

Examining SNAP in the United States

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Introduction

What is SNAP

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, also known as SNAP, is a program designed to help counter hunger in the United States. This program has evolved from the food stamp program implemented during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency. Based off of the food stamp program during the Great Depression, the Food Stamp Act was implemented in the United States in 1964. This implementation occurred during President Johnson's "War on Poverty". This implementation created a federal program to provide food assistance to individuals in need. SNAP is the Food Stamp Act involved and improved.

In 2008, SNAP became federally authorized and funding increased for it drastically. The federal government implemented a new law showing their commitment to providing food assistance by promising over \$10 billion in funding over a ten-year period (A Short History of SNAP, n.d.). SNAP is designed to reach low-income families who are means tested for eligibility. If individuals are eligible from the criteria, they are then able to apply for SNAP benefits.

How is SNAP Funded

Funding for SNAP is provided federally with states dealing with some administrative costs and distributing the benefits to their people. The money the federal government receives is from United States taxpayers. By federal law, funding is required in providing SNAP benefits for people who qualify. In 2024, the budget for SNAP was over \$122 billion (Rosenbaum, 2025). This number includes all the different types of SNAP benefits that are provided to the American people.

Social Welfare Perspective of SNAP

Residual Perspective

SNAP is a program that models the residual perspective. One of the main points of the residual perspective is that social welfare benefits are only given to people who are means-tested. SNAP benefits vary per person with income being the factor that influences it the most. The federal government wants United States citizens to view SNAP as temporary assistance rather than permanent assistance.

SNAP has been able to withstand some of the antiwelfare atmosphere that has been occurring in the recent decades (Bosso, 2023). This is because SNAP provides a limited and targeted form of assistance. Able-bodied individuals have different requirements in order to qualify for SNAP benefits. If an able-bodied individual does not have any dependents to take care of, there will be strict working requirements enacted for SNAP benefits to be provided. Dependents such as children and the elderly change benefit amounts received due to their higher need. Aid given for SNAP is based off of conditions rather than an institutionalized program that everyone can obtain such as public education.

The benefits provided by SNAP align with the principles of the residual perspective. The benefits are limited and what foods people can buy with the benefits are restricted. Only essentials groceries such as vegetables and meats are covered by SNAP benefits. If an individual wanted to buy a hot prepared to eat meal from a grocery store, they would have to use their own money. There are many debates over what foods and drinks should be covered by SNAP benefits in the United States.

People who receive SNAP benefits are viewed with many stereotypes from the media. People sometimes view others, especially able-bodied people, receiving SNAP benefits as complacent with their status. These stereotypes can make people feel unworthy of the assistance they are receiving.

Values Reflected in SNAP

Public Health

A serious concern of the United States government is the public health of their citizens. The citizens of America are the driving force of the economy. The government wants their citizens to use their skills for the benefit of the country. Having low food security will lead to United States citizens being less productive and being a deterrence to their potential. In fact, the USDA reported in 2019 that 13.7 million households dealt with food insecurity. Out of the 13.7 million households dealing with food insecurity, 5.6 million of them experienced very low food security (Gregory & Todd, 2021). Low food security has the potential to lead to poor mental health and illnesses. The numbers provided by the USDA show how widespread the issue of food scarcity is in United States. SNAP reflects the value of public health because it strives to provide access to nutritional food which will support the well-being of society.

Equity

The benefits of SNAP are non-discriminatory. Since SNAP is means-tested, eligibility will be given to those in need of it. There are many programs in United States history that do not strive for equity in distribution. There are programs such as public education that focus more on equality rather equity. This becomes a problem when schools are funded unevenly, especially in

lower income areas compared to wealthier areas. SNAP shows equity by ensuring assistance is given fairly according to the means tested.

Collaboration

SNAP is a program that requires federal and state collaboration. The funding for the program mostly comes from the federal government. Also, the federal government sets the eligibility requirements for receiving any type of SNAP benefits. The state will conduct the interviews and complete the application process. Also, the state will provide jobs in order to deal with SNAP benefits. This reflects the value of collaboration of governments to prioritize the well-being of their citizens.

How Different Issues Reflect SNAP

Age

Different ages are reflected differently in SNAP. Households on SNAP are about 43.5 percent children (Nestle, 2019). Children are dependents who cannot provide for themselves. SNAP focuses on providing children proper nutrition so they are able to develop and improve their future outcomes. Some of the elderly may also be unable to provide for themselves, especially if they are living off of a fixed income. Also, due to the process it takes to apply for SNAP, some of the elderly may not seek out assistance. Some of the elderly may have no idea they are actually able to receive SNAP benefits. SNAP provides the elderly with an opportunity to maintain proper nutrition while they are dealing with rising costs of different items such as medicine.

Race

Systemic issues in the United States play a factor into whether an individual would need to receive SNAP benefits. The program is equitable and everyone can receive benefits, however many minorities rely on SNAP due to inequalities occurring in everyday life. Some of these inequalities include wages, housing and access to proper education. While SNAP does not seek to address the racial inequalities occurring in the United States, it improves the well-being in minorities communities by combatting hunger.

Benefits from SNAP are challenging for immigrants. Immigrants who just get their green card are restricted from accessing SNAP benefits for a five-year period (What is SNAP and Who Qualifies for It, 2025). This five-year restriction can be very dangerous for immigrants especially those who are refugees. Refugees leave their countries in order to avoid whatever catastrophes were occurring in their previous country. Having to wait for access to SNAP benefits damages the well-being on immigrants since food and nutrition is a human need.

Class

Since SNAP is a means-tested program, only those who qualify can receive the benefits. The nutrition of low-income households in made a priority by SNAP. Low-income households feel the financial pressure of everyday life in the United States. During the interview and application process, proof of income and expenses are provided by the potential recipient (Finkelstein & Notowidigdo, 2019). As a result, SNAP will provide nutritional support to households who need it the most.

Gender

Gender also has a drastic impact on SNAP. Women, particularly single mothers, are at an increase to be relying on SNAP. Taking care of a child is a huge financial responsibility as well

as an emotional one. Single mothers often face difficulties in maintaining jobs as well as dealing with the responsibilities of taking care of a child. This program helps provide assistance that stems from gender-based barriers.

SNAP and Social Inequality

Reducing Inequality

Inequality has a drastic effect on society. SNAP works to counter the damages that inequality creates. It addresses social inequality by providing nutrition across the nation for low-income households. According to research on SNAP participation, households that are entirely minorities experience more food insecurity compared to non-minorities (Samuel et al., 2023). By providing food budgets, SNAP helps in narrowing racial disparities in obtaining access to nutritional foods.

Certain Populations

This program definitely unfairly excludes certain populations. As noted earlier in the paper, most immigrants have to wait years in order to be eligible for SNAP benefits. Immigrants come from around the globe due to many different reasons, however their goal in coming to the United States is to live the “American Dream”. By making immigrants wait a long time period in order to receive potential SNAP benefits, immigrants are being put in a vulnerable position during a period of adjustment.

Low-income families who are slightly above the cutoff for SNAP also deal with unfair exclusion. SNAP has strict means testing and low-income families who are above this line can't get the benefits for SNAP. Even though low-income families above this line still struggle in paying for food, their struggles are overlooked. This spotlights that low-income families that are

above the means-tested qualification line are unintentionally disadvantaged for making more money.

Strengths of SNAP

Availability

One of the major strengths of SNAP is it is available in every state in the United States. Each state has their own way in managing SNAP benefits as long as they adhere to the federal requirements. Since SNAP is state-administered, states can be flexible with SNAP to adhere to what their residents need. For example, if a hurricane devastates an area, the state can provide disaster food relief through programs such as Disaster SNAP. This relief goes to current SNAP recipients as well as individuals who are not recipients of SNAP. This focus helps many affected households in dealing with essential food during emergencies.

Improves Public Health

A main priority of SNAP is to promote nutrition and improve public health. In the United States, many families resort to fast food since it tastes good and is inexpensive. However, eating too much fast food can lead to long-term health problems. The main issue with eating healthy is how expensive it is. With SNAP benefits, eating healthier becomes more affordable and accessible.

Combats Poverty

Food is one of the most significant expenses American families deal with. By providing access to food, SNAP allows recipients to focus their incomes on other essential needs. This

focus can potentially lead to prosperity as well as reduced financial stress for low-income families.

Weaknesses of SNAP

Strict Income Requirement

The strict income requirement in order to be eligible for SNAP benefits can act as a deterrent for some low-income families. As stated earlier in the paper, food is a significant expense for American families. Having such strict income and asset limits for eligibility can act as a deterrent for American families on SNAP (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). People weigh the pros and cons for decisions they make. If low-income families decide to limit income and asset accumulation in order to maintain eligibility for SNAP benefits, it defeats the whole purpose of the program.

Stigmas and Stereotypes

Recipients of SNAP can face stigmas and stereotypes due to using it. Especially in today's political climate, SNAP is viewed by some critics as a waste of taxpayers' money. People need to understand the goal of SNAP is reduce hunger and provide low-income families with an opportunity to have access to basic food. As a result of these stigmas and stereotypes, some low-income families may decide to not apply for benefits due to feeling embarrassed of needing the program.

Conclusion

Summary

SNAP is one of the most important programs in the United States that helps millions of low-income families. SNAP helps in reducing hunger and ensuring basic nutrition. Even though there are challenges this program faces, it continues to provide a significant role in dealing with food scarcity as well as improving the well-being of society.

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