



## Increasing Eligible Older Adult Participation in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits

The 2023 National Council on Aging (NCOA) [Benefits Participation Map](#) data revealed that nationally, over 8.9 million older adults are eligible for but not enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These individuals are missing out on an average of \$2,256 SNAP benefits each year (\$188 per month) in 2023. The data also showed that there are wide variations among counties within some states.

In June 2025, NCOA launched a study, conducted in partnership with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), to better understand the factors that influence county-level participation rates in key public benefits programs. The study focused on ten counties across five states (California, Missouri, New York, Texas, and Washington) and included one high-participation county and a geographically adjacent low-participation county in each state. Below are key insights from the five high-SNAP participation rate counties.

### ABOUT THE STUDY

*The County Participation Rate Study aimed to better understand why older adult participation rates in Medicare Savings Program (MSP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) vary dramatically between counties within the same state. The goal was to identify factors that create enabling environments for older adults to access needed public benefits and reduce barriers to their uptake. The study relied on qualitative data gathered through interviews and listening sessions, as well as a review of the Benefits Participation Map and publicly available datasets.*

## CHANGES IN SNAP PARTICIPATION RATES

The comparison of 2018 and 2023 data from the NCOA Benefits Participation Map provides a unique snapshot of changes in SNAP benefits participation at county, state, and national levels. Below, we provide a side-by-side view of the two data snapshots and provide some key explanatory information about policy changes that may have impacted SNAP participation. **Table 1** shows 2018 and 2023 SNAP participation rates across the five study states and **Table 2** shows these rates across the five high-participation rate counties.

**Table 1. State SNAP Participation Rates, 2018 and 2023<sup>1</sup>**

	2018	2023
<b>National</b>	29.8%	37.7%
<b>California (CA)</b>	17.1%	54.7%
<b>Missouri (MO)</b>	26.5%	36.7%
<b>New York (NY)</b>	37.6%	56.3%
<b>Texas (TX)</b>	33.0%	41.2%
<b>Washington (WA)</b>	37.1%	40.6%

**Table 2. SNAP Participation Rates for High-Participation Rate Counties, 2018 and 2023**

	2018	2023
<b>National</b>	29.8%	37.7%
<b>San Francisco County, CA</b>	14.2%	67.6%
<b>St. Louis County, MO</b>	31.1%	40.5%
<b>New York City, NY</b>	47.9%	66.0%
<b>Duval County, TX</b>	43.2%	47.3%
<b>Clark County, WA</b>	38.2%	42.0%

Between 2018 and 2023, SNAP participation rates increased at the national, state, and county levels. At the state level, Texas and Washington saw small changes, Missouri and New York saw modest increases, and California's participation rate more than tripled. At the county level, Duval and Clark Counties saw small increases, New York City and St. Louis County had moderate improvements, and San Francisco County's rate was almost five times higher in 2023.

Several policy changes occurred at the State and Federal levels between 2018 and 2023 that help to explain SNAP participation rate increases. COVID-19 response laws allowed for temporary changes to eligibility and benefit amounts and certain administrative flexibilities to SNAP state agencies. For example, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) authorized emergency allotments, increased monthly benefit amounts, and allowed states to extend certification periods and simplify reporting requirements (e.g., waiving interviews, utilize telephone signatures).<sup>2</sup> At the state level, California passed legislation in 2018 that reversed its long-standing "cash-out" policy, allowing over 1 million individuals who were receiving SSI to become eligible for SNAP.<sup>3</sup> This policy change took effect in June 2019, significantly increasing older adult participation by SNAP statewide, as can be seen in the participation rate data in this report.

<sup>1</sup> National Council on Aging. (2026). Benefits enrollment performance map. National Council on Aging. <https://www.ncoa.org/benefits-participation-map/>

<sup>2</sup> Aussenberg, Randy A., Billings, Kara C., and Falk, Gene. (2022, August 5). *USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs: Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. (CRS Report No. R46681). <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46681>

<sup>3</sup> California Department of Social Services, <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calfresh/supplemental-security-income>

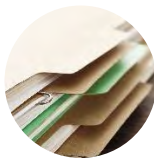
## EFFECTIVE OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Across and within states, counties with higher participation of older adults in benefit programs consistently displayed four strategies and outreach characteristics: local agency collaboration, effective implementation of state policies, strong engagement with community-based organizations, and local funding support.



**LOCAL AGENCY COLLABORATION.** Local coordination across program administrators (e.g., county departments, community-based organizations (CBOs), Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)) helps support older adults' benefits access by building trust at the staff and participant level, addressing issues in application processing, and ensuring that efforts are not duplicated.

**On the Ground:** In St. Louis, Missouri, participation in interagency committees and collaboratives has helped strengthen the reach of public benefits. Examples include public benefit advisory groups focused on SNAP and Medicaid and bi-monthly calls hosted by the Division of Senior and Disability Services to share promising practices.



**EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE POLICIES.** While states' policies to promote enrollment in benefit programs vary, counties with higher participation rates are characterized by strong implementation of state policies to ensure staff and partners at the local level understand and can implement them.

**On the Ground:** In Duval County, Texas, some benefits enrollment partners have backend access to MyTexasBenefits, allowing them to reset passwords, recover or merge accounts, and help clients navigate technical issues, which ultimately helps in reducing reliance on overloaded state staff.



**STRONG CBO ENGAGEMENT.** Building close partnerships with trusted community organizations helps to improve older adult benefits participation by offering culturally competent, neighborhood-based access to services.

**On the Ground:** The San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services partners with trusted organizations in the community to conduct targeted outreach to likely eligible older adults. Materials are written in multiple languages and reviewed by bilingual staff for culturally accurate translations. CBOs reframe messages around benefits enrollment in ways that resonate with clients. For example, focusing on monthly savings has proven more effective than general benefit descriptions, especially for low-income seniors.



**FUNDING.** Philanthropy and public agencies play a vital role in funding local CBOs and nonprofits to deliver culturally responsive services and innovative outreach strategies. This funding can help to bolster staff capacity for outreach and enrollment activities.

**On the Ground:** The Clark County, WA AAA serves five diverse counties (1 urban and 4 rural), and their resources vary widely. Clark County has the advantage of more infrastructure, programs (like adult daycare), and transit access than the more rural counties and can leverage those resources for effective outreach and assistance to eligible older adults.