



# THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In 2021, 41 million people in the U.S. participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).<sup>1</sup> SNAP enables eligible households to afford nutritious food by providing monthly funds through a debit-style Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. These restricted funds can only be spent on food at USDA-approved retailers. Federal eligibility for the program is limited to those who have a gross income under 130% of the federal poverty level and have limited resources.

## HOW DOES SNAP HELP?

SNAP is designed to ensure households with the lowest income receive the most benefits. The benefits also adapt to a fluid economy, emergencies, disasters, and even changes within households, such as a new baby or a job loss. Eligibility and benefit amounts are calculated on a case by case basis within boundaries set by law.

- As of October 1, 2022, a family of four must have a gross income under \$3,007/month to qualify.
- The maximum allotment for this family of four is \$939/month.
- This means a family could spend about \$2.61 per person for each meal.<sup>2</sup>

## WHO DOES SNAP HELP?

**SNAP supports families with children, seniors, and adults living with disabilities**

- An estimated 14 million, or **one in five U.S. children participate in SNAP.**<sup>3</sup>
- 66% of all SNAP recipients live in a household with children.<sup>4</sup>
- 36% of all SNAP recipients live with someone who is elderly or has a disability.<sup>5</sup>
- Only 13% of households receiving SNAP benefits are adults aged 18 to 49, without disabilities, and with no children. This small group is often referred to as ABAWDS (able-bodied adults with no dependents) and are subject to time limits and additional work requirements.

## Active military and veterans are eligible for SNAP

- According to USDA estimates, 22,000 active duty service members and 213,000 National Guard members or reservists participate in SNAP.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.1 million veterans participate in SNAP, with the largest amounts from Florida, Texas, and California.<sup>7</sup>
- Military and veteran data around public benefits is limited and participation rates likely underestimate how many military and veteran households are eligible for SNAP.

## Working families use SNAP

- 84% of SNAP families had at least one person working in the past 12 months.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2019, the average SNAP household, which is two individuals, had an income of \$872 per month or an annual gross income of only \$10,464.<sup>9</sup>

## Rural households participate in SNAP

- More than 16% of SNAP recipients live outside of metropolitan areas.
- For comparison, only 13% of the overall U.S. population live outside of metropolitan areas.<sup>10</sup>

## U.S. citizens and lawful residents are eligible

- In addition to U.S. citizens, only lawfully present immigrant children, refugees, asylees, and qualified immigrant adults who have been in the U.S. for at least five years are eligible for SNAP.
- Undocumented persons are not eligible for SNAP.

## WHAT ABOUT FRAUD?

The overall error rate in SNAP is low, and intentional fraud and trafficking are extremely rare.

- The national payment error rate (NPER) measures errors in benefit amounts.
- This includes fraud and inadvertent mistakes.
- The rate includes overpayments (when participants receive more benefits than they are eligible for) and underpayments (when participants receive less than they are eligible for).
- The NPER was 7.36% in 2019.
- Only 0.9% of SNAP issuances in 2019 were overpayments of any sort, including overpayments due to both household and agency errors.
- Intentional reporting of false information that results in an overpayment is fraud.
- In fiscal year 2019, only 0.1% of SNAP issuances were overpayments based on intentional program violations.<sup>11</sup>
- 1.5% of SNAP benefits redeemed from fiscal years 2012-2014 were trafficked by retailers, meaning SNAP retailers were involved in the illicit sale of SNAP benefits.<sup>12</sup> Those retailers may be subject to permanent disqualification and fines.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/data-files/keydata-august-2022.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-fy-2023-cola-adjustments.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-trends-fy2016-2020.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-struggling-families-put-food-on-the-table-0#part5>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/military-and-veteran-families>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

<sup>8</sup> <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=S2201%3A%20FOOD%20STAMPS%2FSUPPLEMENTAL%20NUTRITION%20ASSISTANCE%20PROGRAM%20%28SNAP%29&q=0100000US&tid=ACSSTIY2021.S2201>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2019, by Kathryn Cronquist. Project Officer, Barbara Murphy. Alexandria, VA, 2021. Accessed at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/characteristics-snap-households-fy-2019>

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2019, by Kathryn Cronquist. Project Officer, Barbara Murphy. Alexandria, VA, 2021. Accessed at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/characteristics-snap-households-fy-2019>

<sup>11</sup> <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/FY19-state-activity-report.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R45147.pdf>