



Missed Opportunities: An Analysis of SNAP Participation in Maryland by County

Maryland is the wealthiest state in the nation based on per capita income, but not all Marylanders share in the prosperity. One in 10 Maryland households struggles against food insecurity. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known in Maryland as the Food Supplement Program), is a proven [tool](#) to reduce hunger and poverty in the state. However, new research from Maryland Hunger Solutions finds that many Marylanders who are eligible to receive SNAP benefits are not participating in the program.

The map that accompanies this brief, created with support from the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, shows the percentage of people who are likely eligible for SNAP but not participating. They reside in every jurisdiction in the state, ranging from 25 percent in Baltimore City to over 60 percent in Montgomery County. This brief does not include demographic data on the population of eligible people not participating in SNAP.

The number of eligible people not participating in SNAP in each county in state fiscal year (SFY) 2017 was generated by comparing the number of people living below 185 percent of the federal poverty level (\$21,978 for an individual and \$44,955 for a family of four) — a proxy for those who are likely eligible for SNAP — to those who are currently participating in the program. Nationally, the eligibility cut-off for SNAP is 130 percent of the federal poverty level, but this analysis uses 185 percent of the federal poverty level due to the high cost of living in Maryland, and Maryland Hunger Solutions' experience enrolling residents in SNAP.ⁱ

Statewide participation in the program has been dropping since the height of the Great Recession (from nearly 800,000 in July 2013 to approximately 650,000 today), and the reasons for the [decrease in participation](#) are varied and complicated. Some may be quick to jump to the conclusion that fewer people are participating in SNAP because the economy has improved, and people have been able to lift themselves out of poverty. While this may be true to some extent, it is also true that the overall poverty rate has continued to hold steady in Maryland, at a rate that is not reflected in the reduced SNAP participation throughout Maryland over the last six years.

There are numerous reasons for the decreased participation in SNAP. Many eligible people are unaware of the program or believe they won't qualify. On the other hand, many eligible people do not apply for or stop renewing benefits because the \$15 minimum monthly benefit is deemed insufficient given the need and the application process.

In addition, stigma continues to exist around the use of programs such as SNAP, despite the program's proven track record of improving the health and well-being of individuals and families. Some of this stigma is the result of the unfortunate but persistent narrative that some elected officials and others have perpetuated about people experiencing poverty, namely that poor people would rather receive food assistance than seek employment. This ignores the reality that the majority of SNAP recipients who are able to work, do work. In [Maryland](#), 81 percent of SNAP families had at least one working member in 2016.

Many counties in Maryland have time limits that restrict Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) — adults aged 18–49 without a disability or a dependent living in their home — from receiving SNAP benefits for just three months in a three-year span, unless certain requirements are metⁱⁱ. These time limits not only prohibit ABAWDs from receiving SNAP, they also discourage people from submitting SNAP applications. More troubling is the [proposed rule](#) from the Trump Administration to reduce the authority of states to receive waivers from USDA on the time limits for areas with high unemployment and areas with few jobs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another barrier includes the Trump Administration's policy agenda on immigration, which includes support for legislation to reduce legal immigration dramatically. One of the ways the Administration has attempted to implement its immigration agenda is by proposing changes to the [public charge rule](#), which has caused mixed-status families to no longer accept benefits that they are eligible for due to confusion and fear about potential negative immigration-related consequences.

Hundreds of thousands of [Marylanders](#) rely on SNAP every year. It helps [support the health and nutrition](#) of seniors, fuels children's education and health, reduces overall food insecurity, and boosts the economic fortunes of families and workers who are experiencing poverty. The map's findings present the challenge of how to provide the best forms of education and outreach to ensure more eligible Marylanders are connected to SNAP so they can receive the nutrition they need for their health and well-being. Maryland Hunger Solutions is committed to partnering with the state Department of Human Services and other outreach and community groups to address food insecurity all across the state of Maryland such as by connecting all eligible residents to SNAP.

ⁱ Maryland uses categorical eligibility to determine benefits, which makes all households with incomes below a state-determined income threshold eligible for SNAP. The threshold in Maryland is 200 percent of poverty. That eligibility estimate does not include mixed-status immigrant families, income deductions, asset tests, or D-SNAP.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2018). Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs). Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawds>. Accessed on January 16, 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Requirements and Services for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents; A Proposed Rule by the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#).

Marylanders Eligible but Not Participating in SNAP

SFY 2017

