



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

THRU: Chris Shorter, Assistant City Manager

FROM: Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer

DATE: July 8, 2020

SUBJECT: Project Summary and Update: Assessing Community Food Needs in Response to COVID-19

Background

The Office of Sustainability is serving as the Food Access Task Force lead as part of the Social Service branch of the Emergency Operation Center's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this role, the Office of Sustainability requested assistance from the UT School of Public Health (UT-SPH) to assess community food needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of the project is to identify specific populations and areas in Austin-Travis County that are experiencing pandemic-related urgent food access needs. This information will be useful in informing funding allocation of emergency resources and to guide food access planning as part of the ongoing pandemic response.

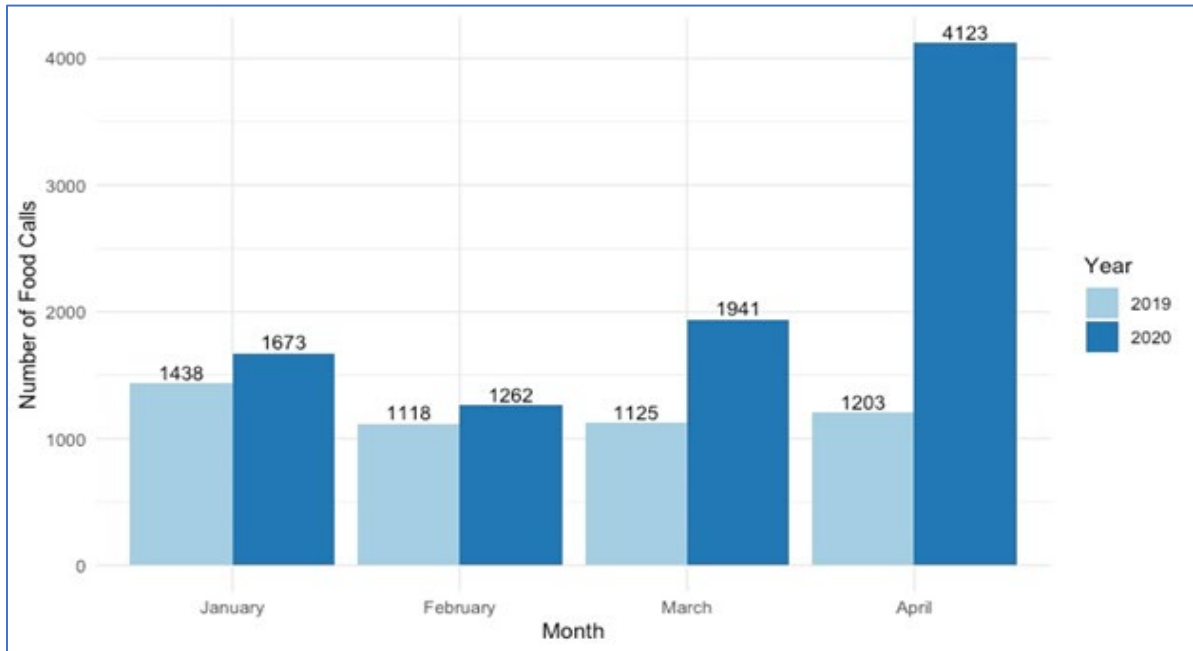
Project Summary

The project provides an analysis of United Way/2-1-1 call data performed by UT-SPH professor Dr Alexandra VanDenBerg and her graduate assistant. Work on this project began in May and is expected to last through August 2020. UT-SPH will deliver reports on monthly food access needs reported to 2-1-1 during March, April and May 2020. Reported "food access needs" include calls to 2-1-1 about food pantries, soup kitchens, free meals, food and meal delivery, SNAP, free and reduced-price lunch and other food-related issues, as well as calls made about SNAP that were transferred to Texas Health and Human Services.

Initial Findings from Analysis of United Way/2-1-1 Call Data

The initial report covers food access needs reported to 2-1-1 in March and April 2020. High-level findings include:

- Overall calls and food-related calls to 2-1-1 increased during March and April, relative to previous monthly trends. The driving factor for the exponential increase in food calls in April 2020 was a large volume of SNAP-related calls



- In April 2020, food needs made up the largest share of call reasons. However, food access needs are not isolated, but rather cluster with other issues associated with poverty. These include financial/unemployment, health/mental health and housing and utility issues — all of which were reported in the overall increase of calls to 2-1-1 during March and April.
- Zip codes located in southern and northeastern Travis County had the highest food-related call volume with the fewest number of emergency feeding assets.
- More food assets were available in March than in April, as some emergency food resources paused or suspended operations during the early days of the pandemic. According to partners such as the Central Texas Food Bank, many food pantries and other assets have since been able to reopen and provide essential food access services to the community.
- Ongoing analysis for future months would allow for a deeper understanding of the changes in food needs over time, since the beginning of the pandemic response in March 2020.

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
 Stephanie Hayden, Austin Public Health Director