

MONITORING POVERTY AND WELL-BEING IN NYC

SPOTLIGHT ON **SNAP**

Going Hungry:
Which New Yorkers
Are Leaving Food
on the Table?



Approximately 1 in 4
New York City households
eligible for SNAP benefits
does not receive them.

More than one-third of New Yorkers struggle to put food on the table at some point each year.⁴ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly known as food stamps) is widely considered one of the most effective hunger-fighting interventions, supplementing millions of New Yorkers' food budgets⁵ and pulling millions above the poverty line nationally every year.⁶

Yet, new data from the Robin Hood Poverty Tracker — a groundbreaking study of well-being and disadvantage in New York City that follows people over time — shows that approximately 1 in 4 eligible New Yorkers does not take advantage of SNAP. This adds up to more than 700,000 New Yorkers who are leaving food on the table.³ New York is falling behind the rest of the country; nationwide, the number of people missing out is 1 in 5.^{7,8}

Columbia University researchers collected new data to understand which eligible individuals were not receiving SNAP benefits. This brief highlights the findings about this participation gap, including the demographics of those New Yorkers who miss out on SNAP, as well as the links between major life events and SNAP enrollment.

The Robin Hood Poverty Tracker is a study of well-being and disadvantage in New York City that follows New Yorkers over time. Unlike typical surveys of poverty that take an annual snapshot, the Poverty Tracker aims to better understand the dynamics of disadvantage in New York City over time, collecting data on income, material hardships, health and other life changes every three months over a four-year period.

• This brief is based on a full report that will be available at <https://www.robinhood.org/programs/special-initiatives/poverty-tracker/> in December 2017

• For research methodology, visit: <https://robinhoodorg-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/11/robin-hood-poverty-tracker-spot-light-on-snap-appendix-winter-2017.pdf>

• For other Poverty Tracker reports, visit: <https://www.robinhood.org/programs/special-initiatives/poverty-tracker/>

¹ Authors: Ruben Rahman, Sophia Collyer, and Christopher Wimer, Columbia University

² Acknowledgments: Veyom Bahl, Ryan Dodge, Sarah Oltmans, and Amanda Stern, Robin Hood

³ This estimate includes all household members of eligible SNAP recipients who are not currently receiving benefits.

⁴ Source: [Robin Hood Poverty Tracker](#)

⁵ Source: [New York City Human Resources Administration](#)

⁶ Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

⁷ Source: [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)

⁸ Note that administrative data was used to estimate the SNAP participation rate at the national level and is therefore subject to less error from underreporting.

Who is forgoing SNAP?

Over **700,000** New Yorkers are eligible for SNAP benefits but are not enrolling.⁹
These New Yorkers share key characteristics. They are:

Living in low-poverty neighborhood



Individuals living in low-poverty neighborhoods are **25 percent** less likely to enroll in SNAP as compared to individuals living in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates.

Young



Individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 are **28 percent** less likely to enroll in SNAP than those age 45-64.

Single



Those without a spouse or partner are **9 percent** less likely to enroll than those with a spouse/partner in the household.

Childless



Those without children in the household are **21 percent** less likely to enroll in SNAP than those who have children in the household.

Foreign-Born



The foreign-born are **18 percent** less likely to enroll in SNAP than the U.S.-born.

Male



Men are **20 percent** less likely to enroll in SNAP than women.

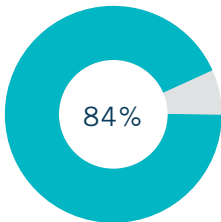
Generally, the Poverty Tracker survey demonstrates that the more advantaged a New Yorker is (e.g., college-educated, higher income, living in a less-poor neighborhood, etc.), the less likely they are to apply for SNAP even though they are eligible and could use the support. This pattern suggests that people who could benefit from the program either do not know about the program or do not want to take advantage of a program they perceive as being exclusively for “the poor.”

⁹ When we use the term “enroll,” we are referring to all New Yorkers who received SNAP and those who applied for SNAP but did not receive SNAP benefits despite their eligibility under the income test. Future research will examine why the latter group did not receive the benefit.

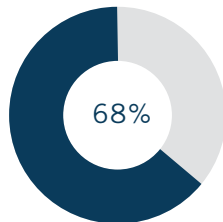
When do New Yorkers turn to SNAP?

New Yorkers who experience major life events or shocks are more likely to participate in SNAP. This suggests that the safety net is helping individuals when they need it most. Key shocks that had a statistically significant impact on SNAP uptake among those eligible included:

Change in child care



Changes in child care

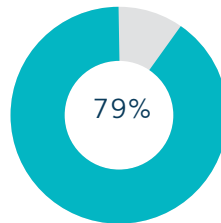


No changes in child care

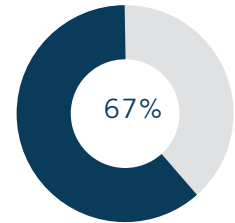
Those who had changes in child care arrangements were more likely to avail themselves of SNAP (84 percent) compared to those who did not have a change in their child care situation (68 percent).

Accident, illness, or injury

Those who had a significant accident, illness, or injury were more likely to enroll in SNAP (79 percent) compared to those who did not experience any such shocks (67 percent).

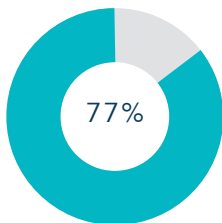


Experienced shock

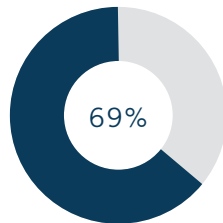


Did not experience shock

Victim of a crime



Victim of crime



Not a victim of crime

Those who were victims of crimes were more likely to enroll in SNAP (77 percent) compared to those who weren't crime victims (69 percent).

Likelihood of enrolling in SNAP by shocks

	Had Not Experienced Shock	Had Experienced Shock
Individual-level shocks		
Moved	69%	72%
Had a child	69%	83%
Someone moved into household	70%	68%
Someone moved out of household	70%	67%
Started a romantic relationship	70%	68%
Ended a romantic relationship	69%	74%
Changed child care**	68%	84%
Took time off work to talk with child's teacher	32%	18%
Household-Level Shocks		
Started a new job	71%	66%
Ended a job	69%	72%
Had a major expense	70%	68%
Had an increase in income	69%	76%
Had a decrease in income	68%	73%
Had an accident, illness, or injury*	67%	79%
Victim of a crime*	69%	77%
Arrested	69%	76%
Stopped by police	68%	76%
Lost or broke expensive belonging	31%	28%

† p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 for respective logistic model.

The table above shows how an individual's likelihood of enrolling in SNAP changes following a major life event or shock. Experiencing either an increase or decrease in income and starting or losing a job did not have a statistically significant impact on an individual's likelihood of applying for SNAP. This surprising outcome may merit further investigation.

Conclusion

This new study finds that the SNAP program serves many New Yorkers in need and is working to help buffer those who face shocks. But it also reveals that many needy New Yorkers — over 700,000 — are missing out on SNAP, perhaps because of lack of knowledge or worry that it is a program just meant for the poor. Closing the participation gap in SNAP could help put more food on New Yorkers' tables, relieving one source of hardship in New York City.