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SNAP & BBCE

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) is a set of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) policy options that states may choose to implement. It helps eligible low-income families access and manage eligibility for SNAP by softening the benefits cliff while also allowing states to reduce costs and lessen the administrative burden on the agency. BBCE reduces paperwork, streamlines the application and certification processes, and lowers the risk of human error**. Internal analysis shows that a BBCE policy is associated with a SNAP payment error rate up to 1.68 percentage points lower compared to no BBCE policy.**[1]

Traditional Categorical Eligibility

Under traditional categorical eligibility, households receiving cash assistance through a means-tested program like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or state general assistance (GA), are automatically financially eligible for SNAP.

- The households have already undergone a rigorous eligibility determination process through another government regulated safety-net program.
- While these households meet the initial financial eligibility standards, they must still satisfy all other SNAP eligibility requirements, including citizenship and residency, household size and composition, and any applicable work participation and reporting.

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility

BBCE is a set of state policy choices that applies this streamlined process to households eligible for non-cash assistance funded by the TANF program. States can align the income and resource eligibility thresholds across programs to make the process more efficient.

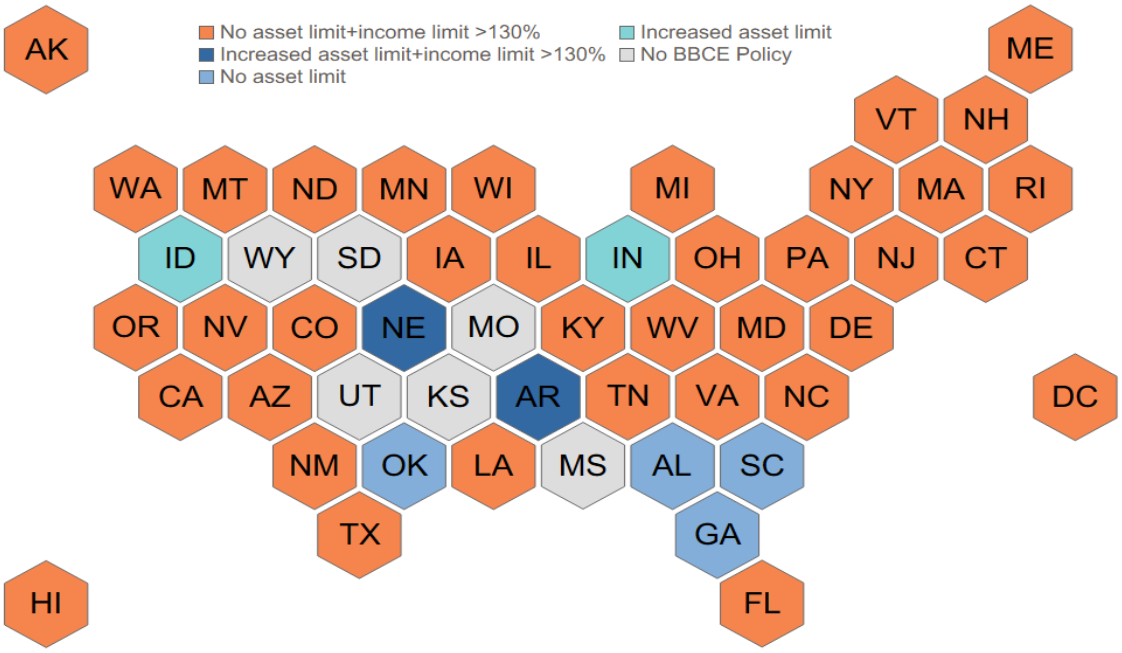
- Non-cash benefits include one-time assistance like emergency car repairs necessary for employment and can include things like job skills training and domestic violence support.
- Like traditional categorical eligibility, families must still meet the other SNAP eligibility tests.

BBCE supports work, allows modest saving, and improves household stability, helping ensure that children remain connected to the nutrition assistance they need to learn and develop.

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[1] Regression analysis conducted using data from the ERS SNAP policy database, FNS SNAP State Options Reports, and the SNAP QC database. The association between payment error rate and a BBCE policy that applies to all and removes the asset test was statistically significant in 2023-2024.

44 states plus D.C. use a form of BBCE*



Data: USDA, "Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility", June 29, 2026, https://www.fna.usda.gov/snap/broad-based-categorical-eligibility

*As of November 2026, and exclusive of Guam and USVI.

Efficient Processing: BBCE enables eligible families to access SNAP benefits with fewer administrative barriers. For families, BBCE allows a more efficient application process; for states, BBCE reduces administrative burden and case-processing churn. This reduction in opportunities for errors, stemming from BBCE, leads to lower payment error rates.

Increased self-sufficiency: BBCE supports working families by softening the abrupt benefit cliff that can occur when modest wage increases or additional work hours put a family over the eligibility threshold and lead to an immediate loss of SNAP. With BBCE, benefits can phase down as household earnings rise, giving families room to build savings, manage expenses, and plan for their future. This flexibility is especially important for lower-wage workers in high-cost areas who face steep housing and childcare costs.

Access to Child Nutrition Programs: SNAP participation streamlines certification for child nutrition programs like school meals and Summer EBT. Accordingly, BBCE impacts more than household food assistance. Because SNAP participation is tied to free school meal eligibility, nearly 1.8 million[2] children across the U.S. could lose access to school meals if BBCE was eliminated. Many children would remain income-eligible, but the paperwork requirements, confusion, stigma, and processing errors would prevent eligible children from being enrolled. Declining SNAP participation also impacts school adoption of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

BBCE is not an automatic pathway to SNAP benefits: It is an effective, practical policy choice that helps low-income working families access SNAP if they are already certified for another federal means-tested benefit program. Households must still meet all other SNAP eligibility requirements.

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[2] https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snaps-broad-based-categorical-eligibility-supports-working-families-older