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Summary of the Rigorous Research on Reduced Administrative Burden for SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federally funded program that provides food assistance to households with low incomes. States can adjust aspects of program administration, including policies that affect the administrative burden for families participating in the program. Administrative burden refers to the barriers that increase the costs (e.g., time, money, and psychological distress) of applying for and maintaining enrollment in SNAP, and these barriers may reduce participation among households eligible for the program.

EMERGING EVIDENCE FOR IMPACTS ON CHILD AND FAMILY WELLBEING

SNAP receipt is associated with improved birth outcomes, reduced childhood food insecurity, and improved child health; therefore, it is critical that eligible families have access to the program. States can use a variety of funding sources, including state and federal funds, to reduce the administrative burden associated with SNAP participation. Whereas the federal government pays for 100 percent of SNAP in-kind benefits, the federal Food and Nutrition Service only reimburses states for 50 percent of most administrative costs.

To reduce administrative burden for SNAP, states can implement a variety of policies—including 12-month recertification intervals, simplified income reporting, online applications and case management, waiving face-to-face interviews, timing interviews earlier in the recertification month, and outreach activities. No individual policy is found to be as effective as a set of low-burden policies implemented together.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University analyzes rigorous evidence to determine which policies are proven to produce positive outcomes for young children, their families, and society. Our comprehensive review of evidence demonstrates that the most effective policies to increase participation in SNAP are longer recertification periods (greater than 12 months) and implementing a combination of policies that reduce the administrative burden for enrolling in and recertifying for the program. However, the evidence base does not provide clear guidance on the optimal combination of policies.

RIGOROUS STUDIES FIND THE FOLLOWING IMPACTS

Reducing administrative burden improves 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.
- The elimination of policies that added transaction costs (e.g., online application availability) and stigma (e.g., fingerprinting requirements) to SNAP participation explained 14.2% of the SNAP caseload increase from 2000 to 2016.
- Policies lengthening recertification intervals to longer than 3 months were associated with a 5.8% increase in SNAP participation from 2000 to 2009.

For more information on reduced administrative burden for SNAP:

- Refer to our comprehensive evidence review for additional detail on and citations for the above-referenced studies: https://pn3policy.org/policy-clearinghouse/reduced-administrative-burden-for-snap/.
- Refer to our Prenatal-to-3 State Policy Roadmap for state progress and variation: https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2023/us/admin-burden/.
- Refer to our state policy lever checklist for the choices states can make to maximize effectiveness and equitable reduction in administrative burden: https://pn3policy.org/state-policy-lever-checklist-snap/.