

Excerpt from the 2020 Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap

POLICY

REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR SNAP

A median recertification interval of 12 months or longer for SNAP is an effective state POLICY to impact:



State policies related to the administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have a significant impact on:

- SNAP participation rates among eligible households.

The most effective policies to reduce administrative burden and increase participation in SNAP include:

- longer recertification intervals (greater than 12 months); and
- a combination of policies that reduce the administrative burden related to enrollment and recertification for SNAP.

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states have a median recertification interval of 12 months or longer among households with SNAP-eligible children under age 18.

WHAT IS ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN?

Administrative burden refers to the barriers that increase the costs—time, money, and psychological distress—of applying for and maintaining enrollment in any public assistance program.

WHY IS ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN IMPORTANT?

Reducing the administrative burden associated with applying for and maintaining enrollment in public benefit programs can help more caregivers and children access the assistance and benefits they need to stay healthy. The research presented here focuses on administrative burden for SNAP, but policies to reduce administrative burden apply to any public assistance and benefit program that states implement.

WHY IS REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR SNAP IMPORTANT?

SNAP Serves Millions of Children Yearly

Known as the Food Stamp program until 2008, SNAP is the largest nutrition program in the United States.¹ The program is available to all low-income^a households and serves millions of families each year. SNAP is not targeted toward a particular subpopulation, but the majority of SNAP recipients are in households with children. In 2018, nearly one-quarter of all children under age 3 (24.1%) were living in households that reported receiving SNAP in the prior 12 months—totaling 2.7 million children.²

SNAP Reduces Poverty and Food Insecurity, Particularly Among Children

In 2017, SNAP lifted 3.4 million people in the United States out of poverty, including 1.5 million children.³ Importantly, access to SNAP has been shown to reduce childhood food insecurity by up to 36%.⁴

SNAP Has a Positive Impact on Child Health and Wellbeing

Receipt of SNAP is associated with improved birth outcomes,⁵ increased health care access among children,⁶ and improved long-term child health.⁷

SNAP Take-Up Rates Vary Considerably by State, Highlighting That Administrative Burden Has an Impact on Program Participation

SNAP benefit levels and general eligibility criteria are set at the federal level, but states have flexibility to adjust program administration, including the administrative burden associated with program participation. Participation in SNAP among those eligible has risen in recent years from 53% in 2001 to 85% in 2016, but this percentage still varies considerably by state—highlighting the effect that state policies have on the proportion of eligible households that are served.⁸

Whereas Burdensome Policies Decrease Participation in SNAP, Accommodative Policies Boost Participation and Could Save Costs

Short intervals between eligibility recertifications that must be completed in person may require participants to more frequently take time off of work or find transportation or child care, increasing the time and monetary costs associated with participation. In contrast, policies such as those that simplify income reporting^b or allow longer recertification intervals can reduce the administrative burden and therefore increase participation. A 2019 USDA report found that states with streamlined administrative policies decreased their per-case costs.⁹

^a Federal requirements set eligibility criteria as (a) gross income at or below 130% of the federal poverty level, (b) net income less than or equal to the poverty level, and (c) assets below \$2,250 for households without an elderly individual or person with a disability.

^b Simplified income reporting requires SNAP participants to report income changes only if the change raises their income above eligibility levels. In contrast, states without simplified reporting require participants to report all changes to income, greatly increasing the cost of maintaining eligibility among those with variable work schedules or employment.

WHAT IMPACT DOES REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN HAVE?

Policies that reduce administrative burden for SNAP increase participation rates among eligible households. Authorization of longer recertification intervals is the most effective individual policy for increasing participation. However, implementing one policy alone is not as effective as implementing a set of policies that work together to reduce administrative burden related to SNAP enrollment and recertification.

The Most Effective Way to Reduce Administrative Burden Is to Implement a Combination of Policies

According to a large national study, changes in administrative policies taken as a whole explained 28.5% of the increase in SNAP participation between 2007 and 2011. The caseload rose 68.7% over that period.¹⁰ Similarly, an index including multiple state SNAP policies increased SNAP enrollment by 22% to 34% from 1996 to 2015, which means that the combination of policies had twice the effect size on participation compared to that of any individual policy.¹¹ Policies included simplified income reporting, longer recertification intervals, phone interviews, the operation of call centers, online applications, Supplemental Security Income interfacing, vehicle exemptions from assets tests, and broad-based categorical eligibility.

Strong Causal Studies Show That Reduced Administrative Burden for SNAP Impacts Two Prenatal-to-3 Policy Goals

Examples of Impact:



Access
to Needed
Services

- Recertification intervals longer than 12 months led to an 11.4 percentage point increase in SNAP participation among households with children (12 percentage points among female-headed households) (E)
- The elimination of policies that added transaction costs and stigma to SNAP participation explained 14.6% of the SNAP caseload increase from 2000 to 2016 (A)
- Policies lengthening recertification intervals to longer than 3 months were associated with a 5.8% increase in SNAP participation from 2000 to 2009 (K)



Sufficient
Household
Resources

- Participation in SNAP reduced household food insecurity by up to 36% in households with children⁴

Note. Results are based on comprehensive reviews of the evidence. The letters in parentheses in the table above correspond to a strong causal study in the comprehensive evidence review of reduced administrative burden for SNAP. Each strong causal study reviewed has been assigned a letter. A complete list of causal studies can be found in the references section at the end of this document. Comprehensive evidence reviews of each policy and strategy, as well as more details about our standards of evidence and review method, can be found at pn3policy.org.

WHAT DO WE STILL NEED TO LEARN ABOUT REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR SNAP?

Little Is Known About How Reducing Administrative Burden for SNAP Impacts People of Color

The evidence to date does not examine differential impacts of administrative burden by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status for families eligible for SNAP benefits. However, research on administrative burden in other programs, such as Medicaid and WIC, shows that administrative burden falls disproportionately on communities of color and low-income communities, and that reducing administrative burden can have a positive impact on enrollment rates.^{12,13} These findings likely would be applicable to SNAP participation as well, but more research specifically on SNAP would be helpful.

Learning More About How SNAP Administrative Burden Affects Fathers and Children Would Be Beneficial

Additional studies also can help highlight how fathers, particularly those who pay child support, are affected by administrative burden policies, as well as the families who receive child support payments. Despite the favorable evidence that administrative burden policies have demonstrated in impacting access to needed services, understanding how these policies can affect longer-term child outcomes also is essential.

More Research Is Needed to Identify the Best Ways for States to Reduce Administrative Burden for SNAP, and How Reduced Administrative Burden for SNAP Influences Other Policies

States are implementing a variety of new strategies to reduce administrative burden, including mobile use technology, online applications, and customer service call centers, among others, but most of these methods have not yet been included in studies of SNAP administrative burden. More studies on the ideal combination of policies to reduce administrative burden would also be helpful.

Tracking and Evaluating How States Have Responded to COVID-19 Will Be Essential

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government provided states with additional flexibility to provide SNAP benefits to the many families faced with sudden financial need. As of July 2020, all states had elected to provide at least 2 months of emergency supplementary benefits to their SNAP participants, and 48 states had been approved to provide meal replacement funds for children eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch whose schools were closed. Also, 47 states extended their certification periods, 20 states allowed telephonic signature requirements, and 45 states had temporarily waived interview requirements. It remains to be seen how the SNAP caseload will transform as a result of the pandemic, and whether some of the more flexible policies being newly implemented will be retained over time.¹⁴



Search the new Prenatal-to-3 Policy Clearinghouse for an ongoing inventory of rigorous evidence reviews at pn3policy.org/clearinghouse.

HOW DO STATES VARY BASED ON THEIR ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN FOR SNAP?

Currently, in 32 states, households with SNAP-eligible children have a median recertification interval of at least 12 months, whereas the rest of the states have shorter median intervals (typically 6 months).

The Majority of States Have a Median Recertification Interval of 12 Months or Longer, but Many Also Have Regressive Policies

Thirty-two states have a median recertification interval of 12 months or longer. In contrast, 19 states have a recertification interval of less than 12 months. Whereas seven of the 19 states have legislation that specifies that a 12-month recertification interval is possible, 12 states have regressive policies specifying that a recertification interval of 12 months is not allowed.

How Do We Determine States' Progress Toward Implementing Effective Policies and Strategies?

Policy adoption does not typically happen quickly. States may introduce legislation several times before adopting a policy and take even more time to fully implement it. States in which there has been considerable legislative initiative have made greater progress toward and are likely closer to adopting and implementing a policy compared to states in which there has been little to no legislative initiative. Once a policy is adopted, some states make the benefits more generous over time, whereas other states may rescind benefits in bills during subsequent legislative sessions. This variation in the legislative process provides greater insights to state policy leaders on where their state stands relative to others.

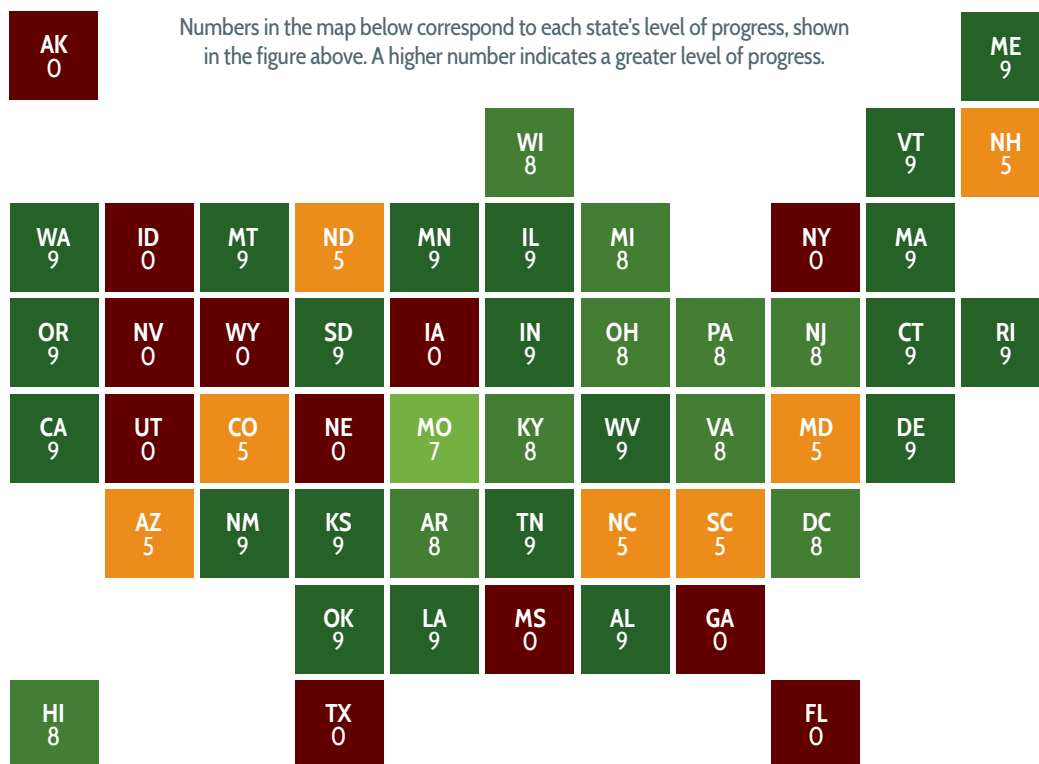
Relying on comprehensive research of state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program manuals, state statutes, and filed state legislation since 2017, and data from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fiscal Year 2018 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Quality Control Database and the QC Minimodel we determined:

- whether (yes or no) each state's median recertification interval was 12 months or longer among households with SNAP-eligible children under age 18 in 2018, and
- what progress each state had made by June 30, 2020, toward allowing for a recertification interval of at least 12 months in their SNAP manual.

The figure on the following page shows the progress states have made to date toward having a median recertification interval that is 12 months or longer among households with SNAP-eligible children under age 18 and allowing for a recertification interval of at least 12 months in their SNAP manual. For additional information, please refer to the Methods and Sources section of pn3policy.org.

Have States Adopted and Fully Implemented a Median Recertification Length of 12 Months or Longer, Among Households With SNAP-Eligible Children Under Age 18?

Progress	Detail	# of States
Yes	10	
	9 Yes, and the SNAP manual requires a minimum of a 12-month recertification interval.	21
	8 Yes, but the SNAP manual allows for recertification intervals that are less than 12 months.	10
	7 Yes, but the SNAP manual provides little specific recertification interval guidance.	1
Some Progress	6	
	5 No, but the SNAP manual does specify a possible 12-month recertification interval.	7
	4	
No	3	
	2	
	1	
Regressive	0 No, and the SNAP manual does not allow for a recertification interval of at least 12 months.	12



Recertification Interval Lengths Vary by State

Most states have a median recertification interval of 12 months or longer. States' recertification intervals range from 5 months in Wyoming to 13 months in nine states (Arkansas, Connecticut, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia).

The following table shows the calculated median recertification interval length compared to the recertification interval length specified in the state manual among households with SNAP-eligible children under age 18 for each state.

Length of Recertification Interval (Months) Among Households With SNAP-Eligible Children Under Age 18

State	Calculated Median Recertification Interval Length (in months)	Length of Recertification Interval Specified in State Manual (in months)
Alabama	12	12
Alaska	7	6
Arizona	6	12
Arkansas	13	4 and 12
California	12	No more than 12
Colorado	6	6 and 12
Connecticut	13	12
Delaware	12	12
District of Columbia	12	6 and 12
Florida	6	6
Georgia	6	6
Hawaii	12	No less than 3, no more than 12
Idaho	6	6
Illinois	12	12
Indiana	12	12
Iowa	6	4 and 6
Kansas	13	12
Kentucky	12	4 and 6
Louisiana	13	12
Maine	12	12
Maryland	7	6 and 12
Massachusetts	13	12

(continued)

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(continued)

State	Calculated Median Recertification Interval Length (in months)	Length of Recertification Interval Specified in State Manual (in months)
Michigan	12	3 and 12
Minnesota	12	12
Mississippi	10	1, 2, and 6
Missouri	13	No guidance for households without elderly individuals or individuals with disabilities
Montana	12	12
Nebraska	6	5 and 6
Nevada	6	6
New Hampshire	6	1, 4, and 12
New Jersey	12	1, 2, 3, and 12
New Mexico	12	12
New York	11	6
North Carolina	6	6 and 12
North Dakota	6	6 and 12
Ohio	12	4, 5, 6, and 12
Oklahoma	13	12
Oregon	12	12
Pennsylvania	13	6 and 12
Rhode Island	12	12
South Carolina	6	6 and 12
South Dakota	12	12
Tennessee	12	12
Texas	6	6
Utah	6	6
Vermont	12	12
Virginia	12	1, 4, and 5
Washington	12	12
West Virginia	13	12
Wisconsin	12	6 and 12
Wyoming	5	4, 5 and 6

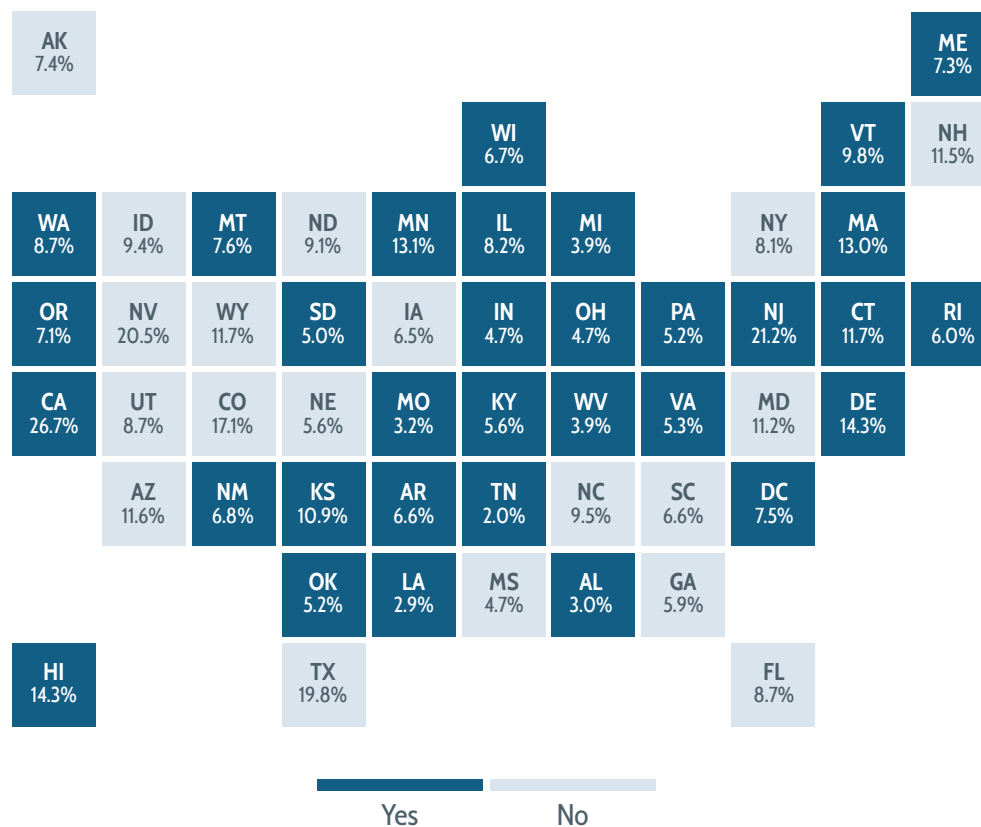
Sources: **Calculated Median:** United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fiscal Year 2018 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Quality Control Database and the QC Minimodel, as of 2018. **Length of Recertification Interval:** State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance manuals, state statutes, and filed state legislation since 2017, as of June 30, 2020. For additional information, please refer to the Methods and Sources section of pn3policy.org.

The Percentage of Eligible Children Who Do Not Receive SNAP Varies by State

Only 2% of households with SNAP-eligible children go unserved in Tennessee, whereas, in California, over one in four households with SNAP-eligible children (26.7%) do not receive services—the highest rate in the US.

Lack of Access to SNAP

% of eligible families with children under age 18 NOT receiving SNAP



States with a "Yes" have reduced administrative burden for SNAP.

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fiscal Year 2018 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Quality Control Database and the QC Minimodel, as of 2018; State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance manuals, state statutes, and filed state legislation since 2017, as of June 30, 2020; and 2016-2018 Urban Institute's TRIM3 project. For additional information, please refer to the Methods and Sources section of pn3policy.org.

Explore your state's interactive data at pn3policy.org/interactive.

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