

Candidate Hunger Action Challenge

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Running for:
San Francisco Mayor

"The government plays a critical role in addressing hunger in San Francisco through both immediate interventions and long-term systemic solutions."



What do you think are the root causes of hunger, and what do you see as the government's role in addressing them?

Hunger in San Francisco, like in many urban areas, is shaped by unique local factors as well as broader systemic issues. Below are the root causes of hunger in the city and the role the government can play in addressing them:

Root Causes of Hunger in San Francisco:

1. **High Cost of Living:** San Francisco has one of the highest costs of living in the U.S., particularly in terms of housing. Many residents, especially those in lower-income brackets, spend a significant portion of their income on rent, leaving little left for necessities like food. This financial strain leads to food insecurity even among working families.
2. **Income Inequality:** The city's wealth gap is stark, with high-paid tech workers living alongside low-income residents, including service workers, the elderly, and people experiencing homelessness. This economic divide exacerbates food insecurity for those who cannot keep up with rising costs, particularly in housing and healthcare.
3. **Homelessness:** San Francisco has a significant homeless population, and homelessness is closely linked to hunger. Without access to stable housing, many people struggle to obtain and store food, leading to increased reliance on soup kitchens, food pantries, and other emergency food services.
4. **Lack of Affordable Food Options:** Many low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco experience "food deserts," where residents have limited access to affordable, healthy food. Grocery stores may be scarce, and available options are often expensive, unhealthy, or both. This makes it harder for people to obtain nutritious meals on a tight budget.
5. **Underemployment and Unemployment:** While San Francisco has a vibrant job market in certain sectors, many residents are underemployed, working part-time, gig jobs, or in industries with low wages and few benefits. These precarious working conditions make it difficult for individuals to afford basic needs, including food.
6. **Immigrant and Undocumented Communities:** Immigrant and undocumented populations in San Francisco face unique challenges, including fear of accessing public assistance due to concerns about legal status, language barriers, and job insecurity. These barriers increase their risk of hunger.
7. **Gentrification and Displacement:** The rapid gentrification of certain neighborhoods in San Francisco has led to the displacement of long-term residents, pushing them into areas with fewer services and higher costs. Displacement disrupts community food networks and increases the risk of hunger.
8. **Inadequate Social Safety Net:** While San Francisco has progressive policies, gaps in the social safety net can leave some vulnerable populations without adequate support. For example, not everyone qualifies for food assistance programs like CalFresh (California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and the benefits may not be sufficient to cover the high cost of living in the city.

The Government's Role in Addressing Hunger in San Francisco:

1. **Strengthening Food Assistance Programs:** The city and state governments can expand access to programs like CalFresh, ensuring that benefits reflect the high cost of living. They can also simplify enrollment processes, address language barriers, and reduce fear for immigrant communities when accessing benefits.
2. **Affordable Housing Initiatives:** Addressing the housing crisis is key to reducing hunger. The government can invest in affordable housing and provide rent subsidies to reduce the financial burden on low-income residents, allowing them to allocate more resources to food.
3. **Supporting Food Banks and Community-Based Organizations:** The government can partner with food banks, non-profits, and community organizations to expand their capacity, improve food distribution networks, and provide funding for programs that deliver fresh, healthy food to those in need.

4. **Improving Access to Affordable, Healthy Food:** Governments can work to reduce “food deserts” by incentivizing grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food retailers to open in underserved areas. This could include subsidies or tax breaks to make healthy food more affordable and accessible in low-income neighborhoods.
5. **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Populations:** The city can focus on providing targeted assistance for specific vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, immigrants, and homeless individuals. Programs like home-delivered meals for seniors, outreach services for immigrants, and expanded food services for the homeless can help address hunger more effectively.
6. **Job Training and Economic Development:** Investing in job training programs, particularly in industries that pay living wages, can help reduce underemployment and unemployment. By helping low-income workers access better-paying jobs, the government can reduce the financial pressure that leads to food insecurity.
7. **Policy on Wage Increases:** Supporting policies that ensure living wages and protect workers’ rights, particularly in low-income sectors, would help address the root economic causes of hunger. Minimum wage adjustments in line with the cost of living would increase residents’ ability to afford basic needs, including food.
8. **Public Health and Nutrition Education:** The government can invest in public health campaigns and nutrition education, especially for low-income and marginalized communities. These programs can help residents maximize limited food resources, teaching cooking skills, and promoting healthy, affordable diets.
9. **Tackling Homelessness:** By expanding homelessness prevention and supportive housing initiatives, the government can reduce hunger among the city’s homeless population. Increasing access to shelters, affordable housing, and supportive services (like mental health and substance abuse treatment) can stabilize individuals and families, giving them a pathway out of hunger.

Conclusion:

The government plays a critical role in addressing hunger in San Francisco through both immediate interventions and long-term systemic solutions. Expanding food assistance programs, addressing the housing crisis, improving access to affordable food, and investing in economic opportunities are all crucial strategies. Collaborative efforts between local, state, and federal governments, alongside community organizations, are necessary to create a more equitable and food-secure San Francisco.

If elected, how would you ensure coordination between the multiple government departments that fund and administer food assistance programs?

As Mayor of San Francisco, I would ensure effective coordination between government departments administering food assistance by establishing a Food Security Task Force to oversee all programs and streamline efforts. This task force would create a Citywide Food Assistance Coordination Plan to align resources, eliminate service gaps, and promote data sharing across departments. I would appoint a Food Justice and Security Coordinator to oversee collaboration and accountability.

Key strategies include:

- Unified Eligibility System to make access easier across multiple programs.
- Regular Inter-Agency Meetings and joint budgeting to enhance collaboration.
- Partnering with community-based organizations and providing them with financial support to scale their efforts.
- Leverage technology for real-time data sharing and simplifying applications.
- Advocate for increased state and federal funding and foster public-private partnerships to sustain these efforts.

By centralizing oversight, improving data integration, and working with local partners, we can ensure that food assistance programs are efficient, accessible, and equitable across San Francisco.

Studies have shown food can be medicine. If elected, how do you plan to use your position to improve food-related health disparities?

I would address food-related health disparities by promoting the concept of “food as medicine” through several key initiatives:

1. **Healthy Food Prescription Programs:** Partner with healthcare providers to prescribe nutritious food for patients with chronic conditions, making healthy food accessible through local outlets.
2. **Expand Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens:** Increase support for community-based food programs and urban farming to provide fresh, affordable produce in underserved neighborhoods.
3. **Nutrition Education and Public Awareness:** Invest in nutrition education in schools, clinics, and community centers to promote healthy eating habits and prevent diet-related diseases.
4. **Integrate Food into Healthcare:** Incorporate food access into public health strategies by connecting food-insecure patients with assistance programs and healthy food options.

These initiatives will help reduce health disparities and promote better long-term health outcomes for all residents.

The San Francisco-Marín Food Bank will be closing all Food Bank-run Pop-Up Pantries by June 2025 due to cuts in government pandemic funding. This program currently serves 11,400 households, 75% of which are estimated to lose access to free weekly groceries when the funding ends. If elected, what would you do to ensure that all San Franciscans have access to nutritious foods?

I'd like to find a way to help fund the food bank. I think this can be done by encouraging our wealthy citizens to make recurring contributions to organizations such as the SF-Marín food bank.

I have friends who rely on food banks for their very survival, they're necessary and should be prioritized.

Absent benevolent benefactors, we should be able to find money somewhere in our \$15.9 billion dollar budget to feed our hungry citizens.

This will be a priority.