



SNAP Leads to Positive Outcomes in Homelessness Prevention, Education and Early Learning, Job Retention, Health Equity and Behavioral Health

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, serves as a primary source of nutrition assistance for many low-income individuals and families. It is our country's most effective anti-hunger program,

"A significant amount of research over the last 15+ years demonstrates how SNAP enhances our overall well-being far beyond the scope of food security."

and lifts millions of people out of poverty each year.¹ SNAP plays an indispensable role in poverty alleviation by placing additional resources directly into the hands of those who need it the most. SNAP provided an estimated average of \$183 a month (or about \$6 a day) per person in fiscal year 2023. Although the primary purpose of this modest benefit

is to allow people to afford food, a significant amount of research over the last 15+ years demonstrates how SNAP enhances our overall well-being far beyond the scope of food security.²

First, SNAP plays a critical role in homelessness prevention. By alleviating material hardship for low-income individuals and families, it reduces risk of eviction and acts as an economic stabilizer. It also provides homelessness prevention strategies with direct access to renters because of the significant overlap between Oregonians who need SNAP and Oregonians who are renters.

¹ <https://frac.org/news/investments-lifted-millions-out-of-poverty-in-2020>

² <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>

Second, SNAP improves education and early learning outcomes by ensuring adequate nutritional support for child development, reducing chronic school absenteeism, improving academic performance, and creating conditions for developing healthy social skills.

Third, SNAP is consistently associated with reduced healthcare costs, as it helps low-income individuals meet their basic nutritional needs and contributes to the prevention or improved management of health conditions.

Finally, SNAP ensures a level of nutritional support that is invaluable for behavioral health and can mitigate the repercussions of food insecurity that have compounding effects on the mental and social well-being of low-income communities.

Despite SNAP's success, far too many people are excluded from the program because of arbitrary reasons like where someone is born or whether someone is attending college. Lawmakers should consider policies to end these harmful exclusions.

Homelessness Prevention

We cannot continue to address housing instability in isolation from food insecurity. Oregonians who are renters are six times more likely to experience hunger than Oregonians who are homeowners.³ **More than 50 percent of Oregonian renters lack sufficient residual income to pay for both rent AND basic necessities, such as food and medicine.**⁴ The financial assistance provided by SNAP not only mitigates housing costs but also improves the chances of achieving and maintaining economic stability.

"SNAP also improves the likelihood that an individual will keep their job."

Being food secure reduces one's risk of falling behind on housing payments and, subsequently, the risk of eviction or foreclosure.⁵ The material hardship that renters face is a leading cause of homelessness in Oregon. More than 86 percent of all eviction filings in Oregon are due to unaffordable rent⁶, and for every \$100

³ https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/2022-11/oregon_food_insecurity_rates_2019-2021.pdf

⁴ <https://twitter.com/lehnerjw/status/1602829423988068352>

⁵ <https://frac.org/blog/food-insecurity-and-housing-instability-are-inextricably-linked>

⁶ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/267365>

increase in rent, there is a 9 percent increase in homelessness⁷. By providing financial assistance to low-income Oregonians to purchase food, SNAP alleviates the financial strain associated with meeting basic needs and allows households to free up funds for other essential expenses, such as rent or mortgage payments.

In addition to alleviating financial strain, SNAP has also long served as an “automatic stabilizer during economic downturns,”⁸ keeping families afloat during times of uncertainty and flux. SNAP plays an important role in supplementing workers’ low or fluctuating wages or helping people during sudden periods of unemployment in an unreliable labor market. **A study of new SNAP participants found that after just 6 months of starting SNAP, households were more likely to become employed or keep their job.**⁹

Finally, expanding SNAP access would be an efficient and effective way to strengthen housing stability in Oregon. There is substantial overlap between Oregonians who need SNAP and Oregonians who are renters. Among those who receive government assistance, about 75 percent are renters.¹⁰ In other words,

“After just 6 months of starting SNAP, households are less likely to be evicted.”

improving access to SNAP would directly benefit renters. In fact, after just 6 months of starting SNAP, households are less likely to be evicted.¹¹ Importantly, families experiencing food insecurity are 62 percent more likely to eventually

experience housing instability.¹² Food security is integral to fostering the conditions necessary for people to achieve and maintain stability, and SNAP serves as the foundation of food security for many low-income renters in Oregon.

Education and Early Learning

The importance of nutrition in education and early learning cannot be understated. We can set up high-quality education and well-resourced child care centers, but that fails to address the other pivotal aspects of a child’s ability to learn and succeed.

⁷ https://wp-tid.zillowstatic.com/3/Homelessness_InflexionPoints-27eb88.pdf

⁸ https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err265_summary.pdf

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4431109>

¹⁰ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/program-participation-and-spending-patterns-of-families-receivin-g-means-tested-assistance.htm#top>

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4431109/>

¹² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33060025/>

Food insecurity can have profound and lasting effects on the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of children, especially during early childhood.¹³ Having access to SNAP during early childhood increases girls' and women's economic self-sufficiency in terms of increased educational attainment, earnings and income, and reduced poverty and public assistance program participation in adulthood.¹⁴ Keeping children nourished during this period of development is one of the most impactful ways we can build a strong foundation for the future.

"Children who face food insecurity at home are more likely to experience chronic school absenteeism and face a higher risk of dropping out."

To mitigate the impact of food insecurity on education and early learning, it is essential to implement comprehensive strategies that expand access to nutrition assistance. Children who face food insecurity at home are more likely to experience chronic school absenteeism and face a higher risk of dropping out.¹⁵ Programs and institutions alone cannot guarantee there will be sufficient food at home, but SNAP dollars in the pockets of parents and caregivers can.

Expanding SNAP participation alone improves gaps in academic performance.¹⁶ One study demonstrated the causal link between SNAP transfer dates and test scores. **After assigning random transfer dates, the students achieved higher test results when they took exams two to three weeks after their SNAP benefits**

"Students experiencing resource scarcity performed worse on the SAT, impacting their ability to attend college and their lifetime wages."

arrived, whereas students who took exams near the end of the month (as benefits were depleting) scored lower.¹⁷ Another study found that students experiencing resource scarcity performed worse on the SAT, impacting their ability to attend college and their lifetime wages.¹⁸

Test scoring is not the only indicator of educational success. Social skills and emotional resilience are also key indicators of a strong education. Several studies show that household food insecurity, "even at marginal levels, is associated with children's behavioral, academic, and emotional problems from

¹³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8431639>

¹⁴ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10200410/>

¹⁶ https://www.chloeneast.com/uploads/8/9/9/7/8997263/east_fskids_r_r2.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4943850/>

¹⁸ https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28386/w28386.pdf

infancy to adolescence.”¹⁹ Studies also show that children who transitioned from being food insecure in the first grade to being food secure in the third grade still had significantly to nearly significantly lower social skills scores – an indication that **“even marginal food security may impact on children’s interpersonal skills and development, even after food insecurity is no longer a significant household problem.”**²⁰ A child’s ability to navigate the social aspects of the educational environment impacts their ability to learn and engage with others as they prepare to make life-changing decisions in adulthood. Childhood exposure to SNAP not only increases adult labor income and reduces adult poverty, but also leads to a 2.4 percent reduction in the likelihood of incarceration for nonwhite males at the ages of six to 18.²¹

To prioritize education and early learning without a strategy to combat child hunger is like placing a plant in a great new pot, and then neglecting to water it. Food security is at the very core of creating safe and healthy communities for children to thrive in and is urgently important for healthy cognitive and socio-emotional development. Increasing access to SNAP to ensure that fewer children in Oregon grow up hungry is an investment in Oregon’s future.

Health Equity

For many low-income individuals, SNAP is vital for meeting basic nutritional needs and is therefore foundational to overall health and well-being. As the most important nutrition assistance program in the country, SNAP should be utilized in health care intervention

strategies for low-income individuals. By improving dietary intake, SNAP contributes to early intervention and prevention of health issues, improves the ability to manage health conditions and reduces health care costs.

“Children enrolled in SNAP had lower rates of anemia and nutritional deficiency than low-income non-participants.”

Food insecurity has long been linked to a wide variety of health conditions. Inadequate resources to purchase groceries lead to higher rates of stress, malnutrition and a wide variety of health conditions – including an overwhelmingly long and consistently growing list of diseases and their associated mortality rates, including cardiometabolic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease, chronic kidney disease,

¹⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10200410/>

²⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8431639/>

²¹ <https://academic.oup.com/restud/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/restud/rdad063/7191876>

congestive heart failure, heart attacks and more.²² Among children, food insecurity serves as a precipitating factor for the development of these conditions.²³ A study of more than 350,000 children found that children enrolled in SNAP had lower rates of anemia and nutritional deficiency than low-income non-participants.²⁴ By significantly reducing food insecurity among low-income households, SNAP participation is associated with an increased likelihood of being in “excellent or very good health.”²⁵

By allowing for more financial flexibility in the household budget, SNAP mitigates trade-offs between food and health care. SNAP operates at the intersection of social and economic factors that influence health outcomes. For example, **food-insecure households often use coping strategies that are harmful to health, such as cost-related medication underuse, postponing or forgoing preventive or needed medical care, forgoing the foods needed for special medical diets and diluting or rationing infant formula.**²⁶

“People who lack consistent access to adequate food spend roughly 45 percent more on medical care... SNAP participation was associated with reduced hospitalization, and among those who were hospitalized, less costly hospital stays.”

SNAP participation is also associated with lower healthcare spending among low-income adults. Research shows that on average, after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics that are expected to impact food-insecure households, people who lack consistent access to adequate food spend roughly 45 percent more on medical care in a year (\$6,100) than people in food-secure households (\$4,200).²⁷ Hospital admissions for hypoglycemia are higher at the end of the month for low-income individuals with diabetes than high-income individuals with diabetes, suggesting that low-income patients are more likely to have hypoglycemia when food benefits, like SNAP, are most likely to be depleted. According to a study of older adults dually enrolled in Medicare

²² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34152581/>

²³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8431639/>

²⁴ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>

²⁵ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>

²⁶ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>

and Medicaid, SNAP participation was associated with reduced hospitalization, and among those who were hospitalized, less costly hospital stays.²⁸

Addressing food insecurity is not only essential for immediate well-being but also for the prevention of long-term health disparities and the promotion of overall health equity. Comprehensive health equity approaches that utilize food assistance can be pivotal for improving long-term health outcomes for low-income individuals and families.

Behavioral Health

While the primary goal of SNAP is to address food insecurity, SNAP also provides invaluable benefits for behavioral health outcomes. SNAP leads to decreased rates of major depressive episodes, mental illness and suicidal ideation.

Financial strain and uncertainty about having enough food – especially in times of crisis or instability – creates and exacerbates psychological distress that

leads to compounding effects on behavioral health.²⁹

“SNAP leads to decreased rates of major depressive episodes, mental illness and suicidal ideation.”

For example, the behaviors and coping strategies used to manage food insecurity (such as reducing the sizes of meals) may contribute to social isolation and a lack of support, which

is particularly harmful for populations who may need extra support, such as new parents who are already at a higher risk of postpartum depression.³⁰ Other food-related insecurities and consequences include social exclusion when individuals lack the financial resources to participate in social and cultural norms in their communities.³¹ SNAP is often the crutch of support that ensures peace of mind when one is already juggling the myriad of other social and mental repercussions of poverty.

²⁸ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>

²⁹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2803892>

³⁰ <https://scholars.org/contribution/connect-food-insecurity-and-housing>

³¹ https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/usfblogs.usfca.edu/dist/9/244/files/2021/05/baileyjessi_6200020_68183569_Missed-Connections-Jessi-Bailey-Capstone-Final-Version.pdf

Recommendations: End Harmful Exclusions so Everyone has Access to these Benefits

2024 will mark the 50th anniversary of SNAP becoming a nationwide program.³² This is cause for both celebration and reflection. It is cause for celebration because SNAP has made the quality of life significantly better for tens of millions of Americans, for the reasons mentioned above. It is cause for reflection because despite SNAP's success, far too many are still left out.

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Lawmakers at the state and federal levels should strengthen SNAP by ending harmful exclusions to ensure everyone has access to food. No one should be denied food assistance simply because of:

- Where someone was born. Thousands of Oregonians are ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status. This includes people who are Legal Permanent Residents but who have yet to clear the "5-year bar," DACA recipients, people in the process of applying for asylum, Oregonians who are undocumented, and people with Temporary Protected Status.
- Whether someone is attending college. Currently, many full-time college students are categorically ineligible for SNAP. This exclusion is based on outdated assumptions about who attends college.
- Whether someone struggles to find full-time work.
- Whether someone lives on land designated as a Reservation.
- Whether someone earns just "too much" to qualify for SNAP, but still struggles to afford food.

³² <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/short-history-snap#1974>