

Children Receiving SNAP Benefits

DEFINITION

Children receiving SNAP benefits is the number of children under age 18 who participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

SIGNIFICANCE

Hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious physical, psychological, emotional, and academic problems in children and can interfere with their growth and development.^{1,2} The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, helps low-income individuals and families obtain better nutrition through monthly benefits they can use to purchase food at retail stores and some farmers' markets.³ Child food insecurity has been shown to decrease by almost one-third after their families have received SNAP benefits for six months.⁴

Nationally, SNAP is available to households with gross monthly incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level, net monthly incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level, and no more than \$2,250 in resources.⁵ Rhode Island is one of 39 states that have implemented broad-based categorical eligibility, which allowed Rhode Island to increase the gross income limit and remove the resource limit for most applicants.⁶ The gross monthly income

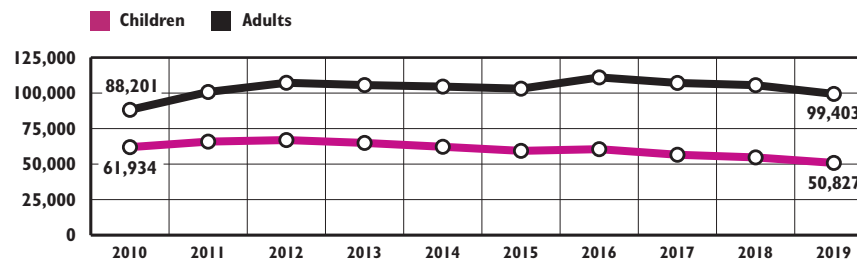
limit for Rhode Island is 185% of the federal poverty level (\$39,461 per year for a family of three in 2019).^{7,8} Households must still meet the net monthly income limit of 100% of the federal poverty level after allowable deductions, which include deductions for housing costs and child care.⁹

SNAP is an important anti-hunger program that helps individuals and families purchase food when they have limited income, face unemployment or reduced work hours, or experience a crisis.¹⁰ In Rhode Island during October 2019, 75% of SNAP households had gross incomes below the federal poverty level (\$21,330 for a family of three in 2019).^{11,12} In October 2019, the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$393.¹³

Participation in SNAP in early childhood is associated with improvements in short- and long-term health outcomes, improved high school graduation rates, and increases in adult earnings. In 2018, SNAP lifted 3.2 million Americans out of poverty and was the most effective program for lifting families out of deep poverty.^{14,15} In addition, SNAP is a quick and effective form of economic stimulus because it moves money directly into the local economy.¹⁶



Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Children and Adults, Rhode Island, 2010-2019



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2010–2015 and RI Bridges Database, 2016–2019. Data represent children under age 18 and adults who participated in SNAP during the month of October.

◆ Of the 150,230 Rhode Islanders enrolled in SNAP in October 2019, 66% were adults and 34% were children. Of the children enrolled in SNAP, 35% were under the age of six.¹⁷

◆ The number of children and adults receiving SNAP benefits decreased slowly between 2012 and 2015, then increased in 2016. It is possible that the 2016 increase was due to efforts to avoid denying eligible SNAP recipients during the difficult transition to the RI Bridges/UHIP computer system. Between 2016 and 2019, the number of adults and children receiving SNAP benefits again decreased.^{18,19}



Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

◆ The USDA defines food insecurity as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Between 2016 and 2018, 11.0% of Rhode Island households and 11.7% of U.S. households were food insecure. In 2018, 13.9% of all U.S. households with children were food insecure, while 38.3% of U.S. households with children with incomes below the poverty level experienced food insecurity.²⁰

◆ Several federal nutrition programs provide nutrition assistance to children and families, including SNAP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.²¹ In 2019, food pantries and soup kitchens provided emergency food assistance to 53,000 Rhode Islanders each month who needed additional help to meet their nutritional needs.²²

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Table 12. Children Under Age 18 Receiving SNAP Benefits, Rhode Island, October 2019



Increasing Access to SNAP Benefits

◆ The decisions that states make about their enrollment and renewal processes for public benefits such as SNAP can help eligible families successfully access benefits and remain enrolled in the program. Rhode Island has implemented a number of strategies to improve access to SNAP benefits, including implementing broad-based categorical eligibility so more families qualify, developing an online SNAP application, and requiring less frequent certification.^{23,24,25}

◆ Rhode Island could increase access to SNAP benefits for children and families by using a more flexible interview process that accommodates households' schedules and has different options for conducting interviews and completing renewals. Rhode Island could also consider the use of mobile technology in the enrollment process to increase access to SNAP benefits. Low-income individuals are more likely to be dependent on their cell phones as a means of going online. Mobile technologies would allow the state to more easily reach families that lack access to a personal computer.^{26,27}

CITY/TOWN	NUMBER PARTICIPATING
Barrington	114
Bristol	383
Burrillville	407
Central Falls	2,529
Charlestown	125
Coventry	790
Cranston	2,839
Cumberland	667
East Greenwich	165
East Providence	1,569
Exeter	66
Foster	83
Glocester	122
Hopkinton	119
Jamestown	26
Johnston	916
Lincoln	553
Little Compton	34
Middletown	473
Narragansett	153
New Shoreham	3
Newport	1,175
North Kingstown	662
North Providence	1,019
North Smithfield	165
Pawtucket	5,905
Portsmouth	194
Providence	19,225
Richmond	137
Scituate	132
Smithfield	172
South Kingstown	431
Tiverton	302
Warren	311
Warwick	1,895
West Greenwich	57
West Warwick	1,629
Westerly	615
Woonsocket	4,561
Unknown	104
Four Core Cities	32,220
Remainder of State	18,503
Rhode Island	50,827

Note to Table

In 2008, the Food Stamp Program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) data are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, RI Bridges Database, October 2019.

Due to changes in the availability of data, we report participation for the entire month of October, rather than October 1 in this Factbook. Due to this change in methodology, *Children Receiving SNAP Benefits* cannot be compared with Factbooks prior to 2016.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

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- ⁷ Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (n.d.). *SNAP eligibility*. Retrieved January 24, 2020, from www.dhs.ri.gov
- ⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2019). Annual update of the HHS poverty guidelines. *Federal Register*, 84(22), 1167-1168.

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