

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)



Center for
Transforming Lives
From Poverty to Possibility

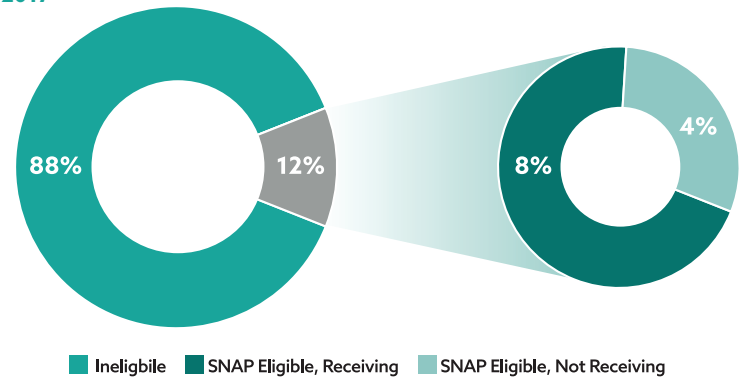
What is SNAP?

- Initially introduced as “food stamps” by the Food Stamp Act of 1964, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutrition assistance to low income community members and households.¹
- SNAP has had a varied and complex history over the past fifty-five years, which many recipients have had to navigate personally.²
- In 2018, over 12% of the population in Texas was eligible to receive SNAP benefits, however only 70% of the eligible 12% enrolled in SNAP (Figure 1).³

What do families receive with SNAP?

- SNAP Benefits are distributed via the electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards to purchase specific foods for the household: breads, cereals, fruits, vegetable, meats, dairy, and seeds or plants that produce food.⁴
- SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase alcohol, tobacco, pet food, hygiene products, household supplies, medicines, vitamins, supplements, hot foods to be eaten in store, cosmetics, diapers, or clothing.⁴
- The size of the benefit distributed to a household is based on criterion such as the number of people in the household, income, expenses, and the federal Thrifty Food Plan – which estimates how much it costs to purchase low-cost meals in the area.⁵

Figure 1. Texas: Percentage of SNAP-eligible and SNAP-enrolled individuals, 2017⁴

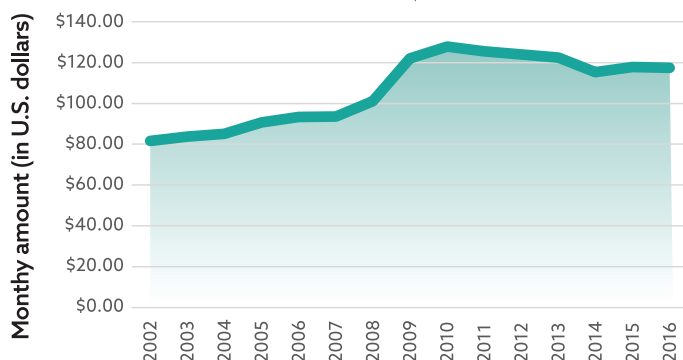


Data Source: Nchako & Cai (2018). A closer look at who benefits from SNAP state-by-state fact sheets: Texas.

How do families receive SNAP?

- To qualify for SNAP, an individual must generally be a U.S. citizen, have proof of a social security number, and have less than \$2,250.00 in assets.⁷
- Criteria for able-bodied adults without dependents include a work requirement and strict time limits.⁸
- In Texas, dependent children under 18 years old may qualify for SNAP benefits even if their parents do not.⁹
- Refugees, asylum seekers, human trafficking survivors, and survivors of domestic violence must also live and work lawfully in the United States for five years before becoming eligible for SNAP.¹⁰
- In Texas, average monthly SNAP allotments per person have stagnated (Figure 2).⁶

Figure 2. Texas: Average monthly SNAP allotment per person, 2002 - 2016⁶



Data Source: Kaiser Family Foundation (2017) based on 2002-2016 United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service data

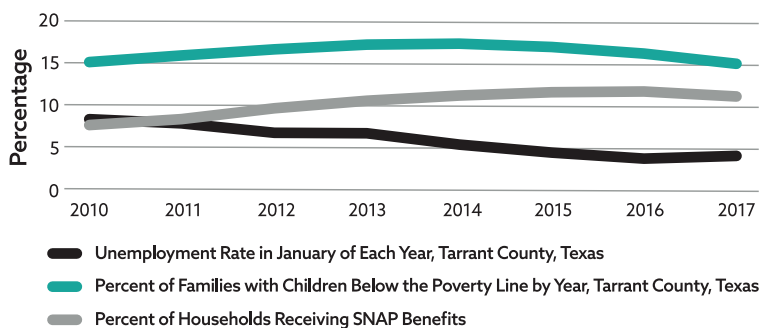
To qualify for SNAP in Texas, a single mother with two children (i.e., family size of 3) can make no more than 130% of the federal poverty limit (\$1,732 per month during Fiscal Year 2019).⁷ If this mother made \$1,000 per month, she would receive \$205 in SNAP benefits.⁷



Who receives SNAP in Tarrant County?

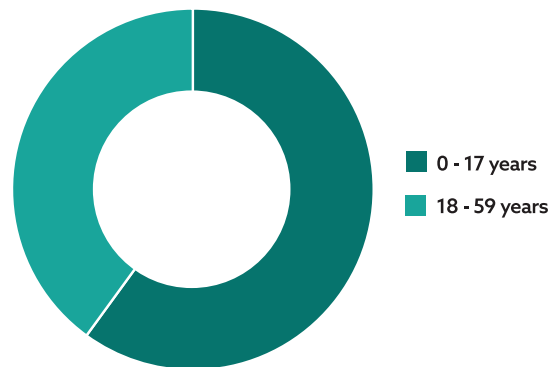
The unemployment rate has been steadily decreasing since 2010 in Tarrant County, Texas, and nationwide,¹¹ which intuitively supports the decrease in SNAP recipients over the past nine years (Figure 3). However, it is important to be careful not to equate all employment with gainful employment: although the unemployment rate in Tarrant County has been cut in half since 2010, the percent of families with children living below the poverty line has remained mostly the same (Figure 3) and the percent of households receiving SNAP benefits has increased slightly.^{12,13}

Figure 3. Tarrant County: Unemployment rate, percent of families with children living below the poverty line, and percent of households receiving SNAP benefits, 2010 - 2017^{14,15}



Data Source: United States Department of Agriculture, 2019. SNAP Data Tables.

Figure 4. Tarrant County: Eligible SNAP households, April 2019¹⁶



Data Source: Texas Health and Human Services (2019). Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) Statistics: SNAP Enrollment 2019.

Based on the most recent monthly data from the Texas Health and Human Services, the largest number of SNAP recipients in Tarrant County have been children between the ages of 0 and 17 (Figure 4).¹⁶

How does SNAP relate to family homelessness?

- SNAP, the nation's largest child nutrition program, alleviates poverty and reduces the likelihood of experiencing homelessness.¹⁷ SNAP delivers more nutrition assistance to low-income children than any other federal program, over 900,000 people from suffering from deep poverty (below 50% of the Supplemental Poverty Measure) in 2017.¹
- Food uncertainty compounds stress experienced by children experiencing homelessness, and these children are more likely to develop chronic illness and experience cognitive delays.^{17, 18}
- Strict eligibility requirements and limited selection of pre-approved foods available leaves many children experiencing homelessness without access to necessities such as hygiene products, medicines, and cookware.
- For families who are cost-burdened, SNAP provides services to these families who otherwise would forgo purchasing food in order to pay rent.¹⁹

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