



SNAP in Coronavirus Legislation

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increases the food purchasing power of low-income households by awarding each eligible household or individual a benefit based on their income and other expenses, which they can use to purchase food at retail grocery stores. SNAP is a crucial piece of the nutrition safety net, and it is even more important during a crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Since February, an estimated 6-7 million people have applied and been approved for SNAP benefits, increasing the number of participants from 36.9 million in February to more than 43 million in May.¹ Such a large increase in SNAP participation has never occurred in such a short time frame, underscoring the need for a strong nutrition safety net during this economic and public health crisis.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)

On March 18, 2020, H.R. 6201, The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) was signed into law. SNAP provisions in FFCRA include:

- Suspends the ABAWD work requirements for SNAP during this crisis. *CBO estimated this provision will cost \$2.7 billion over 10 years.*
- Allows states to request special waivers from the Secretary in the amount necessary to provide temporary, emergency Coronavirus Response (CR)-SNAP benefits up to the maximum monthly allotment. Under this provision, maximum allotments will continue as long as there is both a national health emergency as well as a state-declared emergency. *CBO estimated this provision will cost \$18.5 billion over 10 years.*
- Gives broad discretion to the Secretary to provide much more flexibility for States in managing SNAP caseloads, including: automatically renewing current households for an additional 6 months; allowing more time between periodic reports; and a simplified interview process. These waivers are being extended through August at a state's request. *However, USDA has indicated waivers are unlikely past August.*
- Requires the Secretary to make State requests for waivers and the USDA response, as well as any USDA guidance on State flexibilities, publicly available online.
- Instructs the Secretary to provide a report 18 months after the emergency documenting the decisions made in the operation of this authority.

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [Boost SNAP to Capitalize on Program's Effectiveness and Ability to Respond to Need](#) (July 18, 2020).

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

On March 27, 2020, H.R. 748, The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law. Although it contained no provisions directly affecting SNAP, the additional funding for Unemployment Insurance (UI) was not exempted from being counted as income for SNAP benefit determinations. As a result, some recipients of UI may have become ineligible for SNAP.

Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act (HEROES)

On May 15, 2020, the House passed H.R. 6800, The Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act (HEROES). SNAP provisions in HEROES would:

- Temporarily increase all SNAP benefits by 15% and permanently increase the minimum benefit from \$18 to \$30. *CBO estimates this would cost \$16.9 billion over 10 years.*
- Waive all statutory work requirements for 2 years after the date of enactment. *CBO estimates this would cost \$830 million over 10 years.*
- Provide a total of \$300 million for state administrative costs.
- Stop the pending rules on ABAWDs, categorical eligibility and Standard Utility Allowances. *CBO estimates this would cost \$17 billion over 10 years.*
- Exclude additional UI funding under the CARES Act from being counted as income for SNAP benefit determinations.
- Allow households to use SNAP to purchase hot foods during the pandemic.

On July 27, 2020, the Senate presented a series of bills to the House in lieu of taking up the HEROES Act. The combined bill, known as the HEALS Act, contained no SNAP provisions.

Ongoing Concerns

States continue to be concerned about their ability to serve the large increases in their SNAP population. On July 13, 2020, the Attorneys General of 22 states (DC, CA, CO, CT, HI, IL, ME, MA, MD, MI, MN, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OR, PA, RI, VT, VA, WA, WI) wrote a letter to FNS expressing their concern about the need for waiver extensions to manage the caseloads (see attachment). On July 27, 2020, the [American Public Human Services Association](#) also urged for the extension of existing state SNAP flexibilities.

On July 27, 2020, House Agriculture Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations Subcommittee Chair Marcia L. Fudge of Ohio and her fellow subcommittee members introduced legislation that would allow states to extend administrative flexibilities for SNAP. H.R. 7794, *The Emergency SNAP Flexibilities Extension Act*, would augment the flexibility that FFCRA provided to states by extending the blanket SNAP waivers approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resources

- The Urban Institute has calculated the potential impact of the HEROES Act on poverty, including state-level estimates. Find their report [here](#).
- The Center for American Progress analyzed state-by-state data on the COVID-19 emergency increases in SNAP benefits. Find their report [here](#).

Press Clips

- [Report: Arkansas Food Insecure Numbers Rising; Policy Changes Needed](#) (UALR NPR, Arkansas)
- [Good Shepherd Food Bank calls on Senate to boost SNAP for hungry Mainers](#) (News Center Maine)
- [DHS: SNAP Deadline Approaching for Renewals](#) (KTOE, Minnesota)
- [I was an executive director of a nonprofit; now I'm looking at food stamps](#) (Star Tribune, Minnesota)
- [Nevada experiences surge in first-time applicants for food stamps](#) (8 News Now, Nevada)
- [Hunger in a land of abundance: COVID-19 intensifies rural food insecurity](#) (Capital Press, Oregon)