SNAP: Is it working?

This brief summarizes the basic research surrounding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the largest successful anti-hunger program in the U.S., commonly known as food stamps. This brief was prepared from the findings in the book SNAP matters: How food stamps affect health and well-being which was published in late 2015. The book covers many topics and its overarching findings contend that SNAP is a reactive to the economy and one of the most effective antipoverty programs.

Current Research Findings

Does SNAP reduce poverty?

SNAP is a federal entitlement program which aims to capture those most in need. Most of the recipients have incomes that are below the poverty line. With access to SNAP, these recipients can better make ends meet and have food on the table.

- In a normal year, SNAP lowers the poverty rate by 5% - 10%. [1]
- SNAP lowers the poverty rate by 10% - 20% for families in deep poverty (those living on incomes below one-half of the poverty line). [1]
- Children are the greatest recipients of SNAP; almost 70% of recipients are families with children. [1]
- SNAP is the most effective antipoverty program when adjusting for reporting errors. [1]

Does SNAP reduce food insecurity?

The primary purpose of SNAP is to ensure that those in need have access to food and do not go hungry. Scholars show reliable indications that SNAP reduces food insecurity.

- Many factors affect a household’s food insecurity. [2]
  - Unemployment
  - Housing costs
  - Low wages and Poverty
  - Lack of access to SNAP
  - Medical costs
- Households participating in SNAP for a longer time, compared to households that are just starting to receive benefits, have a decreased risk of food insecurity. [1]
- On average, SNAP participants have higher levels of food insecurity and worse long-term outcomes as it is hard to tease out what the role of SNAP is in these families’ lives. [1]

SNAP and Family Income

SNAP works in tandem with other antipoverty programs. In addition to working with other antipoverty programs, SNAP assists low-wage workers provide food for themselves and their families.

- SNAP is designed to help those earning low-incomes. [1]
- In the past few years, the rates of households working and receiving SNAP have increased; from 27% – 31%. [1]
- SNAP helps low-wage families make ends meet by decreasing the amount of money families spent on food; which means that SNAP assists families by increasing the amount of money in their pockets by 14% - 20%. [1]

If you wish to share your ideas and inquires on summaries of other emerging topics in poverty research and services, please email results@umn.edu with “Understanding Poverty: [insert topic]” in the subject line.
**Read the Full Articles**


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**Connection to Human Service Redesign**

These materials help articulate the impact of SNAP in addressing poverty.

- The data helps frontline staff to see the bigger picture of their day-to-day caseloads and of the positive impact that SNAP has on many lives that are struggling to get by. Most of the time, staff anecdotally know the impact of their work, and here are the research to back that up.

**Sphere of Use**

- Program impact
- Stakeholder reports
- Current program knowledge

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**Explore Further**

**Watch**

- CSPAN: [Senator Durbin - Protecting SNAP](https://www.cspan.org/)
- Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality: [Kathryn Edin - The Case for Measuring Extreme Poverty](https://www.p NES.org)

**Read**

- Oregon State University, Rural Studies Program: [The Great Recession and SNAP Caseloads: A Tale of Two States](https://www.oregonstate.edu/)
- Center for Budget and Policy Priorities: [Policy Basics – Introduction to SNAP](https://www.cbpp.org)

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**Notes**