



Get To Know SNAP: FAQs about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Amber O'Connor, Food Policy Analyst, Every Texan

January 2026

What is SNAP?

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) helps people purchase food and garden seeds to grow their own food.¹ The U.S. Department of Agriculture created SNAP during the Great Depression of the 1930s to boost the economy, pay farmers fair wages, and help people afford food when they had little work or income. SNAP became a permanent program under President Johnson in 1964 to address widespread hunger that continued after the Great Depression.² In Texas, the state Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) administers SNAP applications, eligibility, enrollment, and benefits.

Who does SNAP help?

The program assists households earning less than 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For one person, 130% FPL is less than \$2,152 per month. For a family of four to be eligible, all income earners in the household cannot earn more than \$4,421 combined per month.³ HHSC authorizes the federal government to upload households' monthly SNAP benefits onto Lone Star Cards, the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards recipients use at grocery stores and other food retailers around the state where SNAP is accepted.

- **SNAP helps 11% of Texans.** Approximately 3.5 million of our neighbors receive SNAP benefits; many more are eligible for SNAP but are not enrolled.
- **SNAP helps working people.** In Texas, married households benefiting from SNAP are more likely to work than married households not receiving SNAP.
 - Most households receiving SNAP include working adults, but do not earn enough to meet essential needs without additional support. By increasing minimum wages, Texas lawmakers could reduce SNAP costs to our state and federal governments.
 - The average SNAP recipient household earns only \$33,000 per year. In comparison, the average household without SNAP earns over \$83,000.⁴

¹ "SNAP Food Benefits," Texas Health and Human Services Commission, February 9, 2026,

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/food/snap-food-benefits>.

² "A Short History of SNAP," Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture, February 9,

2026, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/history>.

"SNAP Food Benefits," Texas Health and Human Services Commission, February 9, 2026,

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/food/snap-food-benefits>.

⁴ "Employment & Income Data," *Texas SNAP Recipient Profile*, Every Texan, February 9, 2026,

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/0baf2e6448b94eed9984b3164885edd0/page/Employment-%26-Income?draft=true&org=EveryTexan>.



- **SNAP helps children.** More than 60% of SNAP recipients in Texas are households with children.⁵ Nearly 1.7 million children would go hungry without SNAP.
- **SNAP helps Texans with disabilities.** In 2023, nearly half of all SNAP recipients had a qualifying disability that prevented them from working.⁶
- **SNAP helps seniors.** Adults over 60 live in 33% of Texas' SNAP households.

What are the basic eligibility requirements for SNAP?

1. Household gross monthly income must be below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).⁷
2. Net household income (after deductions) must be below 100% of the poverty line.
3. Must live in the state in which applying.
4. Must be a citizen, a qualified legally-present immigrant, or a legally-present migrant worker.⁸
5. Applicant or household member has or needs a social security number.
6. Generally, people between the ages of 18–60 work and report work hours for at least 80 hours a month, or HHSC limits their SNAP eligibility to three months of benefits in any three-year period.
7. Students aged 18–49 must be enrolled at least part time in a post-high school education program like college or a vocational school that meets certain requirements.⁹

⁵ “PROTECT SNAP to Reduce Hunger and Strengthen Local Economies in TEXAS,” FRAC: Food Research & Action Center, February 9, 2026, https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAP_FactSheets_022525_TX44.pdf.

⁶ “Social and Economic Indicators,” *Texas SNAP Recipient Profile*, Every Texan, February 9, 2026, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/0baf2e6448b94eed9984b3164885edd0/page/-Social-%26-Economic-Indicators-?draft=true&org=EveryTexan>.

⁷ “Federal Poverty Level (FPL),” HealthCare.gov, February 9, 2026, <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/>.

⁸ After the passage of H.R. 1 on July 4, 2025, some qualified, lawfully-present immigrants are no longer eligible for SNAP. These newly-ineligible immigrants include any legally-present immigrants without the following statuses: Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs/Green Card Holders), Cuban/Haitian Entrants, and entrants under the Compact of Free Associations (COFA) treaty. Generally, all LPRs must have resided in the US for at least five years and have paid taxes for 40 quarters (or 20 quarters for working, married immigrants) to be eligible for SNAP. Immigrant children are not subject to the 40 quarters standard that adults must meet. “SNAP Provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill - Alien SNAP Eligibility - Question and Answer #1,” Food and Nutrition Service, US Department of Agriculture, February 9, 2026, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/obbb-alien-eligibility-qas1>.

⁹ College/vocational exemptions include working at least 20 hours per week, qualifying for a federal or state work study program, caring for a child under six years old or person with disabilities, being a single parent of a child under twelve years old, receiving unemployment or TANF benefits, or being in an employer approved training program.



Who has to work to receive SNAP benefits?

Most adults ages 18–60 must work to receive more than three months of SNAP benefits in a three-year period. Individuals or heads of household must work or volunteer for a minimum of 80 hours per month at the time of application.

What happens if someone cannot meet SNAP work requirements?

If applicants cannot meet the work requirement, HHSC may transfer the applicant's information to the Texas Workforce Commission for mandatory Employment & Training (E&T) program participation to help find appropriate employment, training, or volunteer work.¹⁰

HHSC will sanction an entire household from receiving SNAP benefits, for at least one and up to six months, if an individual mandated to work is unable to meet the requirements or report back on them.

During the sanction period, no one in the household can receive SNAP, including children, seniors, and people with disabilities who are normally exempt from work requirements. However, having children under 14 automatically exempts heads of household from work requirements. HHSC will not hold those households to the mandatory work requirements standard until all dependent children in the household are older than 14.¹¹

Work exemptions include pregnancy, disability, having a child dependent under 14,¹² and "Good Cause" exemptions. If households receive a letter of non-compliance due to work requirements violations, the applicant has 10 days to prove they have good cause for the violation, as defined by HHSC. Good causes include illness of the applicant or another household member, a change of job, or experiencing workplace discrimination.

SNAP applicants with an ongoing good cause exemption, like not having transportation for getting to or from work, should include evidence of those exemptions in their initial SNAP applications.¹³

How much do people receive in SNAP benefits?

¹⁰ Exemptions to the work requirements include the following statuses: caretaking a child under 14 or someone with disabilities, being pregnant, having a diagnosed disability, being 65 or older, being under 18 and in school, being under 14, participating in a volunteer or workfare program for at least 20 hours per week at the time of application, ongoing volunteering or workfare participation for at least 30 hours a week if starting after the application period, receiving unemployment benefits, or meeting one of the state's "good cause" exemptions. More on good cause exemptions is below.

¹¹ Amber O'Connor, "H.R. 1: Changes to Texas SNAP Benefits," Every Texan, July 31, 2025, <https://everytexan.org/2025/07/31/snap-texas-work-requirements-full-family-sanctions-hb1/>.

¹² See footnote 11 above.

¹³ "A-1860, Determining Good Cause," *Texas Works Handbook*, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, February 9, 2026, <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/handbooks/texas-works-handbook/a-1860-determining-good-cause>.



Benefits vary based on household size, income, and deductions. SNAP cost-of-living adjustments for 2026 make minimal increases to average monthly payments but do not match inflation rates.¹⁴ The average monthly SNAP benefit is around \$188 for a single person and around \$994 for a household of four.¹⁵

What can SNAP funds be spent on?

SNAP was designed so people experiencing financial hardship can purchase the same foods others without hardship are able to purchase. In 2025, Texas lawmakers restricted that flexibility.

Candy or sweetened drinks are no longer allowed for purchase using SNAP funds. The broad definition of “food,” from the program’s original design, meant that SNAP retailers did not have to determine what foods or drinks are eligible for purchase with SNAP dollars. This shift will lead to confusion between SNAP recipients and SNAP retailers. As a result, some retailers may stop accepting SNAP and leave under-served communities at risk of greater food insecurity.

What is SNAP fraud, and how often does it happen?

Rarely. It’s estimated that fraud affects less than 1% of SNAP funds per year nationally. Fraud occurs when a recipient claims or uses SNAP funds for which they are not eligible, when a person steals funds¹⁷ from an EBT card, or if a recipient sells their benefits to others.

The federal government penalizes states when they overpay or underpay a SNAP recipient. On average, SNAP error rates in Texas represent approximately 7% of benefits transfers annually.

Skimming, when an establishment or individual takes unauthorized funds from a payment card, can happen to any credit, debit, or EBT card without adequate security features. Some states have instituted microchipped EBT cards, like those that have become standard on most credit and debit cards. Chips make skimming, which exploits the magnetic strip on a card, nearly impossible.

The move from paper vouchers to EBT cards was fully implemented in Texas by 1995 and has made it more difficult for recipients to sell their benefits, further reducing user fraud.

What is happening with the federal government and SNAP?

Prior to July 2025, states paid 50% of the costs of administering SNAP and 0% of funds for benefits. H.R. 1, the 2025 federal budget bill, shifted more costs to the state. Instead of paying half of the administrative costs, states now pay 75% of administrative costs. Beginning in 2027,

¹⁴ *Does SNAP Cover the Cost of a Meal in Your County?* Urban Institute, July 16, 2025, <https://www.urban.org/data-tools/does-snap-cover-cost-meal-your-county>

¹⁵ “PROTECT SNAP to Reduce Hunger and Strengthen Local Economies in TEXAS,” FRAC: Food Research & Action Center, February 9, 2026, https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SNAP_FactSheets_022525_TX44.pdf.



states will be required to pay between 5–15% of the benefit costs. The rate of benefit costs shifted to states will vary based on its error rates.

The administrative cost shift will hit the Texas budget in FY 2027. The benefit costs shift will hit Texas' budget in FY 2028 and will be based on HHSC's SNAP error rate for FY 2026. The September 2026 Farm Bill and federal budget negotiations will be ideal times for Texas lawmakers to partner with their federal counterparts to delay or repeal these cost shifts.

Is SNAP the same as Summer EBT?

No! SNAP is a year-round nutrition support program for eligible people of all ages, and benefits vary based on household size and income. Summer EBT is a nutrition support program for eligible school-age children when school is out for summer.

State SNAP agencies automatically enroll school-aged children whose families receive SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or other income-based benefits programs into Summer EBT. Families receive an extra \$120 per child to help buy food while schools are closed for summer to provide the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs. Texas is 1 of 11¹⁶ states choosing not to participate in the Summer EBT program. The Legislature set aside \$60 million for Summer EBT in the 2026–2027 budget, but the governor line-item vetoed that appropriation.

¹⁶ USDA Food and Nutrition Services, *SunBucks (Summer EBT)*, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/summer/sunbucks>

