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BRIEF



Improving SNAP Can Protect National Security

Updates to SNAP and related programs in the Farm Bill will strengthen our nation

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a vital resource for those who need assistance obtaining nutritious food. SNAP is the largest food program in the United States, serving more than 42 million people each month.[1] As of FY2019, 41 percent of SNAP recipients were households with children.[2]

Despite the importance of SNAP, the program does not receive sufficient funding. In FY2019 and FY2020 (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), the average SNAP participant received $121 per month. The pandemic compounded issues already faced by SNAP participants, such as difficulty affording a nutritious diet, making additional funding for the program necessary. For FY2023, this monthly amount is estimated to be $186 per person, or approximately $6 per day.[3] With the high costs of healthy foods, this amount is not enough to support a healthy diet. Through the Farm Bill, which is only updated every five years, Congress must increase support for SNAP to ensure that participants can access the nutrition they need. This will also help children in households that utilize SNAP to grow up healthy and prepared for any career they choose, including the military.

“To prevent food insecurity and protect national security, we must increase funding and support for SNAP and its related programs.”

– Major General (Ret.) Juan Ayala, U.S. Marine Corps



SNAP can improve national security

Malnutrition, specifically obesity, poses a threat not only to our nation's health, but to our national security. Nationwide, 77 percent of youth between the ages of 17 and 24 cannot qualify for military service, an increase from 2017's ineligibility rate of 71 percent. Overweight disqualifies 11 percent of youth from serving if they so choose, and contributes to the 44 percent of youth who are disqualified for multiple reasons.[4]

Among children between 2-19 years old in the United States, the obesity rate is over 19 percent.[5] While counterintuitive, one cause of obesity is food insecurity—lacking access to sufficient, healthy food.[6] Fortunately, research has shown that SNAP can reduce food insecurity. One study found that food insecurity among children decreased by nearly one third after their families had participated in SNAP for six months.[7]

Barriers to utilizing SNAP

One study found that over 88 percent of SNAP participants faced barriers to accessing healthy foods each month. The most common barrier was being unable to afford healthy foods, reported by 61 percent of respondents. These participants were more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity.[8] Additionally, 20 percent of participants cited distance to a grocery store or lack of transportation as a barrier.[9]

Increasing SNAP participation

Including increased funding for SNAP in the Farm Bill can help reduce the barrier of affordability. Modernizing the program would allow participants to enroll and to have benefits reauthorized online, and make the enrollment process more clear for retailers. Additionally, modernization could broaden eligibility to reach more vulnerable people. These updates could make participating in SNAP easier for individuals and retailers alike.

Expanding the Gus Schumacher Nutritional Incentive Program (GusNIP) can help reduce the barriers posed by distance. Updating and strengthening GusNIP incentives, such as "Double Up Food Bucks," can help more families enrolled in SNAP access fresh fruits, vegetables, and nutrient dense healthy foods. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) partners with state and local organizations to help individuals lead healthier lives.



The goal of SNAP-Ed is to provide education to SNAP participants on healthy food choices and physical activity based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.[10] Implementing SNAP-Ed in the venues where GusNIP is offered can ensure that SNAP participants gain nutrition education, and can put that knowledge into practice by selecting healthy foods, all in the same place.

“We must ensure that federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP, can continue to help families access fresh, nutritious foods.”

— Brigadier General (Ret.) Sandra Alvey, U.S. Army

These solutions support the pillars outlined as part of the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, released at a White House Conference in September 2022. Each of the Strategy’s five pillars aims to address challenges around nutrition or physical activity. Pillars 1 and 3 are particularly aligned with SNAP—they include improving access to healthy foods, and ensuring consumers are able to make healthy choices by having access to the food and education required to do so.[11]

Conclusion

Strengthening programs such as SNAP and GusNIP alone cannot solve the health and national security crisis our country faces, but this is a crucial component in addressing these challenges. Congress must update the Farm Bill to help improve health and national security.

Endnotes

1 https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/ , https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/29SNAPcurrPP-1.pdf

2 https://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP-State-characteristics/2019

3 https://www.cbpp.org/research/]food-assistance/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits

4 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of People Analytics (2022). 2020 Qualified Military Available (QMA) study.

5 https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/national-obesity-monitor/

6 https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/#:~:text=Food%20insecurity%20is%20the%20limited,foods%20in%20socially%20acceptable%20ways.

7 https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs

8 https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-Barriers-Summary.pdf

9 https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-Barriers-Summary.pdf

10 https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/about

11 https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/White-House-National-Strategy-on-Hunger-Nutrition-and-Health-FINAL.pdf

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1025 Connecticut Avenue NW / Suite 1100 / Washington, DC 20036 / 202.464.7005

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SNAP participation by state

State	Percent of eligible who accessed SNAP in 2019	State	Percent of eligible who accessed SNAP in 2019
NATIONAL	82	MONTANA	79
ALABAMA	78	NEBRASKA	80
ALASKA	86	NEVADA	91
ARIZONA	77	NEW HAMPSHIRE	90
ARKANSAS	66	NEW JERSEY	81
CALIFORNIA	70	NEW MEXICO	98
COLORADO	80	NEW YORK	87
CONNECTICUT	92	NORTH CAROLINA	69
DELAWARE	100	NORTH DAKODA	64
FLORIDA	84	OHIO	85
GEORGIA	84	OKLAHOMA	86
HAWAII	85	OREGON	100
IDAHO	73	PENNSYLVANIA	98
ILLINOIS	100	RHODE ISLAND	93
INDIANA	75	SOUTH CAROLINA	78
IOWA	88	SOUTH DAKOTA	79
KANSAS	70	TENNESSEE	91
KENTUCKY	77	TEXAS	75
LOUISIANA	84	UTAH	79
MAINE	80	VERMONT	93
MARYLAND	89	VIRGINIA	73
MASSACHUSETTS	97	WASHINGTON	100
MICHIGAN	89	WEST VIRGINIA	89
MINNESOTA	76	WISCONSIN	93
MISSISSIPPI	71	WYOMING	56
MISSOURI	85		

Source: https://www.fns.usda.gov/usamap#