

Report puts \$160 billion price tag on U.S. hunger

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [December 23, 2015](#) issue

Hunger and food insecurity are so widespread in the United States that they add \$160 billion to national health-care spending, according to a Christian advocacy group.

David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, said in a report on November 23 that hunger is a key factor in the United States having the worst infant mortality rate among developed countries.

“All the things that we do that allow the infant mortality rate to be so high,” he said, are “in effect killing a hundred thousand babies in communities across this country a year.”

The report, titled *The Nourishing Effect: Ending Hunger, Improving Health, Reducing Inequality*, notes that the United States also ranks at or near the bottom for other health indicators such as obesity, lack of access to food, and maternal mortality.

The report says that as many as 50 million people—approximately one in six Americans—live in a state of sustained hunger or food insecurity, defined as not having adequate access to food to keep them healthy. It says the figure has remained “stubbornly high” at the same level since 2008, despite the recovering economy.

John T. Cook, an associate professor of pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine, who helped prepare the report, said the figure of \$160 billion in health-care costs is “probably an underestimate.”

But doctors are increasingly recognizing the connection between health and hunger, experts said.

Acacia Bamberg Salatti of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said hospitals are partnering with church groups to help patients translate their doctor’s instructions and connect them to healthy meals.

“At the end of the day, health care and hunger are very much linked,” she said. “You can’t be healthy, you can’t be able to stave off chronic diseases if you’re not eating healthy food.”

Sarah Jane Schwarzenberg of the American Academy of Pediatrics said there should be as much attention given to the economic and human costs of food insecurity as to a comparable breakout in infectious disease.

“The fact that we can’t see it makes it very hard for people to deal with it,” she said.
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