

SNAP Time Limits Harm Women, LGBTQIA+ People, and Families

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps millions of families put food on the table every month. It provides women, LGBTQIA+ people, and their families with critical nutrition assistance that supports their health and well-being. SNAP not only promotes better nutrition and reduces food insecurity, but it also boosts families' economic security and increases economic activity.¹ It reduces poverty and frees up resources for other necessary costs, like utilities and health care.

Under current law, able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) between the ages of 18-54 are required to work 80 hours a month to be eligible for SNAP benefits.² Otherwise, they can only receive SNAP for three months in a 36-month period.³ Parents/guardians with children under 18 years old are exempt from these time limits and people who are students, pregnant, caring for a child or incapacitated person, or have a disability are eligible for an exemption to this requirement. Veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and young people who have aged out of foster care also qualify for exemptions under current law.⁴ These time limits are often referred to as "work requirements." States can currently waive these time limits for SNAP recipients in high-unemployment areas.⁵

Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a reconciliation bill, and Republicans in the U.S. Senate are drafting reconciliation legislation, that would take nutrition assistance away from millions of people, to help fund more tax cuts for the wealthiest individuals and big corporations. One of the ways it would do so is by dramatically expanding SNAP time limits.⁶ In 2024, more than half of respondents (54%) in a national survey reported that groceries and food were the most stressful expense,⁷ and this bill would make it harder for people who are struggling to make ends meet to afford food at a time of skyrocketing grocery bills. Overall, the House-passed reconciliation bill and Senate proposal would raise the costs of food, as well as health care, care for aging and disabled family members, and aid for higher education, for women, LGBTQIA+ people, and families.

SNAP is critical for millions of women, LGBTQIA+ people, and their families across the country.

Despite the expiration of pandemic SNAP benefits in March 2023, nearly 43 million people received SNAP in December 2024,⁸ demonstrating the need for nutrition assistance amidst rising costs of groceries, health care, housing, and child care. Recent data on participation show that women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities were more likely to participate in SNAP:

- Women were more than half (55%) of nonelderly adult SNAP recipients in 2023.⁹
- About one in three (33%) non-elderly adult SNAP recipients was a woman of color in 2023.¹⁰
- In 2022, over half (53%) of SNAP households with children were headed by a single adult.¹¹
- In 2020, 29% of LGBTQ women and 28% of nonbinary/genderqueer individuals reported that they, their partner, or their children received SNAP benefits in the past year.¹² Only 37% of income-eligible LGBT people were enrolled in SNAP based on data from July-October 2021.¹³
- SNAP helps nearly 4 million nonelderly adults who either receive disability benefits or have work-limiting health conditions.¹⁴

SNAP promotes the health, education, and economic security of women and families.

In 2023, SNAP moved nearly 3.4 million people out of poverty as measured by the Supplemental Poverty Measure, including 1.3 million women (303,000 of whom are Black, 329,000 of whom are Latina, 79,000 of whom are Asian, and 518,000 of whom are white, non-Hispanic).¹⁵ In addition, SNAP leads to improved health outcomes for families, as well as improved education, economic self-sufficiency, and other positive outcomes for children who grow up in families with low incomes.¹⁶

- Studies have shown that SNAP participants are more likely to report excellent or very good health than nonparticipants with low incomes.¹⁷ Early access to SNAP among pregnant mothers and in early childhood improved birth outcomes and long-term health as adults.¹⁸
- Due to limited financial resources, those who are food insecure may attempt to stretch budgets by underusing or postponing medication¹⁹, or postponing or forgoing preventive or needed medical care.²⁰ Receiving SNAP can alleviate pressure on family budgets and make it easier to meet health-related costs.

- For students in their critical years of development, SNAP can positively affect performance in school. Studies have shown that students participating in SNAP have lower rates of disciplinary issues in the earlier part of the month, compared to later in the month when SNAP benefits usually run out.²¹

Labor market conditions make it difficult for many workers to meet SNAP's 3-month time limits.

In May 2025, more than 7.2 million people aged 16 and over were unemployed but looking for work.²² Many of them were unemployed for substantially longer than 12 weeks, which is the SNAP time limit. Indeed, the average (mean) jobless spell in May 2025 was 21.8 weeks.²³ Those unemployed 15 weeks or more accounted for more than one in three unemployed job seekers (34.9%) and those out of work for 27 weeks (roughly 6 months) or more accounted for one in five unemployed people (20.4%).²⁴ Those out of work for 27 weeks or more accounted for 20.1% of unemployed women, 19.7% of unemployed Latinas, 24.1% of unemployed Black women, and 25.1% of unemployed Asian women.²⁵

This is not due to lack of “incentives” for people to seek work: the United States has a jobs deficit. There are not enough jobs with full-time hours and living wages. Even among those aged 16 and over who had jobs in April 2025, 4.6 million were “part-time for economic reasons,” nearly half (47.2%) of whom were women.²⁶ As the Bureau of Labor Statistics explained, “These individuals, who would have preferred full-time employment, were working part time because their hours had been reduced or they were unable to find full-time jobs.”²⁷

Many workers have difficulty consistently working and reporting 20 hours of paid work per week. For example, workers in the low-paid workforce, like restaurant, retail, and care workers, are plagued by unstable and unpredictable work schedules, nonstandard hours, and part-time schedules,²⁸ which can make meeting the required hours of work difficult.²⁹ Women, especially women of color, are overrepresented in the low-paid workforce.³⁰ Women are also more likely to face discrimination and harassment at work, which can result in lost hours or job loss.³¹ Women also disproportionately bear family caregiving responsibilities, which can disrupt work hours, incline workers towards part-time schedules, or push caregivers out of the workforce periodically.³²

SNAP time limits don't increase employment; they just harm women, LGBTQIA+ people, and their families.

Calling the SNAP time limits a “work requirement” is a misnomer, as a person can work or conduct an active job search and still have their SNAP benefits cut off under this policy.³³ In fact, the majority of non-elderly adult SNAP recipients who can work, do work.³⁴ Census data show that more than 9 in 10 households with a non-disabled adult aged 18 to 64 with school-aged children who reported receiving SNAP at some point in 2023 had earnings during that year.³⁵ The idea that SNAP recipients should be punished if they don't work – by terminating their SNAP benefits – is rooted in over-invoked racialized and gendered stereotypes about many SNAP recipients.³⁶ This is a distortion of reality that ignores the lived experiences of low-income people across racial and gender lines. In fact, research shows that many people who lose SNAP under the current work requirements are working or should have qualified for an exemption, but the system has made documenting their employment or proving their exemption too difficult.³⁷

SNAP's time limits do not help people find or maintain employment that enables them to support themselves and their families. Instead, research shows that SNAP time limits dramatically reduce caseloads and benefit amounts, which particularly harms those subject to them because, by definition, they are likely to have lower incomes and limited resources.³⁸ Other research likewise shows that SNAP time limits, when instituted, failed to increase employment and significantly decreased participation in SNAP.³⁹ Other studies found that these requirements, on average, reduced income across all recipients and reduced benefits more than they increased people's earnings.⁴⁰ Temporarily expanded time limits imposed by the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) in 2023 put almost 750,000 older people at risk of losing nutrition assistance.⁴¹ Moreover, the harm of time limits often spills over to populations not technically subject to the time limits, including people with a disability who were not properly screened for their “fitness” for work.⁴²

The impact of SNAP time limits is consistent with the impact of so-called work requirements implemented in other programs. Research shows that strict work requirements in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program made little difference in long-term employment rates;⁴³ increased deep poverty;⁴⁴ and kept the large majority of individuals subject to work requirements in poverty and in low-quality, low-wage jobs with high volatility.⁴⁵ In Arkansas, a Medicaid work reporting

requirement in effect from August to December 2018 stripped over 18,000 people of coverage, including working and otherwise eligible individuals.⁴⁶ Similarly, Medicaid work requirements in Georgia appear to have discouraged or prevented significant numbers of potentially eligible individuals from enrolling in Medicaid, despite need.⁴⁷

Overall, time limits are ineffective at improving long-term economic sustainability. They are only effective at removing people from SNAP who need food assistance at a critical point in their lives.

The House and Senate reconciliation bills would expand SNAP's harsh time limits, taking SNAP away from women, LGBTQIA+ people, and families in order to give more tax cuts to the wealthy.

The House-passed bill⁴⁸ and Senate Committee on Agriculture proposal⁴⁹ would expand the age limit to include older adults ages 55 to 64 in the time limits. In 2023, over 12 million seniors and older adults faced food insecurity.⁵⁰ Older women, especially older women of color, are even more likely to live in poverty and experience food insufficiency than older white men.⁵¹ In addition, older women, who experience not only age but also gender and racial discrimination, tend to face longer periods of unemployment⁵²—meaning they are even more likely to lose SNAP benefits under these expanded time limits. In May 2025, 19.8% of unemployed women ages 55 to 64 years had been unemployed for six months or more.⁵³ The expanded time limits, if enacted, would therefore increase food insecurity and poor health among older people.

The House-passed bill would also make a historic change by subjecting parents with children ages 7 and older to SNAP's time harsh limits. In married-couple households, only one parent would have to show the required hours of work, but single parents, who bear full caregiving responsibilities, including during before- and after-school hours and school vacations, would risk losing SNAP benefits for themselves if they cannot report enough hours of work. The conditions of low-wage work, combined with caregiving and shortages of quality, affordable before- and after-school care, can make it especially challenging for single parents with school-aged children to consistently meet SNAP's work requirements. Imposing time limits on single parents will disproportionately harm women, who are three times more likely to be single parents than men and will effectively ensure that families with children will lose food assistance, negatively impacting their development and health.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that these requirements could lead to 3 to 3.5 million fewer participants in SNAP each month.⁵⁴ Nearly 11 million people – including over 4 million children aged 7 through 17 – live in households that would be at risk of losing at least some of their nutrition assistance because of expanded time limits.⁵⁵

The Senate Agriculture Committee bill, similarly, imposes time limits on parents of school-aged children ages 10 to 18.⁵⁶ (Under the Senate bill, both members of married couples are required to meet the hours of work, and if one fails to do so, only that person would lose their SNAP benefits.) While narrower, the Senate proposal remains deeply harmful to parents and caregivers and threatens food access for millions of children.

The Senate bill also eliminates key exemptions for people who are unhoused, veterans, and former foster youth under 26, which were established under the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023.⁵⁷ Imposing time limits on these groups of people will make some of the most vulnerable individuals even more likely to lose access to food assistance.

Lastly, both the House-passed bill and the Senate proposal severely restrict states' ability to respond to local economic conditions.⁵⁸ Under current law, states can request waivers from work requirements in areas with insufficient job opportunities. The proposals in reconciliation legislation would eliminate that flexibility, allowing waivers only in areas with unemployment rates above 10 percent. This change would prevent states from tailoring SNAP to meet local needs during downturns or in struggling labor markets.



Rather than expand time limits, Congress should enable more people to access SNAP.

Taking away nutrition assistance will not help women and LGBTQIA+ people find quality jobs any faster; it will just increase hunger. As a nation, we should help families meet basic needs by helping them access healthy food, along with health care, care, housing, and education. SNAP needs to be protected and strengthened, and access to SNAP should be increased, not taken away to pay for more tax cuts for the wealthy.

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