



SNAP Must Be Strengthened to Fight Child Hunger During the Pandemic and Beyond

This pandemic has laid bare the catastrophic consequences of our nation's failure to address hunger and poverty, especially for our children. Even before the pandemic, [more than 11 million children—about 1 in 7—were going to bed hungry](#), and those numbers were worse for children of color. Now, rising unemployment and school closures are increasing childhood hunger, with a third of households with children [not getting enough food each day](#). If unemployment and child poverty rates continue to rise, [an additional 6.8 million children—for a total of 18 million—could experience hunger in America](#). As a growing number of families struggle to make ends meet, Congress must increase funding and eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure no child goes hungry in the wealthiest nation on Earth.

[Jami Clinkscale](#) of Columbus, OH relies on a \$580 per month disability check to make ends meet. After COVID-19 hit, she went from feeding two people to six after taking in her grandchildren when their mother got evicted. Jami is feeding her family on \$170 a month in SNAP benefits, supplementing with food pantries, and ultimately skips meals so there is enough for her grandchildren. **“I’ve eaten a lot less just to make sure they get what they need.”**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps keep children and families fed, but too many children are still going hungry.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps low-income families keep food on the table. In 2018, nearly [40 million Americans relied on SNAP benefits](#) each month to eat, with [more than two-thirds of SNAP recipients living in households with children](#). Every month, SNAP helps feed [17 million children—nearly a quarter of all children in America](#).

For these children and families, **SNAP is a critical lifeline**. SNAP prevents children from going hungry, improves health and education outcomes, and reduces poverty among families. In 2018, [SNAP lifted 3.2 million people, including nearly 1.4 million children, out of poverty](#).

While SNAP alleviates hunger and poverty for millions of children, millions more are still hungry because **benefits are too low**, requirements **are too harsh**, and **access is too limited**.

- **SNAP benefits are too low:** Among households with children, [monthly SNAP benefits average only \\$118 a person—or \\$1.40 per person per meal](#). This makes

it nearly impossible for many families to keep food on the table and feed their growing children. [Almost half of families](#) use their monthly benefits within the first few weeks of the month and [nearly half](#) remain food insecure even after receiving benefits. Now, with [unemployment rising and grocery store prices hitting record highs](#), families' food budgets are being stretched even thinner.

- **Requirements are burdensome:** Adults ages 18-49 without dependents or documented disabilities are subject to a cruel three-month time limit (within three years) on SNAP and are required to work 80 hours per month to retain benefits. While these restrictions do not apply directly to children or adults with children, children in poverty often depend on pooled resources—including SNAP benefits—from family members who do not claim them as dependents. These families are often the poorest and have to share resources and burdens of expenses.
- **Access is limited:** [Most undocumented immigrants and Lawful Permanent Residents are ineligible for SNAP](#), and mixed-status families can only receive benefits for their children. [College students enrolled at least half-time are also unable to participate](#) and many part-time students have had their benefits terminated because they can no longer meet their

20 hour weekly work requirements. Even before this pandemic, [nearly half of all college students](#) experienced food insecurity. Now with school closures, students are at further risk of going hungry.

- **The Trump administration is seeking to restrict access and weaken SNAP benefits even further:** Even in the midst of a pandemic and the [greatest unemployment crisis since the Great Depression](#), the [USDA is continuing to push for implementation](#) of a harsh rule that would impose stricter time limits and take food away from 700,000 people. The administration has also issued a proposal to [restrict states' ability to use Broad Based Categorical Eligibility \(BBCE\)](#), which would take free school meals away from 1 million children, and another to [lower SNAP benefits for nearly 1 in 5 households](#) by changing how states account for utility costs when determining benefits.

SNAP helps the national economy recover during recessions.

SNAP is one of the most effective and responsive federal programs in an economic downturn. SNAP is an automatic stabilizer, [expanding to cover additional households in times of need](#) and shrinking as the economy improves. During the last recession, increasing SNAP benefits [lessened food insecurity](#), [prevented an additional 1 million people from falling into poverty](#), and [stimulated our economy](#). Every [one dollar spent in SNAP benefits generates between \\$1.50 and \\$1.80](#) in economic activity.

Expansions of SNAP during the COVID crisis have not gone far enough to keep children from going hungry.

[Families First](#) and the [CARES Act](#) improved SNAP, but did not go far enough to meet the growing needs of people who have lost jobs or wages and are going hungry across the country. So far, Congress has made improvements to SNAP by:

- **Suspending time limits through end of the public health epidemic**, ensuring that parents will not be subjected to harsh work requirements;
- Creating a new **Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)**, which allows children who would have received free or reduced school meals access to SNAP while schools are closed due to COVID-19;
- Allowing states to **provide emergency SNAP benefits to households up to the maximum monthly benefit allotment** for up to two months

and more flexibility for states managing their caseloads; and

- Providing **\$15.5 billion for SNAP administrative funds** and to help offset the rising costs of applications.

House Democrats recently released the [HEROES Act](#), which includes many other important changes to SNAP that should be maintained as the next COVID relief package moves through Congress. **The next COVID relief package must:**

- **Boost the maximum SNAP benefits by 15 percent**, which would provide an extra \$100 a month for an average family of four.
- **Increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30** and switch from the Thrifty Food Plan to the Low-Cost Food Plan to accurately calculate food costs to improve the health and well-being of families.
- **Suspend all SNAP administrative rules** that would terminate or weaken benefits.
- **Expand program eligibility for SNAP and Pandemic EBT**, including by allowing young children who are enrolled in childcare feeding programs and college students to qualify.
- Enhance and restructure SNAP administrative processes by **waiving requirements for in-person meetings** and connecting SNAP applicants to other social programs, and provide enough funding to meet increased caseload demands.
- **Allow the purchasing of hot foods in grocery stores and foods at restaurants.**
- **Waive harsh work requirements** until the economic downturn ends.

Beyond this pandemic, hungry children need long-term solutions.

Congress must ensure that any changes to SNAP now are part of a long-term strategy to make real, permanent changes to the program's limitations. This should include changing the SNAP formula to the Low Cost Food Plan to further take into account how much people spend on food, permanently increase the minimum benefit amount as outlined in the [Closing the Meal Gap Act](#), and removing harsh and arbitrary time limits on assistance, as outlined in the [Improving Access to Nutrition Act](#), to ensure that no child in America goes to bed hungry.