



Study: NYC food emergencies up nearly 21%

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ALBANY, N.Y. - The recession may be easing, but the urgent need to feed New York's hungry is still sharp.

The number of people seeking emergency food assistance in New York City is up 20.9 percent over last year, but agencies were better able to meet that demand despite the shaky economy, according to a report released Monday by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

Agencies in New York and around the state have been able to help more people with a boost from federal stimulus money.

The study found that 51 percent of the agencies responding to the survey reported an increase in federal U.S. Department of Agriculture food assistance funding. And money for shelter and food in New York City from a Federal Emergency Management Agency program rose from \$4.5 million last year to \$7.4 million this year, with \$2.3 million from the recovery bill.

About 55 percent of agencies surveyed weren't able to distribute enough food to meet their current demand, down from nearly 69 percent last year.

Despite that, the economic downturn has increased demand enough that many agencies say they're still struggling.

"In our neighborhood, there is an insatiable demand for food," wrote the Rev. Paul Block, a pastor who works at the Bronx's Transfiguration Food Pantry. "Food insecurity is a significant problem. Even though we have increased tremendously the amount of people we serve, there continues to be people who are turned away."

The study only covers New York City, but upstate food banks and soup kitchens haven't seen as much of an increase in demand as last year, when the economic downturn was in full swing. And fewer programs are running out of food, said Mark Dunlea, the executive director of the Hunger Action Network of New York State. But demand is still up overall.

"As people lose jobs, it's just flooding into the emergency food programs," Dunlea said.

Hard-hit segments of the population include families with children, senior citizens and immigrants, according to the coalition.

The findings in the coalition's annual hunger survey are based on responses from 287 agencies that run soup kitchens, food pantries and similar programs.