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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 41 million Americans in 2017 (as of December 2017). 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 wildfires or Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that participation will continue to go down to pre-recession levels over the next decade.¹

SNAP reaches exactly whom it's supposed to. The average SNAP household has a gross monthly income of \$813.² This is well below the strict national income limits. Ninety two percent of SNAP benefits go to households with incomes at or below the poverty line.³ Additionally, nearly two-thirds of all SNAP benefits go to the most vulnerable – children, elderly, or disabled people. In fact, roughly 1.5 million veterans live in households that participated in SNAP (formerly food stamps) at some point during the past 12 months, and about 8 percent of all veterans received SNAP.⁴

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 2015 (the latest year for which we have data) compared to 56.7 percent in 2000.⁵

SNAP encourages work. Employment rates



Laura Elizabeth Pohl for Bread for the World

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.

among households with children and at least one non-disabled adult rose nearly 10 percent from 2009 to 2015, the Great Recession years.⁶ Additionally, the majority of able-bodied adults who receive SNAP are already working or looking for work.⁷ 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. When individuals have their basic needs met first, they do not need to worry about when and how they will get their next meal. Instead, they can focus their energy on finding and keeping a job.

SNAP fraud is the exception, not the rule. The USDA tracks two types of SNAP fraud data: trafficking and error rate.

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 1.5 cents.⁸

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2. SNAP's error rate, which accounts for both underpayment and overpayment of benefits, have been nearly cut in half since 2003. 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.



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Endnotes

¹ Congressional Budget Office. The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2018-2028. April 2018. <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/115th-congress-2017-2018/reports/53651-outlook.pdf>.

² USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2016. November 2017. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2016-Summary.pdf>

³ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Updated February 13, 2018. <http://www.cbpp.org/research/policy-basics-introduction-to-the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

⁴ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "SNAP Helps Almost 1.5 Million Low-Income Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State," November 09, 2017. Note: the 1.5 million figure is a three-year average for 2014 through 2016 and is the latest available data. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-almost-15-million-low-income-veterans-including-thousands-in>

⁵ USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Reaching Those In Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2015. January 2018. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Reaching2015-Summary.pdf>

⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Chart Book: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table," February 14, 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-13-12fa-chartbook.pdf>

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. The Extent of Trafficking in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: 2012-2014 (Summary). September 2017. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/extent-trafficking-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-2012%E2%80%932014>