

2022 POLICY BRIEF

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) REAUTHORIZATION AND APPROPRIATIONS

ACTION NEEDED:

Urge your members of Congress and the administration to support counties' role in the federal, state and local partnership in administering and financing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

BACKGROUND:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is the largest federal nutrition program, providing 41.5 million low-income individuals with monthly grocery benefits. SNAP was reauthorized along with other food and agriculture programs in the 2018 Farm Bill, which is set to expire September 30, 2023 and will likely see legislative work begin in earnest in the 2022 calendar year. Though SNAP is an entitlement, it still receives funding annually through the congressional appropriations process, meaning benefit availability can be impacted by government shutdowns. In Fiscal Year 2022, Congress provided \$140 billion in funding for SNAP.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers SNAP in partnership with states, 10 of which delegate that responsibility to counties: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin. These 10 county-administered states account for 31 percent of all SNAP program participants. Counties operating SNAP often contribute significant levels of local funds to meet the administrative and supplemental costs of running the program. SNAP not only helps struggling families put food on the table but effectively and efficiently stimulates the economy during times of downturn and natural disasters, as families in need can quickly access and spend benefits. In addition to providing food assistance for millions of low-income families, elderly Americans and individuals with disabilities, SNAP supports self-sufficiency through Employment and Training (E&T) programs that help participants gain skills, training or work experience and equip them for regular, sustained employment.

SNAP PROVIDES NUTRITION ASSISTANCE TO **41.5 MILLION** LOW-INCOME AMERICANS

TEN STATES REPRESENTING **32 PERCENT** OF PARTICIPANTS DELEGATE SNAP ADMINISTRATION AND COSTS TO COUNTIES

IN 2020, **10.5 PERCENT** OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCED FOOD INSECURITY

IN 2020, SNAP BENEFITS LIFTED **3.2 MILLION INDIVIDUALS** OUT OF POVERTY

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To be eligible for SNAP, participants must have income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level and may not possess assets exceeding \$2,250 (\$3,500 for households with an elderly or disabled member), with certain exceptions. However, an option called Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) allows states to forego verification of these asset requirements and/or expand income eligibility up to 200 percent of the federal poverty line if SNAP applicants qualify for non-cash Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or state maintenance of effort-funded benefits. SNAP participants must also fulfill work requirements, such as registering for work, accepting a suitable job if offered one, not voluntarily quitting a job without good cause and not reducing work participation below 30 hours a week. There are exemptions for certain groups such as students, those caring for children under age 6, individuals over age 59 and participants in alcohol or drug treatment programs. Able bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs)—individuals aged 18-49 deemed work-eligible and not living with children—are subject to additional requirements. ABAWDs are limited to participating in SNAP for three out of 36 months unless they are working or participating in unpaid work through a state approved program or an E&T program for at least 20 hours per week.

SNAP benefit levels are calculated based on what USDA deems to be a minimal-cost, nutritious diet—also known as the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP), first developed in 1975. In 2018, Congress included language in its bipartisan Farm Bill reauthorization directing USDA to reevaluate the TFP based on current food prices, food composition data, and consumption patterns. In 2021, the Agency released an updated TFP aligning more closely with recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and including a modest increase in calories. As a result, SNAP benefits increased by roughly \$1.19 per day.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

In response to the pandemic, Congress and the administration have allocated billions of dollars in supplemental funding for nutrition assistance programs. They have also implemented temporary flexibilities (such as waiving SNAP work, interview and certification requirements) to ease access to the program and support administering agencies. Notably, Congress also authorized the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program, which provides monthly SNAP benefits to low-income children who have lost access to free/reduced price meals at school or child care due to the pandemic. Most recently, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 extended an emergency 15 percent SNAP benefit increase through September 30, 2021, provided an extra \$1.1 billion for state SNAP administration and extended the Pandemic-EBT program through the summer months in both FY21 and FY22. As of January 1, 2022, states can request to extend or implement certain COVID-19 flexibilities through the end of the month subsequent to the month in which the public health emergency declaration related to the COVID-19 pandemic is lifted by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

KEY TALKING POINTS:

- SNAP helps provide food assistance as well as employment and training programs for low-income individuals and families. Nearly 70 percent of the households participating in SNAP include children.
- States and counties should maintain flexibility in designing and implementing the program according to their needs and economic context, including the discretion to streamline administrative and application processes with other social service programs.



- Families participating in SNAP often face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency and can struggle to meet SNAP's full work and participation requirements. States and counties should continue to receive flexibility in waiving SNAP work requirements to meet the individual needs of their caseloads
- In county-administered states, counties often contribute substantial local funds to administrative and supplemental costs of the SNAP program.
- Increased funding and flexibility for the SNAP program is critically important for county human service agencies to meet local needs.

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