

How neighborhood characteristics affect SNAP participation and food access

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Cities are spatially diverse, with enclaves of different demographic groups, clusters of businesses, and pockets of low-income individuals living alongside the affluent

In an essay published recently in the *American Journal of Public Health*, Associate Professor Nevin Cohen presents data from New York City to illustrate the importance of measuring and addressing [neighborhood characteristics](#) that affect Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation and the purchasing power of SNAP benefits.

"Some demographic groups, often clustered in particular communities, have low levels of SNAP participation despite eligibility and need for nutrition assistance," Cohen writes. "Federal policies requiring some SNAP participants to work do not account for the physical distances between participants and entry-level jobs. Disparities in [food costs](#) across cities disadvantage SNAP participants who live in affluent, and expensive, neighborhoods."

In order to address these community-scale issues and increase SNAP participation and food access, Cohen recommends targeted outreach in neighborhoods populated with groups less likely to enroll in SNAP, such as [older adults](#) and immigrants; tracking the demographic composition of SNAP participants by community; supporting populations vulnerable to job loss with assistance in enrolling in SNAP; moving SNAP Services online; and diminishing the barriers to affordable groceries by allowing SNAP participants to buy food online.

More information: Nevin Cohen. SNAP at the Community Scale: How Neighborhood Characteristics Affect Participation and Food Access, *American Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305363](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305363)

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