

TRENDS IN SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES: FISCAL YEAR 2010 TO FISCAL YEAR 2016 (SUMMARY)

Background

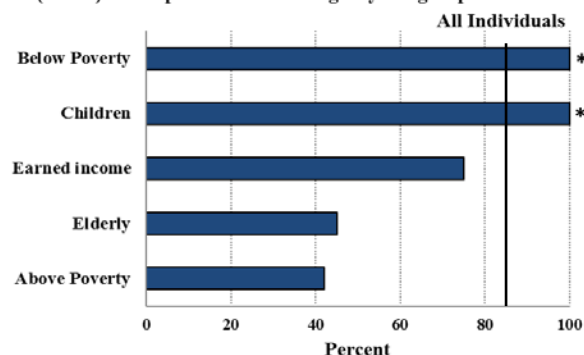
The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutrition assistance to eligible, low-income individuals and households in need. This report is the latest in a series on SNAP participation rates, which estimate the proportion of people eligible for benefits under Federal income and asset rules who actually participate in the program. This report presents estimates of participation rates for fiscal year (FY) 2016, comparing them to estimates of participation rates for FYs 2010 through 2015.

Findings

On average, 47 million individuals were eligible for benefits each month in 2016, and nearly 40 million received them. **Overall, the program served 85 percent of all eligible individuals in 2016, up 13 points from 72 percent in 2010.**

As in past years, the lowest income individuals – those eligible for higher benefits – participated at higher rates. While virtually all individuals in households eligible for the maximum allotment participated in SNAP, only 30 percent of those eligible for the minimum benefit (\$16 in 2016) or less participated in SNAP. Participation rates were also higher for children and for individuals in households living in poverty.

Figure 1: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates Among Key Subgroups



* This report caps estimated participation rates at 100 percent.

In contrast with these rates, but consistent with past years, participation rates for the elderly and for individuals in households with incomes above poverty (but still eligible) were much lower – 45 percent and 42 percent, respectively. The participation rate for individuals in households with earnings was 75 percent.

The participation rates for individuals in households receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) was close to the overall average, at 86 percent.

While participation rates varied considerably among subgroups of eligible individuals, rates increased between 2010 and 2016 for most groups. Participation rates rose slightly or held steady for most groups between 2015 and 2016.

Methodological Notes

Estimates of participants (numerator) in this report are based on SNAP administrative data for FY 2010 through FY 2016, while estimates of eligible individuals (denominator) are based on Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data for calendar year (CY) 2010 through CY 2017. Differences between these two sources cause some estimated participation rates to exceed 100 percent.

Individuals in households with income or assets above the Federal SNAP limits are removed from the participant count unless every member receives cash benefits from SSI, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or State general assistance.

For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen. (2018). *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2010 to Fiscal Year 2016*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).