

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105458](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The COVID-19 pandemic and recent economic challenges, including inflation and increased housing costs, have raised questions about whether more U.S. households are experiencing hunger and homelessness. House Report 117-99 includes a provision for GAO to conduct a study on federal programs that address hunger and homelessness. Among its objectives, this report (1) describes the geographic distribution of EFSP, CoC, and ESG funding and how per capita program funding aligns with state-level homelessness rates, median rents, and income inequality; and (2) compares the geographic distribution of two rounds of ESG funding under the CARES Act, one using the traditional ESG funding formula and the other a formula developed to target populations experiencing homelessness.

GAO reviewed prior work and federal agency documentation and reports to identify key federal programs that can provide food or housing assistance to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. GAO reviewed agency funding data and documentation. GAO analyzed the geographic distribution of funding of the three key programs that use formulas to allocate funding (EFSP, CoC, and ESG) and how per capita funding aligned with indicators of need that GAO determined relevant to the programs—two of which primarily focus on addressing homelessness. GAO also interviewed agency officials, advocacy groups, and recipient organizations.

View [GAO-23-105458](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or CackleyA@gao.gov.

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HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS

Funding Distribution for Key Programs

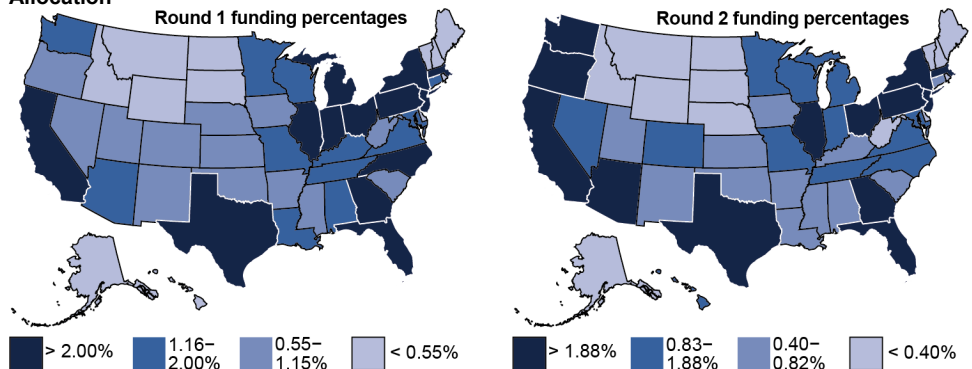
What GAO Found

Five key federal programs can provide food or housing assistance to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness: the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), and Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

Of the programs providing food or housing assistance, GAO analyzed the geographic distribution of funding for the three that use formulas to allocate funding to qualifying jurisdictions—EFSP, CoC, and ESG. None of the programs are required to use criteria related to homelessness in their formulas. State funding per capita for these programs did not always align with measures of homelessness, rental costs, and income inequality. For example, in fiscal year 2020, two states with some of the highest per capita funding for CoC—Connecticut and Louisiana—were among the states with the lowest level of homelessness. Another state with relatively high per capita funding for CoC, Ohio, ranked among the bottom half for each measure of need. Analysis of per capita funding also showed different geographic patterns. States in the Northeast and West tended to receive the highest EFSP and CoC funding per capita, while ESG funding tended to be concentrated in the Northeast and parts of the Midwest.

A CARES Act-related change to the ESG funding formula in 2020 resulted in better targeting of funds to states with large homeless populations than under the traditional formula. The CARES Act provided funds to be awarded in two rounds. The first round allocated \$1 billion using the traditional formula, which does not factor in measures of homelessness. The second round allocated \$2.96 billion using a formula that weighted indicators of homelessness. As a result, states with the largest homeless populations received a greater share of program funds in the second round. For example, California, New York, Texas, and Florida accounted for over 50 percent of funds allocated in the second round, compared to about 34 percent in the first round.

Emergency Solutions Grants – CARES ACT Round 1 and 2 Funding by Percentage of Allocation



Sources: GAO and Department of Housing and Urban Development. | GAO-23-105458