

Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program use grows in 2011

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In 2011, 13 percent of all American households relied on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—the program formerly known as food stamps – with nearly 6.2 million more American households using the program now than five years ago, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

"The Great Recession had profound effects on families across the United States, and [economic recovery](#) has been slow. Poverty and unemployment remained high in 2011, and job growth was stagnant. Amid these signs of a sluggish recovery, [social safety](#) net programs have played a key role in supporting vulnerable families," the Carsey researchers said.

The new research is presented in the Carsey Institute brief "Recent Data Show Continued Growth in [Supplemental Nutrition](#) Assistance Program Use." The research was conducted by Jessica Carson, vulnerable families research scientist at the Carsey Institute, and William Meub, vulnerable families research associate at the Carsey Institute.

According to the [Food Research](#) and Action Center, SNAP has remained particularly important for providing families and children with [nutritious foods](#) and alleviating poverty. If SNAP benefits were counted as income, 4.4 percent fewer families would have been considered poor between 2000 and 2009.

Despite the U.S. [Census Bureau](#)'s September announcement that poverty stabilized in 2011, SNAP receipt rose nationwide, and remained important for potentially vulnerable families. For example, more than three-quarters of households receiving SNAP contained at least one worker, and more than half of rural single mothers reported receipt in 2011.

The key findings are as follows:

- In 2011, 13 percent of all households reported receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This represents an increase from 7.7 percent in 2007, reflecting both changes in need and policy.
- The highest rate of SNAP receipt was in central cities (16 percent), closely followed by rural areas (15.6 percent).
- Between 2010 and 2011, SNAP receipt increased at a similar pace (by roughly 1 percentage point) in every region and in every place type (rural areas, suburbs, and central cities). Northeastern central cities realized the largest increases since 2007, resulting in the highest rate of SNAP receipt (21.5 percent) of any area by 2011.
- [Single mothers](#) had the highest rate of SNAP receipt, substantially higher than single fathers' rates and three to four times as high as rates among married couples with children.

"SNAP is increasingly the target of congressional budget cuts, despite the large number of Americans who rely on the program. Although budget cuts are imminent, policymakers should consider what such cuts would mean to families, including seniors, single parents, the poor, and those with disabilities, who rely on SNAP to meet their nutritional needs," the researchers said.

More information: The complete Carsey Institute report about this research is available at carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publication/668

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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