

SNAP *shots*

8 Facts About Older Adults and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

1. Older adults' participation in SNAP is staggeringly low.

Nationally, about 3.37 million older adults (aged 60+) are enrolled in SNAP. Yet this figure only represents two-fifths of the eligible population; approximately 3 out of 5 seniors who qualify to receive SNAP are missing out on benefits—an estimated 5.2 million people in all.¹

2. The average SNAP benefit for older adults is not \$15/month.

While there is a pervasive myth that older adults who qualify for SNAP only receive \$15/month in benefits, this is largely untrue. The \$15 figure is the minimum monthly benefit a senior can receive—81% of elderly SNAP participants receive more than the minimum. The average monthly benefit for a senior living alone in FY12 (the most recent year that data was available) was \$119/month.² Many older adults may be able to take advantage of deductions for other expenses that can increase their monthly SNAP allotment.

3. Many older adults who qualify for the excess medical expense deduction don't use it.

Seniors who spend more than \$35 a month on out-of-pocket medical costs may be able to deduct that from their gross income when applying for SNAP, thus increasing their monthly benefit amount. Currently only 14% of older adults utilize the medical expense deduction, but it is estimated that 55% of SNAP-eligible seniors would qualify to use it.³ To learn more about the deduction, see our fact sheet [*SNAPshots: Maximizing the SNAP Medical Expense Deduction for Older Adults*](#).

4. Isolation is a key factor in the lives of many older adult SNAP participants.

Roughly 80% of older adults who receive SNAP benefits live alone. More than half of these

isolated seniors have little to no income—depending entirely on general assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or other benefits for their subsistence.⁴ For these individuals, the \$1,428 in average annual SNAP benefits can mean the difference between having food and going without.

5. SNAP is good for the local economy.

SNAP benefits are spent at community grocery stores and markets, thereby infusing money into the local economy. An analysis from Moody's of the fiscal stimulus measures found that additional SNAP benefits created the best return on investment, with every \$1 in additional SNAP benefits generating \$1.79 in local economic activity. On a larger scale, it is estimated that an additional \$1 billion in SNAP benefits would generate 8,900 full-time equivalent jobs.⁵



6. Older adults enrolled in other benefits may still be missing SNAP.

An analysis of data from NCOA's BenefitsCheckUp® online benefits screening tool revealed that of those who may qualify, but are not enrolled in, SNAP:

- 41% are enrolled in the Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy.
- 46% receive Supplemental Security Income benefits.
- 53% participate in the Medicare Savings Programs.
- 43% get Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program benefits.⁶

7. You can get all the information needed to help older adults apply for SNAP in one place.

NCOA's SNAP map makes it easy to find your state's SNAP program website, application forms (in multiple languages, where available), and eligibility criteria. Users can take a simple, quick screening to see if they potentially qualify. Because 42 states allow individuals to apply online for SNAP, there are also links to the online applications. Visit the SNAP map online at: <https://www.benefitscheckup.org/cf/snap.cfm>.



8. Addressing hunger is an important issue for the aging network.

Adequate food and nutrition is essential for older adults to adhere to their medication regimen, manage chronic conditions, and avoid injury. Yet up until very recently, increasing SNAP enrollment has not been a focus of the aging network. Opportunities abound for aging organizations to partner with the anti-hunger community, such as food banks, to better serve seniors at risk of hunger. NCOA has several webinars that explore these opportunities in more detail. Check them out on our webinar channel: <http://www.vimeo.com/channels/ncboe>.

References

- ¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2012*. Feb 2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2012Characteristics.pdf>.
- ² USDA, Feb 2014.
- ³ Cunyningham, Karen. *State Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility and Participation Among Elderly Individuals*. Sept 2010, p. 45. http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/nutrition/SNAP_elderly.pdf.
- ⁴ USDA, Feb 2014.
- ⁵ USDA Economic Research Service. *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and the Stimulus Effects of SNAP*. Oct 2010. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err103.aspx>.
- ⁶ Analysis of BenefitsCheckUp® comprehensive screening data, Jan–Dec 2011.

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