

NAP to SNAP

Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States, but unlike citizens in the continental U.S., Puerto Ricans do not have access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Instead, Puerto Rico has the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), a lesser version of SNAP. SNAP benefits are more generous than benefits in NAP; for example, Puerto Ricans receive \$116 to \$307 less in federal nutrition assistance than Americans living in the continental U.S., Hawaii, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam.

Hunger is a greater problem in Puerto Rico than elsewhere in the U.S. As much as one-third of the population is food insecure in normal times. During emergencies, such as after Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, or during the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity rates have skyrocketed. There is no reason why Puerto Rico, as well as the other U.S. territories—American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands, should not have access to SNAP.

Basic facts about NAP


Puerto Rico participated in SNAP's predecessor, the Food Stamp Program (FSP) until 1981. At that time, Congress and the Reagan administration established NAP at funding levels set well below what Puerto Rico had been receiving under the FSP. NAP is a block grant, meaning it has a fixed funding amount. Unlike SNAP, NAP is unable to expand when hunger increases and more people need assistance, even during emergencies.

Because of the block grants' low, capped levels, territories reliant on NAP have more limited eligibility and/or benefit levels. Puerto Rico must set eligibility and benefit levels low to keep the program's cost within the fixed funding limits, meaning these levels aren't solely based on need. SNAP eligibility levels are set based on poverty levels, and all eligible people who apply can receive benefits. NAP's eligibility levels must fit the confines of fixed funding.

States that experience natural disasters can request disaster SNAP benefits from the USDA. This process does not require congressional action, and the USDA approval process is straightforward and swift. In contrast, NAP does not have an automatic mechanism to provide disaster benefits. Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Commonwealth government was required to submit a comprehensive plan to the USDA before it could receive emergency funding. The hurricanes devastated the island in September 2017, and the USDA approved this plan in February 2018.

NAP primarily benefits children, elderly, disabled, college students, and low-income working families. The SNAP maximum monthly benefit is on average **41%** higher than NAP benefits in Puerto Rico.

Reform Through the Farm Bill

To implement SNAP in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Congress would need to modify a statute to provide authority to the government of Puerto Rico to operate SNAP. Specifically, Congress would need to amend or replace provisions of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, which governs the operation of SNAP and the NAP block grant for Puerto Rico. Congress should support the Puerto Rico Nutrition Fairness Act H.R. 253/S. 949 and the Closing the Meal Gap Act H.R. 3037/S.1336 



For more information about implementing SNAP in Puerto Rico visit the USDA website, and view the report:

[Update to Feasibility Study of Implementing USDA's SNAP in Puerto Rico | Food and Nutrition Service.](#)

