



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 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.

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.

Block Grants and SNAP

Block grants are a set amount of money the federal government provides to states or local governments to operate a program. The amount of money is usually based on a certain year's expenditures. States typically have broad discretion to shape programs under block grants, and often have the flexibility to pay for services previously funded with state dollars, diverting funds from the original intent of the program.

Why Are Block Grants Bad for SNAP?

1. **Block grants set funding at a fixed amount, eliminating the guarantee that a program like SNAP can meet the needs of all those who are, or become, eligible.** Block granting SNAP would set the program up to fail, leaving it without enough money when demand is high and potentially spending too much when conditions improve. In the case of a major economic shock or recession, or in the case of a natural disaster, there would be no additional funds to meet the needs of hungry people.
2. **Block grants allow states to divert funding to fill budget shortfalls.** As states across the country face budget challenges, there is additional pressure to fill gaps with funds from other programs. Under a block grant, SNAP funds could be diverted to pay for other services instead of the needed food benefits they are supposed to provide to low-income individuals.
3. **Block grants lead to less access to needed food benefits.** Because states have capped levels of funding under a block grant, it is likely they would have to make cuts to their current spending levels for their eligible population to address increased demand and keep pace with inflation. These cuts could come in the form of reducing benefits or kicking people off the program all together. Without federal oversight of the program as a whole, states would have the authority to take these extreme actions.

In short, a block grant to SNAP would cause hunger to become worse for the most vulnerable in our country and would leave millions of families, children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities without the nutrition they need.

ABOUT SHARE OUR STRENGTH

No child should go hungry in America, but 1 in 5 kids will face hunger this year. Using proven, practical solutions, No Kid Hungry is ending childhood hunger today by ensuring that kids start the day with a nutritious breakfast and families learn the skills they need to shop and cook on a budget. When we all work together, we can make sure kids get the healthy food they need. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength.

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Learning From TANF Block Grant

In 1996, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program was turned from an entitlement into a block grant, renamed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. States now have control over the program, making spending and policy decisions that have no federal oversight to ensure they are meeting the needs of the people the program is intended to serve.

As a result, we have seen this important program diminish in its ability to serve poor families.

1. **The cash assistance TANF is supposed to provide to poor families has eviscerated overtime.** In 1996, 68% of families with children living in poverty received TANF cash assistance. Today that number is 23%.¹
2. **States have diverted their funding to fill budget gaps.** Rather than spending TANF funds on the program's stated purpose of providing cash assistance, child care, and employment and training programs, half of all TANF funding now goes to other state budget programs.
3. **TANF has failed to respond to economic conditions.** As a result of its capped funding structure, TANF has not been able to grow to meet increased demand during the recession or in cases of natural disaster. This has left poor families across the country without the benefits they needed in times of crisis.

SNAP Works Today

SNAP works in its current form as an entitlement program. It is our most targeted, powerful tool for ending childhood hunger. It works in concert with other child nutrition programs, like school meals and WIC, to ensure children have access to the healthy meals they need to grow and thrive.

Independent research shows that SNAP reduces food insecurity and poverty among children. Specifically, food insecurity among children falls by one-third after families have been receiving benefits for about six months.²

SNAP also reduces poverty for children and their families. In 2012, SNAP kept nearly 5 million children out of poverty and kept an estimated 2.1 million children from experiencing deep poverty, defined as 50 percent or less of the poverty threshold.³

RESOURCES

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Lessons from TANF Block Grant," 2017.

² White House Council of Economic Advisers, "Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," 2015

³ Schanzenbach, Diane, et al. "Twelve Facts About Food Insecurity and SNAP," The Hamilton Project, 2016