

Threat 4: Changes to SNAP

The law shifts the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit costs to states if their payment error rate — a measure of states' payment accuracy that includes both underpayments and overpayments — exceeds 6%, a threshold that 44 states are currently at or above. Higher error rates would require higher state payments, up to 15%. This cost-sharing mechanism begins in 2027. In total, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that the law will cut \$186 billion from SNAP over the next 10 years. OBBBA also broadens SNAP work requirements to include parents with children aged 14 and older, as well as older adults up to age 65. These work requirements mirror those in Medicaid, requiring individuals to report on work or other approved activities, such as pursuing education for 80 hours each month, to remain eligible. The law also eliminates eligibility for individuals in the country legally, including refugees and asylees, limiting SNAP eligibility to citizens, legal permanent residents, and certain Cuban and Haitian entrants.

RISK: Reduced Access to Food for College Students

According to the CBO, [1.1 million college students](#) rely on SNAP, and an estimated 2.2 million college students meet the criteria but are currently unable to access benefits due to the program's complexity. In addition to the loss of food assistance through SNAP, which will further exacerbate the basic needs challenges facing underserved students, there will also be impacts on college access and affordability. As states grapple with reduced federal funding and increased cost-sharing, they may resort to tuition increases and budget cuts for higher education and state financial aid. In short, cuts to SNAP will result in more college students being denied food assistance and going hungry. The cuts will also put pressure on state budgets, forcing lawmakers to redirect funds from education to SNAP to fill these budget holes.

How State Advocates Can Drive Change

Advocates should push state legislators to:

Increase state funding for food assistance: Expand state investments in food assistance programs to mitigate harm and ensure continued access for underserved families.

Track student insurance and food insecurity: Monitor rates of student health insurance coverage and food insecurity before and after implementing eligibility changes to understand short- and long-term effects and to guide interventions.

Strengthen SNAP employment and training programs: States can expand qualifying education and training opportunities to meet SNAP requirements. States can also broaden access to SNAP employment and training programs and approve more education, workforce training, and campus-based activities that help students and individuals from low-income backgrounds meet federal SNAP work requirements.

Simplify enrollment and renewal processes: Streamline application procedures, reduce renewal requirements, and minimize documentation burdens so eligible individuals can more easily access and maintain benefits.

Adopt universal child-care policies: Implement statewide universal child-care policies to help stabilize families facing rising basic needs insecurity and support parents' ability to work and pursue education. These policies are especially important for student-parents who may be affected by changes to Medicaid and SNAP. When student-parents lose health or food benefits, child-care costs become an even greater barrier to staying enrolled in school.

Example: [New Mexico](#) became the first state in the nation to offer no-cost universal child care to all families, regardless of income.

How Advocates Can Engage Institutions to Drive Change

Advocates should engage institutions to:

Fund campus food security initiatives: Create funding to support food security programs on campuses, such as food pantries, emergency food grants, and meal assistance, and target resources to students from low-income backgrounds.

Example: [New Mexico's](#) Higher Education Department awarded \$1 million in food security grants to colleges and universities to fund projects that address food insecurity among students, faculty, and staff.

Invest in basic needs supports: Fund campus-based programs that address food security, housing stipends, and child care to help students remain enrolled and succeed academically.

Collaborate with community-based organizations: Partner with organizations like [Swipe Out Hunger](#) to expand on-campus meal swipe donation programs and establish dedicated hunger relief funds.

Enable SNAP access at campus food locations: Allow students to utilize SNAP benefits at campus dining locations and grocery stores to improve food access and reduce barriers to using benefits.

Example: [Eastern Kentucky University](#) became the first university in Kentucky to integrate SNAP access into its dining system, Aramark, allowing students to use SNAP benefits at campus grocery stores.

Use FAFSA data to connect students with public benefits: With a student's consent, higher education institutions can share FAFSA data with federal, state, and local agencies to help students apply for public benefits. Institutions can also use FAFSA information to proactively inform students about programs they may be eligible for, such as SNAP, while states and institutions partner on data sharing and targeted outreach to increase SNAP uptake among college students.

- With a student's consent, institutions can share a student's FAFSA data with federal, state, or local agencies to help them apply for benefits.
- Institutions could use FAFSA data to inform students that they may be eligible for public benefits programs like SNAP.
- States and institutions should engage in data sharing and targeted outreach to increase SNAP uptake among college students.