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**Prepared by Data You Can Use, in Collaboration with FoodCare: Milwaukee's Food and Healthcare Coalition**

In Fall 2024, Data You Can Use (DYCU), a member of FoodCare: Milwaukee's Food and Healthcare Coalition, convened three data chats with Milwaukee residents to discuss food access and health. Led by the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin in partnership with several other community- and health-based organizations, the FoodCare Coalition aims to influence policy and practice that creates conditions for children in Wisconsin to thrive. Using a model of small, focused conversations called "[data chats](#)", DYCU partnered with community organizations to learn from Milwaukee families about the state of food access in the city. Understanding the experiences of Milwaukee families working to provide healthy food and quality health care for their children will help guide the FoodCare Coalition in their efforts to create thriving conditions for these families.

During the data chats, Milwaukee residents shared their perspectives and experiences in accessing fresh, healthy food. This summary provides an overview of what was learned through the data chats. The full report [[LINK](#)] provides insights about both short- and long-term solutions for more equitable food access in Milwaukee, as well as more details around the key themes that emerged: 1) Economic Hardship, 2) Education & Training, and 3) Equity & Access.

**Economic Hardship**

Participants cited increasing food prices, rising costs for other basic needs like housing and healthcare, and disparities between racial groups and neighborhoods as the primary barriers. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, residents noticed food prices increasing rapidly, especially fresh foods. One participant said, "*[Prices] are increasing. I cannot even buy grapes or oranges. Corn bread in my home is now being made without eggs to be able to make it.*" Alongside food prices, many also shared concerns about the increasing costs of other basic needs. As one participant noted, "*There is always a choice between one or the other – food or medicine, food or housing, etc.*" Finally, many participants were concerned with inequitable food access among racial groups and neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The difference in frequency between corner stores – more commonly located in lower-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods predominantly composed of residents of color – and larger grocery stores was mentioned often. Participants noted that corner stores tend to have higher prices, so paychecks and food stamps did not stretch as far. However, due to time constraints and lack of access to transportation, many individuals cannot access the more affordable grocery stores.

**Education & Training**

Some participants pointed to individual-level issues, like lack of education and knowledge, as key factors contributing to the challenges with food access. As one participant mentioned,

*"It's education, on how to budget, make those meals you need to make, how to cook, etc. Make something that will stretch, not just today's meals but tomorrow's."* Many of the residents highlighted a lack of knowledge about budgeting, shopping and preparing healthy meals, and preserving fresh food to make it last. Beyond food-specific skills, others noted that many resources that currently existed were not being widely advertised or taken advantage of: *"Bring more knowledge and provide people with education so that they know the resources and ways that they can take advantage of them while also applying it to their own lives. Even about basic skills, like writing a resume, getting a job, etc."* Overall, many participants share the sentiment that expanding knowledge about resources for food access and job training, as well as skills like budgeting, shopping, meal planning, and food preservation, would improve the lives of Milwaukee families in the immediate future.

## **Equity & Access**

However, other participants pointed to systemic issues as the root causes behind these challenges. One resident said, *"There has always been food insecurity in our community. We pay more than any other race in the country for food, gas. This is not new. It's a way to keep a group of people in poverty. If we are so stressed because of the insecurity, how are you going to teach your children how to eat healthy? How to budget? In reality, no matter how much you budget, it's never going to be enough."* Largely, participants felt that low wages and high prices were a root cause for food insecurity and poor nutrition in Milwaukee. One participant noted, *"Food stamp [allotments] went up. The government made you go back to work [after the pandemic], gave us at least \$15 per hour, but the prices went up, the childcare is up, and transportation is up. You cannot live off of food stamps but going to work is also not enough."* Some participants pointed to government regulation and business systems as the party at fault: *"Corporate greed is a true problem. Grocery [stores] say that they are going to have cheaper prices, but that is not accurate. There is no regulation and it is a huge problem."* Additionally, systemic solutions like raising the minimum wage were posed as ways to improve food security among Milwaukee families.

## **Members of the FoodCare Coalition:**



The full report for this project can be found here [[LINK](#)]. For more information about this summary or the full report, contact Data You Can Use at [connectwithus@datayoucanuse.org](mailto:connectwithus@datayoucanuse.org). For more information about the FoodCare Coalition, contact Geeta Wadhvani at [gwadhvani@childrenswi.org](mailto:gwadhvani@childrenswi.org).