

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) in 2015 and the percentage change between 2010 and 2015 in the number of children under age 18 participating.

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.¹² 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.³ Young children under the age of three who are eligible but do not receive SNAP benefits are 50% more likely to go hungry than those who receive these benefits.⁴

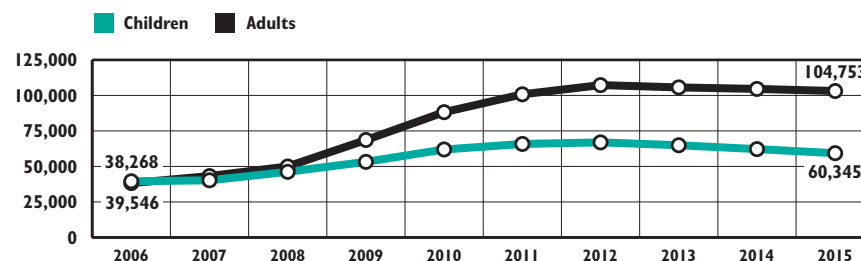
Nationally, SNAP is available to households with gross incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level, net incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level, and no more than \$2,250 in resources.⁵ In 2009, Rhode Island implemented expanded categorical eligibility, an option encouraged by the

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which allowed Rhode Island to increase the gross income limit and remove the resource limit for most applicants.^{6,7} The gross income limit for Rhode Island is now 185% of the federal poverty level (\$37,167 per year for a family of three in 2015).^{8,9} Households must still meet the net income limit of 100% of the federal poverty level after allowable deductions, which include deductions for housing costs and child care.¹⁰

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.¹¹ On October 1, 2015, almost three-fourths (74%) of Rhode Island families receiving SNAP benefits had incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level (\$20,090 for a family of three in 2015).^{12,13} In 2015, the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$361.¹⁴

Participation in SNAP has been associated with improved health outcomes among low-income or food insecure children, and has been linked to lower risk of adverse outcomes such as nutritional deficiency, hospitalization, and obesity.¹⁵ SNAP also is a quick and effective form of economic stimulus because it moves money directly into the local economy.¹⁶

Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Children and Adults, Rhode Island, 2006-2015



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2006–2015. Data represent children under age 18 and adults who participated in SNAP during the month of October.

◆ Of the 165,098 Rhode Islanders enrolled in SNAP in October 2015, 63% were adults and 37% were children. More than one-third (34%) of the children enrolled in SNAP were under the age of six.¹⁷

◆ From 2008 to 2012, the number of Rhode Islanders receiving SNAP benefits increased steadily. However, the number of children and adults receiving SNAP benefits has been decreasing slowly since 2012.¹⁸ SNAP is designed to respond quickly to economic changes; enrollment expands when the economy is weak and shrinks when the economy begins to recover.¹⁹

Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

◆ The USDA defines food insecurity as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Between 2012 and 2014, 12.7% of Rhode Island households and 14.3% of U.S. households were food insecure. In 2014, 19.2% of all U.S. households with children were food insecure, while 44.8% of U.S. households with children with incomes below the poverty level experienced food insecurity.²⁰

◆ Five 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 National School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. In 2015, food pantries and soup kitchens provided emergency food assistance to an average of 60,000 Rhode Islanders who needed additional help to meet their nutritional needs each month.²¹

Table 12. Children Under Age 18 Receiving SNAP Benefits, Rhode Island, October 1, 2010, 2014, and 2015

CITY/TOWN	NUMBER PARTICIPATING IN 2010	NUMBER PARTICIPATING IN 2014	NUMBER PARTICIPATING IN 2015	% CHANGE IN NUMBER PARTICIPATING FROM 2010 TO 2015
Barrington	113	102	116	3%
Bristol	456	444	408	-11%
Burrillville	458	530	473	3%
Central Falls	3,270	3,368	3,349	2%
Charlestown	206	205	161	-22%
Coventry	1,006	1,048	967	-4%
Cranston	3,418	3,485	3,428	<1%
Cumberland	788	776	809	3%
East Greenwich	185	169	189	2%
East Providence	1,971	2,067	1,959	-1%
Exeter	106	88	91	-14%
Foster	79	104	99	25%
Glocester	159	122	117	-26%
Hopkinton	235	222	208	-11%
Jamestown	35	36	39	11%
Johnston	1,008	1,054	985	-2%
Lincoln	585	671	647	11%
Little Compton	42	48	43	2%
Middletown	436	418	472	8%
Narragansett	278	235	212	-24%
New Shoreham	7	10	5	-29%
Newport	1,386	1,277	1,341	-3%
North Kingstown	798	828	791	-1%
North Providence	1,169	1,315	1,273	9%
North Smithfield	187	303	290	55%
Pawtucket	6,396	7,250	7,091	11%
Portsmouth	277	253	263	-5%
Providence	22,933	22,226	21,681	-5%
Richmond	138	134	137	-1%
Scituate	162	155	155	-4%
Smithfield	229	252	235	3%
South Kingstown	498	572	497	<1%
Tiverton	373	350	381	2%
Warren	430	431	384	-11%
Warwick	2,367	2,642	2,540	7%
West Greenwich	74	77	62	-16%
West Warwick	1,699	1,787	1,699	0%
Westerly	848	934	919	8%
Woonsocket	4,847	4,913	4,746	-2%
Unknown	NA	81	63	NA
Four Core Cities	37,446	37,757	36,867	-2%
Remainder of State	22,206	23,144	22,395	1%
Rhode Island	59,652	60,982	59,325	-1%

SNAP Participation in Rhode Island

◆ Between October 1, 2010 and October 1, 2015, the number of Rhode Island children receiving SNAP benefits decreased by 1%, from 59,652 to 59,325. SNAP participation rates among children decreased by 2% in the four core cities and increased by 1% in the remainder of the state.²²

◆ In recent years, Rhode Island has implemented a number of strategies to improve access to SNAP benefits, including implementing “expanded categorical eligibility” so more families qualify, developing an online SNAP application, conducting telephone interviews so applicants do not need to apply in person, requiring less frequent recertification, and implementing same-day SNAP processing when possible.^{23,24,25,26}

◆ Improving coordination with other work support programs, reducing documentation requirements, simplifying renewal processes, and improving communications (i.e., improving phone systems and simplifying and clarifying notices) are additional strategies that could be implemented to further increase access to SNAP benefits for children and families in Rhode Island.²⁷

Note to Table

In 2008, the Food Stamp Program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) data are from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, October 1, 2010, 2014, and 2015.

The data in the city/town table may differ from the data elsewhere in this indicator as this table uses point-in-time data for October 1st, rather than data based on participation for the entire month.

Due to changes in Rhode Island’s SNAP eligibility criteria (e.g., implementation of expanded categorical eligibility) many children in families with gross incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are now eligible for SNAP. For this reason, Census data on the number of children in families with incomes below 130% FPL no longer provides an accurate estimate of the number of income-eligible children, and this year’s Factbook does not present participation rates. Instead, the number of children participating in 2010 is presented as a baseline and data for 2014 and 2015 are presented for comparison. Due to this change in methodology, *Children Receiving SNAP Benefits* cannot be compared with Factbooks prior to 2014.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

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- Perez-Escamilla, R. & Pinheiro de Toledo Vianna, R. (2012). Food insecurity and the behavioral and intellectual development of children: A review of the evidence. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*, 3(1), 1-15.
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