

Congress Must Expand SNAP to Boost Food Security and the Economy

Congress must expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help Americans put food on the table and provide immediate economic relief.

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed an economic and hunger emergency in the United States.

- The US economy had its [worst quarter since the Great Recession](#) and more Americans than ever before are [filing for unemployment insurance](#).
- [22 million children have lost free or reduced-price school meals](#), and many of these families are still waiting on federal assistance promised through the Families First Act.
- [Food pantries have seen a surge in demand](#), with lines spanning for miles. The food bank network Feeding America is now predicting a \$1.4 billion shortfall over the next six months.

SNAP Boosts Food Security and the Economy

The Congressional Budget Office deems SNAP [one of the most effective economic supports](#) during a weak economy. [SNAP benefits are redeemed quickly and free up resources](#) for low-income families to spend on other goods and services. Every \$1 in federal SNAP spending during an economic downturn generates \$1.50 in economy activity.

SNAP is also a powerful tool for quickly and effectively alleviating hunger. The program provides [nine times the number of meals served by Feeding America's network](#) of 200 food banks and 60,000 pantries, and a benefit increase can be implemented within several weeks.

Yet many individuals [face significant barriers to accessing SNAP](#) and benefits average \$1.40 per person per meal. Many families cope with insufficient food budgets by [purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food](#). A SNAP expansion would help millions of Americans put nutritious food on the table, ease the burden on the charitable food system, and provide an immediate boost to local economies.

Policy Priorities

To address the growing economic and food security crisis, Congress should prioritize the following:

1. **Increase the maximum benefit** available to all households by 15 percent (this would provide individuals with an average of an additional \$25 per month). Congress provided a similar boost during the Great Recession and it was effective at [reducing hunger and poverty](#) and providing an economic stimulus.
2. **Increase the minimum monthly benefit** from \$16 to \$30.
3. **Suspend implementation of all [administrative rules that restrict access](#)** for millions of people to much-needed SNAP benefits. Congress should also suspend the three-month time limit for adults with barriers to work not raising minors for as long as the economy is vulnerable.

For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at policy@cspinet.org.

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