

2018  
SENIOR HUNGER  
COMMUNITY  
ASSESSMENT REPORT



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# INTRODUCTION

In this report the Senior Hunger Action Team of the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions will lay out the strategic process, the results and the key initiatives that have been adopted from implementing their Senior Hunger Community Assessment. We hope to provide insight to the landscape of senior hunger and the new knowledge we gained on the barriers our older adult population in Dallas County is faced with when accessing food. Over the course of this assessment, new partnerships were established and light was shined on unexpected issues. The Senior Hunger Action Team hopes that this report serves as a resource for our community members, partners and organizations and demonstrates how community collaboration is imperative in making Dallas County a better place for our senior population.

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# THE LANDSCAPE OF THE SENIOR POPULATION

## STATISTICS FROM A NATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

The dynamic shifts in our country's population is a topic that we are all too familiar with. The number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to more than double from 46 million to 98 million by the year 2060. Those who make up this growing group will affect the nation's total population with a rise from 15 percent to 24 percent in the next coming years. As the rate of older adults continues to grow, we find that this population tends to work longer hours and has become more racially and ethnically diverse. In 2014, around 23 percent of men ages 65 and older and about 15 percent of women ages 65 and older were in the labor force. That statistic is projected to rise further by 2022 to 27 percent men and 20 percent women. By 2060, the share of the older adult population that is non-Hispanic White is projected to decrease to 54.6 percent (compared to 78.3 percent in 2014).

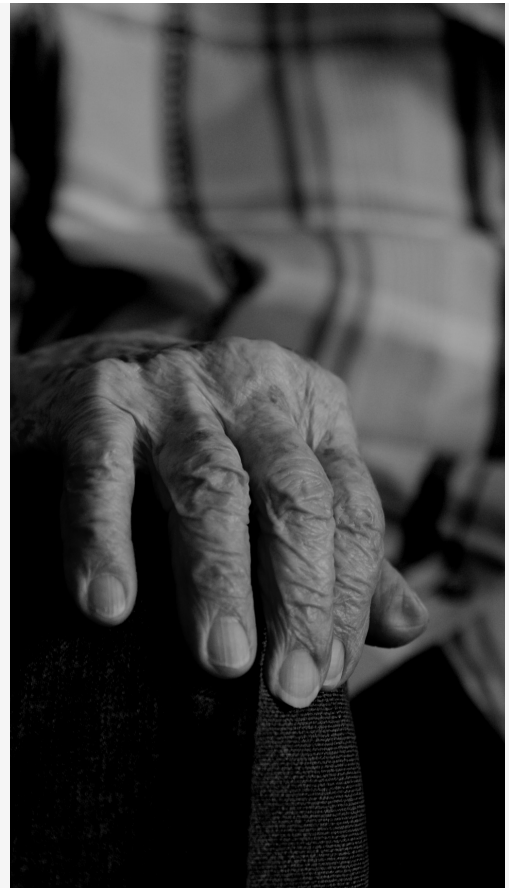
The burgeoning number of older adults in the United States is not just isolated to the nation. It is estimated that almost 12 percent of Texans – 3.2 million people – are over the age of 65 years of age. By 2050, that figure is expected to increase to almost 20 percent. Dallas County is currently home to 117,236 seniors ages 65 and over which is roughly 10.5 percent of the county's population. With a rapidly growing older adult population, comes serious health and economic challenges, specifically, higher obesity rates, a wider economic disparity gap, an increase in seniors under the poverty level along with a greater number of older adults who are considered food insecure.

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In 2017, roughly 5.5 million seniors- around 7.7 percent of the nation's population- were considered food insecure. While, 3.1 percent (2.2 million seniors) were identified as VLFS (very low food secure).<sup>4</sup> At the local level, it is estimated that 15 percent of seniors 65 and older live below the poverty line in Dallas County, a rate that is 1.4 times higher than the state level.<sup>5</sup> In addition, 23 percent of Dallas County residence who 65 and older are receiving food stamps.<sup>6</sup> With the expanding population of the older adults in the Dallas community as well as the state of Texas, it is imperative that we understand this populations needs as well as the barriers that prevent seniors from living a health and fullfilling life.

## WHY THE NEED FOR AN ASSESSMENT?

The Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solution's (DCHS) Senior Hunger Action Team has continued to improve upon their strategic working plan to guide the coalition's efforts in addressing senior hunger. As a coalition, they are aware of the multifaceted issue hunger poses to the Dallas community. With the increasing number of individuals, especially those in the senior community, who struggle to provide food for themselves and loved ones, the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions determined it was imperative to hear from seniors themselves what their needs are and the barriers that prevent them from meeting those needs.



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# THE SCOPE OF WORK

## ASSESSMENT TIMELINE, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EXECUTION.

A Community Assessment Task Force was created by members of the DCHS Senior Hunger Action Team. Members of the Community Assessment Task Force were made up of a diverse group of community organizations, private corporations and county/city agencies. At every step of the community assessment, each representative provided their input and knowledge in planning, collecting and analyzing the survey data. In addition, members of the Community Assessment Task Force utilized the data gathered to brainstorm potential initiatives the Senior Hunger Action Team could implement.

Below are all the partner organizations who were apart of the *task force* or helped collect surveys/ focus groups

- Brody Senior Services
- *Bubbl Rides- Dallas*
- First Baptist Carrollton
- *City of Dallas: Office of Community Care- Senior Services*
- *City Square*
- *Dallas Area Agency on Aging*
- *Dallas County Health and Human Services: Older Adult Services*
- *DHA: Housing Solutions for North Texas*
- Dallas Senior Affairs Community Listening
- Metrocrest Services
- Mt. Olive Lutheran Church Food Pantry
- *My Ride Dallas*
- *National Council of Jewish Women-Greater Dallas Section*
- *North Texas Food Bank*
- Office of Adam Medrano- Dallas District 2
- Office of Omar Narvaez-Dallas District 6
- *Star Transit*
- *Society of St. Vincent de Paul of North Texas*
- *The Senior Source*  
The Wilkinson Center

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# COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT TIMELINE

Prior to starting this Community Assessment the Task Force created an Assessment Timeline to guide this process. The Task Force had estimated that they would complete this assessment within a year. At each month there were specific goals that the Task Force aimed to accomplish.

TASK	START DATE	END DATE
<b>MONTH 1</b> TASK FORCE CREATED AND SET ASSESSMENT GOALS	SEPTEMBER 2018	SEPTEMBER 2018
<b>MONTH 2</b> IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES DETERMINED	OCTOBER 2018	OCTOBER 2018
<b>MONTH 3</b> BRAINSTORMED QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEYS	NOVEMBER 2018	NOVEMBER 2018
<b>MONTH 4</b> IMPLEMENTED THE ASSESSMENT	DECEMBER 2018	JANUARY 2019
<b>MONTH 5-7</b> COLLECTED COMPLETED SURVEYS AND CONDUCTED DATA ANALYSIS	JANUARY 2019	MARCH 2019
<b>MONTH 8-10</b> IDENTIFIED KEY THEMES IN THE DATA AND DETERMINED COALITION INITIATIVES	APRIL 2019	JUNE 2019

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# IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

## Methods used to collect data from the Dallas older adult population



**1,538 SENIOR  
QUESTIONNAIRES**



**26 SENIOR SERVICE  
SURVEYS**



**5 SENIOR FOCUS  
GROUPS**

In order to gather information on the needs of our older adult population, the Task Force decided to implement this assessment in three parts. A questionnaire designed specifically for seniors to fill out was created. Questions ranged from SNAP utilization, food access, transportation preferences and food insecurity screening questions. A copy of the senior questionnaire along with a link to the online version was distributed every week to the coalitions Senior and Faith Community network. With the help of over 20 organizational partners, 1,538 surveys were collected.

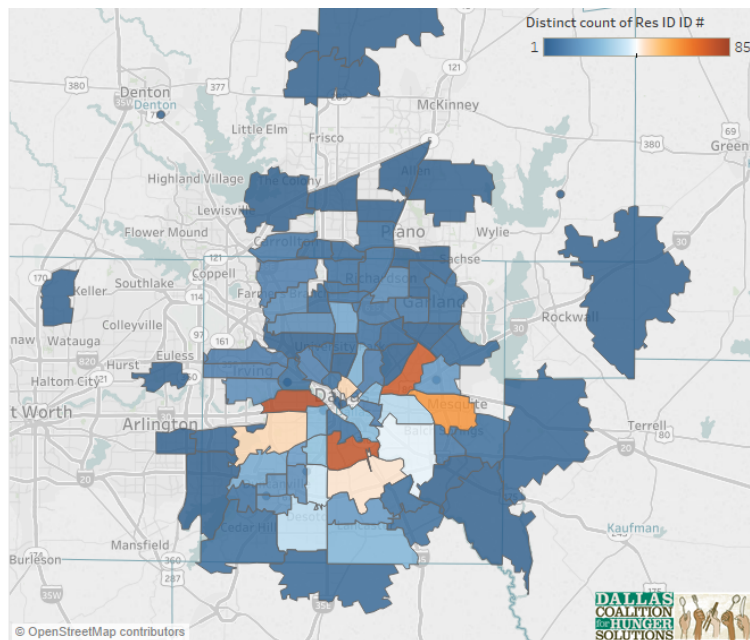
Focus groups were also determined to be an effective way of gathering qualitative data related to senior hunger. Open-ended questions were produced and followed the same themes as the senior questionnaire. These focus groups were conducted throughout the month at various senior centers and Dallas Housing Authority Properties. A representative from the Community Assessment Task Force facilitated each focus group. In total, five focus groups were conducted, with a total of 25 individuals participating.

Finally, the Task Force felt it necessary to also hear from service providers who worked with seniors on what they feel are senior's critical needs in regards to hunger and where there are specific gaps of service. Online surveys were sent out via email every week and asked how senior services could be improved. In total, 26 surveys were collected.

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# KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

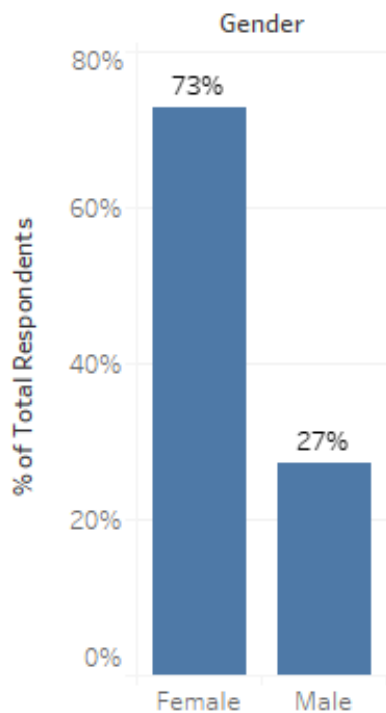
With the help of the Dallas Coalition's many partner organizations and agencies, 1,538 senior questionnaires were received, 26 online service provider surveys were completed, and 5 focus groups were conducted. With this survey data, the Community Assessment Task Force was able to understand how issues such as transportation, housing, food access and monthly expenses play a vital role in the senior community's every day life. Among the senior questionnaires collected, 92.7 percent of the questionnaires were conducted in English and roughly 7 percent were in Spanish. A large portion of our survey respondents centered around the Southern and Western parts of Dallas county, with the largest ethnicity surveyed being African Americans followed by Caucasians and Hispanics.



It is important to note that after collecting the surveys, it became clear that the Northern part of Dallas County had fewer participants. This could be due to how the surveys were collected. The process of collecting surveys was done through engaging the Coalition's partners and was not geographically planned out. Many of the Coalition's partners who volunteered to gather surveys typically served in areas where there is a higher need for assistance which resulted in a larger number of respondents in the Southern portion of Dallas County.



# SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS



In order to have a better understanding of the respondents surveyed in this community assessment, we included several demographic questions, including age, gender, employment status, income level, etc. Among the the 1,538 questionnaires collected we found that a large portion of our respondents were largely female. In total 73 percent of respondents identified as female and 27 percent of respondents identified as male.

Despite there being equal opportunity for both men and women to fill out this questionnaire, it seemed that women were more comfortable sharing their information. We also found that men would also ask to complete the questionnaire together with their wife. This may account for the disparity in respondents based on gender.

Below we compared income level and employment status of our respondents to understand the economic situations many of them were experiencing and how that relates to food insecurity. We found that the highest category of our survey respondents were those who were retired and making less than \$20,000 a year. The second largest category were those who were retired and making \$20,001-\$50,000/Prefer Not to Say.

## Employment v. Income

Employment	Total Number of Respondents				
	Less Than 20,000	Prefer Not to Say	20,001-50,000	50,001-100,00	100,001 and Above
Retired	367	143	122	21	6
Unable to Work	106	36	12	1	2
Part Time	29	6	13	2	1
Unemployed but Not Looking	21	9	8	1	
Unemployed but Looking	16	2	7		
Full Time	4		12	3	

## Age vs. Ethnicity

Total Number of Respondents  
1  321

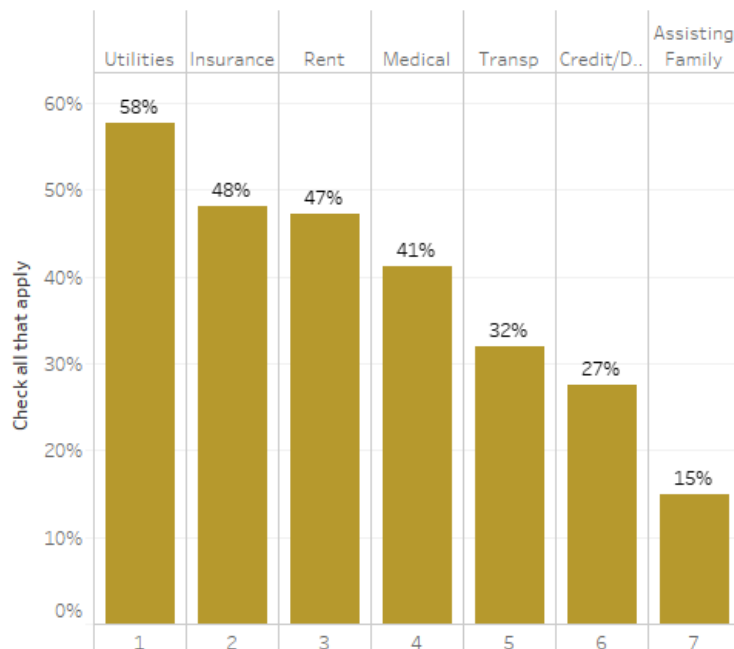
Age	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic	Native American/Ame..	Other	White
Between 65-80	26	321	117	3	16	105
80 or Older	11	103	32	3	6	62
Between 60-64	7	82	23	3	4	19
Prefer Not to Say		23	7	1	1	8

In addition we also compared age and ethnicity among the participants surveyed and found that a large portion of our respondents were African American and between the ages of 65 and 80.

## UTILITY COSTS VS. FOOD

As stated previously, we explored several themes with both the survey and focus group questions, striving to have a better understanding of how SNAP utilization, food access, transportation preferences, and outside monthly expenses impacted a senior's ability to obtain healthy and nutritious foods.

### A Total Ranking of Monthly Expensesne That Cut into Food Budget



We asked participants of the questionnaire to check all the options they felt cut into their food budget for the month. Surprisingly, utilities was ranked as the number one item that cut into a seniors food budget, followed by insurance and rent.

When comparing this by each income level, utilities ranked as either the first or second item that cut into a monthly food budget for respondents. Many indicated that they felt they were forced to choose between paying to keep their lights on or buying food for the week.

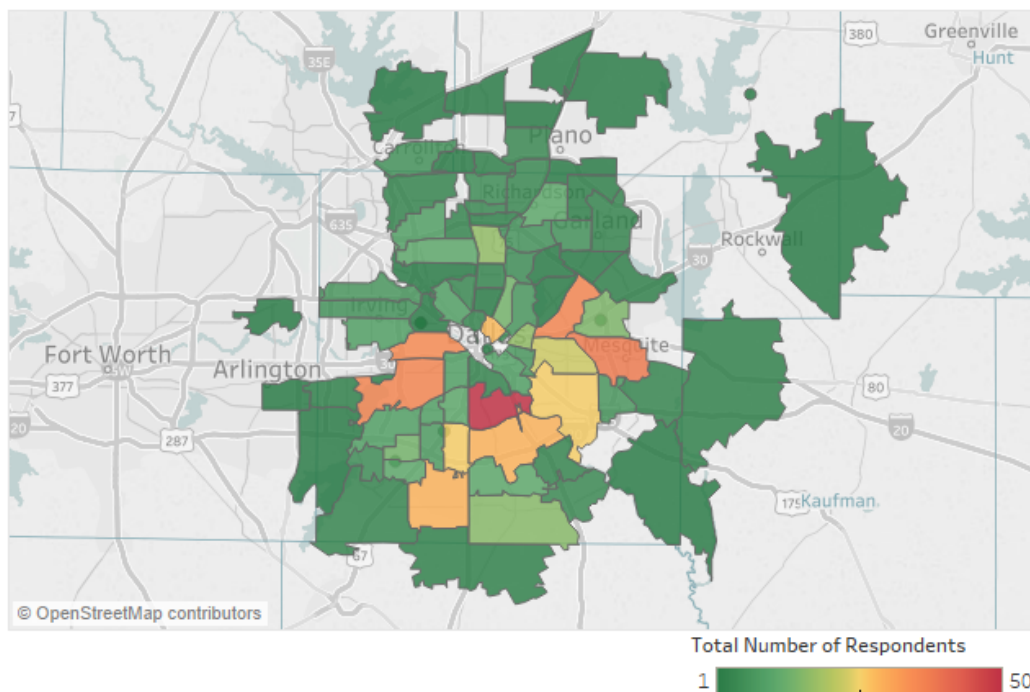
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## SENIORS AND SNAP

SNAP, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is a government funded benefit that allows for individuals who qualify to receive assistance in purchasing food. Today SNAP, also formally know as Food Stamps, comes in the form of a Lone Star card that looks much like a credit card and can be swiped at most grocery and convenience stores to purchase food.

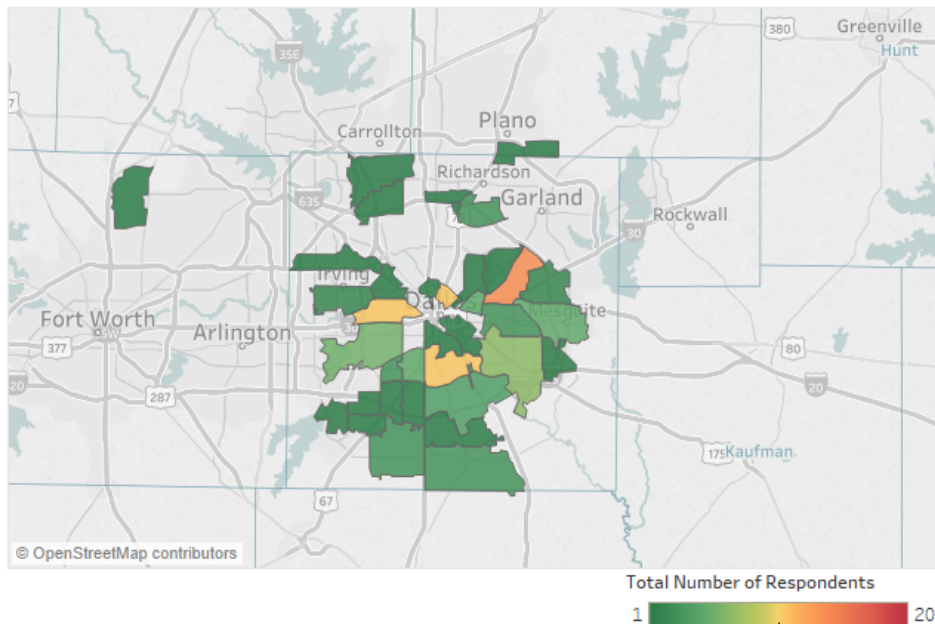
Many seniors are eligible to receive SNAP benefits, meaning their income level is low enough that they can qualify for assistance. To understand more about SNAP usage among seniors in the Dallas Community, questions about SNAP usage and SNAP difficulty were asked in the questionnaire and during focus groups. Below is a map of respondents who indicated that they had not utilized SNAP benefits in the last six months.

Respondents Who are Not Utilizing SNAP

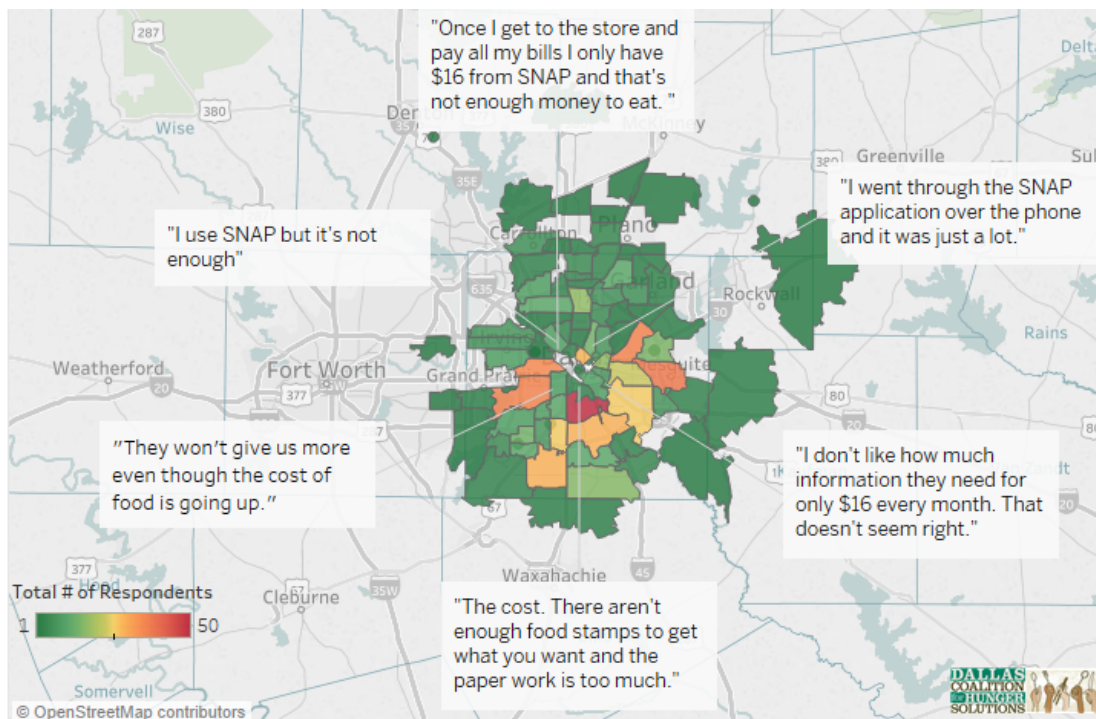


The survey results showed large sections of Southern Dallas had residents that were not utilizing the SNAP benefits that many qualified for. In addition, a question related to difficulties in applying for SNAP benefits was included in the survey. While there was a large portion of respondents who indicated they weren't using SNAP benefits, there were very few who answered that they had difficulties with signing up for the benefits.

## Respondents Who Had Difficulty Applying for SNAP

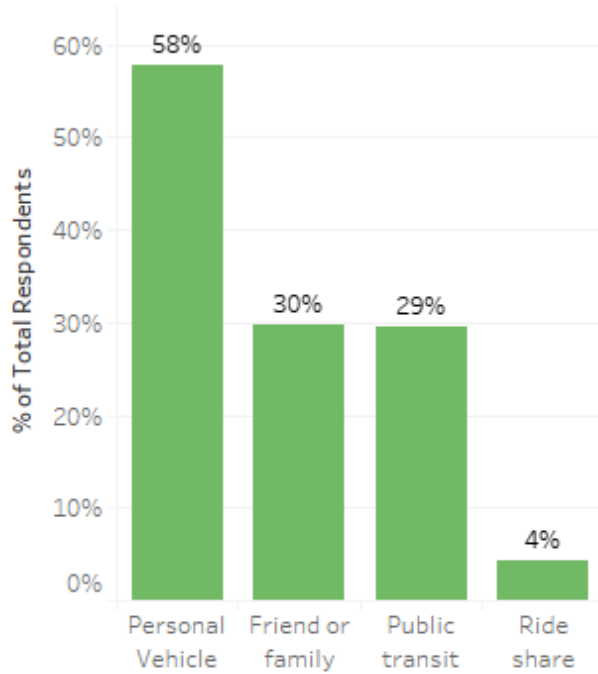


The survey allowed for quantitative data to be gathered around SNAP usage but didn't provide further information on why many individuals indicated they weren't utilizing SNAP. This is where the focus groups provided insight into the issue. During the focus group sessions, participants were asked to elaborate on some of the reasons why they decided not to utilize SNAP despite qualifying for the benefit. Many indicated that the money given was just not enough to cover the rising costs of food while others felt that the application process was tedious and asked for too much information.



# TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

## Transportation Options

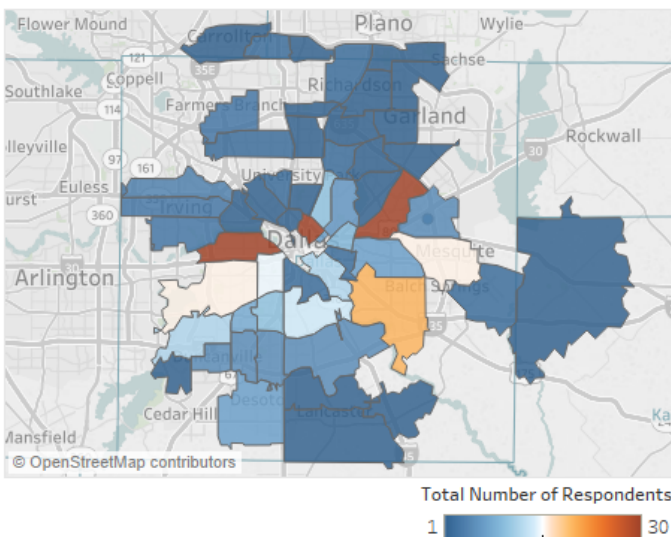


Transportation can play a vital role in accessing healthy food, improving social isolation, and allowing for easy access to medical visit. Poor transportation can have a detrimental effect, especially among seniors. Lack of access to transportation options can cut off many food access points and leave many, especially seniors, isolated in their own homes.

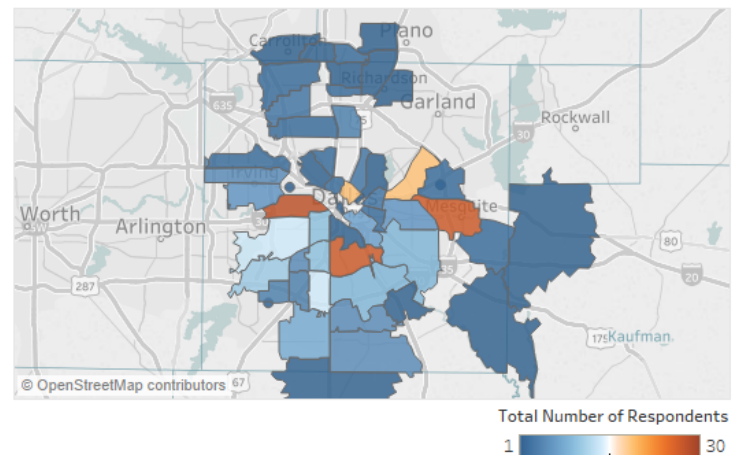
As part of this assessment, we wanted to know the role transportation has played among the senior community and how barriers, if any, prevented them from accessing food, socializing, and attending necessary appointments. A large number of respondents of the survey indicated that they relied on a personal vehicle as their primary form of transportation.

However, about a third of the respondents indicated that they relied on public transportation while an additional third relied on friends or family members to get around. .

## Respondents Who use Public Transportation



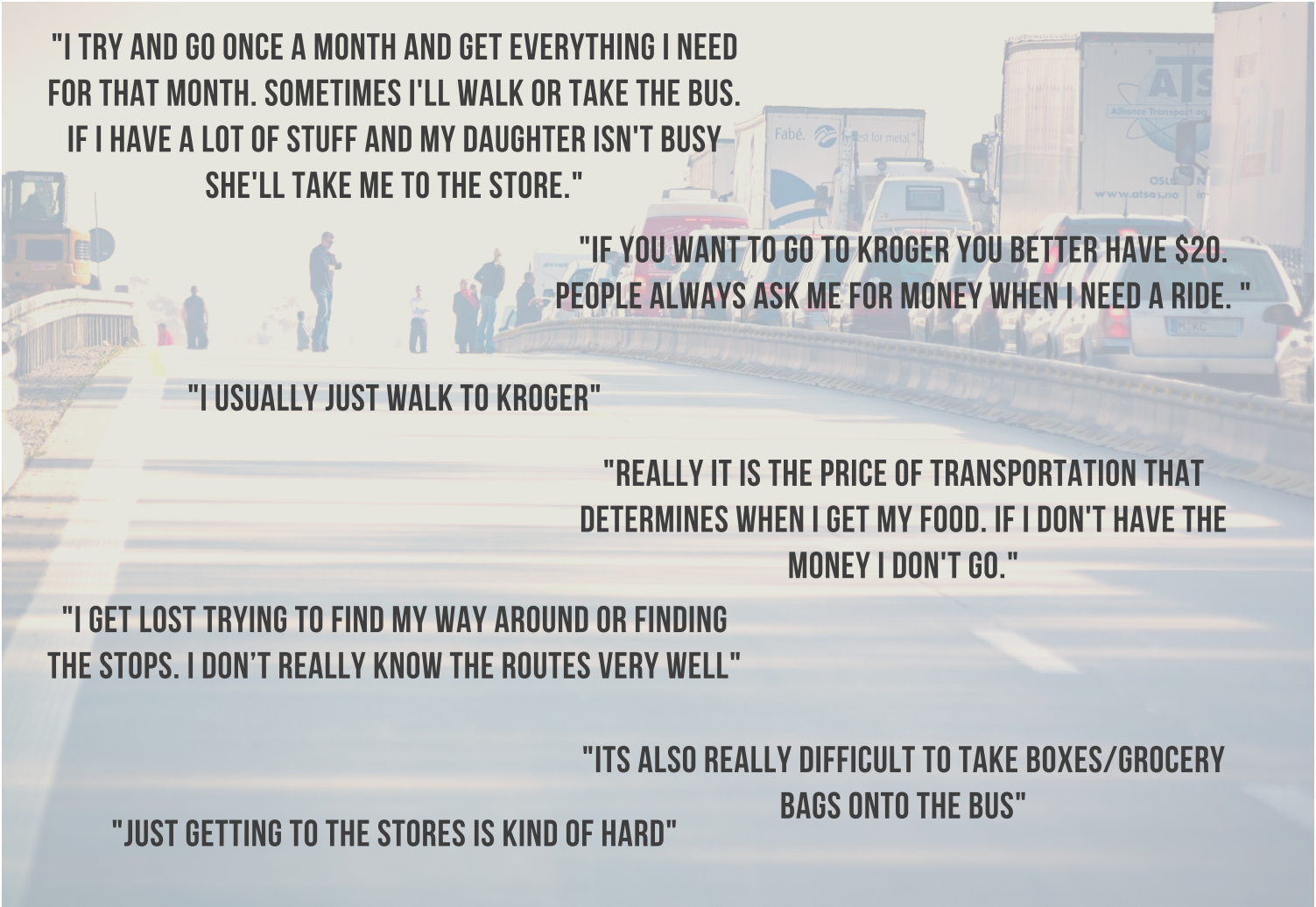
## Respondents Who use Friends or Family Members for Transportation



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We asked our focus group participants to describe some of the barriers they face when using different transportation options, especially public transportation. Many indicated that understanding the routes and when and where to get off was very challenging, especially when you are having to carry your groceries. In general, the price of using public transportation can be taxing on an already stretched budget. Several of the participants indicated that the cost of food and transportation will ultimately determine whether or not they go to the grocery store. Those who relied on friends or neighbors as a form of transportation mentioned having to pay extra for the needed rides or felt that it was just better to walk to the nearest store, often having to cross lanes of traffic.

Data from the questionnaire along with responses from the focus groups and senior service provider surveys showed that seniors in the Dallas community struggle with accessing healthy food options due to the nature of the city's transportation system and the location of grocery stores. This issue is further compounded by senior's already restrictive budget and the general cost of food.



**"I TRY AND GO ONCE A MONTH AND GET EVERYTHING I NEED FOR THAT MONTH. SOMETIMES I'LL WALK OR TAKE THE BUS. IF I HAVE A LOT OF STUFF AND MY DAUGHTER ISN'T BUSY SHE'LL TAKE ME TO THE STORE."**

**"IF YOU WANT TO GO TO KROGER YOU BETTER HAVE \$20. PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ME FOR MONEY WHEN I NEED A RIDE. "**

**"I USUALLY JUST WALK TO KROGER"**

**"REALLY IT IS THE PRICE OF TRANSPORTATION THAT DETERMINES WHEN I GET MY FOOD. IF I DON'T HAVE THE MONEY I DON'T GO."**

**"I GET LOST TRYING TO FIND MY WAY AROUND OR FINDING THE STOPS. I DON'T REALLY KNOW THE ROUTES VERY WELL"**

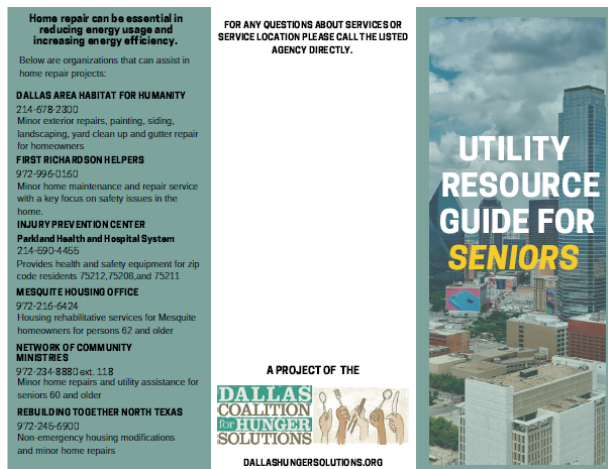
**"ITS ALSO REALLY DIFFICULT TO TAKE BOXES/GROCERY BAGS ONTO THE BUS"**

**"JUST GETTING TO THE STORES IS KIND OF HARD"**

# FUTURE STEPS

The results from this community assessment has shed light on new and existing issues related to hunger among the senior population in Dallas. Despite the issues discussed in this report, an overarching theme found in not only the questionnaires but the focus groups, was how many of the seniors who participated were resigned to their situation. For many, this was the way of life and they had to find the best way to make do with the cards that were dealt. In an effort to mitigate these issues and assist the senior community, the Community Assessment Task Force has decided to take on specific initiatives that address the aforementioned issues in this report.

## SENIOR UTILITY GUIDE



To address the dilemma of choosing between electricity and food, the Task Force looked at current resources available and fostered new partnerships with TXU Energy and Texas Energy Poverty Research Institute. Ultimately, the Task Force decided to create a one page brochure with contact information of organizations around Dallas County that provided seniors with emergency utility assistance and home repair. In addition to a senior

guide, the Task Force plans to continue to make inroads with various utility companies in the North Texas region to address the dilemma seniors face between buying food or paying their utility bills. The Task Force also plans to continue to share the utility guide, updating the information regularly.

## FUTURE INITIATIVES

Furthermore, the Task Force hopes to create a partnership with several transportation agencies and organizations in the metroplex to continue to address the issues poor transportation poses when accessing healthy food and decreasing social isolation. Overall, the Task Force feels it is necessary for the Senior Hunger Action Team to continue the work on senior outreach through the *Eating Well is a SNAP!* initiative by continuing to educate seniors on how to shop healthily on a restricted budget and incorporating utility assistance resources and utility bill education.

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# FINAL NOTE

Through this community assessment the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions has learned a great deal from the senior community. We are extremely grateful to all of the partner organizations and agencies who helped make this assessment a success. It was with your help, we were able to reach out to and hear from over 1,600 individuals in the Dallas community. In addition, a very special thanks to our seniors in Dallas County, who took some time out of their day to explain their needs and the barriers they face.

Our work is far from over and we can't continue this effort alone. We will need the continued support of our community members to work collaboratively to address the issues of hunger. The more people who are involved in this effort the better. We need people to continue reaching out to their neighbors, sharing information on emergency utility assistance, SNAP benefits and transportation options. If you would like to learn more about the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions you can visit our website at [www.dallashungersolutions.org](http://www.dallashungersolutions.org) or you can reach out to our Coalition Coordinator Wyonella Henderson-Greene at [Wyonella\\_Henderson-Greene@baylor.edu](mailto:Wyonella_Henderson-Greene@baylor.edu).



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