



Talking Points

The following talking points on the importance of increasing participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/ Food Stamp Program can be used when creating outreach materials, reaching out to the press, communicating with legislators and working with advocates. Note: in this piece, the program will be referred to as the SNAP/Food Stamp Program; please change depending on your state's decision on the program's new name.

- **Economic Pressures**

- In today's economic environment, with food prices rising every day, the SNAP/Food Stamp Program is more important than ever. Food stamps can serve as a first line of defense for a hungry family and help ensure that children are never going to bed hungry.
- **Benefit Gap:** However, there is still a large gap between the number of people participating and the number of people eligible. The most recent data shows that *only about 67 percent* of eligible people receive food stamps. On average, 37 million individuals were eligible for food stamp benefits each month in FY 2006 (the last year for which such data are available at this point), and 25 million received them.
- **100 Percent Federal Funding:** The 100 percent federal funding for SNAP/Food Stamp benefits makes this a virtually cost-free way for the state to deal with the recession.

- **Hunger in America**

- According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Census Bureau, the number of people who are in food insecure households rose from 31 million in 1999 to 35.5 million in 2006, which is more than 11 percent of U.S. households. Food insecure means that the households are struggling with hunger, unable to consistently obtain a minimally adequate diet.
- Families with children were even more likely to have food insecurity problems than those without, with 15.6 percent of these families being defined as food insecure in 2006. Given the national ongoing economic problems, the number of hungry households is rising.
- The Census Bureau found that those at greatest risk of being hungry or on the edge of hunger live in households that are headed by a single woman, a Hispanic or Black person, or those with incomes below the poverty line. Geographically, food insecurity is more common in urban households and in households located in the Midwest and South.

- **Food Prices and the Economy**

- Low-income families are especially vulnerable to rising food prices. The average middle-income family spends approximately 7 percent of its income on food at home and another 5-6 percent on food away from home
- While the cost of food rose by 7.5 percent from August 2007 to August 2008, the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (the mix of food items on which low-income people rely) rose even faster. Over the same time period, the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan rose by 10.5 percent.
- This increase in the Thrifty Food Plan is a more accurate indicator of how low-income households are suffering from rising food costs, because the Thrifty Food Plan is USDA's estimate of what it would cost to purchase a minimally adequate diet. The Thrifty Food Plan is the least expensive market basket of food the government prices – and recommends for short-term use.

- **SNAP/ Food Stamps as Economic Stimulus**

- SNAP/Food Stamp benefits pump federal dollars into state and local economies, which is especially needed during this economic downturn. Every dollar in SNAP/Food Stamps spent generates a “multiplier effect” of \$1.84 in economic activity. The federal government pays 100 percent of SNAP/Food Stamps benefits, with federal and state governments sharing only administrative costs.
- When eligible people don't participate in the SNAP/Food Stamp Program, the communities miss out on the economic boost of new food stamp dollars flowing into the state and families miss out on better access to healthy foods.
- SNAP/Food Stamps can help increase health and productivity. Hungry adults miss more work and consume more health care. Hungry children tend to be sicker, absent from school more often and more prone to getting into more trouble.