

Children Receiving Food Stamps

DEFINITION

Children receiving Food Stamps 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.¹ 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.²

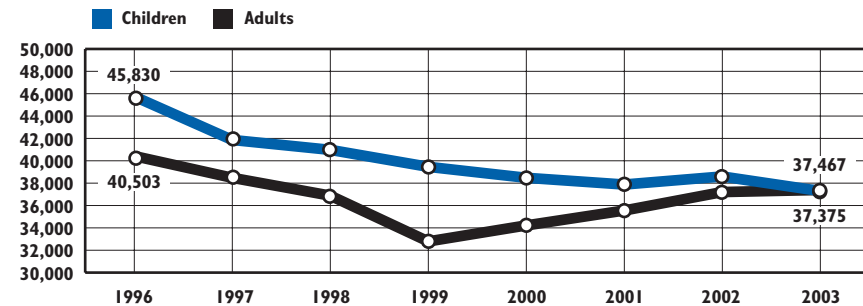
The Food Stamp program is an entitlement, meaning that federal funding is provided to all applicants who meet the eligibility requirements. Food Stamps is not time-limited and can be used as long as the person maintains their certification.^{3,4} One of the strengths of the Food Stamp program is its flexibility. The program is structured to respond to changes in need brought on by economic cycles or natural emergencies.⁵ Many working families are unaware of their eligibility for Food Stamps. The benefit level for each eligible household is adjusted

according to income, and the monthly benefit level decreases as household income increases.⁶ Nearly one in five (19%) Food Stamp cases in Rhode Island has some earned income.⁷

To qualify for Food Stamps, a household's gross 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.⁸ For example, a family of three with a gross annual income less than \$19,848 (monthly income less than \$1,654) will qualify for Food Stamps if they meet the assets guidelines.⁹

The maximum monthly Food Stamp benefit for a Rhode Island family of three is \$371. This is \$5 higher than last year's maximum. The average monthly benefit for a family of three in the state is \$232, a decrease from the 1997 monthly average of \$270.¹⁰ As of December 1, 2003 there were 37,375 children in Rhode Island who received benefits from the Food Stamp program. Half of all food stamp recipients in Rhode Island are children under age 18.¹¹


Food Stamp Participation, Children under Age 18 and Adults, Rhode Island, 1996-2003



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 1996 – 2003. Data represents children and adults as of December 1 of each year.

- ◆ The number of children participating in the Food Stamp program declined from 45,830 in 1996 to 37,375 in 2003, an 18% decrease. During the same time period, the number of adults on the Food Stamp program decreased from 40,503 to 37,467, a 7% decrease.¹²
- ◆ In 2001, the USDA estimated that only 60% of those eligible for Food Stamps in the U.S. were enrolled. In Rhode Island, the USDA estimated that between 61% and 73% of people who were eligible for the Food Stamp Program participated in 2001.¹³
- ◆ Based on estimates of the number of children ages birth to 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of the federal poverty threshold according to the 2000 Census, there are an estimated 53,697 income-eligible children able to participate in the Food Stamp program in Rhode Island. As of October 1, 2003, 72% (38,738) were participating.^{14,15}
- ◆ Participation rates vary across the state. Overall, low-income children in the core cities are more likely to receive Food Stamps, with 77% of income-eligible children participating as compared to 59% of eligible children participating in the remainder of the state.^{16,17}
- ◆ In October 2003, Rhode Island implemented an Automobile Exclusion Policy. The new policy allows for one automobile per adult (for up to two adults per household) to be excluded from resource consideration for food stamp eligibility, regardless of the value of the vehicle.¹⁸

Table 10. Children Under Age 18 Receiving Food Stamps, Rhode Island, October 1, 2003

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER INCOME-ELIGIBLE	NUMBER PARTICIPATING	% OF INCOME-ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING
Barrington	155	43	28%
Bristol	607	204	34%
Burrillville	356	229	64%
Central Falls	2,840	2,224	78%
Charlestown	173	97	56%
Coventry	654	427	65%
Cranston	2,057	1,425	69%
Cumberland	485	275	57%
East Greenwich	242	110	45%
East Providence	1,687	1,081	64%
Exeter	169	73	43%
Foster	66	43	65%
Glocester	225	75	33%
Hopkinton	228	104	46%
Jamestown	36	19	53%
Johnston	733	498	68%
Lincoln	404	244	60%
Little Compton	21	6	29%
Middletown	404	156	39%
Narragansett	310	119	38%
New Shoreham	19	3	16%
Newport	1,731	1,170	68%
North Kingstown	818	404	49%
North Providence	802	526	66%
North Smithfield	92	52	57%
Pawtucket	5,948	4,271	72%
Portsmouth	187	102	55%
Providence	22,395	18,304	82%
Richmond	118	48	41%
Scituate	157	65	41%
Smithfield	239	96	40%
South Kingstown	485	252	52%
Tiverton	150	162	100%
Warren	333	200	60%
Warwick	1,712	1,260	74%
West Greenwich	81	28	35%
West Warwick	1,610	858	53%
Westerly	843	451	53%
Woonsocket	4,125	3,032	74%
Core Cities	38,649	29,859	77%
Remainder of State	15,048	8,877	59%
Rhode Island	53,697	38,736	72%

Note to Table

Because of a change in methodology, Food Stamp participation rates in this Factbook can not be compared with Factbooks before 2003. This year's estimates for the percentage of eligible 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 lunch program. Some children who are eligible for free School Breakfast may not be eligible for Food Stamps because they do not meet other program requirements.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Food Stamp program participation data are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRHODES Database, October 1, 2003.

Note: October 1 data has been substituted for December 1 data to avoid including participation numbers that may be misrepresented due to holidays. Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

References for Indicator

- ^{1,4,8} *The Poverty Institute Guide to Government Assistance Programs 2001*. (September 2001). Providence, RI: The Poverty Institute at Rhode Island College School of Social Work.
- ² *The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies*. (June 2002). Waltham, MA: The Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University.
- ³ *Hunger in America: America's Second Harvest's Third National Hunger Study*. (2001). Washington, DC: America's Second Harvest.
- ⁵ *Food Stamp Program: Basic Facts and Data*. (January 2002). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center.
- ⁶ *The Decline in Food Stamp Participation: A Report to Congress*. (July 2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
- ^{7,10,11,14,16} Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRhodes Database, October 1, 2003.
- ⁹ Food Research and Action Center web-site: www.frac.org. (January 2004).
- ¹² Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRhodes Database, 1996 – 2003.
- ¹³ Schirm, A. and L. Castner. (February 2004). *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2001*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
- ^{15,17} U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.
- ¹⁸ Rhode Island Department of Human Services. Retrieved January 2004 from www.dhs.state.ri.us.