

Methodological Note: 6/2012

Tracking Food Security in California with the California Health Interview Survey

The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) measures food security using a validated six question scale¹ derived from the 18-item U.S. Household Food Security questionnaire. The six questions are: 1) “The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more. Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?” 2) “I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you in the last 12 months?” 3) “In the last 12 months, since (date 12 months ago), did you (or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?” 4) “How often did this happen-almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?” 5) “In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?” and 6) “In the last 12 months, since (date 12 months ago), were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?” The food security questions are only asked to adults in households with incomes $\leq 200\%$ FPL. In this policy brief, we present results for this low-income population from all five rounds of CHIS: 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009. We use the term “very low food security” to describe the most severe condition that is characterized by disruption of eating patterns and reduction in food intake. This survey does not include homeless individuals. It is likely that the numbers reported here underestimate the magnitude of the problem since people with incomes over 200% FPL that may suffer from food insecurity are not represented in these statistics.

¹Blumberg SJ, Bialostosky K, Hamilton WL, Briefel RR. The effectiveness of a short form of the Household Food Security Scale. *American Journal of Public Health* 1999;89:1231-4.