

Inequities in access to fruits and vegetables and diet-related health outcomes:

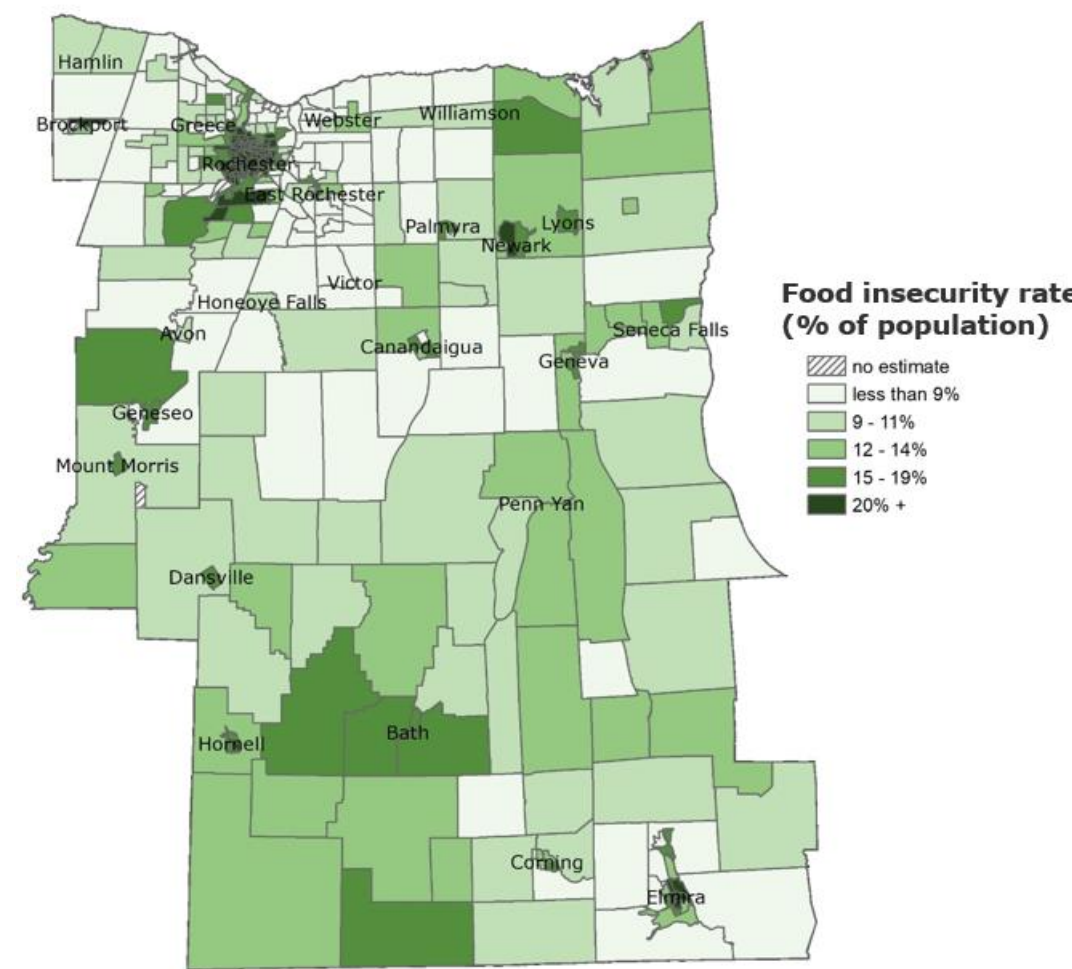
An exploration of the Finger Lakes Region

Melissa Pennise, MPH, and Melissa Wendland

Introduction

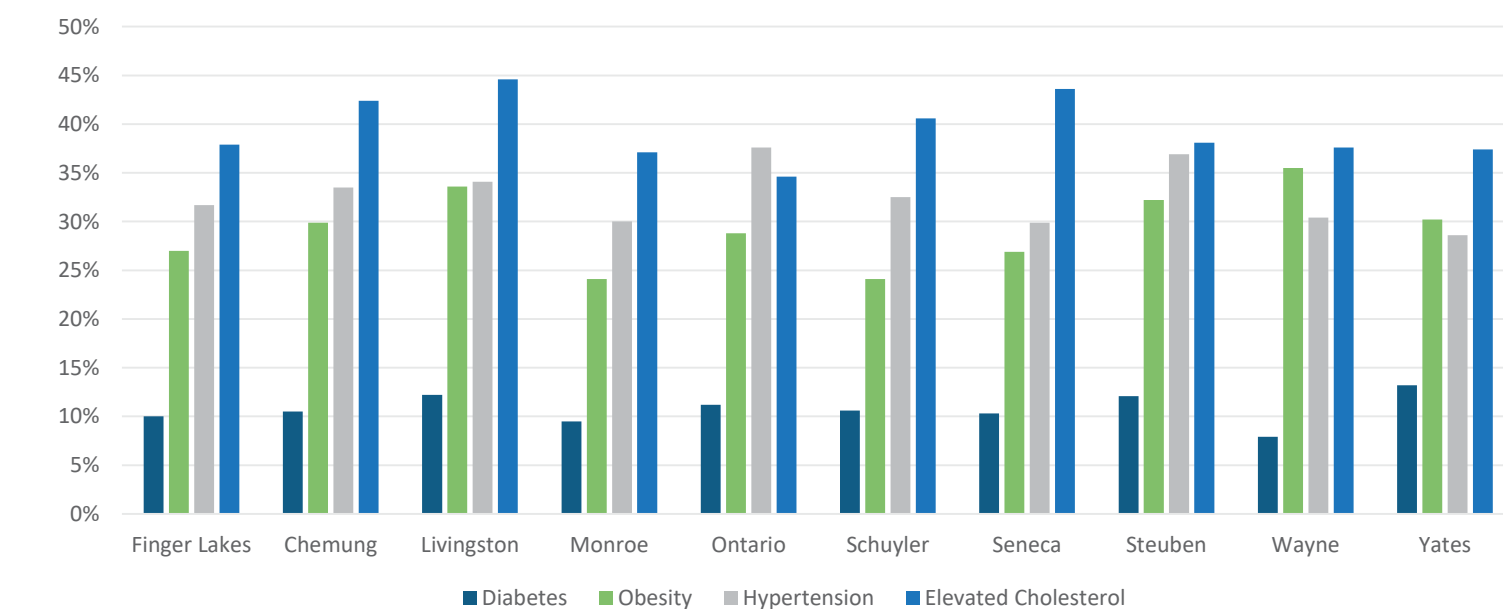
Nearly 22% of people in our region experience food insecurity, with the highest levels (29% or more) reported in the city of Rochester and in the heart of our rural farming communities. Lack of access to healthy foods contributes to chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity. Rates of diet-related chronic disease vary across our region. In alignment with the NYS Prevention Agenda's Healthy Eating and Food Security priority, we sought to understand residents' barriers to accessing fruits and vegetables.

Food Insecurity Rates by Census Tract



Source: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. Map the Meal Gap 2018: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2016. Feeding America, 2018.

Rates of diet-related chronic disease, Adults, Finger Lakes Counties, 2013-2014 NYS BRFSS



The Food and Health Connection

The Food and Health Connection, a multi-sector regional committee, conducted an assessment of food access issues across the region.

My Health Story

In partnership with the nine Finger Lakes county public health departments, Common Ground Health conducted a survey that sought to go beyond health outcomes to dig deeper into the social determinants of health. The goal was to better understand the barriers residents face to living healthy lives. The My Health Story survey asked several questions related to food and diet-related chronic diseases.

Barriers to eating healthier varied across groups:

- Over half (54%) of low income respondents (<\$25K) identified cost as a barrier, as did 20% of the highest income (\$75K+) respondents.
- Lack of time to shop or prepare food was a top barrier for higher income respondents (22%).
- Transportation impacted lower income (12%) and urban (7%) respondents more than others.
- Fifty seven percent (57%) of seniors (65 and older) reported that they do not have any barriers, compared to about 27% of people in the three youngest groups.

Respondents with chronic diseases

The My Health Story asked people with self-reported obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure if they are managing their condition well. Those who responded that they are not managing their condition well were asked to identify what would help them manage their conditions better. The open-ended responses were coded and grouped into a proportional evidence cluster.



Community Cafés

We spoke with over 100 residents in Community Café settings. Like our survey data results, cost and time were the most often-cited barriers. Community members were interested in:

- Increasing convenience for people of all incomes through models like Foodlink's Curbside Market and expanding incentive programs such as Double Up Food Bucks.
- Activating existing institutions, such as schools, community centers, senior centers and workplaces to increase access to fruits and vegetables.
- Pairing nutrition education with hands-on, guided experiences purchasing and preparing food.
- Multigenerational approaches that address access barriers for people of all ages, including children and seniors.
- Addressing health insurance barriers to nutrition education. For example, ensuring that health insurance will continue to reimburse for classes for people with diabetes even after their A1C levels are controlled.

Next Steps

This assessment provides data and examples of promising practices to address food and health issues in the Finger Lakes Region. In support of the Prevention Agenda 2019-2024 vision to be **the healthiest state for people of all ages**, the Food and Health Connection report is intended to support the development of Community Health Improvement Plans across our region.