



# SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

## **WHAT IS SNAP?**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) is the nation's first line of defense against hunger in America. Congress and the Administration should protect and strengthen this vital program to ensure nobody in this country goes hungry.

SNAP helps millions of low-income Americans put food on the table, providing benefits that are timely, targeted, and temporary. SNAP responds quickly to changes in need, growing in response to increases in poverty and unemployment. The program is targeted at our most vulnerable citizens, predominantly serving households with children, elderly, and disabled members. SNAP benefits phase out as participants get back on their feet, with the average household staying on the program less about a year. SNAP is also a highly efficient program, boasting one of the highest payment accuracy rates in delivering the appropriate benefits with low administrative overhead.

## **HOW SNAP WORKS**

SNAP benefits are delivered monthly to eligible participants through electronic debit transfer (EBT) cards that can be used to purchase groceries at over 260,000 authorized retailers nationwide. Benefits are redeemable only for food and boost the purchasing power of eligible low-income families to obtain the nutrition they need through normal channels of commerce. The federal government pays 100% of SNAP benefits, but administrative costs are shared between federal and state governments. SNAP households must generally have a gross income below 130% of poverty and all SNAP benefits go to households with a net income of less than 100% of poverty.

## **SNAP IS EFFECTIVE**

SNAP began in the 1960s with the lofty goal to utilize "the Nation's abundance of food ... to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's population and raise levels of nutrition among low-income households." SNAP has a strong, evidence-based track record in effectively meeting this goal.

## **SNAP IS TIMELY AND RESPONDS TO CHANGES IN NEED**

One of the strongest features of SNAP is its ability to respond quickly to changes in need. This is the case both during natural and economic disasters. After major storms, floods or other disasters, the program can immediately respond to help displaced families with disaster SNAP assistance.

During the recent recession, SNAP participation grew alongside rising unemployment and is falling as the economy slowly recovers. In fact, CBO's January 2017 budget projections show SNAP costs more than \$30 billion lower than estimates from just one year ago.

## **SNAP IS TARGETED**

SNAP serves very vulnerable populations. The vast majority of SNAP participants (64%) are children, seniors, or people with disabilities. Children under 18 account for nearly half (44%) of all SNAP participants and families with children receive nearly two-thirds (67%) of all SNAP benefits.

SNAP households have very low incomes. Over 80 percent have gross incomes at or below the poverty line. Two out of every five SNAP households have incomes at or below half the poverty line. Nearly 92 percent of SNAP benefits go to households below the poverty line and 57 percent go to households with incomes at or below half the poverty line.

## **SNAP IS TEMPORARY AND ENCOURAGES WORK**

SNAP supports households as they get back on their feet, providing them with needed nutrition and encouraging work. New participants spend an average of only 12 months on SNAP and most leave the program within two years. SNAP is structured to provide a strong work incentive and was designed to not have a “benefit cliff.” For every additional dollar a SNAP participant earns, their benefits decline by about 30 cents, not a full dollar, so participants have a strong incentive to find a job, work longer hours, or seek better-paying employment.

More than half of SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult work while on SNAP; more than 80 percent work in the year before or after receiving SNAP. For many of these families, SNAP is an important support while they are between jobs and looking for work; it doesn't keep them from looking for work.

## **SNAP PROVIDES STATE FLEXIBILITY AND FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

SNAP's structure couples local decision-making with federal oversight to deliver a program that is both flexible for state administrators and accountable to the federal taxpayer. States have a robust framework of state options when administering SNAP, enabling them to adapt the program to best meet the needs of their state.

At the same time, federal oversight ensures that SNAP is accountable both to taxpayers and to participants. Consistent eligibility parameters and benefit levels across states ensure that eligible families are guaranteed food assistance when they fall on hard times, regardless of where they live.

## **SNAP IS EFFICIENT AND ACCURATE**

Nearly 93% of federal SNAP spending is for benefits to purchase food. The remainder goes toward administrative costs including monitoring of retailers and anti-fraud activities, and important services like employment and training that help participants find work. SNAP has one of the best records of accurately with more than 99% of SNAP benefits issued to eligible households.

## **SNAP IMPROVES HEALTH AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES**

SNAP promotes long-term health and well-being, especially for children. Groundbreaking research in 2016 showed that children with access to SNAP in early childhood and whose mothers had access during pregnancy were less likely in adulthood to have stunted growth, be diagnosed with heart disease, or be obese, and they were more likely to graduate from high school.



**WE NEED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO PUSH FOR A STRONG FARM BILL**

The Congress should protect and strengthen SNAP, and increase access to SNAP benefits! The farm bill should ensure adequate SNAP benefits and program resources, simplifying and increasing application efficiency for seniors and those with disabilities. Congress should strengthen job training programs and work waivers to ensure access to SNAP for all beneficiaries seeking employment. Congress should also maintain categorical eligibility to address SNAP's benefit cutoff and encourage asset building.