



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

What is SNAP?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is the nation's first line of defense against hunger in America. Congress and the Administration should protect and strengthen this vital program to ensure nobody in this country goes hungry.

SNAP helps millions of low-income Americans put food on the table, providing benefits that are timely, targeted, and temporary. SNAP responds quickly to changes in need, growing in response to increases in poverty and unemployment. The program is targeted to help our most vulnerable neighbors, predominantly serving households that include children, seniors, and people with disabilities. SNAP benefits phase out as participants get back on their feet, with the average household staying on the program about a year. SNAP is also a highly efficient program, boasting one of the highest payment accuracy rates and one of the lowest fraud rates of any benefit program. SNAP delivers appropriate benefits with low administrative overhead.

HOW SNAP WORKS

SNAP benefits are delivered monthly to eligible participants through electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards that can be used to purchase groceries at over 260,000 authorized retailers nationwide. Benefits are redeemable only for food and boost the purchasing power of eligible low-income families to obtain the nutrition they need through normal channels of commerce, like their local grocery store. The federal government pays 100% of SNAP benefits, but administrative costs are shared between federal and state governments. SNAP households must generally have a gross income below 130% of poverty, which for a family of four equals \$2,665 a month. A SNAP household's net monthly income, or income after deductions are applied for items such as high housing costs and child care, must be less than or equal to the poverty line, which is \$2,050 monthly for a family of four.

SNAP IS EFFECTIVE

SNAP began in the 1960s with the lofty goal to utilize "the Nation's abundance of food ... to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's population and raise levels of nutrition among low-income households." SNAP has a strong, evidence-based track record in effectively meeting this goal. In fact, SNAP helped more than 8.4 million people lift themselves out of poverty in 2015 (the most recent year available).

SNAP IS TIMELY & RESPONDS TO CHANGES IN NEED

One of the strongest features of SNAP is its ability to respond quickly to changes in need. This is the case both during natural and economic disasters. After major storms, floods or other disasters, the program can immediately respond to help displaced families with disaster SNAP assistance.

During the recent recession, SNAP participation grew alongside rising unemployment and is falling as the economy slowly recovers. The program also responds to local economies as they face circumstances particular to different areas. Households typically spend their monthly benefits quickly, making SNAP a particularly effective stimulus in providing quick support to local economies - every dollar in SNAP benefits helps generate more than \$1.70 in economic activity.

SNAP IS TARGETED

SNAP serves very vulnerable populations. According to USDA, the vast majority of SNAP participants (64%) are children, seniors, or people with disabilities. Children under 18 account for nearly half (44%) of all SNAP participants and families with children receive nearly two-thirds (67%) of all SNAP benefits.

SNAP households also have very low incomes. Over 80 percent have gross incomes at or below the poverty line (\$25,100 annually for a family of four in 2018, and \$12,140 for a person living alone, such as an elderly widow). Two out of every five SNAP households have incomes at or below half the poverty line. Nearly 57 percent of SNAP benefits go to households with incomes at or below half the poverty line, which for a family of four, amounts to \$12,550 a year.

SNAP IS TEMPORARY & ENCOURAGES WORK

SNAP supports households as they get back on their feet, providing them with needed nutrition and encouraging work. SNAP is structured to provide a strong work incentive by phasing out benefits slowly as earnings increase. Through the use of Broad Based Categorical Eligibility, states can smooth out the modest “benefit cliff.” For every additional dollar a SNAP participant earns, their benefits decline by about 30 cents, not a full dollar, so participants have a strong incentive to find a job, work longer hours, or seek better-paying employment.

A study by USDA finds that new participants spend an average of only 12 months on SNAP and most leave the program within two years. More than half of SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult work while on SNAP; more than 80 percent work in the year before or after receiving SNAP. For many of these families, SNAP is an important work support while they are between jobs or looking for work; it doesn't keep them from looking for work.

SNAP PROVIDES STATE FLEXIBILITY & FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY

SNAP's structure couples local decision-making with federal oversight to deliver a program that is both flexible for state administrators and accountable to the federal taxpayer. States have a robust framework of state options when administering SNAP, enabling them to adapt the program to best meet the needs of their state.

At the same time, federal oversight ensures that SNAP is accountable both to taxpayers and to participants. Consistent eligibility parameters and benefit levels across states ensure that eligible families are guaranteed food assistance when they fall on hard times, regardless of where they live.

SNAP IS EFFICIENT & ACCURATE

Nearly 93% of federal SNAP spending is for benefits to purchase food. The remainder goes toward administrative costs including monitoring of retailers and anti-fraud activities, and important services like employment and training that help participants find work. SNAP has one of the best records of accuracy and preventing fraud, with an accuracy rate over 96% of SNAP benefits issued to eligible households.

SNAP IMPROVES HEALTH & EDUCATION OUTCOMES

SNAP promotes long-term health and well-being, especially for children. Groundbreaking research in 2016 showed that children with access to SNAP in early childhood and whose mothers had access during pregnancy were less likely in adulthood to have stunted growth, be diagnosed with heart disease, or be obese, and they were more likely to graduate from high school.

WE NEED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO PUSH FOR A STRONG FARM BILL

Congress should protect and strengthen SNAP and increase access to SNAP benefits. The farm bill should ensure adequate SNAP benefits and program resources, simplifying and increasing application efficiency for seniors and those with disabilities. Congress should also maintain broad-based categorical eligibility to address SNAP's modest benefit cutoff and encourage asset building.

