



RESEARCH REPORT  
FEBRUARY 2020

# NEW YORKERS DON'T LIVE SINGLE-ISSUE LIVES: THE INTERSECTIONS OF HUNGER



PREPARED & PRESENTED BY  
FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the most expensive and diverse cities in the world, it is not unusual for the data and experiences reported from New York City's front lines against hunger and poverty to diverge from what is reported on the national level. While unemployment and poverty rates are reported to be at their lowest in U.S. history and the economy seems to be growing at a steady clip, new data from Food Bank For New York City show a different reality as New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens continue to report high demand for emergency food among the vulnerable New Yorkers.

Food Bank For New York City's most recent survey of emergency food providers (EFPs) sheds light on multiple socio-economic factors contributing to the divergence between national headlines and the real-life experiences reported from New York City's frontlines. **These factors underscore that the families and individuals who show up at emergency food programs across the five boroughs experiencing hunger are not just living single-issue lives.**

**Hunger follows the New Yorkers served by our city's network of soup kitchens and food pantries into every area of their lives.** The results of Food Bank's survey show that hunger intersects with three areas in particular to cause heightened barriers to food security:

1. **The cost of living** – which includes expenses such as rent, healthcare, transportation and school costs – compete with and shortchange food budgets, forcing families and individuals to rely on emergency food programs.
2. **Federal policy proposals** that undermine public assistance and target immigrant populations amplify need, and strain resources, in our most vulnerable communities.
3. **Nutrition-related preventable diseases**, marked by lack of access to diverse healthy foods, disproportionately affect New York City's poorest communities and fortify barriers to food security through increased healthcare costs.

This report examines a holistic view of the hunger and poverty landscape in New York City; the services that community-based organizations stretch to provide in response; and the resources these organizations need at a moment when concerted attacks on food assistance by the federal administration threaten the food security of more New Yorkers in need.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### Demand for Food Remains High

**A growing percentage of New Yorkers are experiencing hunger and relying more on emergency food programs.** Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens reported an increase in the number of visitors.

**Increased visitor snapshot:** The need for food reported by food pantries and soup kitchens appears to be driven by increases in **specific populations seeking assistance**, such as:

- families with children (76 percent);
- the elderly (60 percent);
- immigrant families (58 percent); and
- college students (16 percent).

### Barriers to Food Security Are Diverse and Far-Reaching

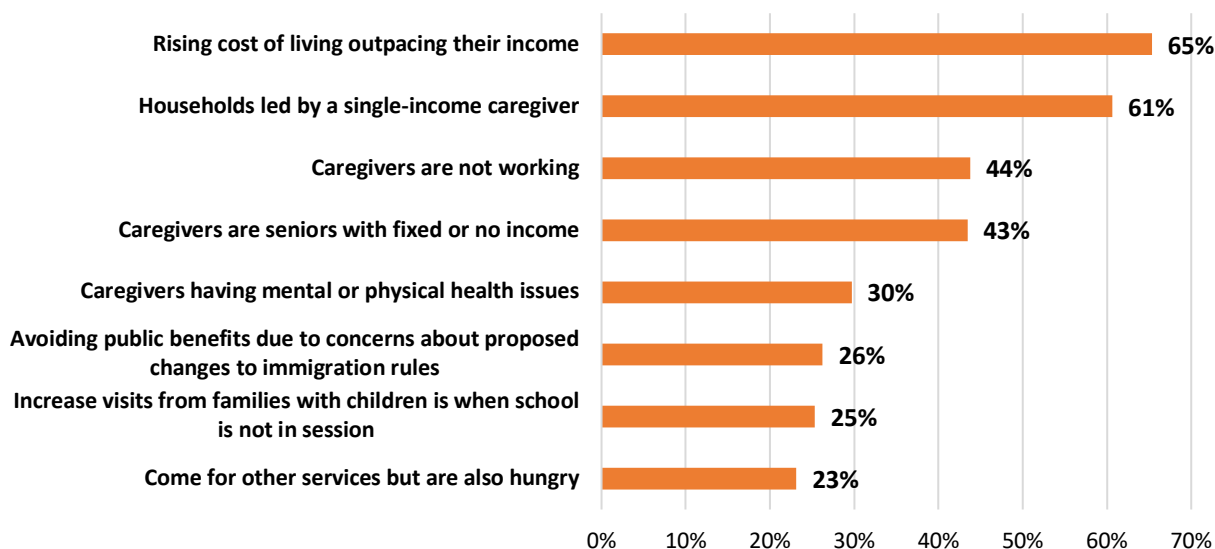
#### I. COST OF LIVING AND LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES

A closer look at food insecurity among our city's most vulnerable populations – namely **families with children, working-individuals, seniors** and **college students** – shows that **limited financial resources** and ongoing non-negotiable **cost of living expenses** (e.g. rent, healthcare, transportation and school costs), compete with and shortchange food budgets, forcing families and individuals to rely on emergency food programs.

##### **Families with Children:**

- **More families being served:** More than three-quarters (76 percent) of emergency food providers reported an **increase in families with children** at their programs, compared to the previous year.
- **Rising cost of living:** 65 percent of emergency food providers reported that the **rising cost of living is a major barrier** to food security among their families with children visitors.
- **Households held by single-income caregivers:** 61 percent of emergency food providers reported that a single-income caregiver for a household with children is one of the key drivers to food insecurity among their family with children visitors.

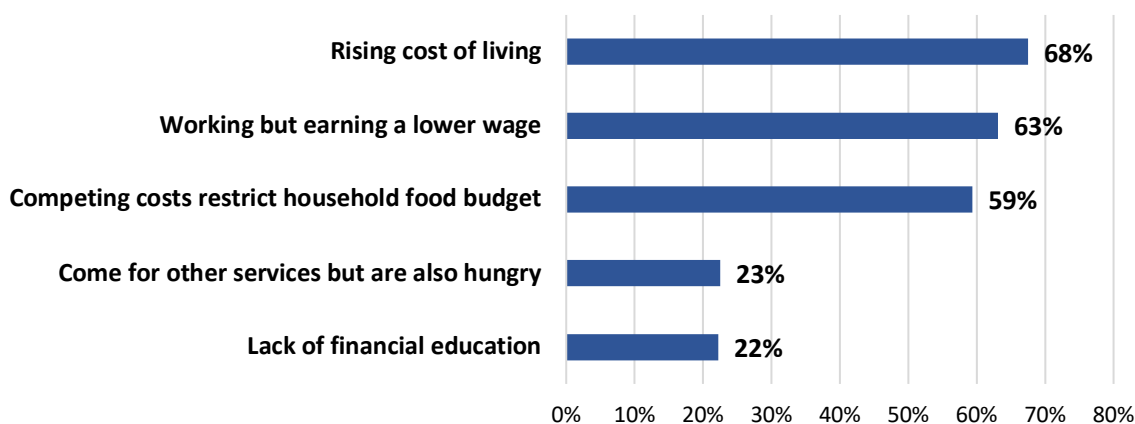
### Barriers to Food Security Among Families With Children



### Working Individuals:

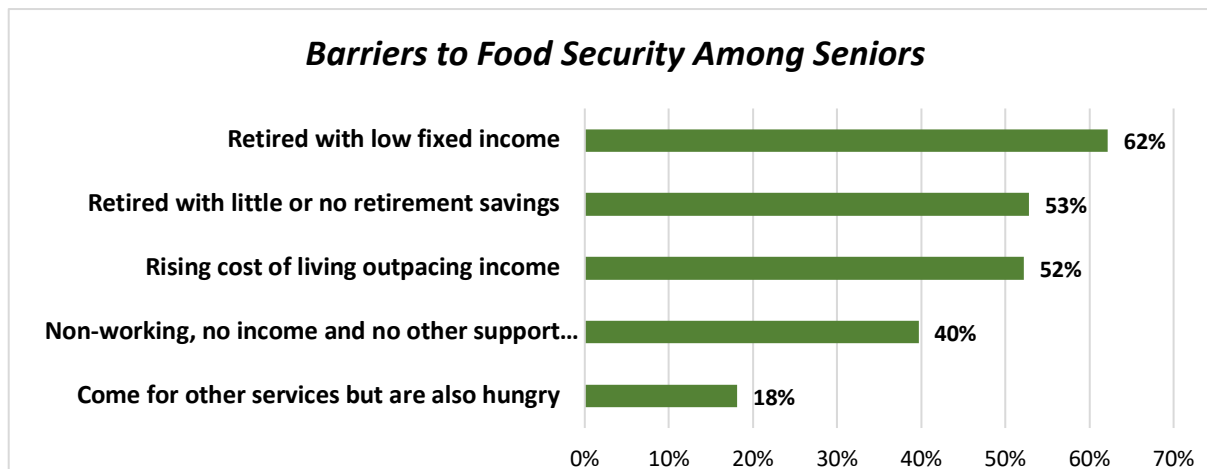
- **More working individuals being served:** 44 percent of emergency food providers reported an increase in working individuals compared to the previous year.
- **Rising cost of living:** 68 percent of emergency food providers reported that the rising cost of living is a major barrier to food security among their working visitors.
- **Lower wages:** 63 percent of emergency food providers reported that earning a lower wage is one of the factors affecting the food security of their working visitors.

### Barriers to Food Security Among Working Individuals



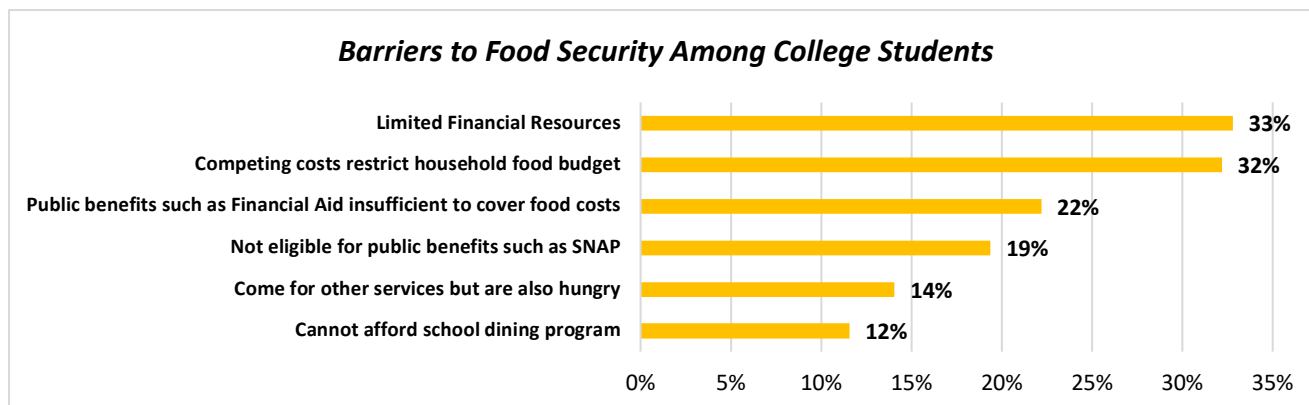
## Seniors:

- **More seniors being served:** 60 percent of emergency food providers reported an increase in senior visitors compared to the previous year.
- **Low fixed-income or low retirement savings:** 62 percent of emergency food providers reported that being retired with low fixed-income and/or with low to no retirement savings are the main barriers to food insecurity among their senior visitors.
- **Rising cost of living:** more than half (52 percent) of emergency food providers reported that cost of living outpacing income is an obstacle to food security for their senior visitors.



## College Students:

- **More college students being served:** Approximately one in six emergency food providers (16 percent) reported an increase in college students compared to the previous year.
- **Limited financial resources:** One-third (33 percent) of emergency food providers reported that having limited financial resources is a major barrier to food security among college student visitors.
- **Cost of living:** Nearly one-third (32 percent) of emergency food providers reported that competing costs, such as rent and tuition, are restricting their college student visitors' food budgets, causing them to be food insecure.





## Housing and Homelessness

In addition to creating food insecurity, the rising cost of rent outpacing income in New York City is a real issue. **Nearly half of all New York City residents (47 percent) are rent burdened** and 462,000 New York City renter households are severely rent burdened – paying more than 50 percent of their income on rent.<sup>1</sup>

Rent affordability leads to the issue of homelessness. In November 2019, there were 63,092 homeless individuals, including 14,973 homeless families with 22,258 homeless children, sleeping each night in the New York City municipal shelter system.<sup>2</sup> **Families make up more than two-thirds of the homeless shelter population.** New York City homeless individuals make up 85 percent of all homeless individuals in New York State (91,897)<sup>3</sup>.

## II. FEDERAL POLICIES AND THEIR LOCAL IMPLICATIONS

The Emergency Food Network is raising significant concerns about policy proposals that undermine public assistance. **More than 80 percent of emergency food providers reported policy changes by the federal government as a major or moderate threat** to their operations.

### Targeted Risks to Immigrant Communities

More than half (58 percent) of emergency food providers reported an **increase in visits of immigrant families** compared to last year. More than one in four emergency food providers (26 percent) reported that an increase in visits of immigrant families with children is **associated with avoiding public benefits due to concerns about proposed changes to immigration rules**<sup>4</sup>.

Our member soup kitchens and food pantries have reported that undocumented parents who are receiving SNAP benefits on behalf of their children (U.S. Citizens) are now requesting to discontinue receiving SNAP benefits, as they are fearful that this will increase their chances of being identified by ICE. Even more significant, agencies are now receiving clients who are requesting assistance with developing a plan for the custody and care of their children, if or when the parents are deported.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/2019\\_hunger\\_hearing\\_021419\\_final.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/2019_hunger_hearing_021419_final.pdf)

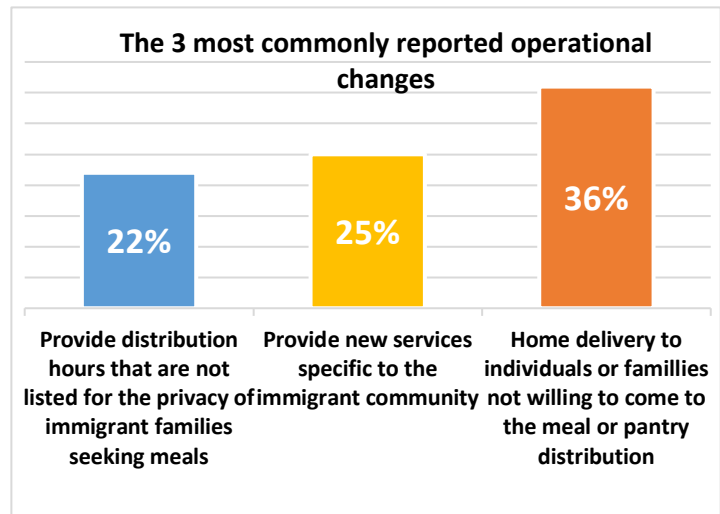
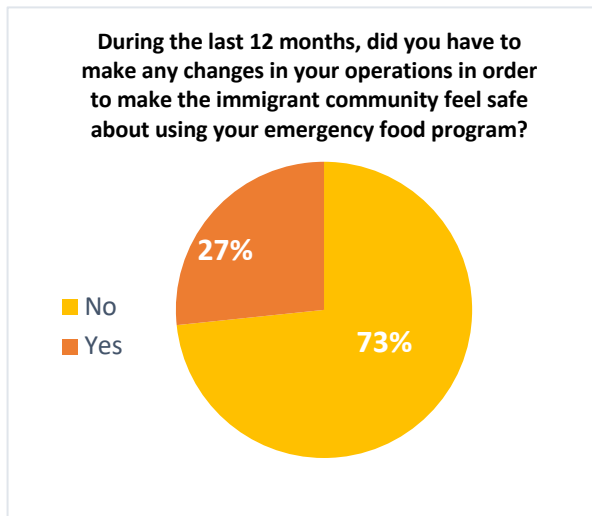
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>

<sup>3</sup> New York State Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all data on immigrant status as being a risk factor of hunger is based on [HUNGER CANNOT AFFORD TO BE HIDDEN: The Impacts of Bad Policies](#), Food Bank For New York City

## Additional Services Provided in Response

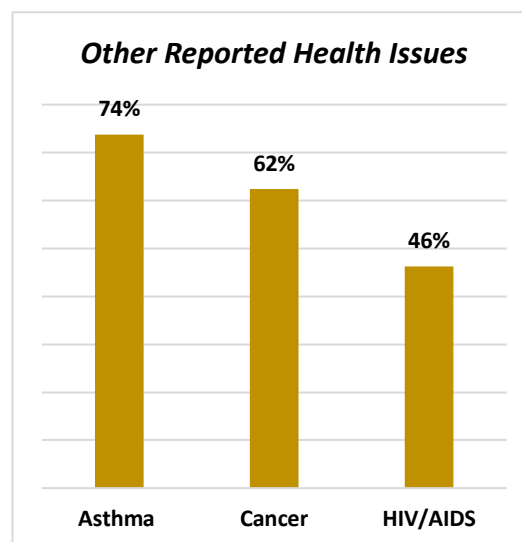
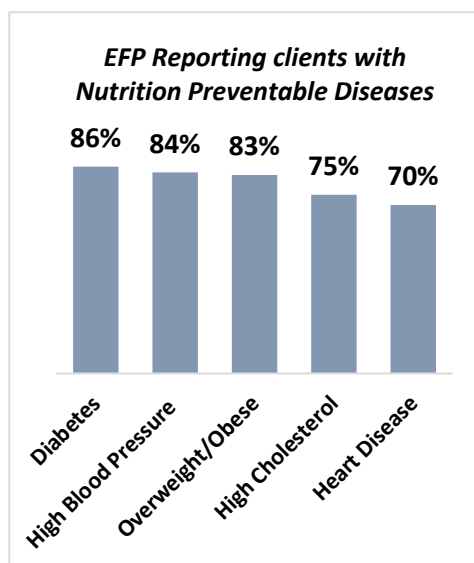
More than one in four emergency food providers (27 percent) reported making changes to their operations during the last 12 months in order to **make the immigrant community feel safe** about using their services.



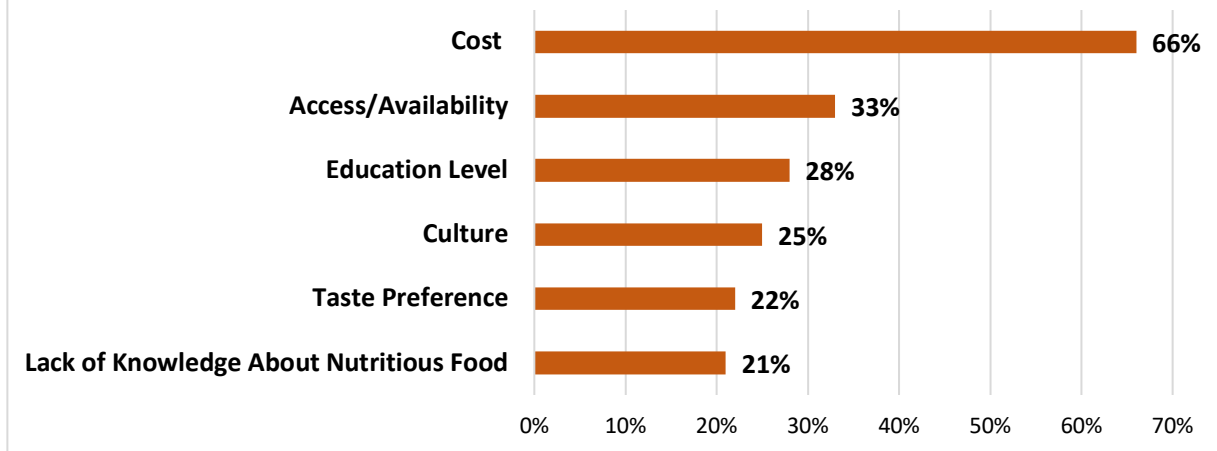
## III. Health and Wellness as an Issue of Access

**Health conditions of Emergency Food Provider visitors:** More than 70 percent of emergency food providers reported their clients have some nutrition-related preventable diseases, with diabetes ranking #1.

**Barriers to healthy food:** 66 percent of emergency food providers reported that cost of healthy food is the biggest obstacle to accessing healthy options for their clients.



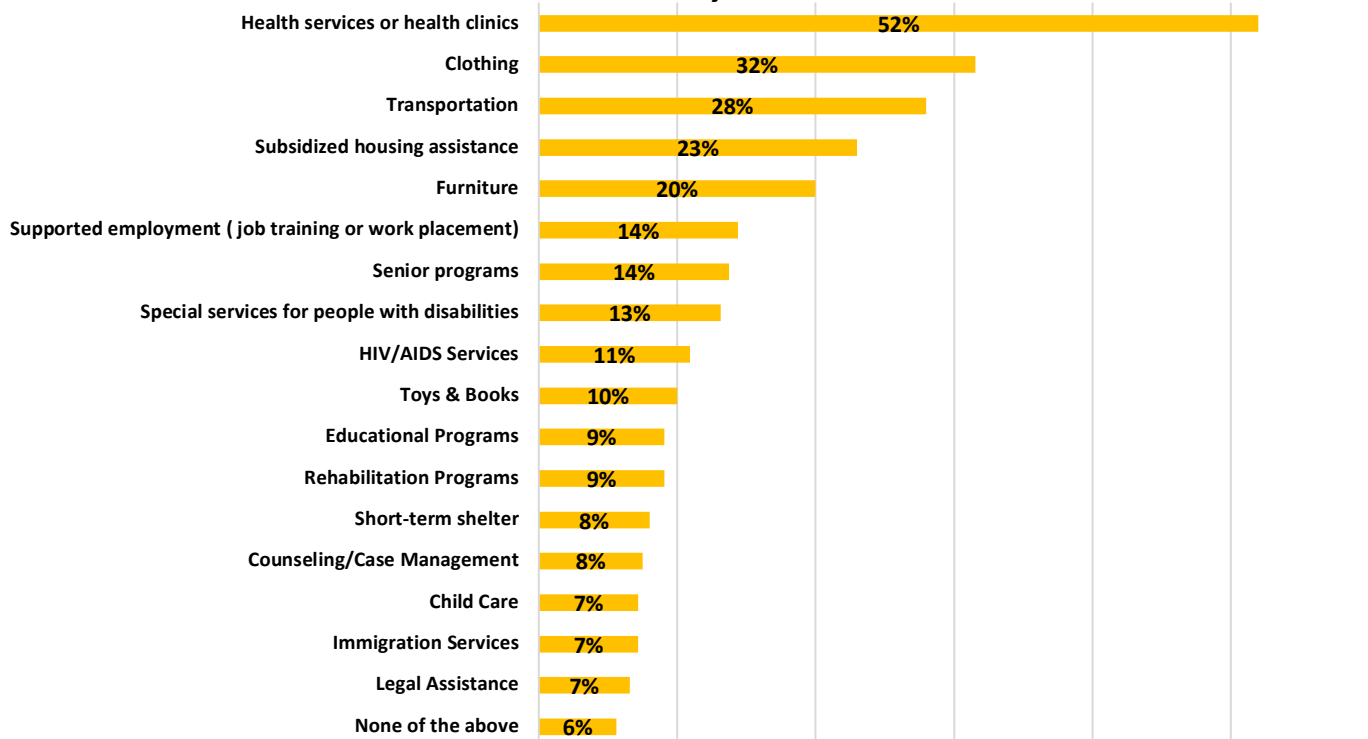
### Common Barriers to Healthy Food Choices



### Providing Solutions through Meals and More

Emergency food providers are stretching their operations to provide additional resources to help support more of the needs of the New Yorkers they serve. Nearly 60 percent of emergency providers currently provide health services or health clinics. Others are offering health, education, and transportation services, as well as household goods, housing assistance, and more.

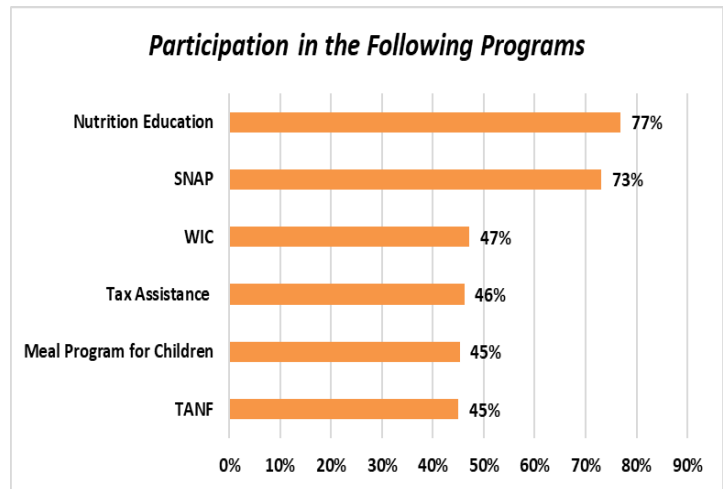
### Services Provided Beyond Food Distribution



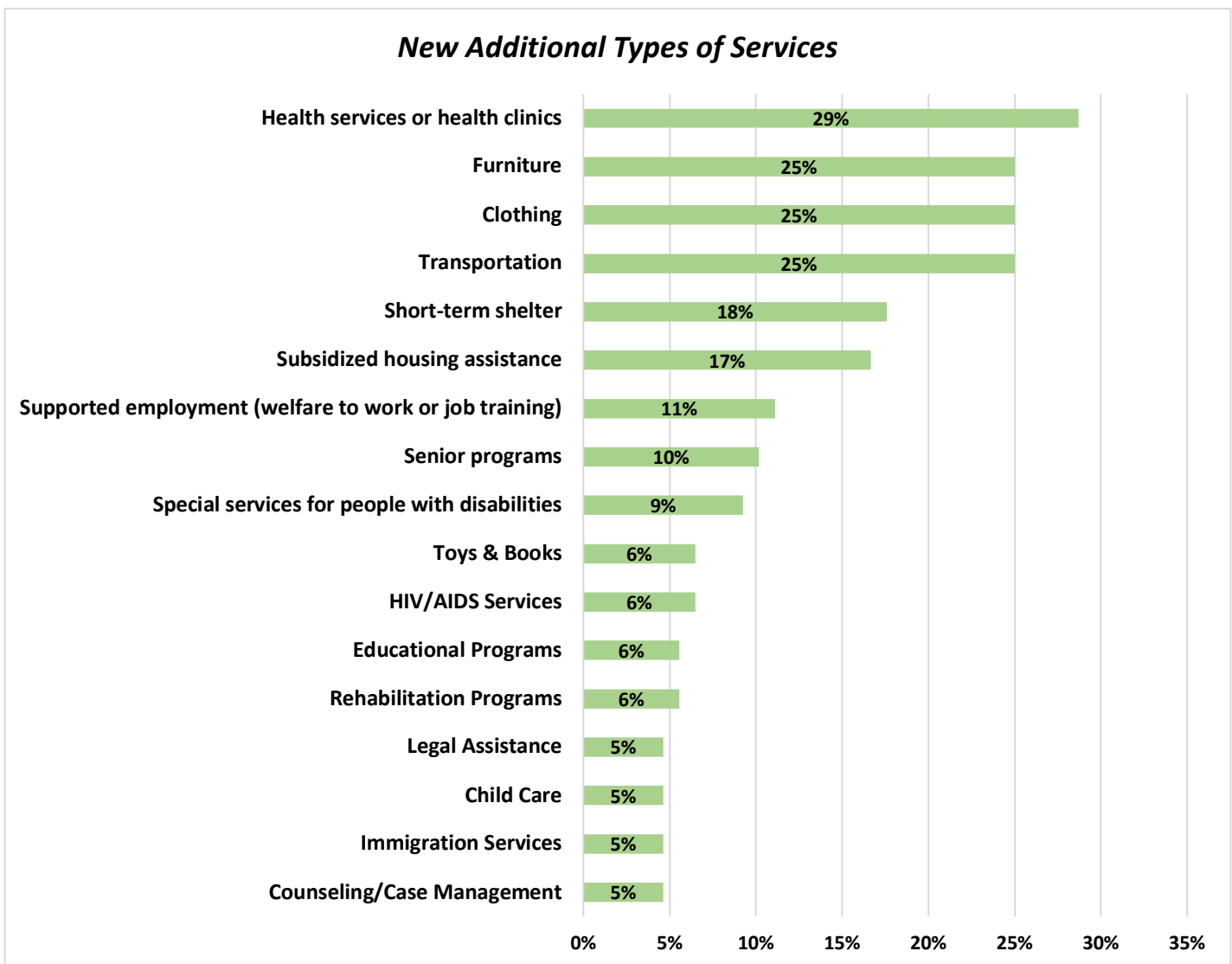


Emergency food providers are also participating in government programs and are helping expand access to vital government assistance programs in order to help support their clients.

Emergency food providers continue to extend themselves in response to rising need. More than one-third (34 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens reported providing new additional services in the last 12 months, whether alone or in partnership.

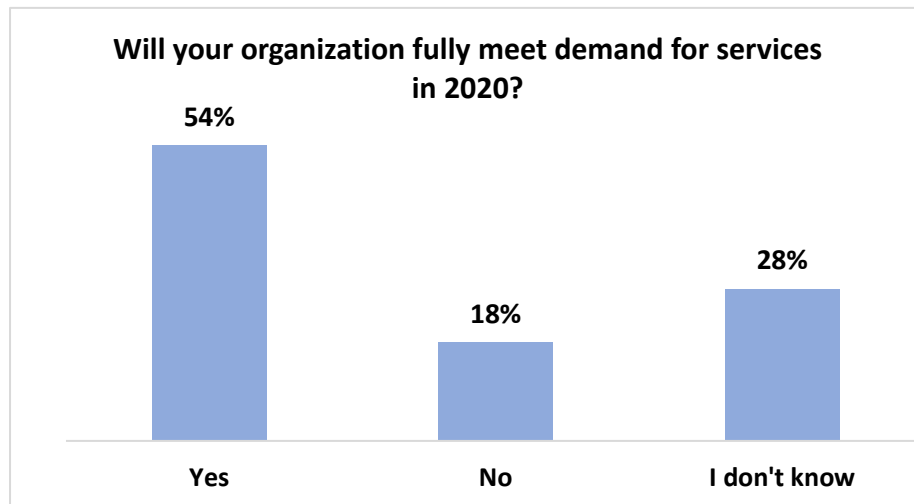


*The percentages provided in the chart below are based on the 34 percent of respondents who reported providing new additional services in the last 12 months, whether alone or in partnership.*

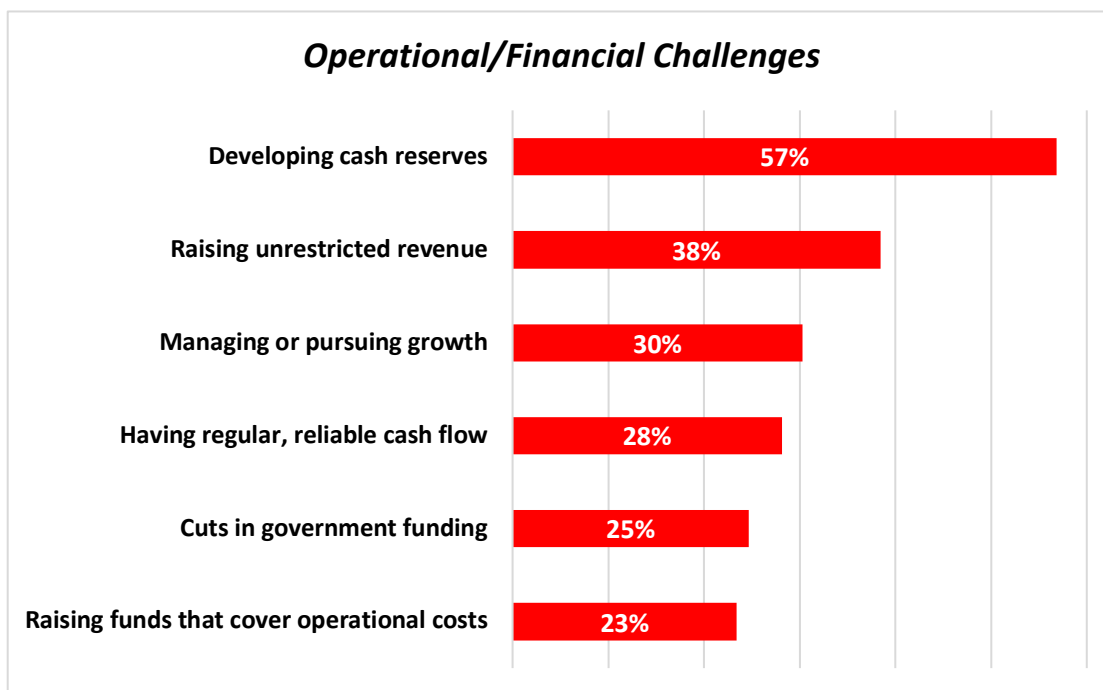


## Sustainability of the Emergency Food Network

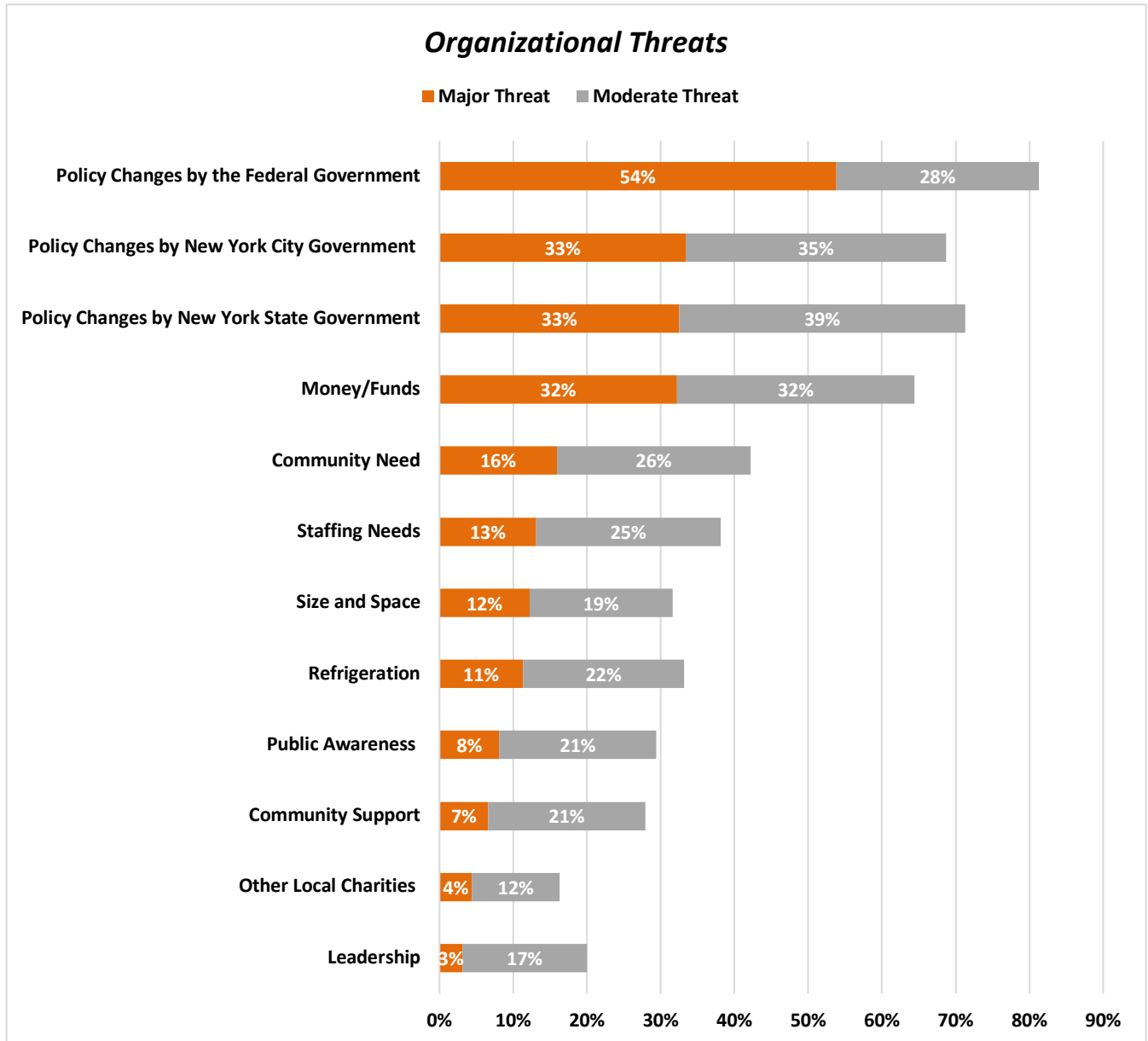
Approximately **one-third (28 percent)** of emergency food programs reported being unsure of their **ability to meet the demand** for services in 2020 and 18 percent knowing they would not be able to meet the need.



**Emergency food providers face operational and financial challenges in their response to community need**, with developing cash reserves (at 57 percent) and raising unrestricted revenue (at 38 percent) being identified as top challenges.



More than 80 percent of emergency food providers reported policy changes by the federal government being a major or moderate threat to their operations:



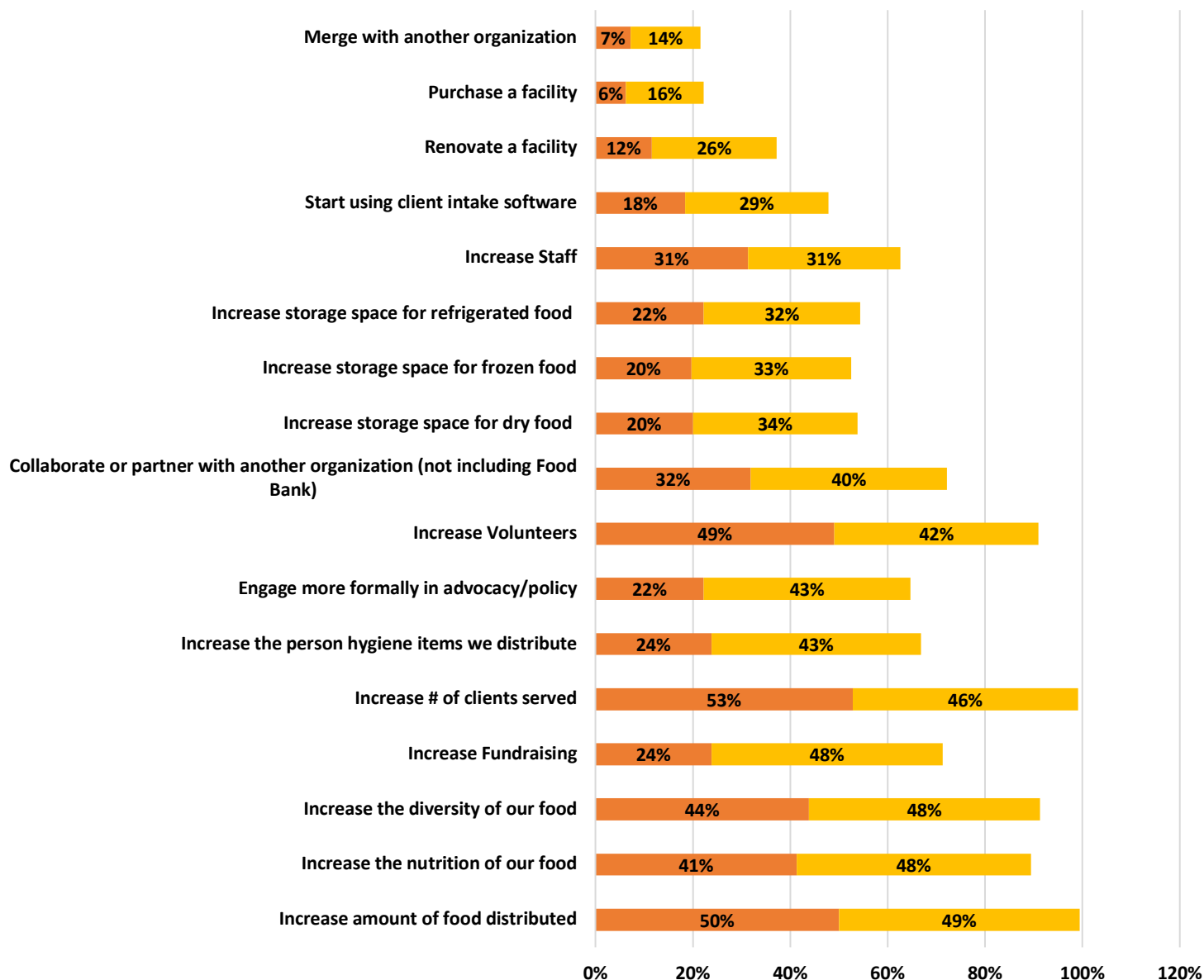
## Emergency Food Network Operations and Plans

While 50 percent of emergency food providers reported increasing the amount of food distributed last year, 49 percent reported that they plan to do so in the upcoming year.

53 percent of emergency food providers reported that they have increased the number of clients they served last year and 46 percent reported that they plan to do so in the upcoming year.

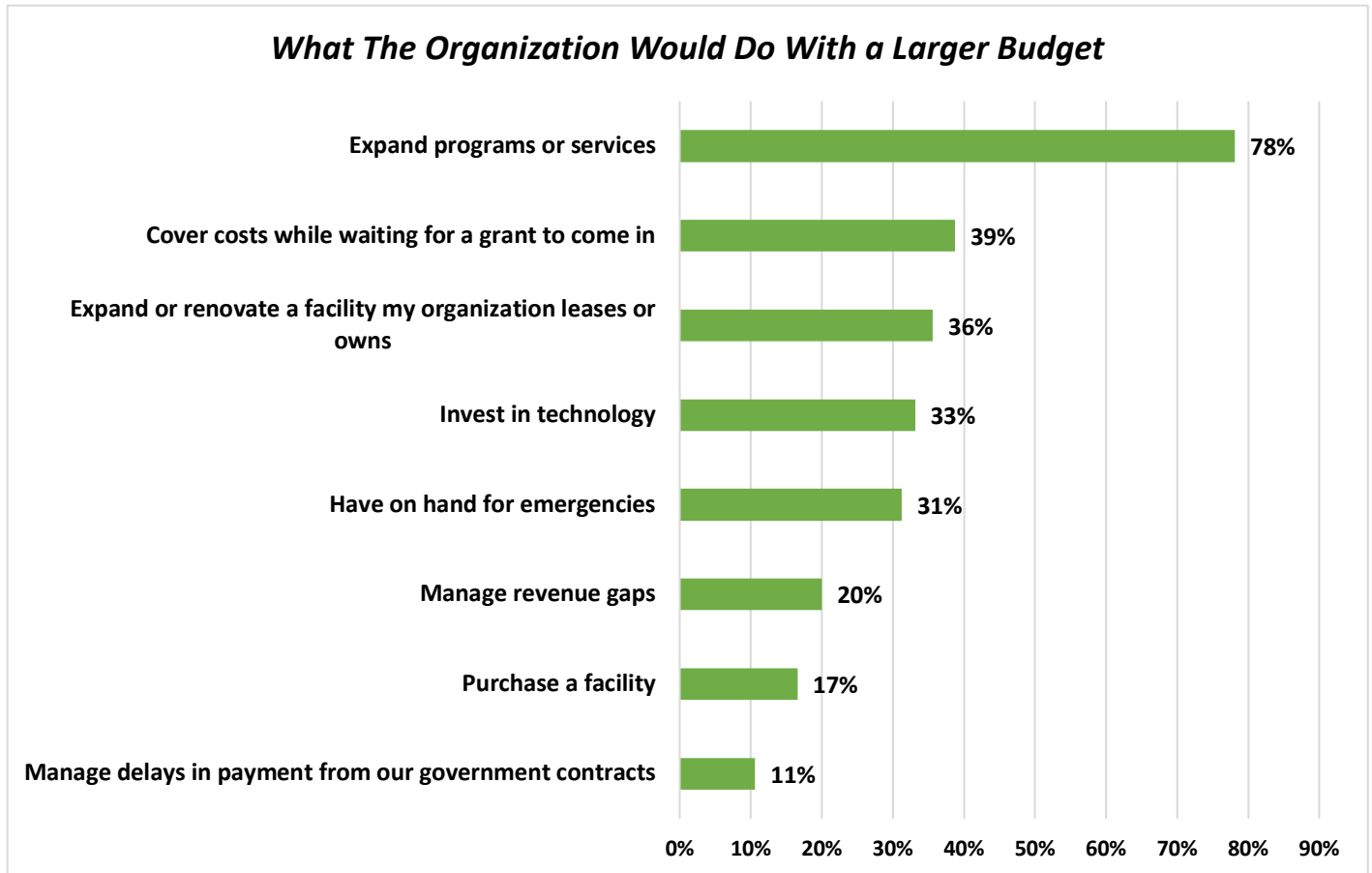
## Has your organization Taken/Plan to take any of the following actions?

■ Actions Taken Last Year    ■ Actions Planned for this Year



## Greater Impact through More Resources

More than three-quarters (78 percent) of emergency food providers reported that if a larger budget was provided, they would plan to expand their programs or services.



## CONCLUSION

The needs of individuals experiencing hunger go beyond food. For New Yorkers experiencing hardship, hunger is too often hiding behind trade-offs between non-negotiable costs of living that impede their ability to afford food.

Over the past 12 months, policies designed to restrict or deny participation in public assistance programs have continued to advance, demonstrating an alarming trend toward policy-making that is harmful – if not punitive – to those struggling most. More attacks on SNAP are expected to go into effect in 2020, each with the potential to strike a devastating blow to our city's already-strained emergency food network.

As of the publication of this report, tens of thousands of New Yorkers stand at the precipice of **a second Hunger Cliff**, due to the new restrictions for adults receiving SNAP benefits. On April 1, 2020, non-disabled adults without dependents, referred to as **ABAWDs, who rely on SNAP will lose their benefits if they have been jobless since the start of the year** – regardless of their ability to afford food, the availability of work where they live, their ongoing expenses, or the challenges in proving and attaining disability or dependent status.

Beginning February 24, 2020, **immigrants will face a new test to prove their viability in the United States** under the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' new definition for **Public Charge**. For more than a century, an immigrant was deemed a public charge when immigration officials determined they relied entirely on outside support to live. Starting February 24, SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance and more will be considered in determining if an immigrant will become a public charge. Not simply that an immigrant uses these resources, which they pay into and for which they are eligible, but their *potential* to use them in the future will hurt their application for legal permanent residence or a "green card." **This policy is driving fear-based hunger across the immigrant community**, with local food pantries and soup kitchens attempting to stand in the gap for public assistance that their immigrant clients are too fearful to claim.

These policies are part of a long series of targeted attacks aimed at decimating SNAP and forcing low-income people into the shadows. **At the loss of their benefits, individual and families in need will turn to our city's food pantries and soup kitchens** that serve as the resource of last resort for New Yorkers at risk of hunger.

Though New York City's network of emergency food providers is already operating under tremendous strain, it is striving to meet the increased need by **focusing on the intersectionality of hunger with the other issues their clients face**. However, the charitable network cannot replace government public assistance. Public and private efforts must **together** focus investments on the intersections of hunger and poverty that follow vulnerable New Yorkers through every aspect and phase of their lives.



## METHODOLOGY

To generate these findings, an online survey was sent to all active emergency food providers including food pantries, soup kitchens, school-based campus pantries, shelters, and youth and senior services for which Food Bank For New York City had an email contact (a total of 1300), followed by a phone call interview to non-respondents.

The survey responses were collected during the last two weeks of January 2020. After rejection of duplicated, outlying, and incomplete responses, a total of 320 completed responses made up the sample for analysis. The confidence level for all top-line survey results is at 95 percent, with a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percentage points.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Food Bank For New York City thanks its members for the time and effort they devoted to participate in this research.

### PREPARED BY

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## ABOUT FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

For 36 years, Food Bank For New York City has been the city's major hunger-relief organization working to end hunger throughout the five boroughs. Nearly one in five New Yorkers relies on Food Bank for food and other resources. Food Bank takes a strategic, multifaceted approach that provides meals and builds capacity in the neediest communities, while raising awareness and engagement among all New Yorkers. Through its network of more than 1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank provides food for more than 57 million free meals per year for New Yorkers in need. Food Bank For New York City's income support services, including food stamps (also known as SNAP) and free tax assistance for the working poor, put more than \$110 million each year into the pockets of New Yorkers, helping them to afford food and achieve greater dignity and independence. Food Bank's nutrition education programs and services empower more than 50,000 children, teens and adults to sustain a healthy diet and active lifestyle on a limited budget. Working toward long-term solutions to food poverty, Food Bank develops policy and conducts research to inform community and government efforts. To learn more about how you can help, please visit [foodbanknyc.org](https://foodbanknyc.org). Follow us on Facebook ([FoodBank4NYC](https://www.facebook.com/FoodBank4NYC)), Twitter ([@FoodBank4NYC](https://twitter.com/FoodBank4NYC)) and Instagram ([@FoodBank4NYC](https://www.instagram.com/FoodBank4NYC)).



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