

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Work Requirements



A Resource for Improving Measurable Impact
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SNAP is a federal program that provides benefits to supplement the food budget of low-income families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency.¹

Background:

- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is a federally funded program that provides benefits to certain low-income individuals and families, to enable them to supplement their food budget.¹
- Currently more than 3.4 million Texans receive SNAP benefits,^{2,3} representing 1.6 million households. This translates to 1 in 9 Texans.
- In Texas, approximately 79% of SNAP recipients live in households with children, and more than 27% live in households with seniors or people with disabilities.^{4,5}
- More than half of all Texas SNAP recipients live in families in which at least one person is working full time.²
- While each state determines the eligibility requirements for its residents, the federal government provides 100% of SNAP funding. Administrative program costs are split equally between the federal government and the state.⁶
- SNAP has been shown to reduce poverty and food insecurity, and leads to improved outcomes for children in families.^{6,7}

Eligibility in Texas:

- Eligibility rules for SNAP are income-based and asset-based:⁴ An applicant's gross household income may not exceed 130% of the Federal poverty line.^{8,9} Further, there are [limits on an applicant's liquid assets and the fair market value of their vehicles](#).
- In addition to the income and asset limitations, there are stringent rules concerning work requirements for SNAP.

Work Requirements:

- Individuals between the ages of 18 and 59 years old (or aged 16 or 17 and head of their household) who are non-exempt* and who receive SNAP benefits must:¹⁰
 - Work for salary or hourly pay at least 30 hours per week,
 - Receive weekly earnings equivalent to 30 times the federal minimum wage (\$7.25/hour),
 - Work at least 30 hours a week in exchange for goods or services (in-kind work),
 - Work without pay (volunteer labor) at least 30 hours a week with a business, government entity or nonprofit organization,
 - Home-school a child living in the home at least 30 hours a week, or
 - Meet 30 hours of the foregoing in some combination, or
 - Participate in the SNAP Employment and Training Program under the Texas Workforce Commission.

* Individuals are considered to be exempt if they are not physically or mentally fit to work, participating in drug/alcohol, addiction treatment program, responsible for care of child under age 6 or a person with a disability, enrolled in school, college or work training program (see SNAP Benefits for College Students), registered for employment serviced under TANF, 3 to 9 months pregnant, or have applied for or are receiving unemployment compensation.¹⁰

- SNAP recipients subject to the foregoing work requirements are prohibited from voluntarily quitting a job or reducing their hours.¹⁰
- SNAP recipients must provide proof of identity and work eligibility through proper documentation when requested.
- Unemployed able-bodied adults (18-49 years old) without dependents can receive benefits for up to 3 months every 3 years.¹¹

Work Requirement Issues:

- There are several barriers to meeting the work requirements for otherwise eligible SNAP recipients. Some of these barriers are:¹⁰
 - Those who are self-employed or work as an employee may have fluctuating work hours, which prevent them from consistently meeting the 30 hour per week requirement. This is particularly true for those who work in seasonal or weather-dependent industries, such as construction.
 - It may be difficult to show proof of working 30 hours per week, depending on one's job.
- If the head of the household (sometimes referred to as the Primary Wage Earner) is sanctioned for violating the work requirements, the **entire family loses their SNAP benefits**.¹⁰
 - In 40 other states, in cases where the Primary Wage Earner violates the work requirements, only that individual loses their SNAP benefits and the rest of the family is not penalized.

SNAP Benefits for College Students:

- Approximately 1 in 3 college students are food insecure.¹²
- Generally, a student who attends an institution of higher learning more than half time is considered ineligible for SNAP benefits unless they meet the following requirements.
- A student who is enrolled in at least part-time college or university curriculum qualifies for SNAP benefits if he/she:¹³
 - Stays enrolled continuously until their education ends
 - Is determined to be unfit for employment due to physical or mental disability
 - Is employed for pay of an average of 20 hours per week
 - Participates in a state or federally funded work study program.
 - Participates in an on-the-job training program
 - Is approved for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - Is responsible for a dependent child under the age of 6, or
 - Is a single parent enrolled in school full time and responsible for the care of a child under 12.
- Students do not qualify if they are enrolled in curricula that do not require a diploma or equivalent for entrance or are enrolled only in English as a second language curriculum.¹³

Recommendations:

- Revise the work requirement rules so that if the primary wage earner fails to meet his/her work requirements, only that individual loses his/her SNAP benefits, not the entire family.
- Support policies that facilitate increased enrollment and expansion of SNAP, especially for college and community college students.
- Consider innovative programs that leverage SNAP benefits to improve the health of recipients, such as doubling the value of SNAP benefits when used to purchase fruits and vegetables, or having food stores on college campuses accept SNAP benefits.

Summary:

SNAP is a proven program to combat food insecurity. The work requirements for SNAP prevent many otherwise eligible Texans from qualifying for SNAP benefits. For example, current work requirements are challenging for those with fluctuating schedules, and if the primary wage earner fails to meet them, the entire family loses their SNAP benefits. Texas policymakers have an opportunity to support policies that facilitate increased enrollment in SNAP, including college students. Additionally, policymakers can simplify the process for qualifying and requalifying for the SNAP program, which would also expand SNAP eligibility and qualification. The expansion of SNAP would benefit many vulnerable Texans, reduce poverty and food insecurity, and improve the economic and health outcomes of children who are in families that receive SNAP benefits.

Other TX RPC Resources Related to SNAP and Food Security:

1. [SNAP Utilization and Eligibility in Texas and Texas Legislative Districts](#) (October 2020)
2. [Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity](#) (January 2022)
3. [Data Brief: Food Insecurity in Texas and Texas Legislative Districts](#) (January 2021)
4. [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\): Vehicle Value Limits](#) (February 2022)

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