MISSION: READINESS

BRIEF

Protecting SNAP Funding Can Foster National Security

Prioritization of SNAP and similar programs will help secure our nation

Proper nutrition is the nation's first line of defense against threats to its security, longevity, and prosperity. For families experiencing economic instability, federally-funded nutrition assistance programs are vital resources for access to healthy and nutritious foods, particularly families with children. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – the largest nutrition assistance program in the United States – provides monthly benefits to households with low incomes to purchase nutrient-rich food.[1] Of the households who receive SNAP assistance, 62 percent are families with children.[2] Other nutrition assistance programs that support families and children include the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)[3] and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).[4] Together, these programs provide a safety net for vulnerable children and families.

> "Maintaining SNAP benefits for struggling Americans is a strategic investment in their health, work performance, education, and our national security."

Brigadier General
Charles O. Dillard, MD
U.S. Army (Ret.)

Despite their importance, these programs face the threat of severe reductions due to proposed funding cuts. SNAP, in particular, is facing potential cuts, stricter work requirements, and changes to how states fund the program.[5] For FY 2025, the average SNAP participant is estimated to receive $187 per month, or approximately $6 per day.[6] With the average monthly grocery bill around $504,[7] even a small reduction to this amount will make maintaining a healthy diet even further out of reach for struggling families.

Congress must ensure that struggling families can meet their daily nutritional needs. Targeted support from Congress will ensure that children in households that utilize SNAP receive the nutrition needed to foster the healthy physical and cognitive functioning needed for any career they choose, including the military.

SNAP can foster national security

Malnutrition—especially obesity—threatens national health and security. Nationwide, 77 percent of youth ages 17–24 are ineligible for military service, up from 71 percent in 2017. Obesity alone disqualifies 11 percent and contributes to 44 percent being disqualified for multiple reasons.[8] Among children ages 2 to 19 years old in the United States, over 19 percent are obese.[9] Paradoxically, food insecurity—limited access to healthy food—is a major factor.[10]

Programs like SNAP can help combat this. One study found food insecurity among children dropped by nearly one-third after six months of family participation in SNAP.[11] SNAP is also linked to lower risks of obesity and heart disease. Similarly, the NSLP is tied to a 14 percent drop in food insufficiency,[12] while it is estimated that WIC reduces food insecurity by 20 percent and improves dietary quality.[13]

SNAP is cost-efficient

Administration of SNAP is highly efficient, with about 94 percent of federal funds going directly to food benefits and minimal administrative costs.[14] Most payment errors stem from unintentional mistakes, not fraud[15]—which affects only about 0.1 percent of recipients annually.[16] Shifting administration of SNAP to state and local governments could lead to reduced benefits for recipients, higher state costs, and negative impacts on local economies.[17]

Barriers to utilizing SNAP

SNAP serves over 42 million households monthly,[18] but many eligible families—especially in rural areas—still face barriers. Challenges include lack of program awareness, transportation issues, and difficulty completing required paperwork.[19] One study found 88 percent of participants struggled to access healthy food, with 61

percent citing cost as the main barrier.[20] These individuals were over twice as likely to face food insecurity. Additionally, 20 percent reported distance from a grocery store or lack of transportation as a key obstacle.[21]

Modernizing SNAP

Efforts to reduce the difficulties to accessing SNAP benefits must be prioritized. Broadening eligibility, enhancing access to online purchasing options, and modernizing the application process can help. These updates can make it easier for more families to receive benefits, particularly military families, who are often excluded because the Basic Allowance for Housing is counted as income when determining eligibility.[22]

Expanding the Gus Schumacher Nutritional Incentive Program (GusNIP)[23] can help reduce the barriers posed by distance. Updating and strengthening GusNIP incentives, such as "Double Up Food Bucks," can also help more families enrolled in SNAP access fresh fruits, vegetables, and nutrient dense healthy foods.

Conclusion

Renewing congressional investments in SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs is vital for supporting national security and strengthening the health of children and families. Congress must keep funding levels intact for SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs to strengthen national security and promote better public health.

Percent Ineligible to Join the Military

State	Ages 17-24	State	Ages 17-24
NATIONAL*	**77%**	MONTANA	71%
ALABAMA	74%	NEBRASKA	71%
ALASKA	71%	NEVADA	71%
ARIZONA	72%	NEW HAMPSHIRE	73%
ARKANSAS	74%	NEW JERSEY	69%
CALIFORNIA	71%	NEW MEXICO	74%
COLORADO	70%	NEW YORK	71%
CONNECTICUT	69%	NORTH CAROLINA	72%
DELAWARE	72%	NORTH DAKOTA	71%
FLORIDA	72%	OHIO	71%
GEORGIA	73%	OKLAHOMA	73%
HAWAII	62%	OREGON	71%
IDAHO	71%	PENNSYLVANIA	71%
ILLINOIS	70%	RHODE ISLAND	72%
INDIANA	71%	SOUTH CAROLINA	73%
IOWA	70%	SOUTH DAKOTA	71%
KANSAS	70%	TENNESSEE	73%
KENTUCKY	72%	TEXAS	73%
LOUISIANA	75%	UTAH	71%
MAINE	68%	VERMONT	70%
MARYLAND	70%	VIRGINIA	70%
MASSACHUSETTS	69%	WASHINGTON	70%
MICHIGAN	71%	WEST VIRGINIA	72%
MINNESOTA	69%	WISCONSIN	71%
MISSISSIPPI	76%	WYOMING	70%
MISSOURI	71%	*DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA*	*78%*

Source: Department of Defense, 2017

*U.S. Department of Defense, Office of People Analytics (2022). 2020 Qualified Military Available (QMA) study. In 2020, the Department of Defense found that 77% of youth nationwide are ineligible for military service. The results were not broken down by state. However a previous (2017) version of the study, which found that 71% of youth were not eligible, did provide the state data (see table). Since the nationwide ineligibility rate has increased, it's reasonable to assume that the situation in states is similar to, if not worse than, what is seen in the table.

Rates of SNAP Households with Children by State

State	Percent of SNAP households with children in FY 2024	State	Percent of SNAP households with children in FY 2024
NATIONAL	**62%**	MONTANA	63%
ALABAMA	67%	NEBRASKA	68%
ALASKA	64%	NEVADA	62%
ARIZONA	68%	NEW HAMPSHIRE	62%
ARKANSAS	64%	NEW JERSEY	64%
CALIFORNIA	55%	NEW MEXICO	61%
COLORADO	64%	NEW YORK	52%
CONNECTICUT	53%	NORTH CAROLINA	66%
DELAWARE	66%	NORTH DAKOTA	66%
FLORIDA	59%	OHIO	62%
GEORGIA	69%	OKLAHOMA	66%
HAWAII	56%	OREGON	54%
IDAHO	67%	PENNSYLVANIA	58%
ILLINOIS	60%	RHODE ISLAND	49%
INDIANA	69%	SOUTH CAROLINA	68%
IOWA	64%	SOUTH DAKOTA	70%
KANSAS	65%	TENNESSEE	66%
KENTUCKY	68%	TEXAS	76%
LOUISIANA	69%	UTAH	69%
MAINE	50%	VERMONT	51%
MARYLAND	59%	VIRGINIA	67%
MASSACHUSETTS	50%	WASHINGTON	53%
MICHIGAN	59%	WEST VIRGINIA	56%
MINNESOTA	63%	WISCONSIN	60%
MISSISSIPPI	67%	WYOMING	71%
MISSOURI	68%	*DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA*	*54%*

Source: Food Research & Action Center, 2025

Endnotes

1 https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap

2 https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap#_edn2

3 https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/wic-program

4 https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=110125

5 https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/expanded-work-requirements-in-house-republican-bill-would-take-away-food

6 https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap#_edn2

7 https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cesan.pdf

8 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of People Analytics (2022). 2020 Qualified Military Available (QMA) study.

9 https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/national-obesity-monitor/

10 https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement#insecurity

11 https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs

12 Huang, J., & Barridge, E. (2016). Low income children's participation in the National School Lunch Program and household food insufficiency. Social Science Medicine, 150, 8-14.

13 Kreider, B., Pepper, J.V., & Roy, M. (2016). Identifying the effects of WIC on food insecurity among infants and children. Southern Economic Journal, 82(4), 1106-1122.

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19 https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/rural-hunger-in-america-snap-get-the-facts.pdf

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21 https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-Barriers-Summary.pdf

22 https://www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/MFBNA-Summary-and-Sample-Households-February-2021.pdf

23 https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/hunger-food-security-programs/gus-schumacher-nutrition-incentive-program

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