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HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Get the Facts About SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) served more than 43 million Americans in 2016 (as of November 2016). Enrollment in the program almost doubled in the wake of the recession and has been trending downward as the economy continues to recover.

Here are some key facts about SNAP:

SNAP works exactly as it's supposed to. SNAP was designed to respond quickly and efficiently to increases in need. When poverty and unemployment spiked in 2008, 2009, and 2010, so did SNAP participation. SNAP also responds to disaster emergency situations, for example temporarily providing assistance in states recently affected by tornadoes or Hurricane Matthew. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that participation will go down to pre-recession levels as the economy recovers.¹

SNAP reaches exactly whom it's supposed to. The average SNAP household has a gross monthly income of \$786. This is well below the strict national income limits. Eighty-three percent of SNAP households have incomes below the poverty line, which is \$24,250 for a family of four. Additionally, 82 percent of all SNAP benefits go to the most vulnerable households—those with children, elderly, or disabled people.² In fact, roughly 1.7 million veterans live in households that participated in SNAP (formerly food stamps) at some point during the past 12 months, and about 980,000 veterans lived in households that participated in SNAP in an average month in 2013.³

SNAP participation increased mainly due to the poor economy. The largest increases in SNAP participation came on the heels of the recession (see above). Additionally, many more eligible Americans accessed SNAP in the last decade. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 83 percent of eligible Americans participated in the program in 2014 (the latest year for which we have data) compared to 56.7



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SNAP is a lifeline for millions of Americans. Congress must do its part to end hunger by protecting SNAP from budget cuts and harmful structural changes.

percent in 2000.⁴

SNAP doesn't create dependency. Contrary to general perception about the program, 3 out of 4 new SNAP participants leave the program within 2 years and half leave the program within 10 months.⁵ More than half of SNAP recipients who can work do so and more than 80 percent worked before or after receiving SNAP.⁶ In a family budget, food is the most easily squeezed line item. SNAP helps fill the food budget gap for households struggling with unemployment or underemployment.

SNAP has the lowest fraud and error rates on record. Increased oversight and transparency at the USDA has led to better enforcement.⁷ The big picture shows that fraud and errors are exceptions. The USDA tracks two types of SNAP fraud data: trafficking and error rate.

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1. SNAP trafficking is the illegal, intentional exchange of SNAP benefits for cash. Trafficking has dropped from about 4 cents on the dollar to about 1 cent.
2. SNAP's error rate, which accounts for both underpayment and overpayment of benefits, have been nearly cut in half since 2003 and remains at a low 3.7 percent. The majority of SNAP payment errors are a result of administrative errors, not intentional fraud, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Charity alone can't feed everyone. Our federal nutrition programs deliver more than 19 times the amount of food assistance as private charitable sources. All food programs have been stretched thin by our economic downturn, making the role of federal programs even more crucial.



Endnotes

- ¹ Congressional Budget Office. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Baseline Projections. January 2017. <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/44211>
- ² USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2015. December 2016. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2015.pdf>
- ³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "SNAP Helps Roughly 1.7 Million Struggling Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State," November 11, 2014. Note: the 1.7 million figure is a three-year average for 2011 through 2013 and is the latest available data. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-helps-roughly-17-million-struggling-veterans-including-thousands-in-every-state>
- ⁴ USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Reaching Those In Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2014. January 2017. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2014.pdf>.
- ⁵ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Building a Healthy America: A Profile of SNAP. April 2012.
- ⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Updated March 24, 2016. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-introduction-to-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.
- ⁷ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Fighting SNAP Fraud. Last modified May 24, 2012. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fraud.htm>