



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 4, 2022

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Statement by Dr. Gail C. Christopher, Executive Director, National Collaborative for Health Equity

FOOD INSECURITY MUST BECOME A NATIONAL PRIORITY

WASHINGTON, DC - “The [National Collaborative for Health Equity](#) (NCHE) applauds President Biden for hosting the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health last week, the first in more than 50 years. The administration provided a much-needed platform for these critical issues that are too often overlooked by families, public officials, and community leaders. We ask the administration to continue pursuing food security. The federal government must place more emphasis on food security – both reducing hunger and eliminating the ‘food deserts’ that plague urban communities of color, where fresh, healthy food is not conveniently available.

“For decades, the private sector has chosen not to significantly invest in grocery stores in urban communities of color, leaving residents with diets dominated by unhealthy foods. These corporate investment decisions fuel chronic conditions like obesity that increases the risk for heart disease, diabetes, and colon cancer, which lead to poor health outcomes and premature deaths. In total, more than 19 million people live in the food deserts.

“The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) estimated that before the worst of the pandemic roughly 35 million Americans, including more than 5 million children, were unable to meet their food needs or know where their next meal was coming from. Further, Blacks and Hispanics are affected disproportionately, with 19.1 % of Black households and 15.6 % of Hispanic households experiencing food insecurity, compared to only 7.9% of White households.

“It is a problem that cannot be ignored any longer.

“Three organizations, NCHE, the Texas Health Institute and Virginia Commonwealth University tracked food security and other indicators of health during a massive data gathering initiative known as the HOPE Initiative. The program provides [interactive data](#) to help states and the nation move beyond measuring disparities to spurring action toward achieving health equity.

“The HOPE researchers confirmed the disturbing lack of food security but also explained what it would take to fix the nation’s food security problem. In Texas 4.3 million people needed to achieve food security to reach HOPE’s 97% threshold, in Arizona the number was 930,150 residents and in Mississippi it was 803,839 people.

“We know the task is arduous. But all of America, including our public, private and non-profit sectors, must show the resolve to improve food security so every American enjoys healthier life outcomes. Food security can have a positive impact on our society by boosting economic productivity, creating better educational outcomes, and preventing avoidable health care costs from nutrition-related health issues. Together, America can make it happen.”

About NCHE

Founded in 2014, NCHE established to promote health equity through action, leadership, inclusion, and collaboration. We work to create environments that foster the best possible health outcomes for all populations, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or nativity. NCHE also works to improve conditions for health and well-being, including those related to housing, education, income and wealth and the physical and social environment. Further, it is imperative that we address historic and contemporary structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism, which fuels inequities in our society.