

Close the College Student SNAP GAP



The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) provides vital assistance to alleviate food insecurity, but as many as **59 percent¹** of college students who are eligible for the program do not enroll.

SNAP is one of the most effective responses to food insecurity among college students. SNAP can increase students' financial stability and improve their likelihood of completing degrees or certificates. Food insecurity is associated with a range of negative health consequences² that interfere with students' ability to attend and complete college.³

The Vast College SNAP GAP

There is a vast **"SNAP gap"** between the number of college students who are eligible for SNAP and the number students who receive assistance from the program.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office⁴ (GAO) in a December 2024 report estimates that in 2020, **3.3 million college students** were eligible for SNAP benefits. These were students with household incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level who also met one of the student SNAP exemptions: either working 20 hours weekly, caring for a dependent child, or having a disability.

Of those 3.3 million eligible students, **2.2 million** students reported that their household *did not* receive any SNAP benefits. In other words, two-thirds of students who likely meet the stringent eligibility criteria to enroll in SNAP are not benefiting from the program.

Here are some of the other findings from the GAO report:⁵

- **Food insecurity rates are significantly higher among students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).** Nearly 38 percent of students at HBCUs were food insecure, compared to an estimated 20 percent at non-MSI institutions. For-profit college students also had exceptionally high rates of food insecurity.
- **Food insecurity was more prevalent among select vulnerable student populations.** This includes students with a differing ability, those who are 24 years of age or older, single parents, or those who are financially independent from their parents.
- **More college students today are from households with lower incomes,** with 34 percent coming from households at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level in 2020, compared to 28 percent in 1996.

Bread for the World believes that:

- 1 SNAP benefits should be protected so that everyone, including college students, has access to this important food security benefit.
- 2 College students who are at risk of food insecurity and eligible to participate in SNAP should be made aware that they can get help from this program. ☹

Endnotes:

i. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107074>

ii. <https://www.acponline.org/acp-newsroom/acp-says-food-insecurity-is-a-threat-to-public-health-in-the-united-states#:~:text=Food%20insecurity%20is%20associated%20with,a%20policy%20and%20funding%20priority.>

iii. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2021/food-insecurity-during-college-years-linked-to-lower-graduation-rate>

iv. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107074>

v. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-107074>