

# Children Receiving Food Stamp Benefits

## DEFINITION

*Children receiving food stamp benefits* is the percentage of income-eligible children under age 18 who participate in the Food Stamp Program.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The Food Stamp Program provides low-income families with the ability to obtain better nutrition through monthly benefits that can be used to purchase food at retail stores.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious health, psychological, emotional and academic problems in children and can impede their healthy growth and development.<sup>2,3</sup>

The Food Stamp Program is open to all applicants who meet the eligibility requirements. Participation in the Food Stamp Program is not time-limited and can be used as long as the person maintains their certification (with the exception of some able-bodied adults without dependent children).<sup>4,5</sup> To qualify for food stamp benefits, a household's gross monthly income must be less than 130% of the federal poverty level for that family size and meet requirements that limit the value of cash assets. In federal Fiscal Year 2008, a family of three with a gross annual income of less than \$22,332 (monthly income less than \$1,861) qualifies for

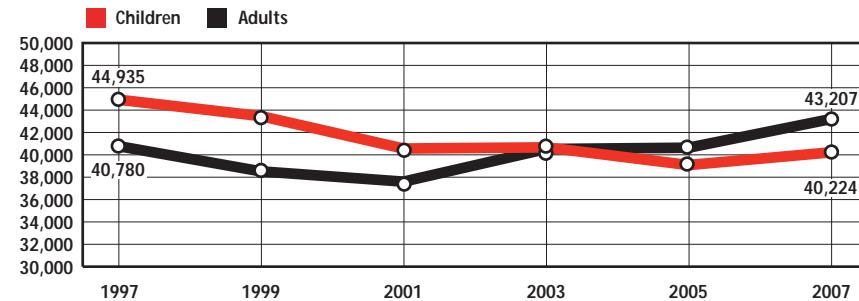
the Food Stamp Program if they meet the assets guidelines.<sup>6</sup>

Food stamp benefits help many low-income working families in Rhode Island bridge the gap between what they earn and their basic living expenses. In 2006, a household with one full-time, year-round worker making the minimum wage had only 73% of the income needed to meet their basic expenses. If the same family received food stamp benefits their income would be enough to meet 85% of their basic needs.<sup>7</sup> In 2007, the average monthly food stamp benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$291.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to increasing access to food, food stamp benefits provide a degree of protection for the local economy. As unemployment increases, people have fewer resources overall, which results in less money spent on food. The Food Stamp Program can slow this negative cycle by compensating to some degree for people's loss of income.<sup>9</sup>

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), an estimated 56% of Rhode Islanders who were eligible for the Food Stamp Program in 2005 received the benefit. This means that in 2005, approximately 57,640 Rhode Island residents who were eligible for food stamp benefits did not participate.<sup>10</sup>

**Food Stamp Participation, Children under Age 18 and Adults, Rhode Island, 1997-2007**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 1997 – 2007. Data represent children and adults who participated in the Food Stamp Program during the month of October.

◆ **Between 1997 and 2007, the number of children receiving food stamp benefits declined from 44,935 to 40,224. During the same period, the number of adults participating in the Food Stamp Program increased from 40,780 to 43,207.<sup>11</sup>**

## Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

◆ **Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Nationally and in Rhode Island, 11.3% of households are food insecure. Of households with children in the U.S., 15.6% are food insecure. U.S. children living in single-female headed households are almost twice as likely to be food insecure (30.4%), and children in households with income below poverty are almost three times as likely to be food insecure (43.1%) as their peers.<sup>12</sup>**

◆ **Food insecure families often rely on public benefits like the Food Stamp Program and on community resources like food pantries and soup kitchens. Almost one-third (31%) of the approximately 60,000 people served by the Rhode Island Food Bank network in 2005 were children under the age of 18.<sup>13</sup>**

◆ **Recipients of emergency food often have to make hard choices between food and other basic needs. According to the Rhode Island Food Bank in 2005, 49% of Rhode Islanders who received emergency food chose between food and utilities, 46% chose between food and housing payments, and 34% chose between food and health expenditures.<sup>14</sup>**

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Table 11. Children Under Age 18 Receiving Food Stamp Benefits, Rhode Island, October 1, 2007

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER INCOME-ELIGIBLE*	NUMBER PARTICIPATING	% OF INCOME-ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING
Barrington	155	38	25%
Bristol	607	185	30%
Burrillville	356	264	74%
Central Falls	2,840	2,305	81%
Charlestown	173	95	55%
Coventry	654	570	87%
Cranston	2,057	1,863	91%
Cumberland	485	405	84%
East Greenwich	242	116	48%
East Providence	1,687	1,098	65%
Exeter	169	72	43%
Foster	66	39	59%
Glocester	225	87	39%
Hopkinton	228	137	60%
Jamestown	36	21	58%
Johnston	733	535	73%
Lincoln	404	323	80%
Little Compton	21	15	71%
Middletown	404	205	51%
Narragansett	310	120	39%
New Shoreham	19	0	0%
Newport	1,731	967	56%
North Kingstown	818	467	57%
North Providence	802	521	65%
North Smithfield	92	83	90%
Pawtucket	5,948	4,527	76%
Portsmouth	187	105	56%
Providence	22,395	17,105	76%
Richmond	118	64	54%
Scituate	157	75	48%
Smithfield	239	119	50%
South Kingstown	485	278	57%
Tiverton*	150	163	100%*
Warren	333	228	68%
Warwick	1,712	1,430	84%
West Greenwich	81	37	46%
West Warwick	1,610	1,101	68%
Westerly	843	410	49%
Woonsocket	4,125	3,343	81%
<b>Core Cities</b>	<b>38,649</b>	<b>29,348</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>15,048</b>	<b>10,168</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>53,697</b>	<b>39,516</b>	<b>74%</b>

## Food Stamp Participation Rates

◆ Rhode Island ranked 43rd in the U.S. in 2005 for the percentage of eligible residents participating in the Food Stamp Program.<sup>15</sup>

◆ Nationally, a lack of information and knowledge about the Food Stamp Program, mistaken perceptions (e.g., that people who are married or who work are ineligible), stigma, a complicated application process, and inconvenient hours of operation and locations of human service buildings, are identified as reasons for low participation rates in the program.<sup>16</sup>

◆ Efforts in Rhode Island to improve food stamp participation include \$100,000 in state funds to conduct outreach and marketing to increase enrollment, the launch of an online application system (applicants still must complete an interview), and the creation of a 2-1-1 hotline that provides information and referrals for people in need.<sup>17</sup>

◆ In 2007 the Rhode Island Department of Human Services received a "most improved" award from the USDA for lowering the percentage of improper denials and termination of food stamp benefits.<sup>18</sup>

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Estimated number income-eligible is based on the total number of children ages birth to 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of poverty from the 2000 Census. Food Stamp Program data are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, October 1, 2007.

The data in the city/town table may differ from the data on the previous page as this table uses point-in-time data for October, rather than data based on participation for the entire month.

Due to a change in methodology, Food Stamp Program participation rates in this Factbook can not be compared with Factbooks before 2003. This Factbook's estimates for the percentage of income-eligible children participating in the Food Stamp Program in Rhode Island cities and towns are based on the total number of children ages birth to 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level from the 2000 Census. Past estimates were based on the percent of children eligible for the free school breakfast program.

\* Estimated Number Income-Eligible is based on Census 2000 data and may not reflect increases or decreases in the eligible population.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

### References

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