



Overview

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest and most effective anti-hunger program.

In 2016, the program served about 45 million Americans, including about 20 million children, by providing families benefits to purchase food at grocery stores, farmer's markets, and other food retailers

Participation in SNAP reduces hunger and leads to healthier and more academically successful children.

SNAP Facts

In 2015, **75% percent** of SNAP households lived in families with **children, elderly, or individuals with disabilities**.

Nearly **50%** of SNAP participants were under the age of 18 (**20 million children**).

Overall, **67% of SNAP dollars** go to families with children.⁷

Approximately **1.7 million veterans** lived in households that received SNAP benefits at one point during 2014.⁸

How Does SNAP Work?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is authorized every five years by the Farm Bill, which was most recently signed into law in February 2014 and is set to expire on September 30, 2018. The program is administered by USDA and carried out in states through state agencies. Benefits are provided on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card and can be used at grocery stores and farmers' markets.

SNAP can only be used to purchase food items. Benefits are not able to be used to purchase hot or prepared food items, toiletries, pet food, alcohol, or tobacco.

SNAP is a federal entitlement program, meaning it is not subject to the annual appropriations process by Congress. As an entitlement, any individual or household who qualifies for the program is able to receive benefits. This structure ensures that SNAP is able to expand when the economy declines and poverty increases, and contract when the economy improves. As a result of the improving economy, SNAP caseload has continued to decline in the past two years and is expected to continue on this path.

Qualifying for SNAP

SNAP eligibility is established through federal law and is based on a calculation of gross monthly income, net monthly income, and household assets. A household qualifies for SNAP when its gross income is at or below 130% of the federal poverty line, about \$26,000 a year for a family of three.¹ The net monthly income must be less than or equal to the federal poverty line, and the household's assets are less than \$2,250 (household without an elderly or disabled member) or \$3,250 (with an elderly or disabled member).

SNAP Benefit Amounts

SNAP benefits are determined by the household's income, size, assets, and expenses. The average SNAP benefit per person is about \$126 per month. That works out to about \$1.40 per person per meal.

Congressional Action

SNAP has demonstrated, proven positive impacts on childhood hunger and child poverty. Having access to food assistance helps families stretch their food dollars and avoid making choices between buying groceries and paying their rent.

During the reauthorization of the Farm Bill and the federal budget process, Congress should protect and strengthen SNAP and reject any attempt to change the current structure of the program.

Resources

¹ US Department of Agriculture, "[SNAP Eligibility](#)." Accessed February 2017

² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "[SNAP Works for America's Children](#)." 2016

³ Council of Economic Advisers, "Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," 2015

⁴ Ibid

⁵ USDA Economic Research Service, "[Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Linkages with the General Economy](#)," Accessed February 2017.

⁶ USDA, "[SNAP Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents](#)," Accessed February 2017

⁷ USDA, "[Characteristics of Households on SNAP, 2015](#)," Accessed February 2017

⁸ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "SNAP Helps Roughly 1.7 million veterans, including thousands in every state," November 2016

SNAP Fights Hunger and Poverty

SNAP is a targeted, powerful tool for ending hunger. Research consistently shows that SNAP has a positive impact on reducing food insecurity and poverty among children. Specifically, food insecurity among kids falls by one-third after families have been receiving benefits for about six months.

SNAP also has a positive impact on reducing poverty for children and their families. In 2012, SNAP kept nearly 10.3 million people, including 4.9 million children out of poverty.²

SNAP Leads to Improved Education Outcomes

Hunger has a direct impact on a child's ability to do well in school. The cycle of SNAP benefits is directly linked to children's test scores. Recent research tracked student test scores against when their families received their SNAP benefits. Scores were highest among students whose families got their SNAP benefits 2-3 weeks before a standardized test (meaning the kids had food during the learning and test prep). At the same time, scores were lowest among kids who were trying to study during the last days of their family's SNAP benefit cycle (or when food budgets were most likely to be exhausted). The analysis also "suggests that the exhaustion of SNAP benefits causes an 11% increase in the rate of disciplinary actions between the first and last week of the month for SNAP students."³

Additionally, research suggests that SNAP has a positive effect on child outcomes that extend into adulthood. For example, early access to SNAP leads to an 18 percentage point increase in the likelihood of high school graduation.⁴

SNAP Supports Local Economies

SNAP has a positive impact on local jobs and economies. Each \$1 billion of SNAP spending creates \$340 million in farm production, and between 8,900 and 17,900 jobs. An additional \$5 of SNAP benefits generates \$9 in total economic activity.⁵

SNAP is Effective and Efficient

SNAP has a 96.34% accuracy rate in providing correct benefits to low-income people. The error rate has been falling for more than a decade. The error rate includes both overpayments and underpayments; ie., families who may have received fewer benefits than they were entitled to or paperwork errors. The fraud rate in SNAP is also very low and continues to fall; it is currently approximately 1% of benefits, down from 4% over the last 15 years.

SNAP Supports Work

Most people who are on SNAP and can work (excluding children, seniors, and the disabled) do work. Among households that include someone who can work, more than 75% had a job in the year before or after being on SNAP.⁶