

Background

One important measure of a program's performance is the ability to reach its target population. This report – the latest in an annual series – presents estimates of the percentage of eligible persons, by State, who participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during an average month in fiscal year 2007 and in the 2 previous fiscal years.

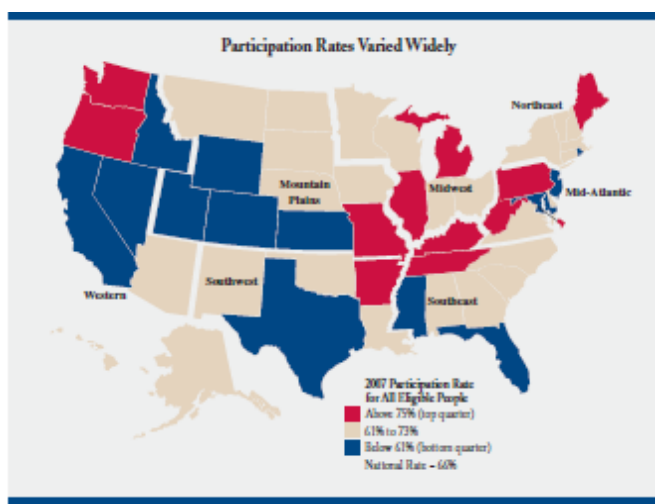
This report also presents estimates of State participation rates for eligible “working poor” individuals (persons in households with earnings) over the same period. Although SNAP provides an important support for working families, the working poor have participated at rates that are substantially below those for all eligible persons. The addition of State-by-State information on participation among the working poor enables a comparison of these rates to the overall participation rates.

Nationally, the SNAP participation rate among all eligible persons was 66 percent in fiscal year 2007. The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was 56 percent, a significant (in a statistical sense) difference of 10 percentage points.

Findings

- SNAP participation rates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in 2007. The lowest State rate was likely within the range of 42 and 53 percent and the highest State rate was likely within the range of 94 and 100 percent.
- Nineteen States had rates that were significantly higher than the national rate, and 17 States had rates that were significantly lower.

- In 30 States, the participation rate for the working poor in 2007 was significantly lower than the rate for all eligibles. In 7 of these States, the difference was greater than 10 percentage points. Working poor rates were not significantly different than the rate for all eligible persons in the other 21 States.
- Some States had consistently high participation rates relative to other States in all 3 fiscal years. In each year from 2005 to 2007, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Oregon, Tennessee, and West Virginia had significantly higher participation rates than *two-thirds* of the States.
- Some States had consistently low participation rates relative to other States. California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than *two-thirds* of the States in all 3 fiscal years.
- With a few exceptions, a State ranked at the top or bottom of the distribution of participation rates for all eligible persons was similarly ranked for participation by working poor persons.



The estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation which draws on data from the Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, and administrative records. The shrinkage estimator averages direct sample estimates of participation rates with predictions from a regression model based on indicators of socioeconomic conditions. Shrinkage estimates are substantially more precise than direct sample estimates from the Current Population Survey, even though larger sample sizes in recent years improved the precision of direct estimates for States with smaller populations. Nevertheless, the estimated participation rates are still based on fairly small samples of households in many States, and the uncertainty associated with these estimates is substantial. Users of these data should take the estimated confidence intervals into account when interpreting differences between States, within a State over time, and between estimates for all eligibles and the working poor.

For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen E., and Laura A. Castner. *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2007*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. November 2009.

Leftin, Joshua, and Kari Wolkwitz. *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. June 2009.

Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/ora.

Acknowledgement

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