

LEVERAGING SNAP TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH



A TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES



CENTER FOR
Science IN THE
Public Interest

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

For more than 50 years, CSPI has been an influential force in the fight for a better food system. We are committed to partnering with communities, organizations, and individuals as they explore and enact innovative policies at the local, state, and federal level that advance a just and equitable food environment. CSPI leverages our unique expertise to support passing policies that increase access to nutritious food, support healthy food and beverage choices, and ensure a healthy diet for all consumers.

A crucial part of this work is helping to build the capacity of our partners and other community-based organizations around the country. To this end, we have developed policy toolkits for CSPI's priority issue areas, including the one you have here. These toolkits are living documents designed to support your advocacy, whether you're a seasoned pro looking for the latest research or are brand new to this issue and trying to figure out where to begin. We've structured this toolkit as a roadmap to guide your campaign, with academic research, case studies, model policies, messaging guidance, and other resources you may need. Included throughout are links to additional resources, developed by CSPI and by our partners, for your deeper learning. We also invite you to explore CSPI's [Resource Hub](#) and [Resource Library](#) for more tools that you may find useful.

We are mobilizing advocates across the nation to advance state, tribal, territorial, and federal policy campaigns to further strengthen the public health impacts of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The SNAP toolkit is designed to support our partners by equipping them with materials that are customizable to their campaign's needs.

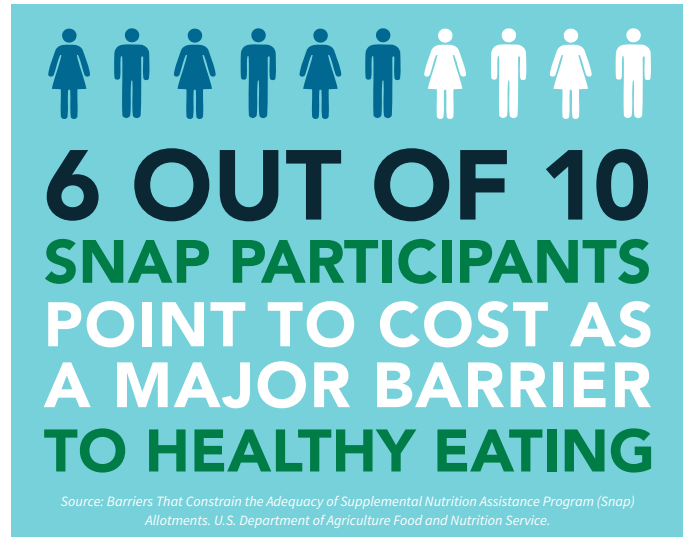
The toolkit provides background, research, and policy recommendations on a range of SNAP topics. It also offers messaging guidance, tips for community engagement, and examples of campaign materials. All fact sheets can be downloaded and printed or shared electronically with stakeholders.



INTRODUCTION TO SNAP

SNAP is the nation's largest federally funded food assistance program and is jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state agencies. SNAP provides financial benefits to buy food at stores across the country and aims to improve participants' food security and their purchasing power to access a nutritious diet.^{1,2}

SNAP is a powerful food safety net program and has many positive public health impacts. The program helps to reduce poverty, food insecurity, health care expenditures, and the risk of chronic conditions later in life.^{3,4} Yet eligibility criteria exclude many people experiencing food insecurity, and six out of 10 SNAP participants point to cost as a major barrier to healthy eating.⁵ Participants may also be uniquely exposed to unhealthy food marketing and a lack of quality, affordable, nutrient-dense food in nearby stores.^{6,7}



The following resources introduce SNAP, including its eligibility criteria, benefit formula, relationship to the farm bill, and public health impact.

At the time of the publishing of this toolkit, [many states are using temporary SNAP flexibilities](#) to help people in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are referenced as relevant throughout the toolkit.

- **Introduction to SNAP**

This resource outlines SNAP authorization, eligibility criteria, benefit formula, and changes to SNAP during the pandemic.

- **SNAP and the 2018 Farm Bill**

This resource describes the role of SNAP in the farm bill, a package of agriculture and nutrition legislation passed by Congress roughly every five years. It also outlines how the most recent 2018 farm bill impacted SNAP.

- **The Public Health Impact of SNAP**

This resource outlines the public health impacts of SNAP, including its role in reducing poverty, food insecurity, and health expenditures. It also discusses the potential of SNAP to reduce disparities in food and nutrition security among marginalized groups.

CSPI'S VISION FOR SNAP

CSPI envisions a future in which SNAP supports people impacted by systemic inequities by ensuring equitable access to a nourishing food environment and equipping participants with sufficient resources to achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

[Learn more about CSPI's Healthy Food Access Theory of Change](#)

To actualize this vision, CSPI supports federal, state, tribal, and territorial policies that:

- 1 Make it easier to access and utilize SNAP;
- 2 Ensure benefits and incentives are sufficient to afford nutritious foods;
- 3 Improve access to SNAP retailers and the healthfulness of retail food environments;
- 4 Advance research necessary to inform further improvements.

What You Can Do

Recent efforts to protect the structure and funding of SNAP, improve benefit adequacy, and establish needed flexibilities during the pandemic were made possible by years of advocacy. Today, the same level of enthusiasm is needed to further strengthen the public health impacts of SNAP. The resources in this toolkit are intended to support advocates who want to improve SNAP policy at the state or federal level. Together, we can ensure equitable access to a SNAP that equips people with sufficient resources to purchase foods that promote health and wellbeing.



HOW IS SNAP POLICY SET?

SNAP is funded by the federal government and states operate the program. While federal policy establishes certain standards, states can modify some aspects of how the program operates. For example, a state law can raise income limits up to 200% of the federal poverty level to allow SNAP to serve more people experiencing food insecurity. More examples are outlined throughout the resources in this toolkit.

FACT SHEETS

The following resources outline some of the main avenues through which SNAP policy can improve public health. Advocates can use these resources to review barriers to accessing and utilizing SNAP; how the program helps people afford nutritious foods through benefits and nutrition incentives; how SNAP interacts with the food retail environment; and the state of the research on strategies to strengthen SNAP's public health impact. Each resource presents policy options for advocates.



- **[SNAP Access and Utilization](#)**

As an entitlement program, SNAP is designed to serve everyone that applies and meets income and asset eligibility criteria.⁸ Yet the criteria exclude many people experiencing food insecurity. Even among people who are eligible for SNAP, it can be hard to access the program, and states vary widely in how they conduct outreach and enrollment. As such, policies to help more people in need access and utilize SNAP may improve public health and reduce health inequities. The tables in this resource outline some of the major barriers to accessing and utilizing SNAP and present policy opportunities.

- **[SNAP Purchasing Power](#)**

SNAP strives to help families afford the nutritious food they need to thrive. Yet six out of 10 people who participate in SNAP point to cost as a major barrier to healthy eating.⁹ This resource details how SNAP helps people to afford nutritious food through benefit allotments and nutrition incentive programs. It also outlines evidence of SNAP benefit and incentive inadequacy and policy opportunities to ensure benefits and incentives are sufficient.

- **[SNAP and the Food Retail Environment](#)**

Congress grants USDA the authority to authorize retailers to accept SNAP and establish eligibility criteria for retailer participation, such as guidelines for what foods must be offered.¹⁰ This resource summarizes issues with access to food retailers that SNAP participants face. It also discusses the ways in which our food environment makes it hard to eat healthy and strategies to improve SNAP retail environments that also have the potential to benefit all shoppers.

- **[Strengthening Healthy Food Access through SNAP: Building the Evidence](#)**

While SNAP has many positive public health impacts, nearly nine in ten participants still report some type of barrier to achieving a healthy diet.¹¹ This resource outlines research on additional

strategies that could further strengthen the nutritional and broader public health impacts of SNAP. It also discusses further research needed to evaluate the potential of these and additional strategies to improve food and nutrition security more fully.

– **Support for SNAP Strategies**

CSPI also reviewed surveys since 2010 that assess support for SNAP strategies among participants and other people with low incomes. We also conducted focus groups across the country with SNAP participants. This resource outlines the results of both.

> **SURVEY**

Of the strategies surveyed, *respondents express the most support for increasing SNAP benefits and fruit and vegetable incentives.* There are relatively few surveys that explore strategies related to SNAP retail environments, but early evidence indicates *high support for ensuring stores stock and promote healthy options, subsidizing online grocery delivery fees, and allowing purchase of hot prepared foods with SNAP.*

> **FOCUS GROUP**

SNAP participants expressed their *support for more spending power for food, especially for fruits and vegetables.* They also felt strongly that *enrollment in SNAP should be accessible.* Many SNAP participants support initiatives to create a healthier food environment, such as *highlighting and offering more healthy options in stores.*

Additional CSPI fact sheets that offer background on how our food environment makes it difficult to eat healthy:

Rigged: Supermarket Shelves for Sale

This report examines how food companies get their products featured in particular locations in supermarkets. Supermarkets collect more than \$50 billion a year in trade fees and discounts from food and beverage companies. As a result, the food system is rigged against everyone but the big food manufacturers with big marketing budgets. The report includes policy recommendations to address this hidden manipulation of the marketplace.

Scroll and Shop: Food Marketing Migrates Online

This report evaluates the practices of six national retailers operating in Washington, DC. The results showed that more than half of food and beverage promotions on online retailers' home pages and search result pages were for unhealthy products, and more than three-quarters of the food- and beverage-related emails that retailers sent promoted unhealthy products.



Soda on Display: A Pilot Study on Sugary Drink Placement and Promotion in Grocery Stores in Washington DC

This pilot study investigated the placement and promotion of sugary drinks across 16 grocery stores in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The purpose of the pilot study was to understand how many times shoppers can encounter sugary drink placements or promotions in a grocery store.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strategies to maximize the public health impacts of SNAP should be led by the communities most impacted by program changes, grounded in science-based evidence, but also supported by diverse stakeholders. It is critical to center SNAP participant insights when considering policy and other interventions.

Since 2018, CSPI has held and funded statewide community engagement projects with SNAP participants and other stakeholders across the research, public health, social service, and anti-hunger fields. These conversations have illuminated the strategies that participants and stakeholders believe will best support access to nutritious foods through SNAP in their state.

The following resource contains best practices on co-creating SNAP policies with communities and a summary of policy recommendations from previous SNAP community engagement projects across the U.S.:

- **[Policy Co-Creation with SNAP Participants](#)**

The following resources describe detailed accounts of the statewide community engagement projects:

- **Arkansas:** [Engaging Arkansas Stakeholders to Improve SNAP's Public Health Impact](#)
- **Colorado:** [Colorado Listening Project: Perspectives of SNAP Participants and College Students to Maximize Nutrition Security](#)
- **Florida:** [The Florida Project: Recommendations for Healthy Eating SNAP Pilot Projects](#)
- **Iowa:** [Strategies to Improve Healthy Eating in SNAP: An Iowa Perspective](#)
- **Massachusetts:** [Recommendations for a Healthy Eating SNAP Pilot in Massachusetts](#)
- **North Carolina:** [Recommendations for a Healthy Eating SNAP Pilot in North Carolina](#)
- **Pennsylvania:** [Recommendations for a Healthy Eating SNAP Pilot in Pennsylvania](#)

For overall guidance on co-creating policy with communities, please refer to MN Department of Health's [Principles of Authentic Community Engagement](#).



This resource contains an example from our 2021 grantee, **Nebraska Appleseed**, on how they used focus groups to learn from communities to understand food insecurity in Nebraska:

[Food Access Forum Summary & Moderator Guide](#)

STATE & LOCAL CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

In 2021, CSPI funded a range of state and local SNAP advocacy campaigns. Resources from these initiatives that may be of use for your campaign are provided below.

MAKING IT EASIER TO ACCESS AND UTILIZE SNAP

• ACCESS FOR PEOPLE AT HIGH RISK OF FOOD INSECURITY LIVING JUST ABOVE THE POVERTY LINE

- [Pear in Mind Grantee Spotlight: Nebraska Appleseed](#)

Details Nebraska Appleseed's successful campaign to improve SNAP in their state by reducing the "cliff effect," whereby people can lose significant benefits after receiving a minor wage increase.

- [Nebraska Appleseed SNAP Cliff Effect Fact Sheet](#)

Provides background on the SNAP cliff effect and how Nebraska's bill would help working families.

• ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DRUG FELONY CONVICTIONS

- [Nebraska Appleseed SNAP Re-Entry Fact Sheet](#)

Provides background on the federal ban on food assistance for those with certain drug convictions and outlines the benefits of a Nebraska bill that would eliminate the ban.

• ACCESS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

- [Colorado Hunger Free Campus Checklist](#)

Hunger Free Colorado worked with Young Invincibles and the Colorado Department of Higher Education to develop a checklist of measures that college campuses can take to reduce disparities in food insecurity among their students. Hunger-free campus initiatives can help students access and utilize SNAP and improve data collection about food security and basic needs on campuses.

• ACCESS FOR OLDER ADULTS

- [No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act of 2021](#)

Describes a bill that would address the high rates of food insecurity in Washington, DC by making it easier for older adults to participate in SNAP, among other provisions.



ENSURING BENEFITS AND NUTRITION INCENTIVES ARE SUFFICIENT TO AFFORD NUTRITIOUS FOODS

• SNAP INCENTIVES

- [Voices for Healthy Kids SNAP Incentives Example Legislation](#)
Provides high-level model language that can be modified for your incentives campaign.
- [Voices for Healthy Kids SNAP Incentives Fact Sheet](#)
Outlines the basics of SNAP incentive programs, including how they support local health efforts and economies.

• BENEFIT ADEQUACY

- [Give SNAP a Raise Policy Brief](#)
DC Greens contracted with Ed Lazere to write a policy brief on how addressing food insecurity in DC is a matter of racial justice, the signs of SNAP benefit inadequacy in DC, and the need to #GiveSNAPaRaise.
- [Give SNAP a Raise Talking Points](#)
Thanks to advocacy by DC Greens and the larger Fair Food for all Coalition, in early 2022 the “Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act” was introduced, which would make DC the first in the U.S. to establish a SNAP local supplement. These talking points outline how the bill would impact minimum and average SNAP allotments in DC.

STRENGTHENING ACCESS TO SNAP RETAILERS AND THE HEALTHFULNESS OF RETAIL FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

• ONLINE SNAP AND GROCERY DELIVERY

- [Rhode Island Food Policy Council – All homebound deserve access to nutritious food](#)
This op-ed describes a pilot that facilitated access to food delivery for SNAP participants by offering multilingual phone ordering and subsidizing delivery fees. It also makes policy recommendations informed by the pilot.

• STRENGTHENING THE SNAP RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

- [Roadmap and Toolkit for a Healthy Checkout Ordinance](#)
This roadmap tells the story of Berkeley’s campaign to pass the first healthy checkout ordinance in the nation. Healthy checkout aisles make it easier for customers and their children to avoid marketing and impulse purchases of sugary drinks and snacks high in sugar and salt. These local initiatives could also inform federal SNAP retail marketing policies.

REFRESHER

Congress grants USDA authority to establish eligibility criteria for retailer participation, such as guidelines for what foods must be offered or how retailers can engage in food marketing.¹²

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Effective messaging is paramount to a campaign's success. Best practices are outlined below to help ensure that your campaign messaging is impactful and science-based.

- **Spell out the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at first mention:** In 2020, CSPI hired a strategic communications firm to conduct polling and focus groups to determine stakeholder attitudes related to a range of policies, including SNAP. One simple takeaway: support for SNAP increased by a significant margin once people were informed about the meaning of the acronym. This held true across age, income, race/ ethnicity, and ideology.

- **Explain systemic barriers to healthy food access:** Our polling underscored the need to take time to explain barriers to accessing and affording nutritious food for people with limited resources, and to use relatable stories instead of relying heavily on statistics. You may need to familiarize your audiences with what those systemic barriers are—including access, affordability, and an unhealthy food environment—and take time to explain systems-oriented policy strategies. This helps to avoid personal responsibility framing that shifts the blame away from our unhealthy food environment and onto individuals.

- [Order Matters](#)

FrameWorks Institute offers further guidance on how to present these systemic barriers. This external resource explains how if advocacy messaging is presented in the wrong order, it can unintentionally convince readers that action is not needed or harmful. It outlines recommendations for organizing communication for change by 1) leading with values; 2) explaining causes before mentioning effects; and 3) offering key takeaways and main ideas before details or complications.

- [CSPI Messaging Guidance for an Effective Healthier Grocery Experience Campaign](#)

One barrier to healthy eating is pervasive marketing of high-calorie low-nutrient food in our retail food environment, which often makes it difficult to eat healthy. This resource summarizes the results of retail-specific communications polling and offers guidance for communicating about healthier grocery stores.



For overall guidance on key terminology regarding racial and health equity, please see our Health Equity Toolkit (expected May 2022)



Pulling all these tips together, you can start to envision messaging a SNAP campaign that spells out the acronym, leads with food access values, takes time to explain the causes of public health problems before discussing their effects, and centers stakeholder perspectives. Here are two examples for how you might craft campaign messaging:

- 1. SNAP purchasing power campaign:** A just society ensures everyone has access to nutritious, affordable foods. Yet many families cannot afford the food they need to thrive. Six out of 10 people who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) point to cost as a major barrier to healthy eating. SNAP incentives can help address this barrier by increasing the value of benefits spent on fruits and vegetables. We must ensure that incentives are accessible to all participants in need.
- 2. SNAP healthy retail campaign:** A just society ensures everyone has access to nutritious, affordable foods. Yet processed food manufacturers pay billions each year for the power to plan grocery store layouts, resulting in a food environment that is saturated with foods that undermine our health. And 82 percent of shoppers believe grocery stores should promote healthier items. We can pass policies, including through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), that encourage grocery stores to make it easier for shoppers to eat healthfully.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

About CSPI and Contact Information

The Center for Science in the Public Interest envisions a healthy population with reduced impact and burden of preventable diseases and an equitable food system that makes healthy, sustainable food accessible to all. CSPI values independence, scientific rigor, and transparency.

If you have any general questions related to this toolkit or SNAP, please contact:

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- Amy Nelms at anelms@cspinet.org
- Cassie Harrison-Ramos at cramos@cspinet.org

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