

REACHING THOSE IN NEED: ESTIMATES OF STATE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION RATES IN 2012—SUMMARY

Background

This report – part of 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 (FY) 2012 and in the 2 previous fiscal years. SNAP eligibility criteria include, but are not limited to, income guidelines and either U.S. citizenship or legal immigrant status with, for most, at least 5 years' residency.

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 for a number of years at rates that are substantially below those for all eligible persons. 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 83 percent in FY 2012 (Eslami, 2014). The participation rate for eligible working poor individuals was significantly lower statistically, at 72 percent.

The participation rates presented here use SNAP administrative data to estimate the number of participants in each State and Census Bureau survey data to estimate the number of eligible individuals. Because the rates are comprised of two different data sources and the estimates of eligibles are based on fairly small samples of households, there is substantial uncertainty associated with estimates for some States.

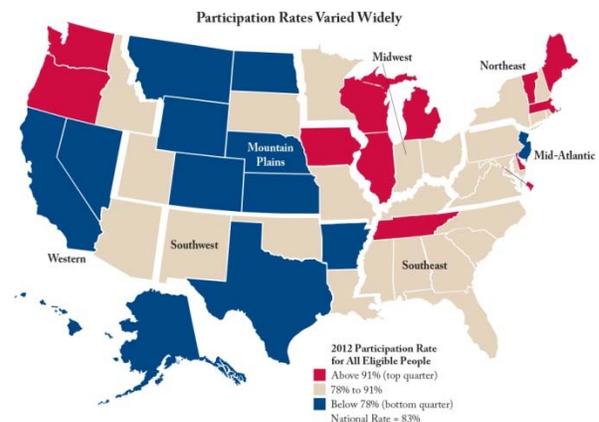
Findings

SNAP participation rate estimates for all eligible persons varied widely from State to State in FY 2012. State participation rates ranged

from a low of 56 percent to a high of 100 percent. Twenty-two States had rates that were significantly higher than the national rate, and 15 States had rates that were significantly lower.

Some States had consistently high participation rate estimates relative to other States. In each year from 2010 to 2012, the District of Columbia, Maine, Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, and Washington had significantly higher participation rates than two-thirds of the States.

Some States had consistently low participation rate estimates relative to other States. California, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, New Jersey, Nevada, Texas, and Wyoming had significantly lower rates than two-thirds of the States in all 3 fiscal years.



Participation rate estimates for the working poor also varied widely across States. Twenty-two States had rates for the working poor that were significantly higher than the national rate for the working poor, and seven States had rates that were significantly lower.

Methodological Notes

The State participation rate estimates are derived using a statistical approach known as shrinkage estimation, developed to improve precision when sample sizes are small. Data come from the

Current Population Survey, American Community Survey, and administrative records. While shrinkage estimates are substantially more precise than direct sample estimates, the estimated participation rates are still based on fairly small samples of households in many States. 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.

The number of eligible persons in California is adjusted to reflect the fact that about 1.3 million Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients receive a small cash benefit for food assistance from the State and are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits. In the absence of this exclusion, about half of this number of SSI recipients would be eligible for SNAP under current program rules.

Periodically, improvements are made in the methods for estimating the direct sample estimates of SNAP-eligible persons that are used in the shrinkage estimation. For this reason, the participation rates cited in this report are not directly comparable to those presented in prior year reports because of some improvements to the methodology (Eslami, 2014).

For More Information

Cunyngham, Karen (2015). *Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2012*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).

Eslami, Esa (2014). *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: Fiscal Year 2012*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).