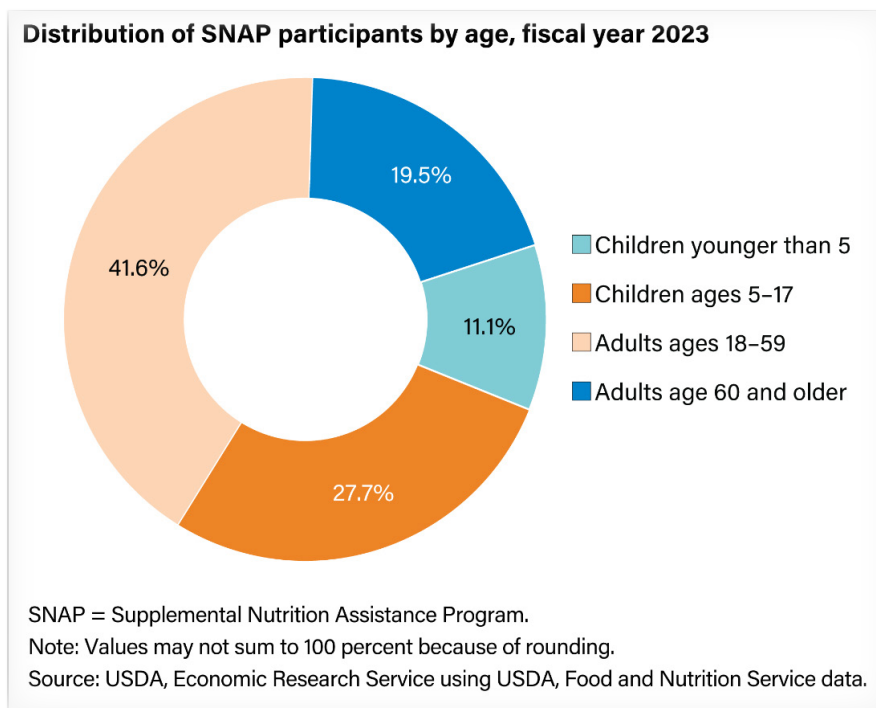




The Government Shutdown Is About to Increase Childhood Hunger. Here's Why.



Sixteen million children under the age of 18 are at risk of going hungry in the days to come.

As the federal government shutdown enters its fifth week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [has announced](#) that it will not fund Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits starting November 1st. With [funding](#) of nearly \$100 billion per year, SNAP is the nation's largest federal food assistance program. Nearly [42](#) million Americans of all ages (12% of the total population) use its benefits to help pay for their groceries. Thirty-nine percent of those beneficiaries are children under the age of 18.

The program is already facing [headwinds](#) in the wake of the passage in July of President Trump's so-called [Big Beautiful Bill](#) (BBB) which in-

creased the share of recipients who are required to work, made it harder to increase benefits to keep up with the rising cost of food, and reduced the federal contributions to the program from 100% to as low as 85%.

“SNAP is a highly efficient and effective program,” NEPC Fellow Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach and Margaret Walker Alexander, both of Northwestern University, [testified](#) to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture in April, prior to the passage of BBB.

It supplements a family’s cash resources, so that between SNAP and their other income they can afford to buy a sufficient diet. Average monthly benefits in 2024 amounted to \$187.54 per person—or about \$6.15 per person per day. SNAP kept at least 3.4 million people out of poverty in 2023 (the most recent data available), including 1.3 million children. SNAP is targeted to families who need benefits the most, reduces the likelihood that families have trouble affording food, and serves as crucial automatic fiscal stabilizer in times of economic downturns.

Drawing upon research results, Schanzenbach and Alexander suggested that the work requirements enacted this past summer would “result in sharp declines in SNAP participation, and little to no impact on employment outcomes.” Because SNAP eligibility is often used as a means to determine eligibility for other programs, this is [expected](#) to lead to reductions in the number of K-12 students who qualify for in-school programs such as free meals. The [SNAP](#) cuts, combined with other spending reductions included in BBB, have also placed pressure on state budgets. Legislators in states are now considering whether to reduce the number of people eligible for the program, to increase taxes, or to cut existing spending—including funding for education, which is typically their biggest or second-biggest line item.

The abrupt interruption to SNAP benefits in the wake of the shutdown could have multiple short- and long-term impacts on children and families. According to Schanzenbach’s [research](#), the benefits of SNAP include:

- Reducing the number of low-birth-weight infants;

- Reducing the risk of childhood obesity and other health conditions, including high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes; and
- Increasing the likelihood of high school graduation by 18%.

The shutdown continues because Republicans and Democrats cannot agree on a bill that would continue to fund government services beyond October 1st. Although Republicans control Congress, they still need Democratic support to pass the spending bill in the Senate (unless Republicans choose to end the Senate's filibuster rule). Democrats are holding out with the goal of restoring \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid (again, in the BBB) and extending health insurance subsidies that are set to expire.

NEPC Resources on Poverty

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