

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS Researchers Link Food Insecurity to Job Loss, Illness

FAYETTEVILLE — Arkansans were more likely to rely on food pantry services following income loss or the diagnosis of a serious illness, according to a study published recently by researchers at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Office of Community Health & Research.

The study, “Events Precipitating Arkansas Food Pantry Utilization,” analyzed the events that led to individuals using seven different food pantries in Northwest Arkansas in 2018-2019. Job loss, acute and chronic illness, and fluctuation in the number of people in a household were the most common factors that led to increased pantry use. About three in four of those surveyed had been using food pantries for more than a year.

“I lost my job because of my illness, and we went down to one income, which was \$24,000 a year, and we were just trapped,” said one participant in the study. “We had to start doing something. The cupboards were getting bare.”

According to a 2019 Feeding America report, Arkansas has the second-highest rate of food insecurity in the U.S., with one in five Arkansans struggling to provide enough food for their families.

In the study, researchers noted the importance of health care and charitable food systems working together to address the unique situations each family faces when confronted with food insecurity.

“Food pantries are a vital resource for anyone struggling to put food on the table, but especially for those who experience unexpected hardships,” said Chris Long, Ph.D., an associate professor with the UAMS Office of Community Health & Research and a lead researcher on the study. “Understanding the situations that bring people to food pantries can better prepare charitable food systems and community organizations to support their clients to get the nutrition they need to live longer, healthier lives.”

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“Events Precipitating Arkansas Food pantry Utilization: A Qualitative Study” was published by *The Journal of the Arkansas Medical Society* and can be found arkmed.org/journal/.

For food assistance or to learn more about food security in Arkansas, visit arkansasfoodbank.org.

The UAMS Northwest Regional Campus includes 288 medical, pharmacy, nursing and health professions students, 64 medical and pharmacy residents, two sports medicine fellows, and 1,000 community-based faculty. The campus has nine clinics including a student-led clinic and physical, occupational and speech therapy. Faculty conduct research to reduce health disparities.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,047 students, 873 medical residents and fellows, and six dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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