

# 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.<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</sup>

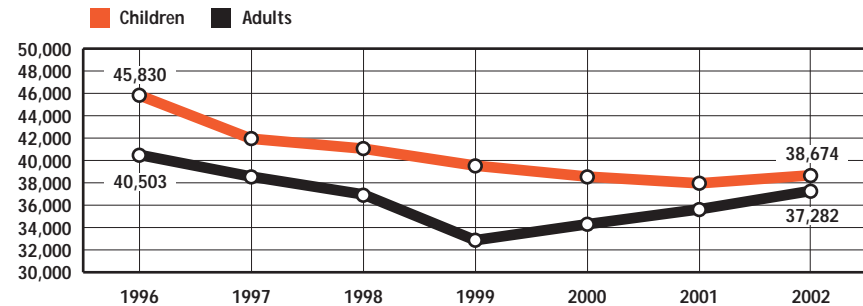
The Food Stamp Program is an entitlement, meaning that federal funding is provided to all applicants who meet the eligibility requirements. Food Stamp benefits are not time-limited and can be used as long as the person maintains their certification.<sup>3,4</sup> One of the strengths of the Food Stamp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

according to income. The monthly benefit level decreases as household income increases.<sup>6</sup> Nearly one in five (19%) Food Stamp cases in Rhode Island has some earned income.<sup>7</sup>

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 assets (such as cash and automobiles).<sup>8</sup> For example, a family of four with a gross annual income less than \$23,532 (monthly income less than \$1,961) will qualify for Food Stamps if they meet the assets guidelines.<sup>9</sup>

The maximum monthly Food Stamp benefit for a Rhode Island family of three is \$366. This is \$10 higher than last year's maximum. The average monthly benefit for family of three in the state is \$226, a decrease from the 1997 monthly average of \$270.<sup>10</sup> As of October 1, 2002 there were 39,717 children in Rhode Island who were receiving benefits from the Food Stamp Program. Half of all Food Stamp recipients in Rhode Island are children under age 18.<sup>11</sup>

**Food Stamp Participation, Children under Age 18 and Adults, Rhode Island, 1996-2002**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRHODES Database, 1996 – 2002. Data represents children and adults as of December 1st of each year.

- ◆ The number of children participating in the Food Stamp Program declined from 45,830 in 1996 to 38,674 in 2002, a 16% decrease. During the same time period, the number of adults on the Food Stamp Program decreased from 40,503 to 37,282, an 8% decrease.
- ◆ The USDA estimates that only 59% of those eligible for Food Stamps in the United States were enrolled in 2000. In Rhode Island, the USDA estimates that between 59% and 72% of people who were eligible for the Food Stamp Program participated in 2000.<sup>12</sup>
- ◆ Based on Census 2000 estimates of the number of children ages birth to 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of the federal poverty limit, there are an estimated 53,697 children eligible to participate in the Food Stamp Program in Rhode Island. As of October 1, 2002, 74% (39,717) were participating.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ Participation rates vary across the state. Overall, low-income children in the core cities are more likely to receive Food Stamps, with 80% of income-eligible children participating. This compares to 59% of eligible children participating in the remainder of the state.<sup>14</sup>

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**Table 9. Children Under Age 18 Receiving Food Stamps, Rhode Island, October 1, 2002**

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED NUMBER INCOME-ELIGIBLE	NUMBER PARTICIPATING	% OF INCOME-ELIGIBLE PARTICIPATING
Barrington	155	40	26%
Bristol	607	227	37%
Burrillville	356	225	63%
Central Falls	2,840	2,240	79%
Charlestown	173	88	51%
Coventry	654	414	63%
Cranston	2,057	1,447	70%
Cumberland	485	256	53%
East Greenwich	242	118	49%
East Providence	1,687	1,075	64%
Exeter	169	92	54%
Foster	66	39	59%
Glocester	225	75	33%
Hopkinton	228	78	34%
Jamestown	36	17	47%
Johnston	733	496	68%
Lincoln	404	197	49%
Little Compton	21	16	76%
Middletown	404	153	38%
Narragansett	310	121	39%
New Shoreham	19	0	0%
Newport	1,731	1,275	74%
North Kingstown	818	429	52%
North Providence	802	515	64%
North Smithfield	92	46	50%
Pawtucket	5,948	4,508	76%
Portsmouth	187	81	43%
Providence	22,395	18,960	85%
Richmond	118	81	69%
Scituate	157	60	38%
Smithfield	239	109	46%
South Kingstown	485	311	64%
Tiverton	150	151	100%
Warren	333	220	66%
Warwick	1,712	1,211	71%
West Greenwich	81	35	43%
West Warwick	1,610	847	53%
Westerly	843	442	52%
Woonsocket	4,125	3,022	73%
<b>Core Cities</b>	<b>38,649</b>	<b>30,852</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>15,048</b>	<b>8,865</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>53,697</b>	<b>39,717</b>	<b>74%</b>

### Note to Table

Because of a change in methodology, Food Stamp participation rates in this Factbook cannot be compared with previous Factbooks. 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 according to the 2000 Census. Past estimates were based on the percent of children eligible for the free school meals program. Some children who are eligible for free school meals may not be eligible for Food Stamps because they do not meet other program requirements.

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Estimated number eligible is based on the total number of children ages birth to 18 living in families with incomes below 130% of poverty according to the 2000 Census. Food Stamp Program participation data are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRHODES Database, October 1, 2002. Note: October 1st data has been substituted for December 1st data to avoid including participation numbers that may be misrepresented due to early issuance for the holidays. Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

### References for Indicator

- <sup>1,4,8,15</sup> *The Poverty Institute Guide to Government Assistance Programs 2001* (September 2001). Providence, RI: The Poverty Institute at Rhode Island College School of Social Work.
- <sup>2</sup> *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.
- <sup>3</sup> *Hunger in America: America's Second Harvest's Third National Hunger Study* (2001). Washington, DC: America's Second Harvest.
- <sup>5</sup> Food Research and Action Center, Food Stamp Program: Basic Facts and Data, www.frac.org (January 2002).
- <sup>6</sup> *The Decline in Food Stamp Participation: A Report to Congress* (July 2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
- <sup>7,10,11,17</sup> Rhode Island Department of Human Services, INRHODES Database, October 1, 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> Food Research Action Center, Food Stamp Program Fiscal Year 2003 Eligibility Limits, www.frac.org (January 2003).
- <sup>12</sup> Schirm, A. (December 2002). *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2000*. Washington, DC: USDA and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
- <sup>13,14</sup> Rhode Island KIDS COUNT calculations based on U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000 and Rhode Island Department of Human Services INRHODES database.
- <sup>16</sup> *State Government Responses to the Food Assistance Gap* (2000). Washington, DC: Food Research and Action Center and America's Second Harvest.
- <sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, *Food Stamp: Program New Guidance on Non-Citizen Eligibility*, www.fns.usda.gov (January 2003).