

Research BRIEF

Expiration of the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Emergency Allotments

Increased Food Insecurity Highlights Inadequacy of SNAP Benefits After Thrifty Food Plan Revisions

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Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's largest federal nutrition assistance program, providing monthly benefits for food to more than 42 million low-income people.¹ SNAP has been proven to lift families from poverty and reduce food insecurity—inconsistent access to an adequate, nutritious diet.² The COVID-19 pandemic brought U.S. food insecurity to its highest levels in recent history,³ prompting Congress to pass legislation allowing temporary issuance of additional SNAP benefits, called Emergency Allotments, to SNAP recipients. Emergency Allotments increased SNAP benefits substantially, adding an average of \$126 to the monthly benefit in the first year and \$166 in subsequent years.⁴ Emergency Allotments ended in March 2023, but 18 states ended them early, when their state public health emergency expired.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN EMERGENCY ALLOTMENTS ENDED?

Richterman and colleagues used national data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey to study the effect of ending Emergency Allotments on food insufficiency—a severe form of food insecurity.⁵ Data from more than 3 million survey respondents showed that food insufficiency increased significantly after the expiration of Emergency Allotments and persisted over 15 months. Specifically, after Emergency Allotments ended:

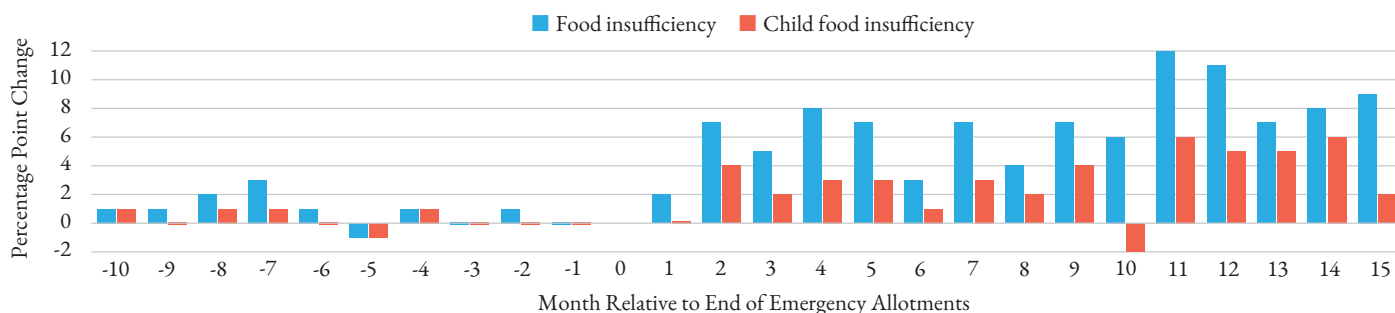
5%↑ Household food insufficiency among all Americans increased by 5%.

6%↑ Child food insufficiency among all Americans increased by 6%.

21%↑ Household and child food insufficiency among those receiving SNAP benefits increased by 21%.



Changes in Food Insecurity Among SNAP Recipients After Ending Emergency Allotments



When these results are applied to the entire U.S., they imply that approximately 2 million additional Americans experienced food insufficiency as a result of Emergency Allotments ending.

These findings add to research showing the standard SNAP benefits are insufficient to afford an adequate diet.⁶ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 30% of households receiving SNAP were food insecure and many families struggled when benefits ran out at the end of the month.⁷ The 2018 Farm Bill—omnibus legislation governing federal nutrition programs, including SNAP—directed the USDA to revise the Thrifty Food Plan, which forms the basis for the SNAP benefit amount, by 2022 and every five years thereafter. Revisions to the Thrifty Food Plan resulted in a 27% increase in the average SNAP benefit beginning in October 2021.⁶ However, this new research shows that revisions made so far have been insufficient for ensuring food security for all Americans.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The USDA is statutorily required to revise the Thrifty Food Plan every five years to reflect the latest research. The 2023 Farm Bill should, at a minimum, uphold this requirement. Ideally, Congress should replace the Thrifty Food Plan with a more adequate food plan. The Low-Cost Food Plan better represents what low- and middle-income households require for food and may help recipients of SNAP afford an adequate and nutritious diet.^{8,9}

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