

SNAP Policy Changes Expand Program



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The latest SNAP data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) show that the number of SNAP recipients exceeded 2.0 million for November 2023. Compared to the same month prior to the pandemic (November 2019), total monthly benefits paid increased 76%. The expansion is motivated by an increase in the number of recipients (+16%) and the average monthly benefit (+52%). (See table.)

	November Data					Total Growth
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Monthly Benefits (\$ millions)	\$208	\$322	\$459	\$531	\$366	76%
Number Persons (000s)	1,750	1,834	1,877	1,936	2,022	16%
Avg Monthly Benefit / Person	\$119	\$176	\$245	\$274	\$181	52%
Max Monthly Benefit 1 Person	\$192	\$194	\$204	\$250	\$291	52%
PA Population (000s)	12,987	12,996	13,014	12,972	12,962	0%
PA Unemployment Rate	4.4	7.9	4.8	4.4	3.4	--
Philadelphia CPI-U Groceries	241.5	246.8	256.5	299.0	303.1	25%

Note: Excludes P-EBT benefits, includes emergency allotments. Population estimates for July of relevant year. 2019 population is estimated by IFO. CPI-U data are for October.
Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Open Data PA.

From November 2019 to 2023, three SNAP changes expanded the number of recipients or the average benefit paid.

- In October 2022, the Commonwealth elected to increase SNAP income eligibility from 165% of the federal poverty income guidelines (FPIG) to 200%. At the time, the Department of Human Services (DHS) estimated that 420,000 residents would become newly eligible for SNAP. For 2024, the 165% monthly FPIG limit is \$2,005 for 1 person and the 200% FPIG limit is \$2,430.
- For federal fiscal year 2022, the USDA updated the definition of the Thrifty Food Plan to increase benefits. This change motivated a significant increase in the maximum monthly benefit. (See table.)
- In August 2023, the Commonwealth expanded eligibility to certain college students. At the time, the administration did not provide an estimate of the impact.

The SNAP expansion occurred despite flat population growth and a (current) record-low unemployment rate. These trends suggest that most of the expansion was driven by recent policy or definition changes. The USDA also publishes state data on SNAP participation rates. For 2019 and 2020 (latest data), the estimated Pennsylvania participation rate was 100%, which also implies that recent changes motivated program expansion, as opposed to increased participation. While state policy changes increased the number of recipients (higher FPIG threshold), the federal update drove the increase in the maximum monthly benefit (+52% over four years), which outpaced grocery inflation as measured by the Philadelphia CPI-U for Food at Home (+25%).