

MKE Elevate Issue Brief:

NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

This category includes: Healthy foods and Nutrition (e.g. access, affordability, diet), Chronic Disease Prevention, Physical Activity and Exercise, and Parks and Recreation.



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Scope and Scale of the Problem

Communities that lack access to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities face a greater risk for chronic health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. These factors are influenced by policy, environmental, and systems level conditions including equitable access to healthy food and clean and safe communities. ¹ Feeding America reported that there are **111,910** individuals or **11.8%** of the population living in Milwaukee County who experienced food insecurity in 2020. Since 2020, child food insecurity has **increased from 21.1% to 25.5%**. According to IMPACT 211, finding food pantries and assistance with getting groceries was one of the top unmet needs in 2021. ² Many families and children do not know when or where their next meal is coming from. This is amplified by the rise of food prices, which is predicted to increase between **3-4%** in 2023. ³

Equity Impact

Structural racism, segregation and **redlining** are part of the root causes that have disproportionately impacted communities of color. As redlined neighborhoods deteriorated, grocery stores left which decreased access to healthy food and created areas of **food apartheid**. In addition, these neighborhoods had fewer parks and green spaces for physical activity which fostered an environment for poorer health outcomes. ⁴ The disinvestment in these neighborhoods have created health inequities that exist today; according to data from Feeding America, **20%** of the Hispanic population and **27%** of the Black population in Milwaukee County are food insecure.

Community Buy In

Out of 2,117 Priority Issue Survey participants, 42% ranked Healthy Foods and Nutrition as the top priority. 30% of respondents selected at least one of the following topics under the category of Nutrition and Physical Activity:

- Healthy foods and nutrition (access, affordability, diet, food allergies)
- Chronic disease prevention
- Physical activity and exercise
- Parks and recreation

In the **\$100 mock activity**, Nutrition and Physical Activity was ranked **4th out of 10** categories, with **11%** of the mock budget allocated to it.

Quotes from fall meeting small groups:

"We have to be addressing food waste-if we are talking about food."

"Kids are eating junk food which doesn't help their ability to learn."

"We've got more green spaces per square mile in Milwaukee County than anywhere else in the country. But we don't put money into them to keep them safe and kept up."

There are many community groups in Milwaukee that are working on food systems:

- City Government:
 - **MHD**: Public Health Strategist-Food Systems
 - **ECO**: Climate and Equity Plan has a proposal on Food Waste Recovery
 - **DCD**: Fresh Food Access Fund
 - **Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program**: (ensuring healthy diets for lead poisoned children and families)
 - **WIC**
 - **Community Healthcare Access Program (CHAP)**: provides enrollment services for WIC/SNAP
- Food Councils: Milwaukee Food Council, NW Fresh Food Access Council, Milwaukee Farmers Market Coalition
- Food Banks: Hunger Task Force, Feeding America
- [Food for Health](#)
- UW Extension
- American Heart Association
- Childrens Health Alliance
- Food Right
- Food pantries/community orgs: (16th St., Walnut Way, Fondy, Kinship, Friedens, UMCS, Sherman Park Association, etc.)

We have the ability to make change in the next five years

There is a need for a convener in Milwaukee's food system. MKE Elevate could serve this role by bringing people from different sectors, neighborhoods and experiences together to talk about food injustice, address root causes, and create actionable steps towards systems change. Additionally, food insecurity data is reported at the Milwaukee County level and there is a need for more city level data to accurately address this issue at the neighborhood level.

Examples of Evidence-based Policy, Systems & Environmental (PSE) Changes:

- Food is Medicine is at the crossroads of nutrition and healthcare, with a focus on investing in people's diets and reducing overall healthcare costs. ⁵ Examples include:
 - Medically tailored meals have the potential to save the U.S. approximately \$13.6 billion per year. ⁶
 - Medically tailored groceries
 - Produce prescription programs
- Increase access to healthy food options:
 - [Fruit & vegetable incentive programs | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#)
 - [School breakfast programs | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#)
- Promote healthy eating:
 - [School nutrition standards | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#)
- Create opportunities for active living:
 - [Zoning regulation and land use policy reforms | County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#)

Resources

Is there staffing to support an action team?

Yes – a Public Health Strategist focused on healthy food access

Is there funding available currently or possibly in the future?

Potential funding sources include USDA and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Sources:

- ¹ [2021_MHCP_Mke_Co_CHNA.pdf \(healthcompassmilwaukee.org\)](#)
- ² [211_Report2021Final.pdf \(impactinc.org\)](#)
- ³ [USDA ERS - Summary Findings](#)
- ⁴ [Redlining and Neighborhood Health » NCRC](#)
- ⁵ These type of incentive programs were a popular topic that emerged from the recent White House Conference on Nutrition and Hunger.
- ⁶ [Association of National Expansion of Insurance Coverage of Medically Tailored Meals With Estimated Hospitalizations and Health Care Expenditures in the US | Lifestyle Behaviors | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)



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