

# 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 October 2016.

## 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>12</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> Receiving SNAP benefits for at least four months has been shown to cut in half the probability of child food insecurity.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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

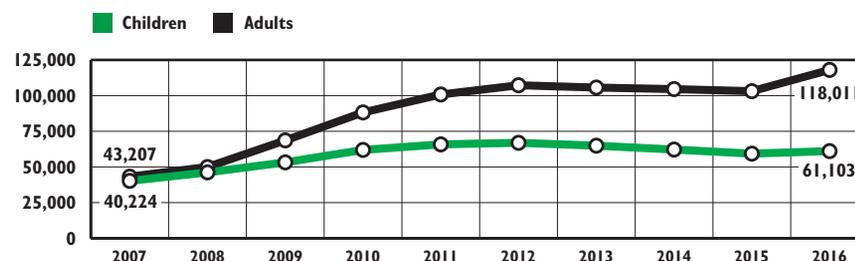
applicants.<sup>67</sup> The gross income limit for Rhode Island is now 185% of the federal poverty level (\$37,296 per year for a family of three in 2016).<sup>8,9</sup>

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.<sup>10</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>11</sup> In the U.S., more than 80% of SNAP recipients have gross incomes at or below the federal poverty level (\$20,160 for a family of three in 2016) with almost all of the rest having incomes between 101% and 130% of the poverty level. About 40% of SNAP households have incomes below half of the federal poverty level (\$10,080) for a family of three in 2016).<sup>12,13</sup> In 2016, the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$373.<sup>14</sup>

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 poor nutrition.<sup>15</sup> SNAP also 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, 2007-2016



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2007–2016. Data represent children under age 18 and adults who participated in SNAP during the month of October.

◆ Of the 179,114 Rhode Islanders enrolled in SNAP in October 2016, 66% were adults and 34% were children. More than one-third (34%) of the children enrolled in SNAP were under the age of six.<sup>17</sup>

◆ From 2008 to 2012, the number of Rhode Islanders receiving SNAP benefits increased steadily. The number of children and adults receiving SNAP benefits then decreased slowly, until increasing in 2016.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the recent increase is due to efforts to avoid denying eligible SNAP recipients during the difficult transition to the RI Bridges computer system.<sup>19</sup>

## Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

◆ The USDA defines food insecurity as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Between 2013 and 2015, 11.8% of Rhode Island households and 13.7% of U.S. households were food insecure. In 2015, 16.6% of all U.S. households with children were food insecure, while 42.9% of U.S. households with children with incomes below the poverty level experienced food insecurity.<sup>20</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>21</sup> In 2016, food pantries and soup kitchens provided emergency food assistance to an average of 59,000 Rhode Islanders each month who needed additional help to meet their nutritional needs.<sup>22</sup>

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Table 12. Children Under Age 18 Receiving SNAP Benefits, Rhode Island, October 2016

## SNAP Participation in Rhode Island

◆ Over the past decade, 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.<sup>23,24,25,26</sup>

◆ Rhode Island could increase access to SNAP benefits for children and families by ensuring adequate staffing in field offices, reducing wait times, allowing for a variety of application processes (i.e., internet, phone, in person), reducing documentation requirements, simplifying renewal processes, improving communications with clients and community partners, providing additional staff training, and seeking recommendations for system improvements from line staff.<sup>27,28</sup>

CITY/TOWN	NUMBER PARTICIPATING IN 2016
Barrington	109
Bristol	421
Burrillville	424
Central Falls	3,441
Charlestown	175
Coventry	963
Cranston	3,242
Cumberland	813
East Greenwich	212
East Providence	1,983
Exeter	79
Foster	107
Glocester	121
Hopkinton	198
Jamestown	46
Johnston	1,022
Lincoln	687
Little Compton	44
Middletown	495
Narragansett	202
New Shoreham	9
Newport	1,522
North Kingstown	865
North Providence	1,161
North Smithfield	206
Pawtucket	7,174
Portsmouth	249
Providence	22,823
Richmond	63
Scituate	171
Smithfield	238
South Kingstown	575
Tiverton	419
Warren	352
Warwick	2,594
West Greenwich	70
West Warwick	1,823
Westerly	878
Woonsocket	4,998
Unknown	129
Four Core Cities	38,436
Remainder of State	22,538
Rhode Island	61,103

### 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, RI Bridges Database, October 2016.

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 prior Factbooks.

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

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Hickson, M., Ettinger de Cuba, S., Weiss, I., Donofrio, G., & Cook, J. (2013). *Too hungry to learn: Food insecurity and school readiness*. Boston, MA: Children's Health Watch.
- <sup>2</sup> 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.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. Retrieved March 7, 2017, from www.fns.usda.gov
- <sup>4</sup> Carlson, S., Rosenbaum, D., Keith-Jennings, B., & Nehako, C. (2016). *SNAP works for America's children*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Eligibility*. Retrieved February 23, 2017, from www.fns.usda.gov
- <sup>6</sup> *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) 2009-2012 accomplishments*. (n.d.). Cranston, RI: Rhode Island Department of Human Services.
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2009). *Improving access to SNAP through broad-based categorical eligibility. Memorandum to regional administrators*. Retrieved February 22, 2017, from www.fns.usda.gov

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