



IMPROVE ACCESS TO SNAP TO REDUCE SENIOR HUNGER

SB 224 / HB 701

Texas ranks as the 5th highest state for senior food insecurity.

11% of Texas seniors are at risk of hunger.

50% of potentially-eligible Texas seniors are enrolled in SNAP.

Difficulty applying online and confusing documentation requirements are among the barriers hindering participation

63% of seniors served by the Feeding America network are forced to choose between food and medical care.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, Texas had the fifth-highest rate of senior food insecurity in the nation, with 11% of Texas seniors at risk for hunger. This figure has likely doubled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Food insecure seniors face an increased risk for health conditions like heart attack, asthma, and congestive heart failure, even when controlling for other factors such as income.

Not only does Texas have one of the highest rates of senior food insecurity, the state has low rates of senior enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Due to barriers in the application process, only half of the roughly 500,000 income-eligible Texas seniors are enrolled in SNAP.

“When you have to choose between helping your daughter buy her medicine or buying a gallon of milk... I’m going to give my daughter money to buy her medicine.”

NANCY, TEXAS CAREGIVER



PROBLEM

Several factors contribute to Texas' low SNAP participation rate among seniors, including difficulties navigating the application process, limited mobility and access to technology, and lack of awareness or knowledge of the program.

While the majority of Texans apply for SNAP benefits via an online portal, the process can be daunting for seniors. In a 2014 survey of food bank clients, 90% of Texas seniors were unwilling and/or unable to complete the SNAP application online, with 76% stating that they did not own a computer. A 2018 study showed that targeted outreach and application assistance tripled SNAP enrollment among people ages 60 and over.

SOLUTION

Increasing access to SNAP can decrease the negative effects of food insecurity, allowing seniors to age in place with dignity and good health. Increased food security among seniors will also lower State healthcare costs. For example, a 2017 study found that access to SNAP reduces a senior's likelihood of admission to a hospital by 14% and a nursing home by 23%.

The Texas Legislature can improve SNAP access for seniors and people with a disability by:

- Implementing a simplified application process. Households composed solely of seniors and/or persons with a disability with no earned income can be certified for 36 months using a shortened application form with limited documentation requirements.
- Using data matching with Medicaid to identify seniors that are eligible but not enrolled in SNAP. Data matching conducted by the state would enable community partners to better identify and assist seniors on Medicaid in applying for SNAP.



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