**The Hidden Cost of Living:**

**A Memo on how Housing Instability Drives Food Insecurity in NYC**

**I.** **The Landscape of Food Insecurity and Housing Prices in NYC**

According to 2024 Feeding America data, 15% of New Yorkers face food insecurity, which they define as someone who does not have enough to eat and may not know where their next meal will come from.[1](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/dMq1) The rate among children in NYC is much higher (24%).[2](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/GSdj) Roughly 50% of working-age households do not have enough income to cover the monthly cost of housing, food, childcare, healthcare, and transportation.[3](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/Ga4A) NYC has one the highest housing price-to-income ratios in the country,[4](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/wxKQ) a disparity that disproportionately impacts communities of color and seniors.[5](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/kXsS) This brief describes how housing instability contributes to high rates of food insecurity in the greater New York City area and provides evidence-based policy recommendations to address these two issues.

**II.** **The Links Between Housing and Food Insecurity**

Studies have demonstrated strong associations between food insecurity and housing stability[6](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/lBb7) with those experiencing food insecurity facing additional hardships such as childcare and healthcare.[7](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/Mb1H),[8](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/s1OX) Individuals struggling with housing instability are also more likely to experience food insecurity and vice versa.[9](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/5yPF) Current policies address these two issues independently, rather than recognizing their interconnection, which exacerbates the competition between housing and food costs.[9](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/5yPF),[10](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/BUga) This leaves individuals with less control over their household budgets, often forcing them to choose between basic essentials.[7,11](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/GWZ5%2BMb1H),[12](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/ksOB) Furthermore, individuals frequently resort to making less healthful dietary choices when constrained by limited budgets.[10](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/BUga),[11](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/GWZ5) A study examining the relationship between diet quality and housing instability in urban settings found that housing instability (e.g., homelessness, sheltered living, pending evictions) was associated with poorer diet quality among parents. These parents were found to score in the lowest quartile of the Healthy Eating Index.[13](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/HdbE)

**III.** **Policy Recommendations**

Research has demonstrated a bidirectional relationship between housing instability and food insecurity. This burden is particularly severe in New York City, where the high cost of living exceeds national averages. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a comprehensive, holistic approach that recognizes and addresses the deep links between housing instability and food insecurity. The 2024 zoning initiative “City of Yes for Housing Opportunity” highlights the potential of zoning changes to address housing instability by increasing housing supply and improving infrastructure.[14](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/Clr9) Such initiatives complement efforts to strengthen and expand housing voucher programs by making stable housing more accessible and allowing families to redirect resources to food and other basic needs. Additionally, investing in eviction

prevention programs is critical to stabilizing families at risk of losing their homes or being forced to relocate.[15–17](https://paperpile.com/c/koOC5F/VJoL%2Bup11%2BAT0O) Stable housing serves as the foundation for economic security, making it essential to address housing instability to curb the rise of food insecurity. By supporting housing plans that leverage the City's assets and reduce regulatory barriers to increase New York's affordable housing supply across all neighborhoods, and by providing additional funding to initiatives that address the root causes of housing loss, policymakers can mitigate economic insecurity and its cascading effects.

**NYU Food Environment and Policy Research Coalition**

The NYU Food Environment and Policy Research Coalition is comprised of faculty, staff members, and students who—through community-based and interdisciplinary research—aim to shape food environments that are health-driven, sustainable, and equitable. The Coalition conducts research that informs policy change on a range of topics to reduce disparities in nutrition and health.

To keep up with the NYU Food Environment and Policy Research Coalition, please visit [our website](https://nycfoodresearchco.org/resources-for-nyc-food-entrepreneurs/) or follow us on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/feed-collaborative/) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/nyuseedprogram/).

**City Harvest**

City Harvest is New York’s first and largest food rescue organization, collecting high-quality, nutritious food that would otherwise go to waste to help provide free food for millions of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity. Since our founding in 1982, we have rescued more than one billion pounds of fresh, nutritious food and delivered it—free of charge—to hundreds of food pantries, soup kitchens, community partners, and our own Mobile Markets® across the five boroughs. This year, we will rescue and distribute more than 81 million pounds of nutritious food to our neighbors in need. By redirecting that food to families, we will also prevent the equivalent of more than 24 million kilograms of CO2 from entering the atmosphere. Named one of America's Top 100 Charities by Forbes, City Harvest also works alongside our community partners to build their capacity, expand nutrition education, and advocate for systems change through effective public policy. For more than 40 years, City Harvest has been there to feed our city—one day, one meal, one New Yorker at a time. To learn more, please visit cityharvest.org.

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