



What is SNAP?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is the nation's largest and most effective anti-hunger program. In 2018, the program served nearly 40 million Americans, including almost 20 million children¹⁴, by providing families benefits to purchase food at grocery stores, farmer's markets, and other food retailers. The economic disruption caused by COVID-19 has increased the number of Americans who rely on SNAP by almost 5 million¹⁵, demonstrating the program's rapid responsiveness and ability to reach millions of vulnerable families in the wake of disasters. SNAP is our nation's first line of defense during tough times.

SNAP AND KIDS

SNAP is a powerful tool for ending childhood hunger. It works in concert with the federal child nutrition programs, like school meals (school breakfast and lunch), summer meals like Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Summer EBT for Children (SEBTC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to ensure children have access to healthy meals where they learn and at home

Research shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity and poverty among children. Specifically, food insecurity among children falls by one-third after families have received benefits for about six months.⁴ In 2019 alone, SNAP lifted nearly one million children out of poverty.⁵ Studies have also shown that SNAP lifts more children out of deep poverty (defined as 50 percent or less of the poverty threshold) than any other program.⁶

SNAP also reduces racial inequities in the prevalence of poverty. Despite the persistence of child poverty across racial and ethnic groups, SNAP is cited as one of the major economic security programs that has contributed to narrowing the racial disparities in child poverty by nearly half over the last five decades.⁷

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2018, 70 percent of SNAP households included a child, an elderly individual, or an individual with a disability, and these households received **85 percent** of all benefits issued. Overall, two-thirds of SNAP benefits go to families with children. Nearly one-half of SNAP participants were under the age of 18, of which more than two-thirds (71%) are school-age children (5-17 years old).¹

SNAP serves children across all age groups. Across the country, 32% of all children ages 0-4, 30% of children 5-11, and 21% of children ages 12-17 participate in SNAP.²

Families with children on SNAP overwhelmingly live in deep poverty. More than 80% of these families have incomes below the poverty line, about \$21,960 for a household of three in 2021".¹³

SNAP is a powerful and an automatic economic stabilizer. SNAP benefits inject money into the economy immediately because recipients spend their benefits on foods at approved retailers. About 80 percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed within two weeks of receipt and 97% are spent within a month.¹⁶ Moody's analytics said that increasing SNAP benefits has one of the biggest "bangs for the buck" in terms of shoring up the economy. A recent USDA study finds that, in a weak economy every \$1 billion invested in SNAP supports 13,600 jobs and approximately \$32 million in farm revenue, and increases the GDP of the United States by \$1.54 billion.¹⁷

SNAP Leads to Healthier Kids

SNAP improves the nutrition and overall health and well-being for children from low-income families starting in utero and continuing through their childhood. Studies show that when pregnant moms participate in SNAP, it reduces the likelihood of low birth weight by 23%. Low birth weight is linked to infant mortality, cognitive development and chronic disease later in life. SNAP participation also decreases the risk of childhood obesity by 5.3 percentage points.¹⁹

SNAP reduces long-term health disparities among children. When low-income children had access to SNAP while in utero and before the age of five, there was a significant reduction in "metabolic syndrome," which leads to obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, including a 16-percentage point reduction in the likelihood of being obese.³

SNAP reduces the risk of preventable hospitalization and health care costs. Among adolescents, those receiving SNAP are less likely to be underweight and their families are less likely to make tradeoffs between food and housing or heating. Research also shows that hospital admissions among low-income Americans for diabetic complications rise by 27% at the end of the month, which they believe is linked to "exhausted food budgets" tied to SNAP benefits running out. SNAP participation is linked with reduction in health care costs by about 25% or \$1,400 yearly.¹¹

SNAP Leads to Improved Education Outcomes

SNAP supports academic performances of students. Hunger has a direct impact on a child's ability to succeed in school. The timing of SNAP benefits can directly impact children's test scores. A study in North Carolina tracked student test scores based on 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).⁸

SNAP increases the prospect of future economic mobility. 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.⁹ High school graduation sets one of the milestones and ingredients of future economic success and climbing the opportunity ladder.¹⁸

The inadequacy of the SNAP benefit amount impacts student behavior. The average SNAP benefits are \$1.40 per person per meal, which is chronically insufficient to cover the cost of a low-income meal in 99 percent of US continental counties and DC.²⁰ Studies shows that the average low-income meals is \$3.06²¹, which is even higher than the current maximum SNAP benefit per meal of \$1.86 that considers maximum benefit level available to households of different sizes.²² In one study, the incidence of disciplinary events among students in families on SNAP was nearly 50 percent higher at the end of the month, when benefits have typically run out, than at the beginning of the month.¹⁰ SNAP also reduces the risk of chronic absenteeism, repeating grades, inability to complete school assignments and other negative educational outcomes.¹²

RESOURCES

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- Schanzenbach, Diane, et al. "[Twelve Facts About Food Insecurity and SNAP](#)," The Hamilton Project, 2016
- ³ Hoynes, Hilary et al. 2016. [Long Run Impacts of Childhood Access to the Safety Net](#). American Economic Review.
- ⁴ White House Council of Economic Advisers, "[Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)," 2015
- ⁵ Liana Fox. [The Supplemental Poverty Measure](#). 2020. Census Bureau, Table 6
- ⁶ National Academy of Sciences. 2019. [A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty](#).
- ⁷ Trisi, Danilo, and Matt Saenz. 2021. [Economic Security Programs Reduce Overall Poverty and Racial and Ethnic Inequities](#). 2021
- ⁸ Health Affairs, "[Exhaustion Of Food Budgets At Month's End And Hospital Admissions For Hypoglycemia](#)," 2014
- ⁹ Supra note at 2.
- ¹⁰ Bloomberg News, "[End of Month Hunger Hurts Students on Food Stamps](#)," 2012.
- ¹¹ Carlson, Steven and Brynne Keith-Jennings. [SNAP is Linked with Improved Nutritional Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs](#). 2018
- ¹² Beharie, Nisha et al. [A Protective Association Between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Economically Strained Households](#). Journal of Hunger, Environment, and Nutrition. 2017
- ¹³ Supra note at 2
- ¹⁴ Supra note at 1.
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- ²⁰ Waxmain, Elaine et al. [How Far Do SNAP Benefits Fall Short of Covering the Cost of a Meal?](#) Urban Institute. 2018
- ²¹ Feeding America. [Map the Meal Gap](#). 2018
- ²² Supra note at 20.