

PUBLIC SECTOR NEWS

LATEST HARC STUDY SHOWS RESIDENTS FOREGOING FOOD

While the Coachella Valley grows many of the nutritious fruits, vegetables and other foods that end up on kitchen tables throughout the world, nearly 19,000 of Eastern Riverside County residents in 2010 did not eat for an entire day. The startling statistic can be found in the newly released *Community Health Monitor*, a triennial research study of regional health conditions published by the Palm Desert-based Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC).

Nearly 68,000 people, or 13% of the region's estimated population, either skipped or cut a meal due to cost in the past year. HARC data shows that Hispanic/Latinos are twice as likely as Whites/Caucasians to forego a meal, not eat for an entire day, or need emergency food assistance. People with lower income and less education face the same reality, according to the agency's research.

The World Health Organization defines food security as, "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life." Failure to meet that standard results in the condition known as food insecurity, a term more commonly associated with emerging or third world countries.

However, U.S. Department of Agriculture data from 2008 reveals that 14.6% of American households were food insecure at some time during that year. Meanwhile, an estimated 37% of homes headed by single women and about 28% of homes headed by single men reported some form of food insecurity in 2008, compared with 14% of married households with children.

HARC Board President Glen Grayman MD said that the regional findings reinforce the fact that food insecurity knows no geographic boundaries, nor is it restricted to specific ethnicities or demographic groups. In fact, some 43,000-plus individuals, or 8.3% of Eastern Riverside County's population, received emergency food assistance from a food pantry or bank last year.

"Preparing for our latest survey, we knew the economic fallout from recession would certainly affect public health," said Dr. Grayman. "What we didn't know was the breadth and degree of that impact. The data reveals that many of our local residents are not only having difficulty accessing basic health care services, in some instance they're not even able to eat. That's a nugget of data all of us should find hard to swallow."

Formed in 2006 by a consortium of more than 35 public and private healthcare agencies, the Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) conducts a confidential community health status assessment in eastern Riverside County every 3 years to identify major health and quality of life issues. The nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization is funded in part by contributions from community partners, as well as entities that contract with the agency for customized public health research. More information can be obtained by calling HARC at (760) 404-1945, or visiting www.harcddata.org.