



D.C. Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

Minding the Grocery Gap in the District of Columbia

A 2025 Update

November 2025 ■ www.dchunger.org





D.C. Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger in the nation's capital

Minding the Grocery Gap in the District of Columbia

A 2025 Update

Acknowledgments

D.C. Hunger Solutions is deeply grateful to the following donors and their commitment to improving and expanding access to food in 2025:

- Agua Fund, Inc.
- Bainum Family Foundation
- CareFirst
- Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
- Naomi & Nehemiah Cohen Foundation
- Nourishing Neighbors, a program of The Albertsons Companies Foundation
- Partnership for a Healthier America
- The Morningstar Foundation
- The Meyer Foundation

The points of view or opinions in this publication are those of the authors and do not represent official positions or policies of supporters.

This report was written by the following at D.C. Hunger Solutions: LaMonika N. Jones, director, Corey N. Thompson, SNAP and WIC outreach associate.

For research citation: Jones, L.N., Thompson, C.N. (2025). *Minding the grocery gap in the District of Columbia — A 2025 update*. D.C. Hunger Solutions. <https://www.dchunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Minding-Grocery-Gap-2025.pdf>

About D.C. Hunger Solutions

D.C. Hunger Solutions, established in 2002 as an initiative of the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), is dedicated to eradicating hunger and poverty and enhancing the nutrition, health, economic security, and well-being of low-income residents of Washington, D.C. The organization employs a three-pronged strategy: improving access through public policies related to hunger and nutrition, maximizing participation in federal nutrition programs, and educating the public about hunger and its root causes. By collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, government agencies, community organizations, businesses, and advocates, D.C. Hunger Solutions effectively reduces hunger, supports economic security, and improves health outcomes in the District.

Executive Summary

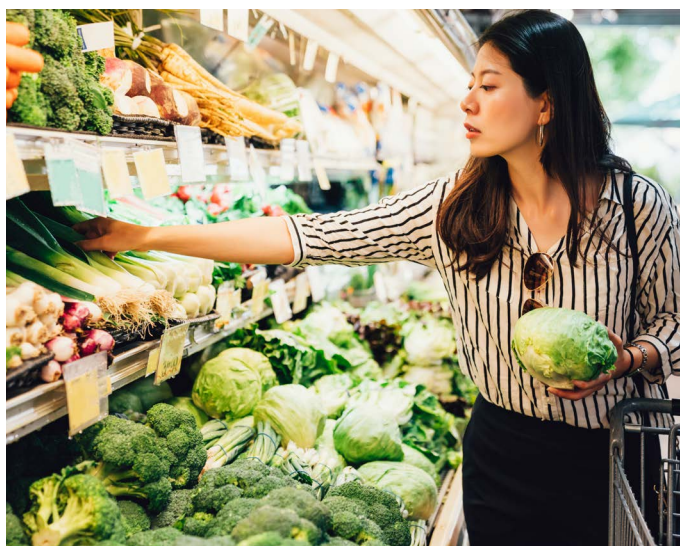
In 2023, nearly 9 percent of households in the District of Columbia struggled to afford enough food.¹ According to the Capital Area Food Bank's *2025 Hunger Report*, 40 percent of households in the District of Columbia and 36 percent of total households in the D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) region face food insecurity, reflecting little change from 2024 and underscoring persistent regional disparities.² The data reflects intersecting pressures such as grocery price inflation, flattening wage growth, and rising costs of housing, utilities, and transportation.

The enactment of the federal budget reconciliation law (H.R. 1) introduces deep structural changes to federal nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), reshaping how benefits are calculated, who qualifies, and how states and retailers participate. For many, these new hurdles may result in the loss of benefits and increased food insecurity.

Grocery retailers, especially small and independent stores, may face new challenges, with increased compliance demands and financial burdens that may discourage their participation in SNAP and WIC, further limit food access points for shoppers with low incomes, and reduce the reach of these vital nutrition programs.

Food insecurity in the District of Columbia stems from long-standing structural poverty and enduring disparities in how wealth, resources, and basic necessities — such as nutritious food — are distributed across communities.³ The historical and current uneven allocation of resources leaves many low-income and marginalized communities in the District disproportionately affected, struggling to afford or access healthy food options. While affluent areas may benefit from a wide array of grocery stores, markets, and fresh food retailers, underserved neighborhoods often face the compounded challenges of limited budgets, lack of grocery stores and affordable product options, and food apartheid.

Policymakers, advocates, and community leaders have long recognized the urgent need to address these disparities. Through coordinated efforts, targeted programs have been developed, aimed at alleviating food



insecurity by focusing on the most vulnerable populations, including initiatives such as the:

- **Healthy Corners Program**, which provides low-cost fresh and frozen produce to corner stores in low-income communities in D.C.⁴
- **Produce Rx**, which allows health care providers to prescribe fresh fruits and vegetables to D.C. Medicaid patients experiencing diet-related illness⁵
- **Grocery Plus** (federally known as Commodity Supplemental Food Program), which provides free nutritious food to D.C. seniors⁶
- **Sun Bucks** (otherwise known as Summer EBT), which provides households with school-age children food assistance during the summer⁷

This multifaceted approach reflects a shared belief that access to nutritious food is not a privilege, but a fundamental right. Building a truly equitable food system will require sustained collaboration, bold policy innovation, and an unwavering commitment to the communities that have been excluded and underserved for far too long.

In November 2024, D.C. Hunger Solutions released [*Minding the Grocery Gap in D.C.: A 2024 Update*](#), a comprehensive report that highlights the persistent and widening disparities in access to grocery stores across the District — and the profound impact these inequities have on food security, health outcomes, and community well-being. While earlier versions of this report focused on policies introduced to mitigate the grocery gap caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2024 update analyzed ongoing progress in strengthening the District's food system and reducing systemic barriers to food access. The 2024 report also revealed a persistent inequity in grocery store access: While higher-income wards continued to see growth in grocery retail, the number of stores in Wards 7 and 8 — home to many of the District's lowest-income residents — remained unchanged.

The goals of this year's report, as in years past, are to assess the lack of grocery store access in the District, especially in high poverty areas; evaluate policy changes addressing food insecurity and grocery store access; offer recommendations for policy implementation; and provide additional guidance on ways to further decrease the grocery gap.



This report includes data from October 2024 to September 2025. For the purposes of this report, the term “east of the river” will frequently be used to refer to communities located east of the Anacostia river, which have historically experienced greater disparities in food access and health outcomes. This distinction is particularly important following the June 2022 redistricting, which expanded the boundaries of Wards 7 and 8 to include areas west of the Anacostia river with comparatively higher-income residents.

SNAP Restrictions’ Ripple Effect on Grocery Retailers

In 2025, there has been an increased push from the federal government for states to adopt new [restrictions](#) on the kinds of foods SNAP recipients can purchase. While these proposals aim to influence consumer behavior, research shows they are not supported by evidence. Restricting food choices overlooks the real causes of poor nutrition — insufficient income, limited affordability, and lack of access to healthy food — while adding administrative and financial burdens for state agencies and retailers.

In an analysis conducted by the National Grocers Association (NGA), FMI — The Food Industry Association, and the National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS), it was found that proposed purchase restrictions would significantly raise costs for both retailers and consumers. Total up-front costs are estimated at more than \$1.5 billion and ongoing annual costs at \$759 million across all store types, with convenience stores bearing nearly two-thirds of the initial expenses and about half of yearly costs. Much of this burden would stem from technology upgrades, new labeling and inventory requirements, and additional labor for compliance. Larger retailers could also see weekly revenue losses of up to \$10,000 per store.

In D.C., where more than 80 percent of SNAP-authorized retailers are small stores like corner stores and pharmacies operating on thin margins, added costs or administrative hurdles could discourage participation in the program.⁷ This would reduce the number of places where residents can use their benefits, making it even harder for families in food-insecure neighborhoods — particularly in Wards 7 and 8 — to access affordable groceries. Instead of limiting food choices, improving access to nutritious food requires

policies that strengthen SNAP benefits, support small retailers in underserved areas, and invest in community-based programs that connect residents with affordable, healthy options.

Advocates can take action now to [protect SNAP choice](#) and stop harmful restrictions.

Poverty Level and Food Insecurity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that in 2023, 86.5 percent of U.S. households were food secure, meaning they had consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.⁸ However, approximately 18 million households (13.5 percent) experienced food insecurity at some point during the year, meaning that they faced challenges in obtaining sufficient food due to limited financial resources.⁹ Of these, 8.4 percent were classified as having low food security, when households avoided major disruptions in food intake, while 5.1 percent experienced very low food security, meaning their eating patterns were disrupted and their food intake was reduced.¹⁰

Households with children continued to experience disproportionately higher rates of food insecurity — 17.9 percent nationally, with 1 percent facing severe levels in which children skipped meals or went without eating for an entire day. Food insecurity rates remained highest among single-parent households, households with low incomes, and Black and Hispanic households, a recurring characteristic of most affected food-insecure groups observed in prior years. Regionally, food insecurity remained the highest in the south of the country and lowest in the northeast.

In the District of Columbia, poverty levels increased slightly from 2024 to 2025, reflecting the persistent economic strain faced by many households. According to the D.C. Office of Planning Data Analysis and Visualization Unit, approximately 14.5 percent of D.C. residents live below the poverty line, up from 11.86 percent in 2024.¹¹ Ward 8 continues to experience the greatest economic hardship, with its poverty rate rising from 23.85 percent in 2024 to 26.8 percent in 2025.¹² Ward 7 also continues to face elevated poverty levels, though its rate declined slightly from 23.85 percent in 2024 to 22.4 percent in 2025. Despite this modest decrease, the overall rate in Ward 7 remains nearly double the District average. In contrast, Wards 3 and 4 maintain the lowest poverty rates at under 9 percent.

Lack of Grocery Store Access and the Root Causes

■ Transportation

According to the Council of District of Columbia Office of the Budget Director, 32 percent of District residents commute via public transportation.¹³ However, access to public transportation such as the Metrorail and bus network historically have been unequal. When analyzing the Metro system map, the lack of rail stations east of the Anacostia River becomes clear. Of the six Metro lines that run through D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, four Metro lines run through Southeast D.C. — Orange, Green, Silver and Blue lines — with only two rail stops east of the Anacostia River.¹⁴ In comparison, the Red line does not touch east of the Anacostia River but includes 27 stops through D.C. and Maryland.

Furthermore, recent changes to the District's bus system have significantly affected how residents can move around the city. The Circulator shuttle bus, which required a base fare of just \$1 and had several bus routes that looped around the city, ended service in December 2024.¹⁵ Its closure eliminated a bus service that many residents had relied on for affordable daily transportation. Additionally, in June 2025, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) introduced the Better Bus Project, the first major system overhaul in 50 years.¹⁶ As part of this redesign, 527 bus stops across the capitol region were eliminated.¹⁷ While these changes were intended to improve efficiency, they may have reduced access for older adults, residents with disabilities, and households already facing food insecurity in the process.

■ Economic Stability

Investing in communities across the District remains critical for ensuring long-term economic stability. Employment, education, and income are key indicators of well-being and directly influence residents' ability to afford nutritious food and meet D.C.'s high cost of living. Median household income varies widely by ward. Ward 3 continues to have the highest household income at about \$141,849, while Wards 7 and 8 trail behind at roughly \$69,109 and \$50,931, respectively.¹⁸ Unemployment and poverty rates remain highest in Wards 7 and 8, where disinvestment and limited access to jobs compound inequities in food access. While Wards 2 and 3 maintain the lowest unemployment and

poverty levels, residents in Wards 7 and 8 experience poverty rates more than double the citywide average.¹⁹ These divides underscore how income shapes residents' ability to afford essentials and highlight the need for equitable workforce development and living-wage opportunities across all wards.

■ Cultural Relevance

Cultural relevance is an important factor in shaping food access and affordability across the District. Communities are stronger when local food systems reflect the traditions, dietary preferences, and lived experiences of their residents. In many neighborhoods, where there are fewer full-service grocery stores, the foods available often do not match the cultural foodways of the people who live there. This gap limits both access and utilization. Supporting food retailers and community programs that provide culturally preferred items such as familiar produce, staple grains, and traditional ingredients can encourage healthier diets, encourage stronger connections between shoppers and food providers, support overall well-being of residents, and build a more equitable food system.²⁰

■ Environment and Climate Change

Climate change continues to threaten food security in the District by disrupting local and regional food systems. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and heavier rainfall patterns strain agricultural production and supply chains, contributing to food shortages and higher costs that disproportionately affect residents with low incomes.²¹ Climate change also threatens the nutritional quality of food itself, as elevated carbon dioxide levels and stressed soils reduce the protein and micronutrient content of staple food crops.²² These environmental stressors make it more difficult for households in underserved wards to consistently access affordable, nutritious food. At the same time, neighborhoods already experiencing limited grocery store access are less resilient to climate shocks, and extreme heat and flooding can disrupt transit, making it even harder for residents to travel to and from the grocery store.²³ In response, community-led initiatives such as urban agriculture, farmers' markets, and city-supported resilience planning remain critical for strengthening food access while also addressing the broader impacts of climate change in D.C.²⁴

■ Food Affordability

Food affordability in Washington, D.C., is a multifaceted issue influenced by supply chain disruptions, inflation, and rising grocery prices. Inflation continues to drive up the cost of groceries, making it harder for low-income communities and older adults to maintain a healthy diet. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, food prices in the D.C., Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia region have increased by 1.4 percent since July 2024, with the cost of meat, poultry, fish, and eggs rising the most at 6.5 percent.²⁵ For D.C. residents, the impact is even greater. District households spend an average of \$10,631 each year on groceries compared to the national average of \$7,302, placing an outsized burden on local families.²⁶

■ Local Procurement

Local procurement plays an important role in strengthening the District's food system by connecting residents with fresh, regionally grown produce while supporting local farmers and food businesses. Given D.C.'s limited farmland, surrounding states in the Mid-Atlantic region supply a wide range of fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products that can be distributed through grocery stores, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs), and small neighborhood retailers. Yet, the absence of a central food processing facility in the city limits the ability to scale and distribute this produce widely, leaving grocers to stock goods that must be marked up to account for lengthy processing. Increasing investment in procurement from nearby farms, expanding urban agriculture, and strengthening distribution partnerships can ensure that culturally relevant, fresh, and nutritious foods are available in the District. Efforts to prioritize local procurement not only reduce transportation-related costs and environmental impacts but also keep food dollars circulating within the regional economy, creating a more resilient and community-centered food system.²⁷

Methodology

This review, conducted by D.C. Hunger Solutions, looks at the number of full-service grocery stores across the District. For purposes of this report, full-service grocery stores are defined as business establishments with a minimum of 50 percent of the store's total square footage,

or 6,000 square feet, primarily engaged in retailing designated food products for home consumption and preparation. The data for this report were collected from various sources, including local government databases and economic reports. The focus was on the number of full-service grocery stores in each ward and changes in median household income from 2024 to 2025.

D.C. Hunger Solutions also analyzed a number of indicators of food security, poverty, and health among D.C.’s residents, including median income, race and ethnicity, health outcomes, availability of transportation, and education. Data was gathered from publicly available sources indicated throughout the report and verified where possible. Unlike previous editions of this report, demographic and economic data were drawn from the *U.S. Census Bureau’s 2019–2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates* rather than the D.C. Health Matters portal, which is no longer active.

Number of Grocery Stores

In 2025, the total number of full-service grocery stores in Washington, D.C., increased from 76 to 80. This modest growth reflects incremental changes across several wards,

though access to full-service grocery stores remains uneven across the city.

Ward-level differences highlight the persistent inequities that remain in D.C.’s grocery landscape. Ward 1 gained one store, bringing its total to 13. Ward 2 reported a small decrease from 14 to 13 stores with one new store in the pipeline to be developed in the coming years. Ward 3 increased from 16 to 17 stores with two new stores in the pipeline. Ward 4 remained steady at 11 stores, and Ward 5 grew from eight to nine. Ward 6 added one store, increasing its total to 10 with two additional stores are in the pipeline. Wards 7 and 8, which historically have faced the highest rates of poverty and food insecurity, saw little improvement: Ward 7 continues to have only three full-service grocery stores, while Ward 8 now has one additional grocery store bringing the total to four. While this is a positive development for Ward 8, it is still limited in scale compared to the needs especially east of the river.

In Ward 8, just two full-service grocery stores are located east of the Anacostia River — one being the recently opened Marion Barry Avenue Market. Prior to its opening, the Giant on Alabama Avenue was the single full-service

Data Shifts Since 2024

Change in Number of Full-Service Grocery Stores and Poverty Rate in D.C. Overall and by Ward, 2024–2025

Ward	Population	Number of Full-Service Grocery Stores (2024)*	Number of Full-Service Grocery Stores (2025)	Number of Full-Service Grocery Stores in Pipeline (2024)	Number of Full-Service Grocery Stores in Pipeline (2025)	Median Household Income (2024)	Median Household Income (2025)	Difference in Median Household Income by Ward	Percentage of Individuals Below the Poverty Line (2024)	Percentage of Individuals Below the Poverty Line (2025)
D.C.	672,079	76	80	3	5	\$98,916	\$106,287	\$7,371	11.86%	14.50%
1	79,373	12	13	0	0	\$120,010	\$126,387	\$6,377	8.58%	11.60%
2	78,878	14	13	0	1	\$116,285	\$131,405	\$15,120	5.67%	11.20%
3	78,404	16	17	1	2	\$147,968	\$141,849	(\$6,119)	2.44%	7.40%
4	85,587	11	11	0	0	\$109,966	\$128,210	\$18,244	7.43%	8.70%
5	88,426	8	9	2	0	\$98,326	\$97,817	(\$509)	9.16%	14.70%
6	84,004	9	10	0	2	\$120,943	\$138,047	\$17,104	9.39%	11.30%
7	90,898	3	3	0	0	\$49,814	\$69,109	\$19,295	23.85%	22.40%
8	86,509	3	4	0	0	\$45,598	\$50,931	\$5,333	23.85%	26.80%

*Two additional grocery stores opened following the release of the 2024 report.

- [Washington D.C. Economic Partnership](#)
- [Open Data D.C.](#)
- [D.C. Office of Planning Demographic Data Hub](#)

grocery option for residents in that area. According to 2021 data before the ward boundaries were redrawn to include a section west of the Anacostia River, more than 80,000 people lived east of the river with just this one grocery store serving their community. Wards 7 and 8 also have the largest majority of Black residents out of all D.C. wards.²⁸ This history underscores how years of disinvestment have left particular segments of the D.C. population with limited choices and deepened the grocery gap in the city.

Top Grocery Store Chains in the District of Columbia

The top grocery chains with the largest presence in D.C. were Safeway with 12 locations, followed by Whole Foods and Streets Market with eight each. Giant ranked fourth with seven locations, and Trader Joe's had six. Looking ahead, five additional grocery stores are in the 2025 pipeline and expected to open in the coming years, including one in Ward 2, two in Ward 3, and two in Ward 6.



Grocery Store	Address	Ward
SAFEWAY 12 Locations	1747 Columbia Road NW	Ward 1
	1855 Wisconsin Avenue NW	Ward 2
	1701 Corcoran Street NW	Ward 2
	5545 Connecticut Avenue NW	Ward 3
	6500 Piney Branch Road NW	Ward 4
	3830 Georgia Avenue NW	Ward 4
	1601 Maryland Avenue NE	Ward 5
	415 14th Street SE	Ward 6
	1100 4th Street SW	Ward 6
	490 L Street NW	Ward 6
	2845 Alabama Avenue Se	Ward 7
	322 40th Street Ne	Ward 7
WHOLE FOODS MARKET 8 Locations	967 Florida Avenue NW	Ward 1
	1440 P Street NW	Ward 2
	2201 I Street NW	Ward 2
	4530 40th Street NW	Ward 3
	2323 Wisconsin Avenue NW	Ward 3
	7130 12th Street NW	Ward 4
	600 H Street NE	Ward 6
	101 H Street SE	Ward 8
STREETS MARKET 8 Locations	3146 Mount Pleasant Street NW	Ward 1
	2400 14th Street NW	Ward 1
	1864 Columbia Road NW	Ward 1
	1255 22nd Street NW	Ward 2
	1221 Massachusetts Avenue NW	Ward 2
	2617 P Street NW	Ward 2
	3427 Connecticut Avenue NW	Ward 3
GIANT 7 Locations	51 M Street NE	Ward 6
	1345 Park Road NW	Ward 1
	1400 7th Street NW	Ward 2
	4303 Connecticut Avenue NW	Ward 3
	3336 Wisconsin Avenue NW	Ward 3
	1050 Brentwood Road NE	Ward 5
	300 H Street NE	Ward 6
TRADER JOE'S 6 Locations	1535 Alabama Avenue SE	Ward 8
	1914 14th Street NW	Ward 2
	1101 25th Street NW	Ward 2
	2101 Wisconsin Avenue NW #A	Ward 3
	701 Monroe Street NE	Ward 5
	350 Florida Avenue NE	Ward 5
	750 Pennsylvania Avenue SE	Ward 6

Data provided from Washington D.C. Economic Partnership

Dreaming Out Loud — Marion Barry Avenue Market

September 2025, Dreaming Out Loud opened the Marion Barry Avenue Market and Cafe in Anacostia, bringing fresh produce, groceries and a fast casual cafe to the historic Ward 8 neighborhood. More than just a place to shop, this market serves as a vibrant community hub providing convenient access to healthy foods, and a demo kitchen for nutrition education and cooking classes, with indoor and outdoor seating to celebrate the rich culture of Ward 8. The cafe, led by Food Hub Culinary Director and Chef, Devonte Howard, features a seasonal soul food inspired menu, serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner that tastes like home while nourishing the body.

The Marion Barry Ave Market and Café anchors this chapter in Dreaming Out Loud's story, a continuation of their work to build a vertically integrated, hyperlocal food ecosystem. This model is designed to grow, distribute, prepare, and share food within the community while creating pathways for economic mobility, health equity, and food sovereignty.

The Marion Barry Avenue Market and Cafe is an initiative of Dreaming Out Loud, a nonprofit dedicated to rebuilding urban community-based food systems, and supported by investments from both public and private partners, including the Longer Tables Fund

established by Chef José Andrés, and Mayor Muriel Bowser through the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development's (DMPED) Food Access Fund, which are both aligned to address urgent issues in food systems, social justice, education and advocacy designed to uplift communities.

"We stand on the shoulders of giants like Mayor for Life Marion Barry understanding the economic opportunities attached to food sovereignty. As a mother of three and a Ward 8 resident, I know first hand that a strong hyperlocal food ecosystem strengthens our community's resilience and that's the spirit behind the Marion Barry Avenue Market & Café," said Jaren Hill Lockridge, director of partnerships.

These disparities mirror broader socioeconomic divides across the District. Median household income is highest in Ward 3, where residents also experience some of the lowest poverty rates.²⁹ In contrast, Wards 7 and 8 continue to report median household incomes below \$70,000 and poverty rates that are more than double the District average.³⁰ The correlation between income, poverty, and grocery store access underscores the structural inequities that drive the grocery gap and shape residents' ability to secure affordable, nutritious food.

Ongoing District Grocery Store Policies and Initiatives

Introducing and funding targeted legislation has been a critical step taken by D.C. government to address the persistent lack of grocery store access in low-income areas. These policy proposals not only seek to increase the number of grocery stores but also aim to alleviate the broader issue of food insecurity, which disproportionately affects underserved communities. By investing in infrastructure and prioritizing these neighborhoods in urban planning, legislation serves as a powerful tool to combat the structural inequalities that contribute to limited access. This approach recognizes that sustainable, equitable food systems require more than short-term solutions — it necessitates comprehensive policies that support long-term community health and economic stability.

■ Nourish DC Collaborative

Launched in 2021, the Nourish DC Collaborative was created in partnership with the government of the District of Columbia to support the development of a robust ecosystem of locally owned food businesses, neighborhood vibrancy, and health equity in D.C. communities, especially in neighborhoods underserved by grocery stores and other food businesses. To achieve a more equitable food system in the District, this collaborative helps with financing, technical assistance, and grants. Awarded grants support grocery stores, food incubators, corner stores, cooperative business, farmers' markets, food delivery businesses, urban farms, food processors, food hubs, restaurants, and caterers.

Since launching in September 2021, the Nourish DC Collaborative has financed over \$19 million with the

support of lending partners Capital Impact Partners, CDC Small Business Finance (CDC), City First Enterprises (CFE), EatsPlace, the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC), and Washington Area Community Investment Fund (Wacif); provided technical assistance to over 1,300 food-based businesses; and funded grants in excess of \$900,000 to more than 20 food businesses in D.C.³¹

“The Marion Barry Avenue Market & Cafe is a community food space for transformation of the status quo, as we work to end food apartheid. It’s not only about access to fresh, local produce but also economic development, and an inspirational vision of holistic community health.”

— Chris Bradshaw, Founder & Executive Director,
Marion Barry Avenue Market and Cafe in Anacostia

■ **The Farmers Market Support Amendment Act of 2025**

Introduced by Councilmember Christina Henderson, along with Councilmembers Matthew Frumin, Robert White, Charles Allen, Brianne Nadeau, and Zachary Parker, the [Farmers Market Support Amendment Act](#) was passed and fully funded in September 2025.³² The law establishes a farmers’ market support program within the D.C. Department of Health to provide technical and financial assistance to farmers’ markets and stands. Specifically, the law aims to improve the farmers’ market licensing and permitting process, increase coordination between agencies regulating farmers’ markets, and will establish a grant program to support the operations of markets in low food access areas.

■ **Supermarket Incentive Tax**

The Supermarket Tax Exemption Act of 2000 was designed to spur grocery store development in underserved neighborhoods by waiving certain taxes and fees. While the intent was to attract investment and expand access to fresh food, the program has largely failed to draw new supermarkets to Wards 7 and 8, where residents continue to face the city’s

most significant grocery gaps. Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Tax incentives alone have not been enough to overcome the higher costs and logistical barriers of opening and sustaining grocery stores east of the Anacostia River.

To make the program more effective and equitable, D.C. Hunger Solutions supports additional reforms, including:

- Tightening geographic targeting to focus incentives on census tracts with low food access and low household incomes.
- Linking incentives to clear public benefits such as affordable pricing, fresh produce availability, and acceptance of SNAP and WIC.
- Pairing tax incentives with direct support, including grants or low-interest loans for store build-out, security, and workforce development.
- Improving accountability and transparency, through public reporting on where incentives are used and how they impact access to healthy food.
- Encouraging community partnerships, requiring grocers to engage local residents, source from local suppliers, and invest in neighborhood well-being.

■ **Healthy Corner Stores**

According to USDA SNAP-Ed Connection, many families rely heavily on corner stores for food purchases in communities without access to supermarkets, farmers’ markets, or other retailers that regularly sell fresh produce and healthy items.³³ In the District, DC Central Kitchen’s Healthy Corners program helps address this gap by delivering fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables to stores in low-income neighborhoods. The program supplies produce at wholesale prices and in smaller quantities than conventional distributors, making it more affordable for store owners and consumers alike.³⁴ Healthy Corners also offers a “SNAP Match” incentive to help stretch food budgets for families. When an individual uses their SNAP benefits to purchase at least 50 cents worth of produce at participating corner stores, they will receive a \$5 coupon to purchase more produce.³⁵ As of 2025, 57 convenience stores across the District participate in the Healthy Corners program, many of which are authorized WIC and SNAP retailers, making it a vital initiative in expanding access to nutritious food in underserved communities.

■ DC Good Food Purchasing Coalition

The D.C. Good Food Purchasing Coalition is a local coalition working to transform local food procurement in the District of Columbia by adopting values-based food procurement policies. The coalition aims to use institutional purchasing to support healthier food systems that benefit nutrition, local procurement, fair

labor, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. It is a collaboration between organizations like D.C. Hunger Solutions, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) Food and Nutrition Services, DC Greens, the DC Food Policy Council, and many other community partners and government agencies taking a major step toward a fairer, more sustainable, and community-centered food system in the District.

Stanton Supermarket Healthy Corners

For more than 15 years, Yonas Haile, owner of Stanton Supermarket in Ward 8, has served his community with a focus on accessibility and care. What began as a small corner store has grown into a neighborhood staple for fresh food. Through his partnership with DC Central Kitchen's Healthy Corners program, Haile has expanded his store to include a produce section offering fresh fruits, vegetables, and frozen options to meet community demand.

"The demand was the driving force for us to go ahead and expand," he explained. His store now places healthy food front and center, with most customers using SNAP (he estimates up to 60 percent to 80 percent of his customer base) and benefiting from the SNAP Match program, which increases the value of their purchases for fresh produce.

Haile credits the success of the expansion to collaboration with and the commitment of DC Central Kitchen, but emphasizes that corner stores might need more support. Although DC Central Kitchen covered much of the cost for the expansion, Haile himself had to contribute nearly \$25,000 out of his store revenue to help get it started. "Some stores might not be willing to invest in a produce section on their own," he said. "If the city supported stores with grants or funding to expand healthy choices, it's a win-win situation — the store wins, the community wins."

By providing targeted funding and start-up support for small retailers, D.C. can empower more corner stores like Stanton Supermarket to bring fresh, affordable produce to neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River and help close the grocery gap one store at a time.

Recommendations for Improving Grocery Store Access

■ Increase Local Supplemental SNAP Benefits

The Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act, enacted in January 2023, temporarily increased the maximum monthly SNAP benefit in the District by 10 percent, an average boost of \$47 per recipient that helped families keep pace with rising food costs.³⁶ The provision expired at the end of fiscal year 2024, and in fiscal year 2025, all SNAP households returned to receiving their previous benefit allotments.

SNAP provides critical support to more than 140,000 D.C. residents, bringing over \$319 million into the local economy.³⁷ Approximately 13 percent of D.C. households participate in the program, including large shares of families with children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.³⁸ Most participating households, roughly 69 percent, include at least one employed person, underscoring that SNAP is a vital tool for working families facing high living costs in the District. In 2024, SNAP participants in D.C. received an average of \$193.47 per month in SNAP benefits — averaging just \$6.36 per person per day.³⁹

Increasing SNAP benefits not only reduces hunger and improves health outcomes but also strengthens the local economy. Each additional \$1 in SNAP benefits generates up to \$1.80 in local economic activity, benefiting grocery stores, corner stores, farmers' markets, and the workers they employ.⁴⁰ In 2024, customers using their SNAP benefits brought in over \$216 million in revenue to D.C. retailers.⁴¹ Given the continuing rise in food costs across the region and the benefit to local retailers, D.C. Hunger Solutions strongly supports increasing the local SNAP supplemental benefit.

■ Improve the WIC Expansion Act

The WIC Program Expansion Act of 2018 waives certain restrictions on Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) vendors in D.C., such as requirements related to store size and number of cashiers. It also mandates a coordinated effort across District agencies to expand WIC participation. To further advance the act, the District government should prioritize funding for training and technical assistance, particularly for small and independent retailers, on topics such as labeling and compliance.⁴²

■ Invest in Alternate Models for Grocery Access

Expanding grocery access in the District will require exploring models beyond traditional full-service stores. Smaller footprint stores can bring fresh produce and staple items into neighborhoods with limited space for large retailers. Co-operative grocery stores are a type of grocery store collectively owned and democratically controlled by its members, who are usually customers of the store.⁴³ They offer a way to keep food dollars local while tailoring product selection to neighborhood needs. Nonprofit grocery stores provide another promising model and operate with missions centered on affordability and equity rather than profit, which can help ensure that healthy, culturally relevant foods are accessible in underserved areas.

Publicly owned grocery stores also present an innovative model for expanding access in areas where private investment has historically fallen short. These stores, operated or subsidized by the government, could help fill critical food access gaps by ensuring that healthy, affordable groceries are available regardless of market profitability or private sector interest.

■ Expand Funding for Grocery Delivery Services

In the District's fiscal year 2026 budget, a suite of innovative grocery access models received critical funding to help close longstanding gaps in food availability, especially in underserved communities. These investments reflect a growing commitment to equity-driven solutions that meet residents where they are. Home-delivered meals, the [Grocery Access Pilot Program](#), and food retail investment opportunities represent a meaningful step forward.⁴⁴



■ Adopt Medicaid 1115 Waiver (Food As Medicine)

The passing of H.R. 1 marks a significant shift in federal priorities that could limit access to health and nutrition support for residents with low incomes. More than 140,000 District residents rely on SNAP. Cuts to SNAP, including stricter work requirements, ineligibility of certain humanitarian immigrants, and the elimination of exemptions for veterans, individuals experiencing homelessness, and former foster care youth ages 24 and younger, under H.R. 1 jeopardize the stability of thousands of households across D.C. As these changes threaten to reduce the reach of Medicaid and other safety-net programs, the food-as-medicine provisions in D.C.'s recently submitted Medicaid 1115 Demonstration Waiver offers a proactive approach to improving health by addressing the root causes of diet-related diseases through better nutrition.

“Food as Medicine” is a concept that highlights the idea of using food to prevent, manage, and treat diet-related disease by focusing on the understanding that diet and nutrition play a fundamental role in maintaining health, preventing chronic conditions, and even reversing certain diseases. Nationally, 85 percent of health care spending is linked to diet-related diseases demonstrating that investing in nutrition-based interventions can improve outcomes and reduce costs.⁴⁵ If approved, the waiver will allow D.C. to use Medicaid funds for programs, including home-delivered meals, produce prescriptions, and nutrition counseling.⁴⁶ These benefits would prioritize residents with chronic conditions, pregnant and postpartum individuals, and families with children.

Grocery stores play an essential role in the food-as-medicine effort by serving as access points for healthy, affordable food and partnering with health programs that promote produce incentives and nutrition education. D.C. Hunger Solutions strongly supports the approval and implementation of the food-as-medicine provisions in the waiver, which would be beneficial in reducing health disparities, lowering medical costs, and strengthening the connection between health care and the local food system.

■ Invest in a Central D.C. Food Processing Facility

Establishing a central food processing facility in D.C. would help strengthen the district's food system by improving efficiency, reducing costs, and supporting equitable grocery access. By processing and distributing locally and regionally sourced foods, the facility would make it easier for grocery stores, particularly smaller neighborhood retailers and corner stores, to stock fresh, affordable produce and staple items. It could also contribute to less food waste as perishable goods have to travel less distance from farm to table. This facility could play a key role in advancing the District's local procurement and food equity goals.

■ Increase Public Transportation Infrastructure in Wards 7 and 8 and Monitor Bus Route Changes

Future transportation planning should prioritize Wards 7 and 8, which continue to face limited transit access and a scarcity of full-service grocery stores. Furthermore, the Better Bus Network redesign should be carefully evaluated to ensure that the new routes and schedule changes do not further isolate residents from essential destinations like grocery stores.

“Some people don’t have cars, so having healthy choices in the neighborhood makes it easy and convenient for them.”

– Yonas Haile, owner of Stanton Supermarket, Ward 8

■ Establish Healthy Food Priority Areas

Establishing Healthy Food Priority Areas would allow the District to identify hyper-local communities most affected by limited grocery access and develop



targeted strategies to close the gap. These areas would serve as focus zones for coordinated investment, bringing together public agencies, local organizations, residents, and food retailers to expand access to affordable, nutritious foods. Strategies could include incentives for full-service and alternative format grocery stores to open in underserved neighborhoods and promote other innovative models to bridge the gap. By concentrating resources where the need is greatest, D.C. can strengthen local food systems, support neighborhoods, and ensure every resident has convenient access to healthy, affordable options.

■ Engage Communities in Decision-Making

Efforts to expand grocery access must begin with the voices of the communities most affected by food insecurity. Residents should be actively involved in shaping, implementing, and evaluating new food access programs to ensure they meet real needs and build long-term trust. Community engagement not only improves the success and sustainability of new grocery initiatives but also recognizes and elevates the informal food networks that may already exist such as mutual aid groups, community gardens, and corner store collaborations. In many cases, the most effective solutions in Wards 7 and 8 may already be in motion and simply need formal support, investment, and scaling. Centering residents' leadership in decision-making ensures that every solution reflects community priorities and strengthens local ownership of the D.C. food system.

Conclusion

Findings from this year's report reveal that inequities, particularly in neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River, where residents continue to face the city's most persistent grocery gaps, persist. Limited access to full-service grocery stores and affordable, nutritious food options continues to disproportionately impact communities of color and households with low incomes — exacerbating health disparities and contributing to higher rates of chronic disease such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. These food access challenges are intertwined with broader social determinants of health, affecting everything from family stability and educational outcomes to economic opportunity and community well-being. Continued, coordinated action is essential to ensure that all D.C. communities have equitable access to nutritious, affordable food.

At the same time, federal policy changes under the new budget reconciliation law (H.R. 1) have intensified these pressures. Cuts and restrictions to SNAP and other nutrition programs are reducing families' food purchasing power while threatening the economic stability of local grocery retailers that serve them. The result is a widening gap that jeopardizes both household food security and the sustainability of neighborhood food economies.

To reverse these trends, the District must continue prioritizing sustained investment in grocery retailers and local food systems. That means incentivizing grocery and small-format retailers to open in, and remain in, underserved areas, particularly Wards 7 and 8; expanding local food procurement initiatives that strengthen connections between D.C. farmers, distributors, and neighborhood stores; integrating food access and affordability into public health, housing, and economic development planning, recognizing that food is a cornerstone of health equity; and supporting community-based food models — such as Healthy Corner Stores, cooperatives, and mobile markets — that provide culturally relevant, affordable, and accessible options to residents.

Ensuring every D.C. resident has reliable access to nutritious, affordable food is not just a matter of health — it is an investment in economic resilience, racial equity, and community strength.

D.C. Hunger Solutions remains hopeful — and determined — that the District will build on recent momentum to enact bold, equity-driven policies that close the grocery gap, fortify local food systems, and ensure every resident has access to nutritious, affordable food. Achieving true food justice demands not only continued progress, but a sustained commitment to transformative change.

Endnotes

¹ United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Recovery Service. *Household food security in the United States in 2023*. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/109896/err-337.pdf?v=1460.1>. Accessed on 30 September 2025.

² Capital Area Food Bank. (2025). *2025 Hunger report*. Available at <https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/report-2025/>. Accessed on October 13, 2025.

³ D.C. Hunger Solutions. (2024, March). *2024 Racial equity report: How racial inequities impact food security in the District of Columbia*.

⁴ DC Central Kitchen. (n.d.). DC Central Kitchen Healthy Corners. Available at: <https://dccentralkitchen.org/healthy-corners/>. Accessed on September 18, 2025.

⁵ DC Greens. (n.d.). Produce Rx. Available at: <https://dcgreens.org/produce-rx/>. Accessed on November 6, 2025.

⁶ Capital Area Food Bank. (n.d.). Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Available at: https://www.capitalareafoodbank.org/what-we-do/direct-food-distribution-programs/commodity-supplemental-food-program/?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F. Accessed on November 6, 2025.

⁷ United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2023). *SNAP retailer locator*. Available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer-locator>. Accessed on October 13, 2025.

⁸ United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Recovery Service. *Household food security in the United States in 2023*. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/109896/err-337.pdf?v=1460.1>. Accessed on 30 September 2025.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ District of Columbia Office of Planning. (n.d.). *District of Columbia profiles*. Available at: <https://opdatahub.dc.gov/pages/district-of-columbia-profiles>. Accessed on September 9, 2025.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Council of the District of Columbia: Office of the Budget Director (2022). *Chartbook for Metro for D.C. Amendment Act of 2022 (COW Committee Print) & Fare-Free Bus Funding Emergency Amendment Act of 2022*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bbd09f3d74562c7f0e4bb10/t/6388c46e947b6b1d4df->

- [dc200/1669907566390/Chartbook+-+Metro+for+DC+and+-+Fare-Free+Bus+12.01.2022.pdf](https://www.wmata.com/schedules/maps/upload/system-map-rail.pdf). Accessed on October 19, 2025.
- ¹⁴ Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. (2025). *Metro system map*. Available at: <https://www.wmata.com/schedules/maps/upload/system-map-rail.pdf>. Accessed on October 3, 2025.
- ¹⁵ District Department of Transportation. (2024). *Bowser administration and Metro announce plan for enhanced Metrobus service to help riders amid DC Circulator phase-out*. Available at: <https://ddot.dc.gov/release/bowser-administration-and-metro-announce-plan-enhanced-metrobus-service-help-riders-amid-dc>. Accessed on October 3, 2025.
- ¹⁶ Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. *Metro's new bus network is here*. Available at: <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/Better-Bus/index.cfm>. Accessed on October 3, 2025.
- ¹⁷ Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. (2025a). *Bus stop consolidation*. Available at: https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/plans/Better-Bus/upload/Bus-Stop-Consolidation_2025-Better-Bus-Network.pdf. Accessed on October 3, 2025.
- ¹⁸ District of Columbia Office of Planning. (n.d.). *District of Columbia profiles*. Available at: <https://opdatahub.dc.gov/pages/district-of-columbia-profiles>. Accessed on September 9, 2025.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Jayasinghe, S., Byrne, N. M., & Hills, A. P. (2025). *Cultural influences on dietary choices*. *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases*, 90, 22–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcad.2025.02.003>. Accessed on October 17, 2025.
- ²¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2021). *Climate change and social vulnerability in the United States: A focus on six impacts*. Available at: https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-11/factsheet_low-income.pdf. Accessed on September 23, 2025.
- ²² U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, March 2). *Food security*. CDC Climate and Health. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/climate-health/php/effects/food-security.html>. Accessed on September 23, 2025.
- ²³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2021). *Climate change and social vulnerability in the United States: A focus on six impacts*. Available at: https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-11/factsheet_low-income.pdf. Accessed on September 23, 2025.
- ²⁴ Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention & Wellness. (2022). *Addressing climate change by improving DC's food system*. Milken Institute School of Public Health The George Washington University. Available at: <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/glasgow-declaration-policy-brief.pdf>. Accessed on September 23, 2025.
- ²⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Consumer Price Index, Washington-Arlington-Alexandria — July 2025*. Available at: www.bls.gov. https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/consumerpriceindex_washingtondc.htm. Accessed on October 14, 2025.
- ²⁶ Washington DC Economic Partnership. (2025, July). *Washington, D.C., grocery market*. ArcGIS StoryMaps. Available at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1aea9bbb2f5249dd94e7bc6ca4c629b4>. Accessed on September 15, 2025.
- ²⁷ DC Food Policy Council. (2022). *Values-based food sourcing: An introduction to buying food that's good for people and planet*. Available at: https://dcfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/valuesbasedfoodsourcingguide_final.pdf. Accessed on October 10, 2025.
- ²⁸ District of Columbia Office of Planning. (n.d.). *District of Columbia profiles*. Available at: <https://opdatahub.dc.gov/pages/district-of-columbia-profiles>. Accessed on October 16, 2025.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Capital Impact Partners. (2025). *Nourish DC Collaborative*. Available at: <https://www.capitalimpact.org/programs/nourish-dc-collaborative/>. Accessed on October 10, 2025.
- ³² Council of the District of Columbia. (2025). *D.C. Law 26-27. Farmers Market Support Amendment Act of 2025*. Available at: <https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/26-27>. Accessed on October 17, 2025.
- ³³ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2016). *Healthy Corner Stores*. <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resourcefinder/Healthy-Corner-Store-Guide.pdf>. Accessed on October 17, 2025.
- ³⁴ DC Central Kitchen. (n.d.). *DC Central Kitchen Healthy Corners*. Available at: <https://dccentralkitchen.org/healthy-corners/>. Accessed on September 18, 2025.
- ³⁵ DC Central Kitchen. (2025). *Benefit programs*. Available at: <https://dccentralkitchen.org/benefit-programs/>. Accessed on September 18, 2025.
- ³⁶ Council of the District of Columbia. (2023). *Bill 24-0600 - Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022*. Available at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B24-0600>. Accessed on October 17, 2025.
- ³⁷ Food Research and Action Center. (2025). *Protect SNAP to reduce hunger and strengthen local economies in the District of Columbia*. Available at: https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAP_Fact-Sheets_022525_DC8.pdf. Accessed on October 17, 2025.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Council of the District of Columbia. (2019). *D.C. Law 22-255. Women, Infants, and Children Program Expansion Act of 2018*. Available at: <https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/22-255>. Accessed on November 7, 2025.
- ⁴³ National Co-op Grocers. (n.d.). *What is a food co-op? Co+Op*. Available at: <https://www.grocery.coop/article/what-food-co-op/>. Accessed on October 9, 2025.
- ⁴⁴ D.C. Food Policy Council (2025). *FY 2026 final budget for District Food Programs factsheet*. Available at: <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/FY2026-DC-Budget-for-Food-Factsheet.pdf>. Accessed on October 17, 2025.
- ⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). *USDA actions on nutrition security*. Available at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-actions-nutrition-security-infographic.pdf>. Accessed on October 9, 2025.
- ⁴⁶ Government of the District of Columbia. (2024). *District of Columbia Section 1115 Medicaid Demonstration Renewal Request*. Available at: https://dhcf.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dhcf/page_content/attachments/DC%201115%20Renewal%20Application_20240606.pdf. Accessed on October 16, 2025.