

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 2018.

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 Child food insecurity has been shown to decrease by almost one-third after their families have received SNAP benefits for six months.⁴

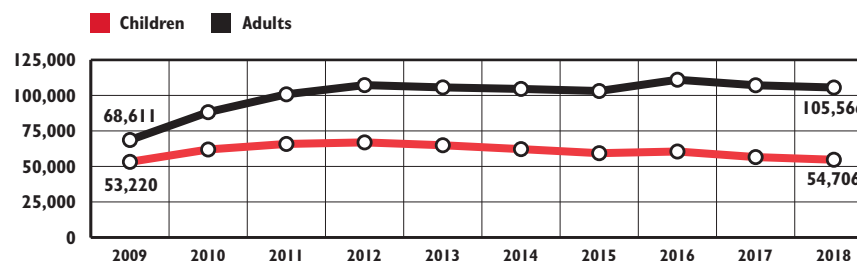
Nationally, SNAP is available to households with gross monthly incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level, net monthly incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level, and no more than \$2,250 in resources.⁵ Rhode Island is one of 40 states that have implemented broad-based categorical eligibility, which allowed Rhode Island to increase the gross income limit and remove the resource limit for most applicants.⁶ The gross monthly income

limit for Rhode Island is 185% of the federal poverty level (\$38,443 per year for a family of three in 2018).^{7,8} Households must still meet the net monthly income limit of 100% of the federal poverty level after allowable deductions, which include deductions for housing costs and child care.⁹

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.¹⁰ In Rhode Island during October 2018, 76% of SNAP recipients had gross incomes below the federal poverty level (\$20,780 for a family of three in 2018).^{11,12} In October 2018, the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three in Rhode Island was \$377.¹³

Participation in SNAP has been associated with improvement in both current and long-term health outcomes among low-income or food insecure children.¹⁴ SNAP also is effective in reducing poverty. Nationally in 2015, SNAP reduced poverty 20.9% for non-Hispanic Blacks, 17.6% for Hispanics, 15.5% for non-Hispanic Whites, and 21.3% for individuals in working families.¹⁵ In addition, SNAP 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, 2009-2018



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, 2009–2015 and RI Bridges Database, 2016–2018. Data represent children under age 18 and adults who participated in SNAP during the month of October.

- ◆ Of the 160,272 Rhode Islanders enrolled in SNAP in October 2018, 66% were adults and 34% were children. Of the children enrolled in SNAP, 34% were under the age of six.¹⁷
- ◆ The number of children and adults receiving SNAP benefits decreased slowly between 2012 and 2015, then increased in 2016. It is possible that the 2016 increase was due to efforts to avoid denying eligible SNAP recipients during the difficult transition to the RI Bridges/UHIP computer system. Between 2016 and 2018, the number of adults and children receiving SNAP benefits again decreased.^{18,19}

Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

- ◆ The USDA defines food insecurity as not always having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Between 2015 and 2017, 12.4% of Rhode Island households and 12.3% of U.S. households were food insecure. In 2017, 15.7% of all U.S. households with children were food insecure, while 43.4% of U.S. households with children with incomes below the poverty level experienced food insecurity.²⁰
- ◆ Several 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, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.²¹ In 2018, food pantries and soup kitchens provided emergency food assistance to 53,000 Rhode Islanders each month who needed additional help to meet their nutritional needs.²²

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Table 12. Children Under Age 18 Receiving SNAP Benefits, Rhode Island, October 2018

CITY/TOWN	NUMBER PARTICIPATING
Barrington	91
Bristol	406
Burrillville	427
Central Falls	2,867
Charlestown	143
Coventry	828
Cranston	3,009
Cumberland	720
East Greenwich	168
East Providence	1,647
Exeter	73
Foster	90
Glocester	124
Hopkinton	162
Jamestown	41
Johnston	960
Lincoln	601
Little Compton	37
Middletown	466
Narragansett	176
New Shoreham	5
Newport	1,329
North Kingstown	726
North Providence	1,091
North Smithfield	164
Pawtucket	6,235
Portsmouth	222
Providence	20,730
Richmond	119
Scituate	144
Smithfield	192
South Kingstown	474
Tiverton	351
Warren	338
Warwick	2,166
West Greenwich	51
West Warwick	1,706
Westerly	687
Woonsocket	4,806
Unknown	134
Four Core Cities	34,638
Remainder of State	19,934
Rhode Island	54,706

Increasing Access to SNAP Benefits

◆ The decisions that states make about their enrollment and renewal processes for public benefits such as SNAP can help eligible families successfully access benefits and remain enrolled in the program. 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, and requiring less frequent certification.^{23,24,25}

◆ Rhode Island could increase access to SNAP benefits for children and families by using a more flexible interview process that accommodates households’ schedules and has different options for conducting interviews and completing renewals. Rhode Island could also consider the use of mobile technology in the enrollment process to increase access to SNAP benefits. Low-income individuals are more likely to be dependent on their cell phones as a means of going online. Mobile technologies would allow the state to more easily reach families that lack access to a personal computer.^{26,27}

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, RI Bridges Database, October 2018.

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 Factbooks prior to 2016.

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

References

- ¹ *Food insecurity: Indicators of child and youth well-being*. (2016). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
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- ⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2018). *Broad-based categorical eligibility*. Retrieved January 28, 2019, from www.fns.usda.gov
- ⁷ Rhode Island Department of Human Services. (n.d.). *SNAP eligibility*. Retrieved January 25, 2019, from www.dhs.ri.gov
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- ^{10,16} *Policy basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. (2018). Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

(continued on page 177)