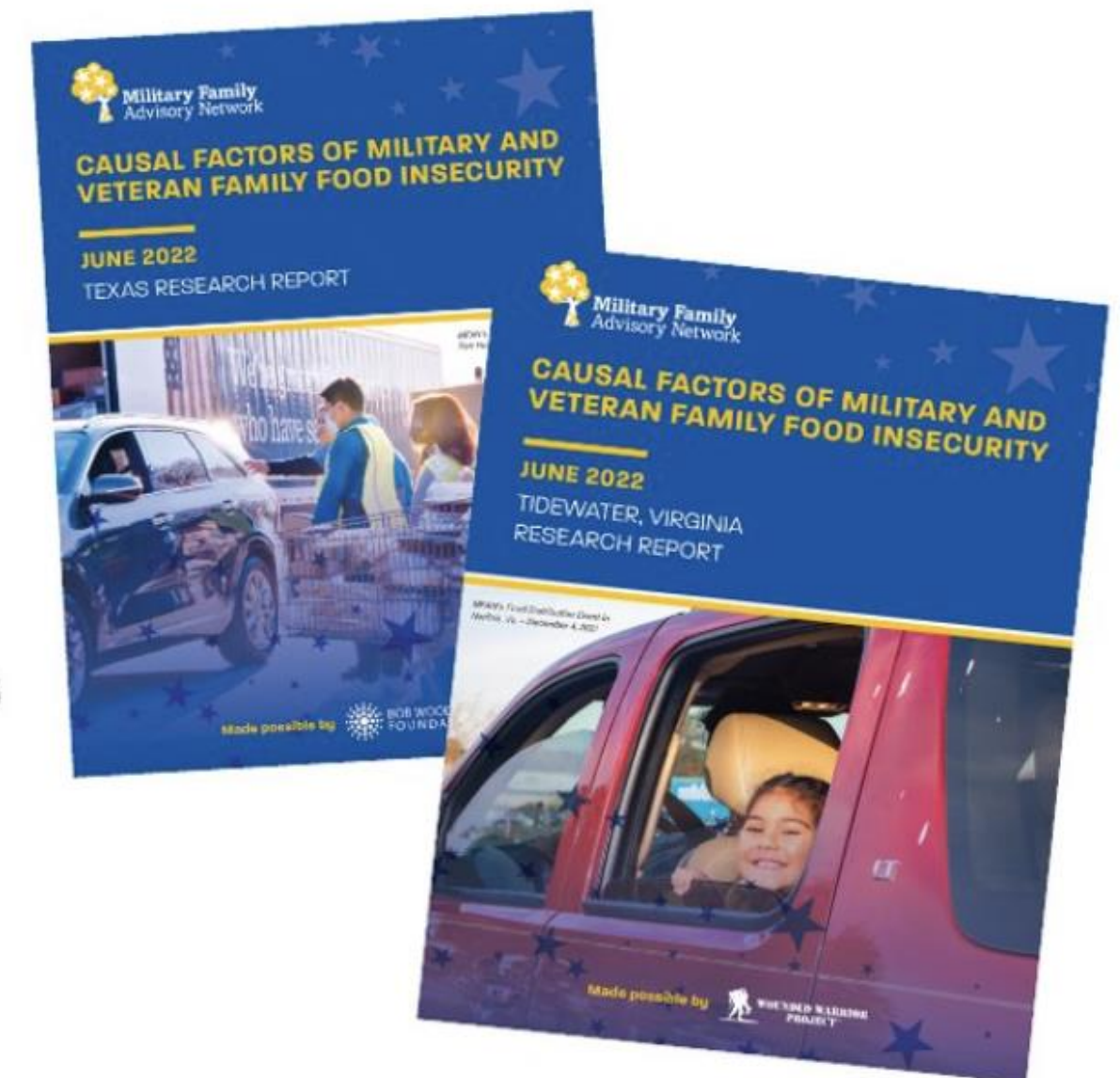


Causal Factors of Food Insecurity

Measured in the Military Family Support Programming Survey for the first time

Several active duty family personas emerged that are significantly more likely to report very low food security:

- Respondents who report a **financial emergency** in the past 12 months or the past one to two years
- Respondents who report experiencing a **disruptive community incident**, such as a severe weather event, within the past two years
- Respondents who **had a child** within the last 12 months
- Respondents who reported **military spouse unemployment**
- Respondents who **PCS'd or moved** due to military orders anytime in the past two years





Recommendations

- 1** **Reevaluate compensation to accommodate for compounding and perennial issues impacting military families**
- 2** **Modernize how families serve, and how they are supported**
- 3** **Shift to a proactive posture and holistic solutions**



Questions & Answers

Contact us at research@mfan.org

Learn more at www.mfan.org

QUESTIONS?

Dr. Binny Chokshi

Pediatrician

Uniformed Services University



Dakota Davis

Community Health Worker

Uniformed Services University



Increasing WIC Enrollment in Military Families at Fort Campbell

Binny Chokshi, MD MEd, Division of Military Child and Family Research
Dakota Davis, Community Health Worker, Fort Campbell



Objectives

1. Discuss food insecurity and its incidence among US Military connected individuals
2. Review prior study related to food insecurity and WIC engagement in military families
3. Discuss current WIC CIAO project at Fort Campbell

What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity is defined as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.



Food Insecurity- Military Relevance

*24% OF MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS IDENTIFIED AS FOOD INSECURE
(2022 DOD)*

Unable to obtain quantity or quality of food

MAJOR IMPACTS:

- **Readiness**
Behavioral health, neonatal/pediatric health
- **Retention**
Inability to provide for family
- **Recruitment**
Obesity, military recruiting poolk

Themes from Qualitative Study

1. Military-specific factors create unique circumstances related to WIC engagement.
2. The WIC program facilitates access to formula supplementation and nutritious foods for military families.
3. Lack of program awareness and misinformation are the top barriers to WIC engagement in military families.
4. Stigma impacts WIC program enrollment and engagement.
5. Logistics of enrollment can impact WIC engagement among military families.
6. The military can support WIC enrollment and engagement through standardization, education, and leadership commitment.

What is WIC?

- Nutrition program for women, infants, and children:
 - Food supplementation
 - Breastfeeding supplies & resources
 - Nutrition & wellness education
- Eligibility
 - Pregnant women (at least 6 weeks)
 - Breastfeeding women (up to 1 year postpartum)
 - Children < 5 years old
- **Less than 50%** of those who are eligible are enrolled

WIC and Military Families

Many military families do not know they can qualify for WIC assistance due to a common misinterpretation of income.

WIC does **NOT** include these military payments when counting your income:

- **BASIC ALLOWANCE FOR HOUSING (BAH)**
- Family Separation Housing (FSH)
- Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA)
- Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA)
- Combat Pay
- Overseas Continental United States Cost of Living Allowance (OCONUS COLA)



Fort Campbell



Ft. Campbell is home to approximately 27,000 ADSM with an additional 51,480 family members

- Estimated that 83% are enlisted
- Approximately 13,000 live on base with remaining living off-base

Blanchfield Army Community Hospital delivered 1,421 babies during the 2022 fiscal year



2020 Census showed that 16.3% of people living on Ft. Campbell are under 5 years old, with median household income of \$45,017

Objectives



Enrollment

Retention

Increase WIC enrollment among Service Members and their families at

Fort Campbell

Work with local WIC offices to facilitate sustained enrollment in WIC program

Objective 1: Enrollment

Targeted Outreach:

- Military Data Repository and DEERS used to extract data and create list of likely eligible service members (family size, rank, years in service, contact information)
- Community Health Workers perform targeted outreach (mailer, phone) to confirm eligibility and assist with WIC enrollment



Objective 1: Enrollment

Global Outreach:

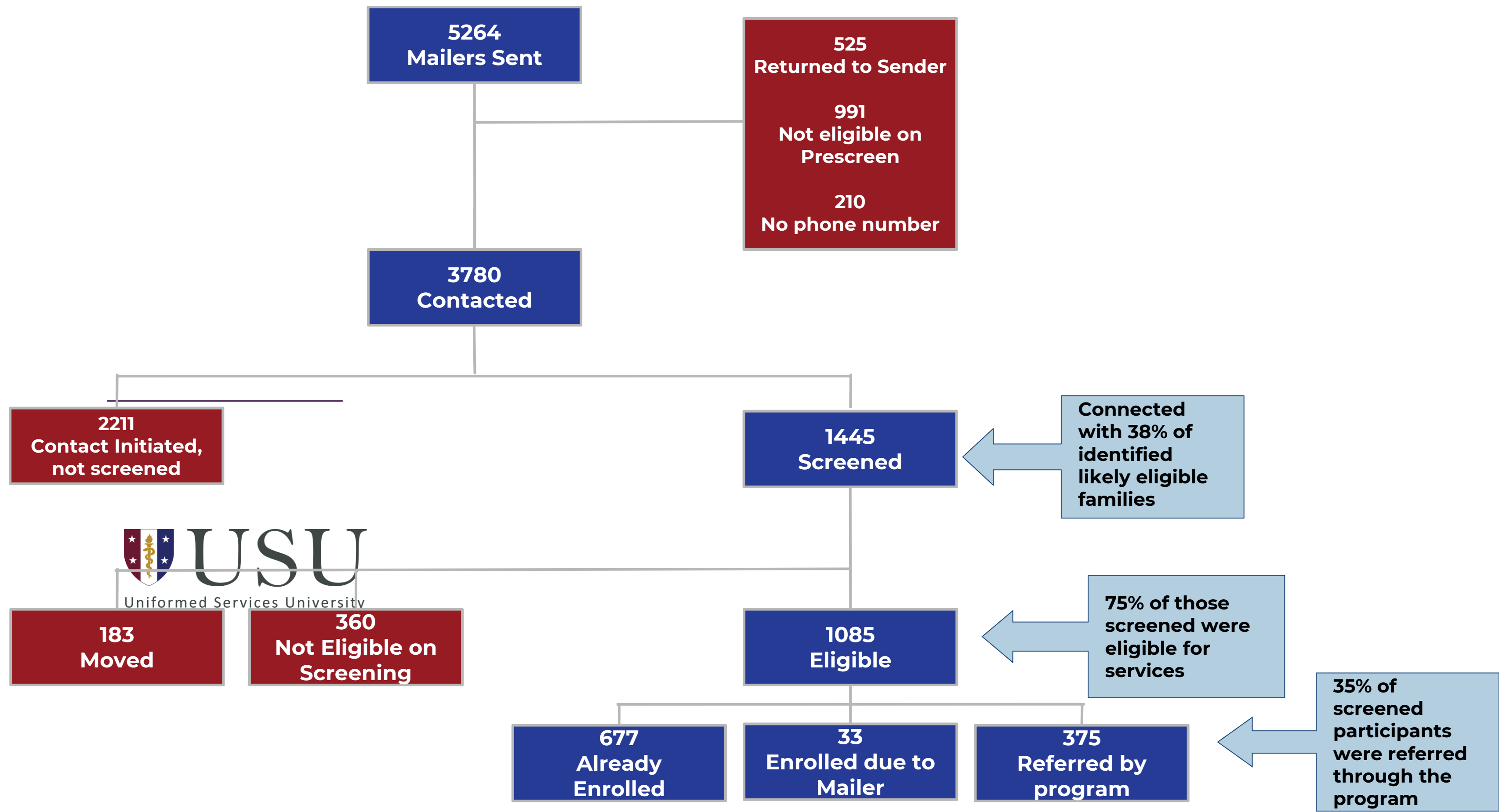
- Flyers placed at high volume locations around Fort Campbell
 - Highlighting benefits of WIC
 - QR code for community health worker contact info
- Brochure made with general and military specific WIC information
- Clinic outreach via flyers and in-person/provider contact
 - Screening 231 in Women's Health Clinic
- In-person outreach via presentations at New Service Member orientation, Play Mornings, etc.,
 - 3,309 attendees at Newcomers Orientation



Objective 2: Retention

- Collaborate with local WIC offices in TN and KY to pursue process improvement
 - Improving virtual availability vs. In-person appointments
 - Streamlining enrollment process
- Work towards assisting relocating military families with transfer of benefits to new state
- Education on the military electronic health record, MHS Genesis for enrollment/recertification





Eligibility Tool

Economic Units:
People living in the house: Includes grandparents, adult children, children, parents, and pregnancy
Monthly Income Allowance for Eligibility
Rank:
Cumulative Years of Service:
BAS
Basic Pay
Total
Income allowable for 2nd Household Income to Remain Eligible

4
\$4,625.00
E-5
Over 6
\$452.56
\$3,423.82
\$3,876.38
ELIGIBLE
\$748.62

Takeaways

- WIC is widely misunderstood in a variety of areas such as:
 - Benefits provided and who is eligible for them, many have stated they thought it was only for formula support and that they could only get it for the baby not themselves
 - A lack of universal screening for military families leads to confusion on eligibility at all levels
 - Income calculation, what truly counts for the military and veteran population. There was a large misconception that BAH is counted but that disability payments would not be.
- WIC is underutilized by all populations, including that of military families

Next Steps

Education

- Continue to empower families through education, this can be expanded to leadership teams and providers.
 - Creation of military specific WIC pamphlets

Outreach

- Developing innovative outreach methods
 - Piloting QR codes that direct the patient to a text message that goes straight to dedicated staff who reach out with 24 hours
- Meeting people where they are to provide information
 - Inprocessing briefs, Women's Health Clinic, Centering Pregnancy

Partnerships

- Increase partnerships with key military agencies to help to increase education/awareness and decrease stigma
 - Financial readiness, commissary, schools

QUESTIONS?

ADVOCACY AND ACTION

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

[H.R. 1510 - Improving Access to Nutrition Act of 2023](#)

Sponsor: Rep. Barbara Lee (CA)

- **Farm Bill**
- Bill would abolish the 3-month time limit for most SNAP recipients who don't meet work requirements.



FEDERAL LEGISLATION

[S.497 - Military Family Nutrition Access Act of 2023](#)

Sponsor: Sen. Tammy Duckworth (IL)

- **Farm Bill**
- Bill excludes military housing allowances from income when determining eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Sen. Marsha Blackburn (TN) is a cosponsor



FEDERAL LEGISLATION

[H.R.3519 - Hot Foods Act of 2023](#)

Sponsor: Rep. Grace Meng (NY)

- **Farm Bill**
- Bill would allow SNAP dollars to be spent on hot, prepared foods.



ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY

Urge DHS to Adopt State Waivers:

- **Time Limit Area Waivers** can exempt entire geographic locations from work requirements, which cause issues for the unemployed and underemployed
- **Broad Based Categorical Eligibility** would expand who can be on and stay on SNAP without fear of income increase knocking off the program



ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY

Other useful solutions

- Portability for professional licenses
- Incentivizing remote work options
- Commissary reform and standardization



ADVOCACY

Contact your legislators via phone, letter, or email.

Ask them to support these and other legislation/policies that removes access to nutrition programs.

- **Federal:** Find your Legislators [HERE](#)
- **State:** Find your Legislators [HERE](#)



SUMMER EBT 2025

#KeepSummerEBT

- Sign the [advocacy action](#) to send an email to Gov. Lee and Comm. Carter and tell them to keep Summer EBT in 2025 and beyond!
- Post on social media using #KeepSummerEBT and tag Gov. Lee and DHS



WORKING GROUPS

- [WIC Champions](#)
 - Second Thursdays at 9:00am CT
- [SNAP Access](#)
 - Third Thursdays at 10:00am CT
- [Healthy Meals Healthy Kids TN](#)
 - First Thursdays at 1:00pm CT
- [Summer EBT Advocacy Call](#)
 - Third Wednesdays at 3:00pm CT
- [College Hunger Quarterly Call](#)
 - Next Meeting February 11, 2025 1:00pm CT



NUTRITION NOTE

Join Nutrition Note!

- Our monthly anti-hunger newsletter
- Updates on changes and news
- Sign up [HERE](#)



QUESTIONS

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