

Children Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP Benefits

DEFINITION

Children receiving food stamps/SNAP benefits is the percentage of income-eligible children under age 18 who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program.

SIGNIFICANCE

Hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious physical, psychological, emotional and academic problems in children and can impede their growth and development.^{1,2,3} 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.⁴ Children who receive SNAP benefits are 26% less likely to go hungry than eligible children who are not enrolled.⁵

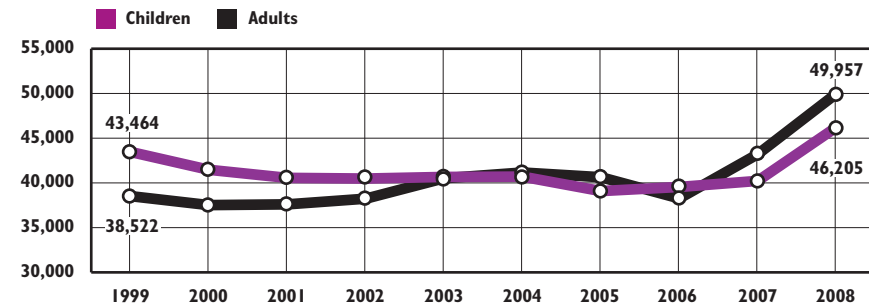
SNAP is open to applicants who meet eligibility requirements related to income, residency, and assets. To qualify, a household must have a gross monthly income that is less than 130% of the federal poverty level. In Federal Fiscal Year 2009, a family of three with a gross monthly income of less than \$1,907 (about \$22,900 per year) would meet the income guidelines for SNAP. Households that include elderly or disabled members or that are "categorically eligible" because

all household members receive certain other public assistance are exempt from some eligibility requirements.^{6,7} The 2008 Farm Bill increased the minimum benefit and the standard deduction, eliminated the cap on dependent care deductions, and excluded education and retirement accounts from the assets counted to determine eligibility.^{8,9} The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also increased the maximum benefit by 13.6%, effective April 2009.¹⁰

Purchasing food using SNAP benefits helps many low-income families bridge the gap between what they earn and their basic living expenses. In 2008, a Rhode Island family with one full-time, year-round worker making the minimum wage had only 70% of the income needed to meet basic expenses. If the same family received SNAP benefits, they would be able to meet 84% of their basic needs.¹¹ In 2008, the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$326.¹²

SNAP benefits provide economic protection for families and for the local economy. Because every dollar in SNAP benefits helps free up funds that families can use to purchase other items, every SNAP dollar ultimately translates into \$1.73-\$1.84 in economic activity, making it one of the most effective forms of economic stimulus.¹³

Participation in the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (Formerly the Food Stamp Program), Children and Adults, Rhode Island, 1999-2008



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 1999 – 2008. Data represent children under age 18 and adults (parents and other adults) who participated in the Food Stamp Program/SNAP during the month of October.

◆ Between 2006 and 2008, the number of Rhode Islanders receiving food stamp/SNAP benefits increased by 24%. The number of children receiving food stamp/SNAP benefits increased by 17%, from 39,546 to 46,205, while the number of participating adults increased by 31%, from 38,268 to 49,957.¹⁴

◆ In 2006, 45% (58,500) of Rhode Islanders who were eligible for food stamp benefits did not receive them, and Rhode Island ranked 46th in the U.S. for food stamp participation.¹⁵

Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

◆ The USDA defines food insecurity as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Between 2005 and 2007, 10.9% of Rhode Island households and 11.0% of U.S. households were food insecure. In 2007, 15.8% of U.S. households with children were food insecure compared to 8.7% of those without children. Almost one-third (30.2%) of female-headed households with children were food insecure.¹⁶

◆ In 2005, 31% of the more than 62,000 people served by the Rhode Island Food Bank network were children. Recipients of emergency food often have to make hard choices between food and other basic needs. 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.¹⁷

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Table 11. Children Under Age 18 Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP Benefits, Rhode Island, October 1, 2008

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER INCOME-ELIGIBLE*	NUMBER PARTICIPATING	% OF INCOME-ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING
Barrington	155	46	30%
Bristol	607	246	41%
Burrillville	356	302	85%
Central Falls	2,840	2,328	82%
Charlestown	173	102	59%
Coventry	654	577	88%
Cranston	2,057	2,037	99%
Cumberland	485	471	97%
East Greenwich	242	134	55%
East Providence	1,687	1,146	68%
Exeter	169	49	29%
Foster	66	45	68%
Glocester	225	91	40%
Hopkinton	228	125	55%
Jamestown	36	21	58%
Johnston	733	639	87%
Lincoln	404	391	97%
Little Compton	21	17	81%
Middletown	404	243	60%
Narragansett	310	130	42%
New Shoreham	19	5	26%
Newport	1,731	1,050	61%
North Kingstown	818	532	65%
North Providence	802	618	77%
North Smithfield	92	109	100%*
Pawtucket	5,948	4,578	77%
Portsmouth	187	130	70%
Providence	22,395	17,431	78%
Richmond	118	99	84%
Scituate	157	107	68%
Smithfield	239	300	100%*
South Kingstown	485	129	27%
Tiverton	150	195	100%*
Warren	333	229	69%
Warwick	1,712	1,619	95%
West Greenwich	81	34	42%
West Warwick	1,610	1,157	72%
Westerly	843	480	57%
Woonsocket	4,125	3,479	84%
Core Cities	38,649	30,023	78%
Remainder of State	15,048	11,398	76%
Rhode Island	53,697	41,421	77%

Increasing SNAP (Food Stamp) Participation Rates

- ◆ Nationally, a lack of information and knowledge about SNAP, mistaken perceptions about eligibility, stigma, a complicated application process, and inconvenient hours of operation and locations of enrollment sites, have all been identified as reasons for low participation rates.¹⁸
- ◆ Strategies for increasing enrollment among working families and families with children include extending hours of operation for enrollment sites, requiring less frequent recertification, offering telephone interviews in place of face-to-face interviews, taking advantage of policies that allow families already receiving other state services to be “categorically eligible” for benefits, and offering child care at enrollment sites.¹⁹
- ◆ In February 2009, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services announced its intention to implement a number of these strategies, including requiring less frequent recertification and conducting telephone rather than face-to-face interviews. They are also partnering with the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training to get information on the SNAP program to those receiving unemployment benefits and hiring additional staff to manage increased demand.²⁰

Note to Table

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

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Estimated number income-eligible is based on the total number of children under age 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of the federal poverty line from the 2000 Census. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) data are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, October 1, 2008.

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 1st, rather than data based on participation for the entire month.

Due to a change in methodology, SNAP participation rates in this Factbook cannot be compared with Factbooks before 2003. Estimates for the percentage of income-eligible children participating in SNAP in Rhode Island cities and towns are now based on the total number of children ages birth to 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of the federal poverty threshold 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

- ¹ *Reading, writing and hungry: The consequences of food insecurity on children, and on our nation's economic success.* (2008). Washington, DC: Partnership for America's Economic Success.
- ² *The safety net in action: Protecting the health and nutrition of young American children.* (2004). Boston, MA: Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program.
- ³ *The consequences of hunger and food insecurity for children: Evidence from recent scientific studies.* (2002). Waltham, MA: Center on Hunger and Poverty, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University.

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