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Boosting NJ SNAP:

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION



A Program of
Center for Food Action

**Hunger Free
New Jersey**

Fueling Change. Feeding All.

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Hunger Free New Jersey works to change policy and practice to ensure every New Jersey resident has healthy food to eat, every single day. Using a strategic combination of state and federal advocacy and local grassroot activism, Hunger Free New Jersey advances a comprehensive approach to solving hunger. HFNJ is a program of the Center for Food Action.



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Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical resource that supports the food security, health and economic well-being of New Jersey residents. SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger and pumps roughly one billion dollars into New Jersey's local economies each year. SNAP helps hundreds of thousands of the state's low-income workers, children, older adults and people with disabilities purchase food from grocery stores and other retail food outlets.

Many households receiving SNAP benefits have at least one working family member and almost all are barely scraping by as a result of inadequate wages or income.¹ Among the elderly and disabled, many subsist on meager incomes that can force the unthinkable choice between food and medicine, worsening health problems and increasing medical expenses.

SNAP Responds to Economic Downturns, Contributes to NJ Economy

The number of people relying on SNAP rises during economic downturns and falls when the economy improves. After unemployment insurance, SNAP historically has been the most responsive federal aid in assisting families and communities when the economy sours.

SNAP serves as a critical safety net, strengthening children, families, workers, elderly and communities across the state, while serving as an important boost to the economy during a recession. Multiple reports have found positive associations between SNAP and long-term health, educational and economic outcomes.²

Federally funded SNAP benefits alleviate food insecurity, while bringing a vital economic boost to the state. Estimates indicate that every \$1 of SNAP benefits can generate between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic activity during a downturn.³

In 2019, SNAP distributed \$953.6 million in benefits to New Jersey residents, who use that money to buy food in grocery stores and other retail establishments. During FY 2020, 5,747 authorized SNAP retailers in New Jersey redeemed more than \$1.5 billion in SNAP benefits.⁴

SNAP Enrollment Climbs, Benefits Boosted During Pandemic

The number of New Jersey residents receiving SNAP rose 23% from February 2020 to January 2021, the most recent data available. In January 2021, 815,000 New Jersey residents, including more than 360,000 children, received SNAP. This increase was likely spurred by:

- An increase in the number of eligible people due to COVID-related job loss or reduction in hours,
- Relaxation of federal rules to make it easier for people to apply during the pandemic, and
- A boost in monthly SNAP benefits.

New Jersey aggressively pursued and received all available federal waivers.

This included:

- Extending certification periods and waiving period reporting requirements of income or other changes between recertifications.
- Eliminating telephone and in-person interviews before being approved for SNAP,
- Allowing telephonic signatures on applications, and
- Increasing monthly benefit amounts, which totaled \$700 million from March 2020 to May 2021.

Congress also took action to allow more college students to qualify.

These smart policies should be continued after the pandemic subsides, giving people easier access to this critical nutrition assistance. For these changes, Congressional or federal action would be required.

HFNJ would like to acknowledge the significant challenges that the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) faced during the pandemic, including implementing changes in benefits and Pandemic EBT and thank them for their dedication and hard work during these difficult times.



Pandemic Boosts SNAP Benefits

Since the federal government enacted a COVID-19 relief package in March 2020, the New Jersey Department of Human Services has provided SNAP households with maximum monthly SNAP benefits for households of their size. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) approves these SNAP Emergency Assistance payments for a state as long as the federal government and the state have issued and maintain public health emergency declarations. In April 2021, USDA clarified that such SNAP Emergency Assistance payments also increased benefits for SNAP households already at the maximum benefit level.

Starting in January 2021, pursuant to separate federal relief, New Jersey increased SNAP benefits by 15%. That increase is independent of monthly SNAP supplements and will be given to every SNAP household, meaning all NJ SNAP recipients will receive a minimum 15% increase, depending on their household size and income at least through September 30, 2021.

Bridging the SNAP Gaps

In January 2020, Hunger Free New Jersey (HFNJ) released a report that found SNAP was not reaching at least 300,000 low-income New Jersey residents. The net gain in participation from February 2020 to January 2021 was just over 154,000, suggesting that, while we have made progress, New Jersey still is not reaching all who could benefit from SNAP.

New Jersey, like other states, has an opportunity to build on this recent expansion and strengthen SNAP so that it reaches all people who need this assistance.

In 2020, Hunger Free New Jersey (HFNJ) launched a statewide project to better understand the barriers to SNAP participation and identify strategies to reach more SNAP-eligible people across the state. HFNJ partnered with the Food Research & Action Center and The Food Trust, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to survey SNAP participants and those likely eligible for SNAP and to convene SNAP's many stakeholders in New Jersey. The goal was to identify challenges and workable solutions. This report details the findings of that research and the recommendations identified by stakeholders over the course of the project. (See list of stakeholders in Appendix A).

How SNAP works in NJ

SNAP is a shared federal/state partnership. Benefits are funded 100% by the federal government. Administrative expenses are shared between USDA and states and counties. Unlike a block grant program, SNAP's federal structure allows it to respond to changes in need, whether due to economic downturns or natural disasters.

Federal eligibility rules provide income and resource limits on SNAP eligibility, but allow states to apply for a variety of options and waivers to vary those rules. With regard to income limits, applicants' net incomes must be no higher than 100% of the federal poverty line. Most households also face asset limits and a gross income test (130% of the poverty line unless the state opts for a higher limit).

In New Jersey, the SNAP gross income test is 185% of poverty, which allows the state to screen more applicants and determine whether their expenses for other basics like shelter and child

care render their net incomes low enough to qualify them for SNAP benefits.

New Jersey is a county-administered and state-supervised SNAP state. The New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) is the administering agency and county human services agencies operate the program for their respective geographies.

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Mid-Atlantic Regional Office provides oversight and guidance to New Jersey and other states in the region. The USDA also provides funds to states for conducting SNAP outreach and application assistance on a 50/50 federal/state reimbursement basis, implementing SNAP Education, known as SNAP-Ed and offering SNAP Employment and Training, also known as SNAP E&T, also on a 50/50 federal/state reimbursement basis as well as through a limited 100% federal allocation.

Summary of Recommendations

The research generated concrete recommendations to improve NJ SNAP participation. The recommendations fall into several broad categories:

- 1 Streamline the application process by reducing paperwork required from applicants and updating the online application system to be user-friendly.
- 2 Expand community outreach to educate the public about the program and assist more potentially eligible residents in completing the application process, with a focus on college students, older adults, immigrants and the newly unemployed.
- 3 Examine the level of customer service provided at county Boards of Social Services to identify challenges and solutions at the county level.

Background

To better understand participation barriers and identify solutions, HFNJ and its partners:

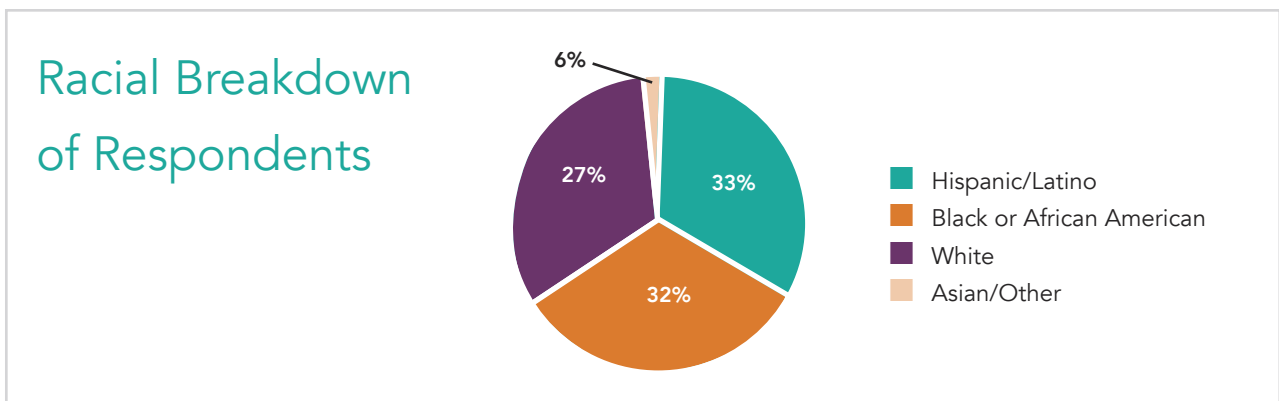
- Surveyed current SNAP recipients through Propel’s Fresh EBT, an app that SNAP recipients can use to manage their benefits,
- Held a series of virtual meetings with a broad range of stakeholders, and
- Surveyed potentially eligible residents who are not receiving SNAP or are no longer receiving SNAP.

NJ SNAP Recipients Cite Phone Delays, Difficulty with Online Application as Barriers to Participation

HFNJ administered an electronic survey to current New Jersey SNAP recipients between July 28 and August 14, 2020, with 510 New Jersey residents completing the survey. All were users of Propel’s Fresh EBT app. The purpose of the survey was to obtain the opinions of SNAP users about their experience applying for and using SNAP benefits.

HFNJ acknowledges that this is not a representative sample but believes the results can help guide improvements and inform future research. It is also likely that many of these respondents are more technologically savvy, which may also influence the results.

The ethnic and racial breakdown of survey participants was fairly evenly split among black, white and Hispanic residents. The largest proportion of respondents were between 30 and 39 years of age. The following charts show the racial and age breakdown of respondents.



Age Group	Percentage
18-19	1%
20-29	18%
30-39	38%
40-49	21%
50-60	12%
61+	5%

As noted, several rules were relaxed during the pandemic to make it easier for people to apply and receive this assistance. Most of the respondents to this survey had applied for SNAP prior to those adjustments, however, so those changes likely had little impact on the survey results.

Most respondents (66%) were not first-time SNAP applicants. More than half (56%) had most recently applied for SNAP more than a year prior to taking the survey. Eighteen percent applied between six to 12 months prior to taking the survey. The survey did not reveal significant differences in respondents' experiences whether applying pre-COVID or during.

The most common difficulties in applying for SNAP that respondents identified were phone system delays, followed by confusion regarding the online application. Other common problems included difficulty submitting documents and trouble accessing the website.

Issue	%
Phone system delays	38%
Online application was confusing	24%
Difficulty submitting documents	23%
Trouble accessing the website	14%

Most respondents (74%) reported that their caseworker was at least somewhat helpful, while only 10% indicated that their caseworker was unhelpful. Less than half of respondents said the interview process was "very easy."

For all questions, there were no significant differences along racial or ethnic lines. Due to the small sample size, it was impossible to draw county-level conclusions.



SNAP Summits Identify Multiple Issues, Solutions

From late September to early December 2020, HFNJ convened three virtual SNAP summits to gather stakeholder input into the barriers to higher rates of SNAP participation in New Jersey and potential solutions to address those challenges. The summits drew 87 participants, representing a broad range of organizations, including emergency food providers, SNAP outreach workers, community organizations, healthcare providers, community college officials, child-serving organizations and advocates. (See list of participating organizations in Appendix A).

The first summit provided a project overview, a broad examination of participation rates, issues that affect participation and included a helpful presentation by the New Jersey Department of Human Services. The second summit delved deeper into three key issues: technology, Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) and participation disparities among counties. The third summit explored outreach issues and solutions focused on four high-risk demographic groups: college students, immigrants, older adults and the newly unemployed/underemployed.

Following is a summary of issues identified by stakeholders during the three summits. Recommendations at the end of the report are largely based on stakeholders' views stemming from their extensive experience with the system.

Program Administration Needs Strengthening

Efficient administration of SNAP is key to reaching those who can benefit from this aid. Stakeholders identified multiple issues related to program administration, especially with regard to customer service at the county Boards of Social Services, the application process and misperceptions about the program. Common themes included:

- Customer service differs significantly from county to county.
- It can be challenging for county board of social services workers to keep up to date with program changes, especially during COVID.
- New Jersey has largely separate application systems for various programs, rather than a streamlined system that allows people to apply for multiple programs simultaneously, (i.e., SNAP and Medicaid).
- Navigating the SNAP enrollment system can be daunting.

SPECIFIC ISSUES IDENTIFIED INCLUDE:

Application Process Unwieldy. Participants expressed concerns over the application process, including:

- The application itself is confusing.
- The overall process is cumbersome and requires a significant amount of paperwork.

- Applicants have difficulty contacting the county welfare offices with inquiries.
- Applicants often experience lengthy response times.
- Older adults face particular challenges with technology and transportation. A more concerted effort is needed to assist this population.

Outdated Technology Stymies Enrollment

The NJ SNAP online enrollment system instructs applicants to use the outdated Internet Explorer to complete the application. The application does not translate well to mobile phones, which is how many potential SNAP participants access the internet. This outdated technology makes the online application system more difficult for many users and is a major barrier to enrollment.

Participants also noted that the online application is difficult to understand and should be edited for readability. Additionally, an e-mail address is required to create an account – something that many applicants do not have.

DATA NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND DISPARITIES AMONG COUNTIES

Stakeholders largely agree that client service at county Boards of Social Services, local SNAP outreach and other factors vary widely from county to county, but said that more detailed county-level data would help to understand why participation rates vary so greatly from county to county.

This includes:

- More detailed demographic information,
- Concentration of poverty in each county,
- Funding devoted to outreach in each county,
- Funding provided to county Board of Social Services operations per county.

Stakeholders noted that counties with the lowest SNAP participation rates tended to be wealthier areas, with a higher percentage of white residents, while the counties with the highest participation rates tended to be among the poorest in the state.⁵

Further research should explore whether decision-makers in higher-income counties view poverty as less of a problem and therefore do less to reach families with this assistance. Conversely, are people in lower-income counties more likely to have information about how to navigate the system from local officials, family members, friends or neighbors? Are there best practices in higher participating counties that could be replicated in counties with lower participation?

More Effective Outreach Could Improve Participation

Outreach to potential recipients was another critical area that could be improved. Stakeholders identified the following broad issues that hinder efforts to reach all potentially eligible residents who could benefit from SNAP.

- There is a lack of publicly-funded outreach in many parts of the state.
- Partnerships between DHS, state-contracted outreach workers and community entities, including social service organizations, local government and the faith-based community, need to be strengthened.

- Special efforts are needed to reach older adults and immigrants, particularly given fears that the households containing immigrants have about any impact of benefit receipt on their immigration status.
- Lack of information available in languages other than English or Spanish.
- Stigma and lack of awareness prevent many SNAP eligible people from applying.

The third summit focused solely on outreach, delving into issues and solutions affecting four distinct demographic groups: the newly unemployed/underemployed, college students, immigrants and older adults. In breakout groups, stakeholders identified very specific issues affecting each group. Following is a summary of those issues.

THE NEWLY UNEMPLOYED/UNDEREMPLOYED:

- Are hesitant to ask for assistance,
- Lack awareness of SNAP and other government programs,
- Have extra difficulty navigating the system.

OLDER ADULTS:

- Lack transportation,
- Fear leaving the house because of COVID-19,
- Lack access to technology and/or have low technology proficiency,
- Believe they are not eligible for benefits or worry they would be taking benefits from a child or other person more in need,
- Perceive the low monthly benefits to be not worth the hassles of applying for SNAP.

COLLEGE STUDENTS:

- May misunderstand their potential eligibility (i.e., They think it is only for families or people on welfare).
- Lack awareness of the program.

IMMIGRANTS:

- Fear SNAP participation would entail potential negative impact on their immigration status,
- Are confused about eligibility,
- Face language barriers.

It should be noted that New Jersey has the fifth largest immigrant population in the United States, with more than 2 million foreign-born residents. When compared to the total state population, New Jersey has the third largest proportion of immigrant residents. In 2018, at least 180,000 New Jersey children live in a household with at least one undocumented family member. The “public charge” rule has likely been a significant factor in program participation. It is difficult to estimate how many families did not seek assistance due to fear.



Survey Reveals Misperceptions about SNAP

A second survey, administered electronically by HFNJ, was conducted in late 2020, early 2021. It was designed to reach those who are likely eligible for SNAP and not participating. The survey garnered 1,837 responses. Of those, 642 respondents — or about 35 percent — were likely SNAP-eligible, based on their answers to questions about income and household size. This clearly is not a representative sample, but we report the results with the intention that this information can inform decision-making and provide direction for further inquiry.

Most likely eligible respondents not receiving SNAP.

Of likely eligible respondents, nearly two-thirds were not receiving SNAP, with about 31 percent saying they have never received SNAP and 30 percent saying they used to receive SNAP but no longer do.

The survey results also support the stakeholders’ perspective that there is a lack of awareness of the program and misperceptions persist about who may qualify for this assistance.

Of those who are likely SNAP eligible, the two most common reasons respondents cited for not receiving SNAP was that they believed they earned too much money (27%) or they were afraid they would take benefits away from others, even though SNAP is an “entitlement” program available to anyone who qualifies. Both point to a need for more public education.

Likely SNAP-Eligible Status	Number	Percent of Respondents
Currently Receiving SNAP	251	39.1
Never Received SNAP	201	31.3
Used to receive SNAP but no longer do	190	29.6
Totals	642	100

"I thought that having a job would affect me."

"I worked."

"Undocumented!"

"Don't have an income."

"The information is not exposed to the people who need it and it's connected to negative connotations. The information should be easier to find."

"I have been told that having the card is more trouble than it's worth: It can only be used to buy certain types of things. You can't use it if your grocery purchase costs more than the amount of money on the card and you have to periodically reapply. Too much trouble for too little money."

"I applied for SNAP before but was denied because of my immigration status."

SNAP Solutions

When survey respondents were asked how to make SNAP more accessible to more New Jersey residents, the number one answer was: Make it easier to get help from the county welfare office. Two other top responses were related to the application process, with respondents saying that the application should be easier to complete and require less documentation and other paperwork.

SNAP-eligible respondents also said that the benefit amount, which is set at the federal level, should be higher, and that the income limits, also set by the federal government, should be raised, especially in high-cost New Jersey where people earning over the current limits still struggle to make ends meet.

Again, these results supported many of the stakeholders' observations during the SNAP Summits.

What do you think would make SNAP a program that reaches more people who need help to buy food for themselves and their families? Please select up to three choices.	Number of respondents	Percent of Respondents
Make it easier to get help from the county welfare office.	291	47
Don't require so much paperwork about people's income and bills.	238	39
Make the amount of money people receive every month higher.	221	36
Make the SNAP application easier to finish.	218	35
Teach county welfare workers to be more respectful and responsive.	208	34
Don't make people come to the county welfare office for an interview.	173	28
Don't make people have a telephone interview with the county welfare office.	32	5
I don't know.	42	7
Other	47	8

Since several of these rules are required under federal law, making changes would require Congressional action. This includes not requiring phone interviews and increasing the amount of monthly benefits. While DHS needs various income documentation to deter-

mine whether a person is eligible, it should work with other state agencies to obtain income/expense verification, such as linking with the New Jersey Department of Treasury to obtain tax returns, reducing the paperwork that applicants must submit.

***“Treat with kindness
and patience.”***

“The (name of county redacted) Office scares people off and can be nasty. Many ppl that are desperate for the money for food have complained that they have gone off the program since the office is very nasty and scares them off.”

“Telephone calls are great. I can’t do email. Paper application and someone over the phone to guide through it.”

“Take people’s other necessary bills into account. (Student loans, fine payments to courts, medical bills, etc).”

“Change the income limits.”

“It’s hard to fill the form out online and make copies.”

“Welfare office needs to answer phone regularly.”

“Raise the maximum income amount higher because some people pay high rent, mortgages, and other bills which leaves less money for food to feed their families, especially for single parent families.”

“Change qualifications to get benefits to help families with higher income levels that have school aged children. My family does not qualify because my boyfriend makes too much money but with the amount of bills that we have we often struggle to buy healthy food. I have a budget of \$100-\$150 a week to feed a family of 4. It is very hard to shop for a healthy diet with that.”

“Make SSI recipients automatically qualified. Don’t force single parents who live with a friend to try to get that friend to provide their financial information for mine and my kids’ SNAP application. My friend isn’t helping to feed my kids.”

“Have access to a question hotline.”

“Answer the phone. Tell people what they need to do to qualify. Let people who own small businesses qualify.”

“A lot of the paperwork they require they have access to so why make people go get what is already available to you.”

“Have an alternative for families without legal status.”

“Send out the EBT card as promised and lessen the amount of time spent waiting for a welfare officer.”

“Don’t require periodic reapproval.”

“Too much work and time to be determined ineligible. Easier to get food from food pantries”.

“When someone is denied service, have a coherent explanation and listen to the applicant. I believe that in my county they do not give good service and do not listen to those in need.”

Recommendations

Improve Customer Service at the County Offices

Many of the issues identified under the broad umbrella of program administration involve customer service at the county Boards of Social Services. Stakeholder recommendations included:

- DHS should create stronger, more uniform standards for county Boards of Social Services and provide enhanced trainings to county social service workers.
- Each county Board of Social Service should ensure staff is kept current on program changes and other communications.
- Create a call center where people can access a live person to assist with issues.
- Administer a DHS customer satisfaction survey to identify and address issues in each county.

Simplify and Improve Application Process

Stakeholders recommended an overarching approach to resolving issues with the application system: empower both clients and outreach workers, in partnership with community organizations, by providing the tools needed to facilitate completion of the application process.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Simplify the paper and online applications and improve readability by using plain language.
- Update the online system to make it user-friendly and employ current technology.
- Simplify the income verification process. This could include working with other state agencies, such as the New Jersey Department of Treasury, to secure tax returns.
- Make applications available in more languages.
- Provide clear instructions about how the online application system works and what is needed to complete an online application, including items such as “how to create a free e-mail account” and “how to scan and upload documents.” Use a PowerPoint and/or video to share this information, which should also be available in various languages.

- Educate non-profits and other community organizations, such as Family Success Centers, about assisting clients in completing online applications and submitting them via telephone and leverage community partners’ capacity to offer clients computer access.

Expand Outreach

Stakeholders proposed broad recommendations to better reach all potentially eligible residents, while also identifying specific solutions for each of the four target populations. An overarching theme was that the funding for SNAP outreach is inadequate through the 50/50 state-federal match and that many areas of the state are not covered. Therefore, the state Legislature should appropriate and the Governor should approve additional funding to expand outreach and enrollment efforts, especially in areas that currently have no publicly-funded SNAP outreach.

Following are other general outreach recommendations, which DHS should implement in partnership with appropriate state agencies:

- Engage the healthcare community in making food insecurity and nutrition screens standard medical practice, with pathways for people experiencing food insecurity to receive help.
- Engage school districts to continuously alert parents to SNAP availability through various means, including sending applications home with students and communicating through robo-calls, text messages, e-mail, social media and other platforms.
- Strengthen engagement with emergency food providers to routinely distribute SNAP information to their clients.
- Strengthen partnerships among outreach workers and community-based organizations to reach more potential SNAP recipients at the community level.

Create Responsive P-EBT Hotline, Communications Campaign

Because of the widespread interest in Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), one of the breakout sessions focused solely on this program, which is a child nutrition program that is separate from SNAP. Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) helps families with children buy groceries when schools are closed because of the pandemic.

This assistance comes through the New Jersey Department of Human Services. The P-EBT card works like a debit card to purchase groceries anywhere EBT benefits are accepted. The first round covered March 2020 through June 2020 and was issued in the summer 2020. A second round was distributed for September 2020. A third round, covering October 2020 through June 2021 is expected. DHS recently received USDA approval of its plan for this round.

Improvements should be made to ensure all eligible children receive this benefit.

During the summit, stakeholders agreed that there has been widespread confusion about P-EBT, including a lack of clear information for families and miscues in program rollout. For example, the P-EBT card itself was mailed in a plain white envelope, and as a result, was frequently mistaken for junk mail.

Community organizations and advocates need accurate information to advise their clients, more transparency about DHS' efforts to address problems and assist families who have had difficulty accessing P-EBT, and greater clarity about the respective roles of state SNAP, county welfare offices and school districts to resolve any issues that arise.

As DHS embarks on administering a new round of P-EBT benefits, it should:

- Establish and adequately staff a toll-free, state-wide hotline where people can reach a live person to investigate their case and resolve issues.
- Collaborate with advocates, community organizations, schools and others to launch a statewide communications campaign to educate parents about P-EBT. This should include the development of flyers, signs and social media messages to distribute through a variety of partners and platforms.

- Clearly mark the envelopes containing P-EBT cards as coming from the New Jersey Department of Human Services.
- In partnership with DOE, require school districts to send messages to parents about P-EBT through various means, including e-mail, text, robo-calls, district websites, social media and other community communications platforms.
- In partnership with DOE, require school districts to conduct aggressive outreach to alert parents to the critical importance of completing school meals applications and clarify that only one application is required per family.
- Engage community organizations trusted by the immigrant population to send the message that immigrants accepting this benefit on behalf of their children will not negatively affect their immigration status.
- Designate at least one staff member in all county Board of Social Services offices to act as P-EBT liaison.
- Work with school districts and the DOE to correct erroneous information sent during the first round (i.e., wrong addresses, listing only one child and not others) and ensure all school districts collect and provide complete, accurate information about eligible families.
- Engage childcare providers and child advocacy organizations to educate parents about P-EBT once federal guidance is issued, with a special focus on providers participating in the USDA Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP).
- Convene regular meetings with DHS, DOE, New Jersey Department of Agriculture and advocates to provide program updates and identify issues and solutions.
- Request and publicize data from the P-EBT card contractor about community-level P-EBT account activation rates across the state to identify and address areas with especially low engagement rates, as has been done successfully in other states, including Massachusetts.

Following are recommendations specific to reaching certain demographics.

NEWLY UNEMPLOYED/UNDEREMPLOYED SOLUTIONS

- New Jersey Department of Labor (DOL), in partnership with DHS, should engage employers and staffing agencies to provide information to furloughed or recently laid off employees. This could involve a partnership among the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, New Jersey Business and Industry Association, Rotary Clubs, local chambers of commerce and unions.
- DOL should include information about SNAP in communications to those receiving unemployment.
- DHS and DOL should develop an effective communication campaign using multiple platforms to reach the newly unemployed and help combat stigma associated with accepting assistance.

SENIOR SOLUTIONS

DHS should:

- Create videos to educate older adults about the program and the application process.
- Expand grassroots outreach through senior centers, hospitals, doctor's offices and other places where seniors congregate.
- Provide expanded telephone assistance to older adults to help them complete the application.

COLLEGE SOLUTIONS

Recommendations to reach more college students include:

- DHS, in partnership with the higher education community, should launch a statewide social media campaign aimed at college students.
- DHS, in partnership with the higher education community, should engage professors, counselors, student health offices, campus food pantries and financial aid officers to promote SNAP to students.
- Colleges and universities should designate a point person on each campus with basic knowledge about SNAP and the application process to educate students and refer them to SNAP outreach workers.

- DHS should provide additional training to county caseworkers about rule changes regarding work requirements for college students.
- Each county Board of Social Services should designate a point person to handle SNAP applications for college students.
- Colleges and universities should give students the information they need to apply for SNAP, including the completed form to present to Board of Social Services documenting either enrollment in career-related courses, known as Perkins courses, or engagement in work-study activity.
- Colleges and universities should include information about social service programs, including SNAP, with federal student aid information.
- Colleges and universities should engage more AmeriCorps or other volunteers to distribute resource guides for students.
- College and universities should circulate flyers about SNAP in student unions, cafeterias and other places where students congregate.
- Colleges and universities should hold workshops about SNAP and other supports during orientation week.

It should be noted that under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, passed in December 2020, Congress temporarily extended SNAP eligibility to two groups of college students enrolled at least half time in higher education:

- Students who are eligible for federal or state work-study (regardless of whether the student is actively engaged in work-study) and,
- Students with an "Expected Family Contribution" of \$0 in the current academic year, including students eligible for the maximum Pell Grant.

The temporary exemptions will be in effect until 30 days after the federal COVID-19 public health emergency has been lifted.

IMMIGRANT SOLUTIONS

- DHS should create outreach and application materials in different languages and distribute through organizations and faith-based communities that immigrants trust (i.e., churches, libraries, ESL classes and food pantries).
- DHS should use social and traditional media, especially non-English media, to reach immigrant populations.
- DHS should develop stronger relationships with organizations and community leaders that immigrants trust.



NJ Just Beginning SNAP Online Grocery Shopping

In 2020, New Jersey began participating in a pilot program to enable SNAP recipients to use their benefits online. The new flexibility was welcome amidst the pandemic, when many consumers changed their purchasing patterns and began buying groceries online, either through delivery or curbside pickup.

Online ordering is a welcome benefit for SNAP participants living in communities underserved by grocery stores and has the potential to significantly increase people's access to healthy food. However, there are gaps in client and stakeholder awareness of this option and delivery fees present a barrier for some.

Moreover, not all SNAP retailers have the capacity or have made the business decision that this option is workable for them. By spring 2021, only

five retailers were offering this option to NJ SNAP customers: ALDI, Amazon, TheFreshGrocer, ShopRite, and Walmart, according to the USDA. Some of the \$25 million in new federal funding made available to USDA in the American Rescue Act enacted in March 2021 is to support efforts for greater online SNAP EBT operations, as well as mobile technology. Over time, this could provide available pathways for more retailers to participate.

SNAP ONLINE SOLUTIONS

To increase the use of online SNAP shopping, a relatively new option for SNAP recipients, DHS should:

- Create and promote an engaging video to increase awareness of online SNAP delivery.
- Identify a funding source (public or private) to pay for delivery fees or advocate for waiver of fees for SNAP orders.

Appendix A

The following organizations participated in the SNAP Summits held from October through December 2020 and helped to inform this report and develop recommendations.

A Future With Hope	New Jersey Foundation for Aging
Advocates for Children of New Jersey	New Jersey YMCA State Alliance
Anti-Poverty Network of NJ	New Jersey's Statewide Afterschool Network
Atlantic Cape Community College	NORWESCAP, Inc.
Bergen County Division of Senior Services	Ocean County College
Brookdale Community College	Passaic County Community College
Camden County College	Propel
Camden Lutheran Housing Inc.	Rise
Coalition Against Rape And Abuse, Inc.	Rowan College at Burlington County
Community FoodBank of New Jersey	Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey
County College of Morris	Rutgers RWJ University Hospital
CUMAC	RWJBarnabas Health
Family Promise of Sussex County	Salvation Army
Fisherman's Mark	Spanish Community Center – Shore AHEC
Food Bank of South Jersey	St. Kateri Migrant Ministry
Food Research & Action Center	Sussex County Community College
Fulfill	Trenton Area Soup Kitchen
Hudson County Community College	The Family Resource Network
Interfaith Food Pantry	The Food Trust
Legal Services of New Jersey	The Heart of Camden
Main Street Pantry/Mays Landing Salvation Army Unit	The United Way of Passaic County
MedPro Wellness	United Community Corporation
Middlesex County College	United Methodists of Greater New Jersey
Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs	United Way of Greater Mercer County
New Jersey Policy Perspective	Wind of the Spirit
New Jersey PTA	Zufall Health
New Jersey Council of County Colleges	

Appendix B

The following chart shows the results of the survey to current SNAP recipients using Propel Fresh EBT. The survey was administered between July 28 and August 14, 2020 and was completed by 510 New Jersey residents.

Question	Options	%
Since the pandemic started have you or someone in your household (check all that apply) (n=499)	Skipped or delayed paying bills, rent, or mortgage	61%
	Visited a food pantry or free food site	53%
	Lost a job	45%
	Had hours / salary (wages) reduced	36%
When did you most recently apply for SNAP (food stamps)? (n=505)	More than a year ago	56%
	1-5 months ago	19%
	6-12 months ago	18%
	within the last month	5%
Was this your first time applying for SNAP? (n=125)	No	66%
	Yes	33%
Were you able to apply online? (n=503)	Yes	56%
	No	28%
	I don't know	15%
Did you experience any of the following applying for SNAP online? (n=219)	Phone system delays	38%
	Online application was confusing	24%
	Difficulty submitting documents	23%
	Trouble accessing the website	14%
	Other	26%
**How helpful was your caseworker when you were applying for SNAP benefits? (n=224)	Very helpful	58%
	Somewhat helpful	16%
	I don't know/Neutral	14%
	Somewhat unhelpful	6%
	Not at all helpful	4%
**How easy or difficult was the telephone interview process? (n=223)	Very easy	45%
	I don't know/neutral	31%
	Somewhat easy	15%
	Very difficult	4%
	Somewhat difficult	3%
Do you have children in K-12 schools? (n=507)	Yes	71%
	No	28%
Did you receive P-EBT? (n=362)	Yes	65%

Endnotes

- ¹ SNAP Fact Sheet, Center on Budget and Policy Perspectives, January 2020, https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#New_Jersey
- ² Fact Sheet: The Positive Effect of SNAP Benefits on Participants and Communities, Food Research & Action Center, <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/positive-effect-snap-benefits-participants-communities>
- ³ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier, USDA 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/93529/err-265.pdf?v=716.4>
- ⁴ SNAP Retailer Management Year End Summary, USDA, 2020, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-SNAP-Retailer-Management-Year-End-Summary.pdf>
- ⁵ Missed Dollars, Bare Cupboards, Hunger Free New Jersey, January 2020, <https://hungerfreenj.org/nj-snap-report2020/>



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