

The recession has continued to squeeze millions of families, increasing the need for federal child nutrition initiatives. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Education Program (SNAP-Ed) have responded as intended, as situations like job losses or natural disasters have increased need. Congress is working on legislation reauthorizing SNAP and SNAP-Ed. The stakes are high, as these initiatives provide food and improve economic security for millions of children in low-income households.

SNAP FIGHTS CHILDHOOD HUNGER AND POVERTY

SNAP provides more than 20 million children with critical nutrition benefits to strengthen their food security and provide access to a nutritious diet. SNAP also serves other low-income Americans, including people with disabilities, seniors, and working families without children. But nearly half of every SNAP dollar goes to hungry children, making SNAP a lifeline during the most recent economic downturn and an essential resource for families.

- 1 in 5 children in the United States was food insecure in 2012.¹ Hunger did not increase dramatically during the recession due to the help of programs like SNAP.
- According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nearly half of all SNAP households include children, and these households receive 69.2 percent of all SNAP benefits, according to the most recent data.²
- SNAP helps families access healthy food and gives parents the ability to feed their children. Households with children are far more likely to be food insecure (20 percent) as households with no children (11.9 percent).³
- Child food insecurity is more pervasive in rural areas; over 62 percent of counties with the highest child food insecurity rates are classified as rural, even though rural counties make up only 43 percent of all counties in the United States.⁴
- In 2009, USDA found that SNAP benefits reduced the depth of child poverty by 20.9 percent and the severity of child poverty by 27.5 percent.⁵

SNAP-ED – HELPING SNAP DELIVER MORE VALUE AND BETTER NUTRITION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) helps low-income Americans make healthy choices on a limited budget, delivering more nutritional value for every SNAP dollar.

Children with poor nutrition, food insecurity, and unhealthy diets underperform in school, are at risk for learning problems and developmental delays, and exhibit more behavioral problems in school. Food insecure children struggle to thrive academically and physically.

- They have trouble focusing in school and are 1.4 times as likely to repeat a grade.
- Food insecure children are more likely to get sick and are 30 percent more likely to have a history of hospitalization.⁶

SNAP and SNAP-Ed play a critical role in reducing these impacts and improving public health. SNAP-Ed programs, which are often times led by registered dietitian, are offered in all states and research has shown that the programs are effective in changing nutrition behavior. Positive outcomes include increased fruit and vegetable intake among participants, reductions in

rates of childhood obesity, better utilization of a healthy shopping list and the implementation of healthy low budget meal planning for families.

Despite positive results, some in Congress want to cut federal investments in SNAP and SNAP-Ed. SNAP demand and costs increase during economic downturns and decrease when the economy improves. According to the Congressional Budget Office, SNAP spending will fall over time as the economy improves.⁷

In addition, families receiving SNAP are already facing a significant benefits cut starting November 1, 2013. Congress responded to the recession by increasing monthly SNAP benefits in 2009, responding to increased need and providing an economic stimulus. Because of that change, SNAP households with children receive an average per-person benefit of \$129 per month, or \$1.43 per person per meal.⁸ When current law expires later this year, a family of four will see their benefits reduced by \$36 dollars a month, which is \$400 over a course of a year.⁹ For very low income families struggling to make ends meet, this will have a profound impact on parents' ability to feed their children.

Cutting benefits further is short-sighted and any short-term savings will be far outweighed by the long-term costs to the health of the nation's children. SNAP and SNAP-Ed are effectively targeted to reach needy children, and as millions of families struggle to make ends meet, these initiatives should be protected. Our country needs to ensure that families have the resources, knowledge, and access to achieve an adequate, nutritious diet for their kids through child nutrition programs.

¹ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, Anita Singh. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2012*. Table 1B. ERR-155, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. September 2013. <http://ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err155.aspx>

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2011*. Table A. 1. November 2012. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/SNAPPartHH.htm>

³ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, Anita Singh. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2012*. Table 2. ERR-155, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. September 2013. <http://ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err155.aspx>

⁴ Gundersen, Craig, Elaine Waxman, Emily Engelhard, Amy Satoh, and Namrita Chawla. *Map the Mal Gap 2013: Child Food Insecurity. Feeding America*, 2013.

⁵ Tiehen, Laura, Dean Jolliffe, and Craig Gundersen. *Alleviating Poverty in the United States: The Critical Role of SNAP Benefits*. ERR-132, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. April 2012.

⁶ Brown, Larry J., Donald Shepard, Timothy Martin, John Orwat. *The Economic Cost of Domestic Hunger*. Sodexo Foundation. June 2007. http://www.sodexofoundation.org/hunger_us/Images/Cost%20of%20Domestic%20Hunger%20Report%20_tcm150-155150.pdf

⁷ Congressional Budget Office. *The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*. Figure 1. April 2012. <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/04-19-SNAP.pdf>

⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2011*. Table 3.3. November 2012.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/SNAPPartHH.htm>

⁹ Stacy Dean and Dottie Rosenbaum, "SNAP Benefits Will Be Cut for All Participants in November," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, revised August 2, 2013. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3899>.