



## Introduction

The coronavirus has impacted millions of people all over the United States. In New Jersey, small businesses are closing, workers are unemployed, and families are finding it difficult to provide. This is especially evident in the county of Hudson and nine casinos. Thousands of people in the county of work as a result of closures

RFFXSDWLRQV RU ZRUN LQ WKH OHLVXUH, 2020 The Pew Research Center (2020) reports that 16 percent of the population in the United States is food insecure (16 percent of the population is food insecure). This is a significant increase from the 10 percent reported in 2013. The increase is particularly concerning for low-income households, where food insecurity has risen from 20 percent to 37 percent. This is a significant increase from the 10 percent reported in 2013. The increase is particularly concerning for low-income households, where food insecurity has risen from 20 percent to 37 percent.

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 residents for 14 percent, work in service occupations, about 6 percentage points higher than the national rate. Of those, 37 percent are in food preparation and serving, specifically. Many of these residents likely work in Atlantic City, a hub for service and hospitality jobs (Data USA, 2020). By the end of 2018, the nine casinos in Atlantic City employed 27,900 people.

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According to Pew Research, workers in the service sector have longer earnings to begin with and are disproportionately impacted by the delay of (Kochhar and Barroso, 2020). Many of these people are with income and now face a higher risk of food insecurity. The Community Food Bank of New Jersey also notes that while Southern New Jersey has relatively few cases of Coronavirus compared to the rest of the state, the shutdown of casinos and related hospitality businesses will continue to have a devastating effect on the economy, highlighting (SDUWLFXODUO\ \$WODQWLF & RXQW\ DQG WKH V LQG X VWU\ VXSSRUWV VR 2020). Many of the low-income households that are the most at risk for Atlantic County with the closure of the casinos. Sources suggest that Atlantic City has become more food insecure because of the increased unemployment. Feeding America projects a shortfall of \$20 million in additional resources for New Jersey over six months beginning in March (CFBNC).

Covid-19 effects on Atlantic County unemployment

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the graphs below. Predictably, unemployment reached an all time high when New Jersey went into lockdown. Atlantic County had the highest rate of unemployment among New Jersey counties.

in April (BLS, 2020) Of these 30,000 people that were put out of work in the matter of a few days, more than 25,000 of them were casino workers (Bensie, 2020)

A year-to-year comparison of April 2019 employment rates to April 2020 demonstrates that Atlantic County had the highest jump nationwide. To contrast Atlantic County had 26.6% unemployment and Cumberland County was just under the average with 16.2% at the time. Kahului, Wiluku-Lahaina in Hawaii, up 32.5% in April 2019 and Las Vegas, Nevada, up 30%, were the only two regions to have a larger year-over-year increase than Atlantic County that month (Betti, 2020). However, in May, Atlantic County had the second highest jump in the nation and by June had the highest change (BLS, 2020)

Figure 2

Atlantic County Unemployment Rate Year Over-Year	2019	2020	Percentage Increase	National Ranking of YOY Increase
April	4.2%	33.8%	29.6%	3 <sup>rd</sup>
May	4.2%	32.5%	28.3%	2 <sup>nd</sup>
June	4.4%	34.3% (P)	29.9%	1 <sup>st</sup>

(P): Preliminary data  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

It is also useful to see how the

Figure 3.

### Food assistance during COVID

The labor force data suggest that thousands of people within Atlantic County are receiving income and could have trouble providing their families with food more so than the Hughes Center poll showed this year March. According to that poll, before Atlantic County unemployment skyrocketed, residents were

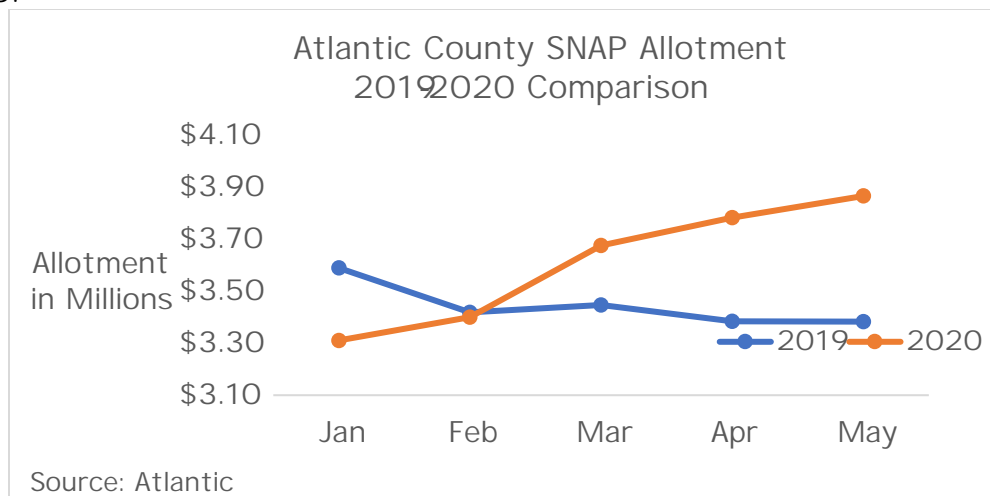
Mayis compared data showed that 2,394 more people were receiving SNAP in 2020 than in 2019 (an 8% increase). These numbers are reflected in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4.

Whereas

is expressed in Figure 5 below. It shows a consistent increase during pandemic months of \$500,000 in the month of May. allotment with a noticeable year-over-year increase of nearly \$500,000 in the month of May.

Figure 5.



We can also look at welfare benefits, such as General Assistance (GA), to show Atlantic County residents may be in need. The money GA provides to individuals can be used for rent, mortgage payments, utility payments, and transportation, among many other essential living expenses. Figure 6 below shows the number of GA cases and the total GA expenditures in Atlantic County for 2019 and 2020. GA cases and expenditures increased during the pandemic months unlike in 2019 when there was a slight decline over this same time period. In June 2020, there was a 30% increase in cases and a 60% increase in expenditures from June 2019. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is another form of cash assistance issued to families for income assistance, childcare, and transportation among other needs. However, the total Atlantic County provided TANF also included payments for an additional program, Home Energy Assistance, which is a fixed yearly amount and did not reflect current financial hardships to allow for accurate comparison across years.



Figure 6.

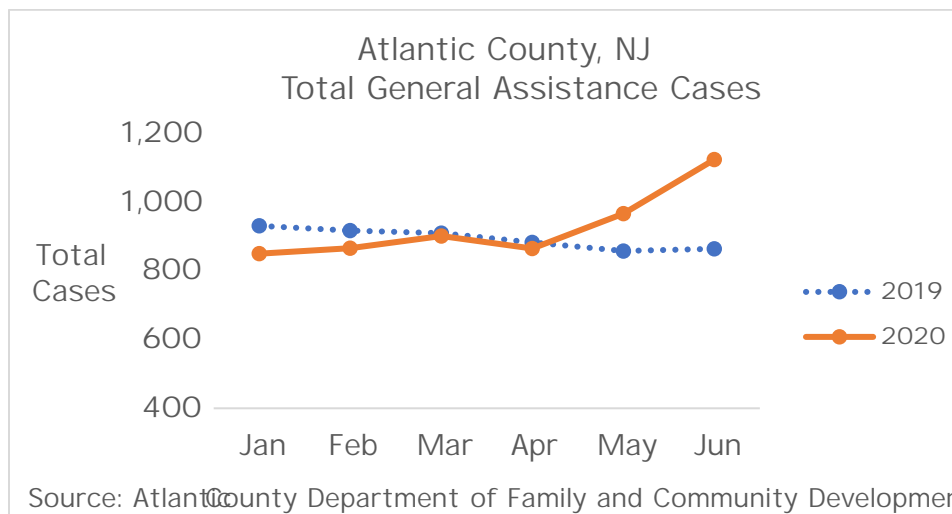
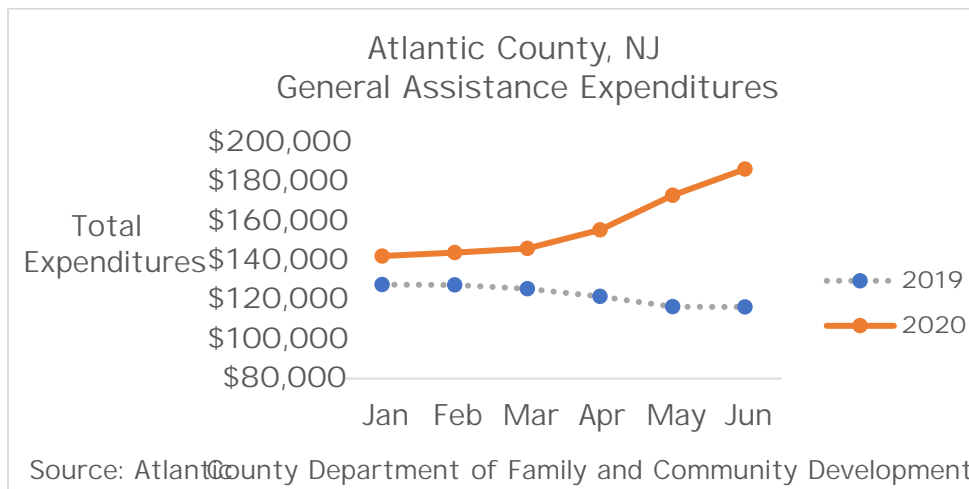


Figure 7.



The increases in SNAP and cash assistance expenditures to address the rising need among residents occurred throughout all of New Jersey County ranked 18 in the state in terms of highest SNAP expenditures for the period of March to July 2020. However, despite having the highest unemployment rate in the state, this increase represented the 18% overyear increase in expenditures over this period from the same period in 2019. At 65%, it ranked behind nearby Camden County which saw a 69% jump, for instance, despite Camden having less than half the unemployment. A comparison of expenditures for cash assistance across the state demonstrates similar findings with Atlantic ranking 15th in the state for year

overyear change from 2019. Figure 8 and Figure 9 below show the year-over-year increase in expenditures for SNAP and cash assistance for South Jersey counties.

Figure 8

South	-Over-Year Change in Total SNAP Expenditures for July			
	Mar-Jul, 2019	Mar-Jul, 2020	Percent Change:	Unemployment rate as of June 2020:
Statewide Total	\$388,127,081.2	\$653,092,779.1	68%	16.6%
Atlantic	\$18,331,751.5	\$30,222,664.1	65%	34.3%

To speak directly to the need for food assistance, I was able to get statistics from the Atlantic County Health Department. The data shows that Atlantic County had the highest rate of falls relative to population from January to June with a total of 579. These numbers are much higher than usual as Melissa Atone of NJ211, said when providing the data. She also informed that food assistance calls were up throughout the entire state during the months of March, April, and May. In Atlantic County, assistance calls rose above 300 each month during this period. In April 2020 they received almost 2,500 calls for food assistance information and just under 2,000 in the following months of May and June. Atlantic County had the highest rate of calls compared to other NJ counties and with the highest unemployment as well as dramatic increases in SNAP recipients and cases, Atlantic County looks significantly more food insecure than before the pandemic.

### Foodbank response to Covid

Food banks are first responders for those in need and their data would be another indicator of whether Atlantic County has become more food insecure since the onset of the pandemic. I looked at the Community Food Bank of New Jersey (CFBNJ), the largest food bank in NJ with pantries in both Newark and Egg Harbor Township, NJ with a focus on the Egg Harbor Township pantry as they distribute food, as well as smaller food pantries in Atlantic County.

Their numbers for distribution, expenditures, and emergency meal kits all rose considerably from the month of March and on top of this with these increasing numbers, the CFBNJ partnered with the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) and UNITE

HERE Local 54 to hold biweekly food drives on the weekend for the thousands of Atlantic City (specifically of work casino employees) who need food. During the months of lockdown, the CFBNJ reported that demand through their partner pantries was up more than 50% and the number of food boxes distributed on an average tripled since the beginning of the crisis (CFBNJ, 2020). At the end of June, the CFBNJ had distributed nearly 70,000 emergency meal kits statewide. One of the main areas targeted for help was Atlantic County, with Atlantic City casino workers receiving the most at more than 30,000 meal kits (CNJGM, 2020). As far as expenditures go, data specific to Atlantic County is available, but statewide the CFBNJ (Newark and Egg Township pantries) has seen spending go up \$1 million to \$1.3 million more per month on food purchases (CNJGM, 2020). This is compared to pre-pandemic when more than 50% of the food that the CFBNJ distributed was donated and less than 50% came by way of purchase through government funds (40%) and a purchase program (CNJGM, 2020). Because donations went down and need went up when the pandemic began, a sharp increase in spending and government commodities became the main source of food that the CFBNJ would distribute.

The toll on South Jersey workers: Union leaders weigh in

I had the opportunity to speak with two people

more than 10,000 members. I spoke with them to determine whether their members were able to put food on the table and whether they had to sign up for SNAP benefits or go to a food pantry. Their answers were drastically different, reflecting how certain types of employees have harder by the pandemic

My first interview was with Edward Boylan at the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 68. He holds the position of President and spoke about the impact of the coronavirus on his union members. During our conversation, I asked if any members had faced unemployment and had trouble putting food on the table, since many of them work to maintain the hotels and casinos in Atlantic City which were shut down due to the pandemic. He quickly replied "2 XU PHPEHUV DUH SUHWW\ UHVLOLHQW DQG ZH K PHPEHUV DUH DOUHDG\ EDFN WR ZRUN EHFDXVH WKH\ PDLQ as many customers, the building still has to operate. He added, "FDQ W WKLQN RI RQH member who called me up and said I need food. He stated that during the weekly

unemployment goes to the cost of healthcare in addition to paying their bills which is not something they normally have to do. This has further compounded their struggle that they

WR SXW IRRG RQ WKH WDEOH ´ , In addition to the cost of emergency services like and she told me that her member IRXJKW IRU HYHU\WKLQJ WKDW V ILJKWHUV VR WKH\ UHPDLQ RSWLPLVWLF DQG KRSHIXO ´ ,

Boylan and how the experiences of the community during the pandemic are opposite and she

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When asked about her own struggles to what her members are going through

V D L L G is heartbreaking, and we are making every effort to feed their families and qualify for

XQHPSOR\PHQW ´ 7KHVH HIIRUWV KDYH FRPH LQ WKH IRUP of other weeks which DE

Atlantic County and New Jersey residents? Will even more small businesses be forced to go out of business because people are not allowed inside?

### Conclusion

Atlantic County has been deeply impacted by the statewide lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Since the middle of March, Atlantic County residents have been unemployed and, for those who worked in the casinos, having trouble providing food for their families. This paper has expressed much more food insecurity in Atlantic County in the time after the Hughes Center conducted its poll in March. In year-over-year increases in measures such as SNAP recipient numbers, the numbers speak for themselves. Regarding unemployment, while the county has begun to recover since April, casino workers are still unemployed and outdoor dining is not viable as a solution for them. There are thousands of people out of work and relying on unemployment to keep a roof over their head and food on the table but finding it difficult to do so. Food pantries have been the source for those who cannot buy groceries. The CFBNJ is seeing the effects of the pandemic and high rates of unemployment every day. In Atlantic County they are distributing more food and more emergency meals than before the pandemic and statewide they are spending exponentially more money to acquire this food. It even became appropriate to coordinate a mass biweekly drive to try to accommodate the greatest amount of people possible when the pantries all could not keep up with demand.

When speaking to union heads, the food system shows bright spots, but the reality of

COVID19 IMPACT ON FOOD



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