



center for BEST PRACTICES



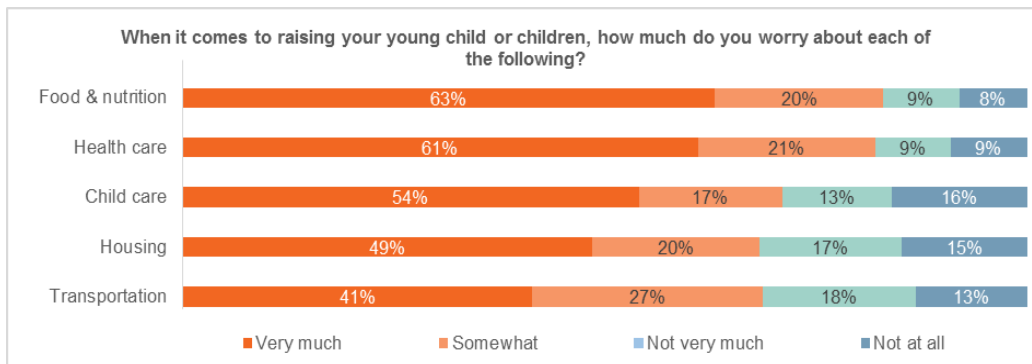
THE ROLE OF DOCTORS IN IMPACTING EARLY CHILDHOOD HUNGER

BACKGROUND

Early childhood is a critical period of growth and development, and access to adequate food and nutrition in early childhood can have long-lasting implications on health and well-being. Share Our Strength partnered with APCO Insight to conduct a national survey among low-income families less than 185% of the poverty income ratio who have children five years old and younger (pre-K). Between December 2016 and January 2017, a total of 1,000 parents and caregivers participated in the survey.¹ The survey asked parents and caregivers about their experiences caring for and feeding their young children, as well as sources of support. This brief focuses on the role of doctors in helping to ensure young children get adequate food.

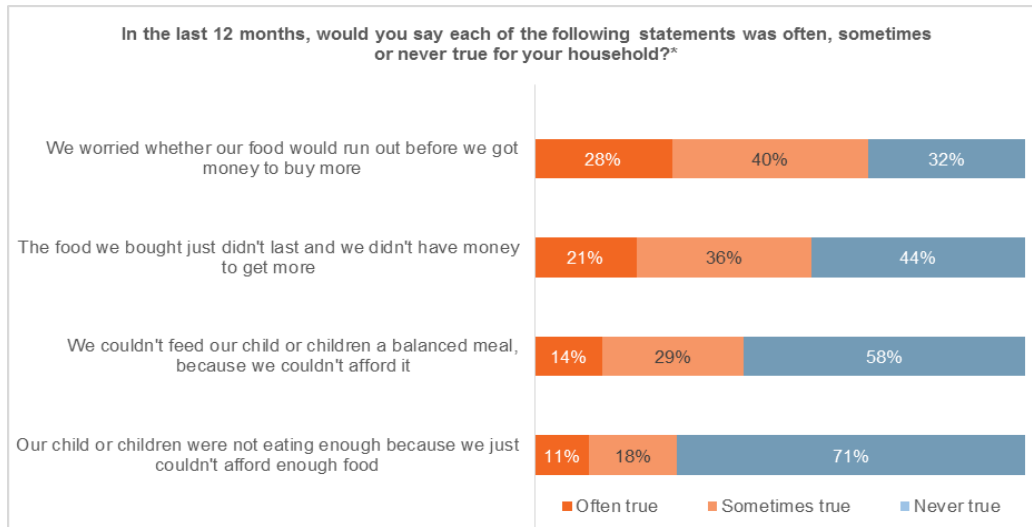
FOOD CONCERNS AND VULNERABILITY

Food and nutrition is a top concern for more than eight in ten low-income families with young children.



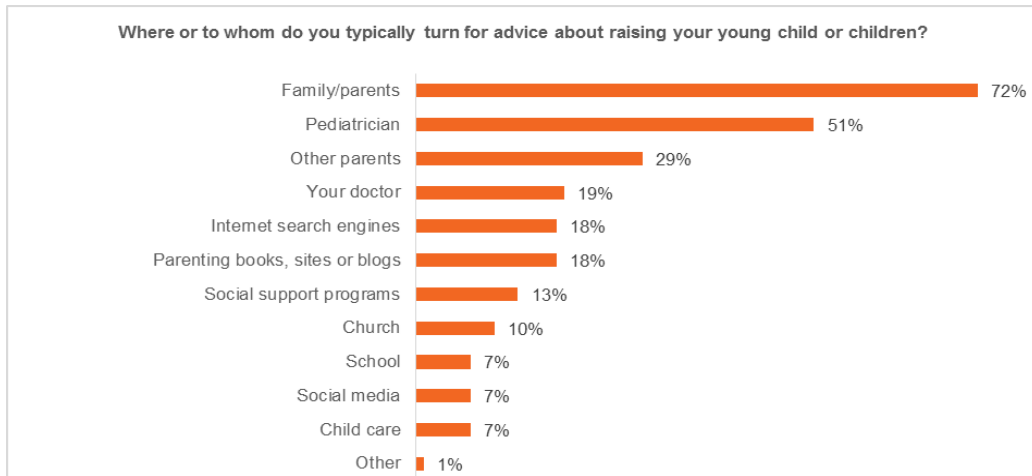
Low-income parents with young children acknowledged serious food challenges in the past year.

- More than two in three (68%) say they worried their food would run out before they got money to buy more.
- More than half (56%) say the food they bought did not last and they did not have the money to buy more.
- An alarming number report food challenges involving their children, including 42 percent who were not able to feed their child a balanced meal. Nearly one in three (29%) said their child was not eating enough.

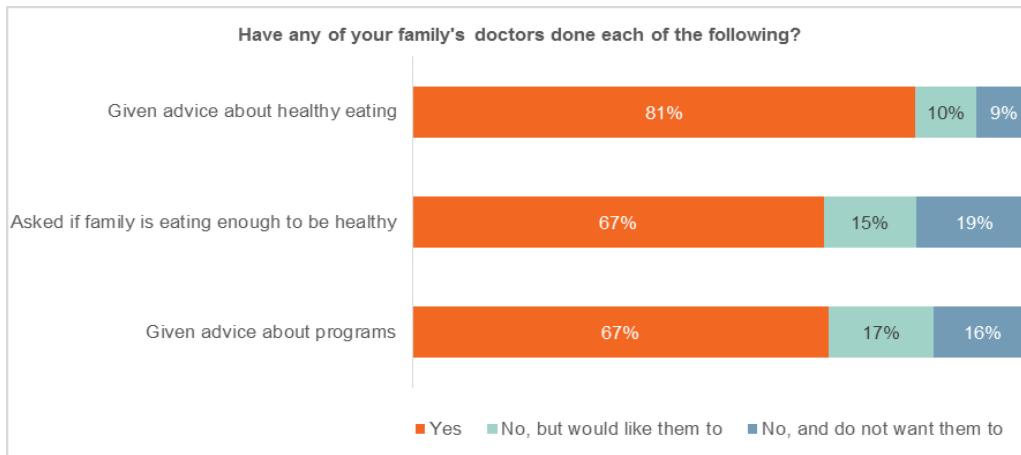


DOCTORS AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

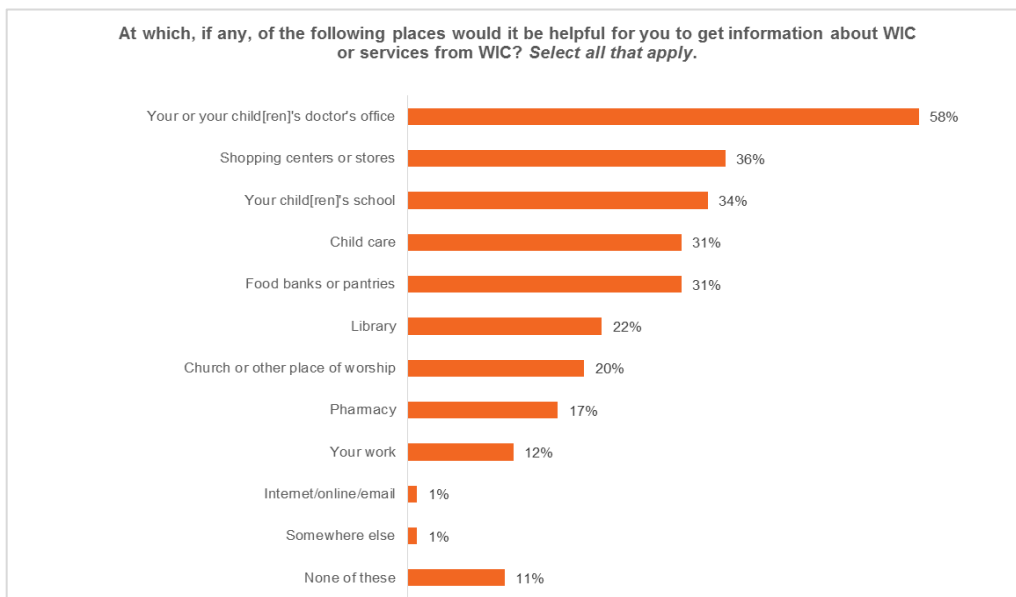
Pediatricians frequently interact with families during the early stages of children’s lives, providing care, information, and support. Our survey confirms that parents seek out their doctor’s advice about caring for their children in general. One in two low-income parents turn to their children’s doctors for advice about raising their young children.



In recent years, there has been increasing acknowledgment that doctors have an important role to play in addressing social determinants that impact health, including hunger. Recognizing this, in 2015, the American Academy of Pediatrics released a policy statement recommending that all pediatricians screen for food insecurity. Our survey found that doctors are asking families about hunger and sharing information about nutrition support programs. Many low-income parents say their doctors discuss food and nutrition with them, including asking whether their family is eating enough, offering advice about how to eat healthy, and providing information on social support programs. Still, between 10 and 17 percent would like this information but are not getting it.



Another way doctors can impact hunger is by playing an even greater role in promoting the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). More than one in two parents (58%) favor receiving information about WIC services from their doctor's office.



CONCLUSIONS

Hunger is a serious issue among low-income families with young children. Many say feeding their families over the last year has been challenging. Doctors have an important role to play in providing parents with information on healthy eating and social support programs, and in assessing if families are eating enough to be healthy. Many parents receive information from doctors already, and consider pediatricians in particular to be among the most preferred sources of advice about caring for their kids. Other parents don't receive this information yet and would like their doctors to provide it, pointing to the need to increase doctor engagement. Future research could gather in-depth information about how frequently parents seek out or receive advice from their doctors, the nature of this advice, and the extent to which parents are acting on such information, to truly understand the impact.

ⁱ 600 online and 400 by telephone