



SNAP Issue Brief: ABAWDs & Time Limits

Policy Overview

Under current law, SNAP requires all participants between the ages of 18 to 49 who are not raising children (often referred to as ABAWDs) to meet certain work requirements. The requirements are time-limited to receive benefits for only three months in a three year period unless they are working or in a work training program for at least 20 hours per week. States can request waivers to exempt people from the time limit, such as those in areas with high unemployment or those who lack a high school diploma or face other high barriers to employment.

Current Administrative Proposal

On February 1st, 2019 the Administration officially posed in the federal register a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that will impact ABAWDs and their receipt of SNAP benefits by limiting a state's ability to issue waivers to exempt individuals from this time limit. This rule will cut SNAP benefits to an estimated 755,000 individuals and result in a loss of 8.5 billion meals over ten years.

Policy Details

All SNAP participants other than children, individuals caring for children or a family member, seniors, pregnant women and people who are exempt for physical or mental health reasons must meet general work requirements which include registering for work, not voluntarily quitting a job or reducing hours, taking a job if offered and participating in employment and training programs, if assigned by the State. If unable to meet these requirements, SNAP participants may be disqualified from the program.

ABAWDs must meet additional work requirements. ABAWDs are required to work or participate in a work program for at least 20 hours per week to receive SNAP benefits for more than 3 months in a three year period. Beyond this time limit, an ABAWD must work at least 80 hours per month, participate in qualifying education and training activities at least 80 hours per month, or adhere to a workfare program, unpaid work through a special State-approved program where the amount of time worked depends on the amount of benefits received. One may also participate in a SNAP Employment and Training Program.

In areas where unemployment exceeds 10% or there exists a lack of sufficient jobs, states may choose to waive the ABAWD time limits. An ABAWD waiver does not waive the general SNAP work requirements.ⁱ

[Below you will find helpful messaging tips regarding ABAWDs and time limits.](#)

Most Snap Participants who can work, do work.

Most SNAP participants work or are seniors, individuals with a disability, children or caring for a child or a person with a disability. Over half of SNAP households with at least one adult who can work does work while receiving SNAP and in families with children, more than 60 percent work while receiving SNAP. SNAP often helps people when they are between jobs, meaning work rates are higher over time: more than 80 percent of SNAP households work in the year before or the year after receiving SNAP benefits with the rate reaching almost 90 percent for families with children. Only 4 percent of SNAP households that worked in the year before receiving SNAP did not work the following year.ⁱⁱ

SNAP encourages work.

The SNAP benefit formula incentivizes work. For every additional dollar a SNAP recipient earns, SNAP benefits decline by 24 to 36 cents. Families that receive SNAP have a strong incentive to work more hours or search for better-paying jobs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Harshening time limits will not help SNAP recipients get jobs.

We can all agree that helping people who can work get good-paying jobs and succeed is a good goal, but more rigid and restrictive SNAP work time limits won't help us get there. SNAP is a nutrition program, not a jobs program. Work is an important factor in moving SNAP recipients off of the program, but punishing workers for being unemployed by taking away their food assistance won't help them find a better job or find work faster. Proposals to expand time limits will result in cutting food benefits for individuals, not providing them with effective job training and works supports to help them be successful. These proposals make a bad policy even worse.

Enforcing strict time limits does not make sense considering the realities of low-wage jobs.

Unfortunately, low paying jobs with unreliable hours and limited benefits are all too common. Workers in the low wage market can't rely on there always being a steady full-time job that pays a living wage. Being sick or having unreliable transportation can result in workers being fired. SNAP is there to help them when they are in between jobs and searching for work. SNAP helps parents working in low paying jobs with unreliable hours put healthy food on the table and keep their families out poverty. In fact, SNAP keeps more than 8 million people out of poverty – including nearly 4 million children.

SNAP participation rates and costs decline in response to an improving economy and access to jobs, not more stringent time limits.

SNAP responds to changes in the economy. During the recession, as unemployment and poverty rates soared, SNAP participation rose as a response. As the economy slowly recovers and unemployment begins to fall, SNAP participation and costs too will decline. Today, SNAP caseloads decline at an increasing rate. SNAP caseloads fell by about 1 million people in both 2014 and 2015, 1.5 million in 2016, and 2 million in 2017. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) predicts SNAP spending will fall to 1995 levels in the next few years.^{iv} Although today's relatively low unemployment rate of 4.1 percent improves on the record high unemployment rates during the recession, 6.7 million workers remain unemployed and 5 million work part-time though they would prefer full-time work. Additionally, job lookers outnumber job openings.^v

Similar proposals were introduced in the House Farm Bill and not included in the final version.

The administration's proposed rule side-steps the decision made by congress to keep state waivers and flexibility. The Farm Bill includes funding for work training pilots designed to help SNAP recipients develop skills and find jobs, a better approach to equipping SNAP recipients with the tools they need to get out of poverty than the administration's proposed rulemaking.

For more information: policy@feedingamerica.org

i U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. *Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)*. 2018.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawds>

ii Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/chart-book-snap-helps-struggling-families-put-food-on-the-table>

iii Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-includes-earnings-incentives>

iv Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis.

v Bureau of Labor Statistics. February 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities analysis.