

# 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.<sup>1,2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Child hunger has been shown to decrease by almost one-third after their families have received SNAP benefits for six months.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> Rhode Island is one of 40 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.<sup>6</sup> The gross monthly income limit for Rhode Island is 185% of the

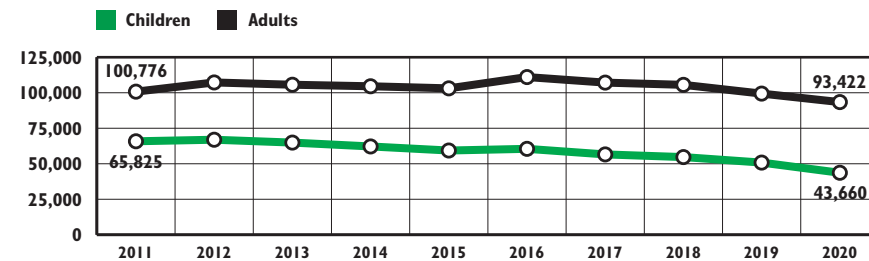
federal poverty level (\$40,182 per year for a family of three in 2020). Households must still meet the net monthly income limit of 100% of the federal poverty level after allowable deductions, which include deductions for housing costs and child care.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> In Rhode Island during October 2020, 75% of SNAP households had gross incomes below the federal poverty level (\$21,720 for a family of three in 2020).<sup>11,12</sup> In October 2020, the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$372 (this average does not include supplemental SNAP benefits provided during the COVID-19 pandemic).<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14,15</sup> In addition, SNAP is a quick and effective form of economic stimulus because it moves money directly into the local economy.<sup>16</sup>



Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Children and Adults, Rhode Island, 2011-2020



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2011–2015 and RI Bridges Database, 2016–2020. Data represent children under age 18 and adults who participated in SNAP during the month of October.

- ◆ Of the 137,082 Rhode Islanders enrolled in SNAP in October 2020, 68% were adults and 32% were children. Of the children enrolled in SNAP, 33% were under the age of six.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ The number of children and adults receiving SNAP benefits has decreased each year since 2016. The decrease in SNAP enrollment between 2019 and 2020 may be due in part to increased Unemployment Compensation benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic, as these benefits counted as monthly income for SNAP.<sup>18,19</sup>



## Child Hunger in Rhode Island

- ◆ Food insecurity is a method to measure and assess the risk of hunger.<sup>20</sup> The USDA defines food insecurity as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Between 2017 and 2019, 9.1% of Rhode Island households and 11.1% of U.S. households were food insecure. In 2019, 13.6% of all U.S. households with children were food insecure, while 37.1% of U.S. households with children with incomes below the poverty level experienced food insecurity.<sup>21</sup>
- ◆ 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.<sup>22</sup> In April 2020, food pantries and soup kitchens provided emergency food assistance to 67,900 Rhode Islanders who needed additional help to meet their nutritional needs, up from 53,700 Rhode Islanders each month before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>23</sup>

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Table 12. Children Under Age 18 Receiving SNAP Benefits, Rhode Island, October 2020



## COVID-19 and SNAP Benefits

◆ According to the Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, households with children were more likely to experience food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic than those without children.<sup>24</sup> It is projected that the child food insecurity rate will increase to 27% in Rhode Island due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

◆ Since March 2020, SNAP households that were not already receiving the maximum benefit received supplemental benefits. States can request additional supplemental benefits as long as the federal government has declared a public health emergency and the state has issued an emergency or disaster declaration.<sup>26,27</sup> The maximum monthly benefit has been temporarily increased through September 30, 2021.<sup>28</sup>

◆ SNAP participants can now select and pay for their groceries online using their EBT card at Amazon and participating Walmart stores.<sup>29</sup>

◆ Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) provides benefits to replace free and reduced-price school meals missed due to school closures and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020, about a third of families receiving P-EBT benefits also received SNAP benefits.<sup>30,31</sup>

CITY/TOWN	NUMBER PARTICIPATING
Barrington	123
Bristol	275
Burrillville	360
Central Falls	2,253
Charlestown	102
Coventry	649
Cranston	2,366
Cumberland	554
East Greenwich	155
East Providence	1,357
Exeter	70
Foster	86
Glocester	93
Hopkinton	124
Jamestown	33
Johnston	793
Lincoln	528
Little Compton	32
Middletown	379
Narragansett	126
New Shoreham	3
Newport	943
North Kingstown	624
North Providence	956
North Smithfield	146
Pawtucket	5,163
Portsmouth	152
Providence	16,339
Richmond	111
Scituate	117
Smithfield	189
South Kingstown	388
Tiverton	226
Warren	247
Warwick	1,583
West Greenwich	65
West Warwick	1,349
Westerly	537
Woonsocket	4,033
Unknown	31
Four Core Cities	27,788
Remainder of State	15,841
Rhode Island	43,660

### 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 2020.

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

- <sup>1</sup> Ralston, K., Treen, K., Coleman-Jensen, A., & Guthrie, J. (2017). *Children's food security and USDA child nutrition programs*, EIB-174. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas, M. M. C., Miller, D. P., & Morrissey, T. W. (2019). Food insecurity and child health. *Pediatrics*, 144(4), 1-9.
- <sup>3</sup> Food Research and Action Center. (2020). *FRAC facts: SNAP strengths*. Retrieved February 3, 2021, from www.frac.org
- <sup>4,14</sup> Carlson, S., & Keith-Jennings, B. (2018). *SNAP is linked with improved nutritional outcomes and lower health care costs*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- <sup>5,9</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2020). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP eligibility*. Retrieved February 3, 2021, from www.fns.usda.gov
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2020). *Broad-based categorical eligibility*. Retrieved February 3, 2021, from www.fns.usda.gov
- <sup>7</sup> Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (n.d.). *SNAP eligibility*. Retrieved February 3, 2021, from www.dhs.ri.gov
- <sup>8,12</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2020). Annual update of the HHS poverty guidelines. *Federal Register*, 85(12), 3060-3061.
- <sup>10,16</sup> *Policy basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. (2019). Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

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