

Congress Should Address the Student Hunger Cliff

Public universities recognize food insecurity as a growing concern for their students and campus communities, which has significant implications for student success and health. Unfortunately, an upcoming hunger cliff could make matters far worse.

Throughout the pandemic, a temporary change in eligibility requirements for SNAP, the federal government's signature nutrition assistance program, enabled up to three million students to access the program for the first time. **But, with those flexibilities expiring on May 11, there is an immediate need for Congress to act so critical support is within reach for low-income students.**

BACKGROUND

Far too many college students lack reliable access to nutritious food, impeding efforts to advance their education and further their careers. This was true even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—the Hope Center found in its 2020 survey that 43 percent of students at two- and four-year colleges reported facing food insecurity in the month before the national emergency was declared.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic students faced even greater need, and higher education leaders have worked to [identify additional means](#) of supporting those needs on campus. Leveraging the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal government's signature program providing nutrition assistance to low-income individuals and families, has been a key tool for addressing food insecurity on college campuses.

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Traditionally, college students enrolled at least half-time in school have been ineligible for SNAP unless they meet one of several exemptions. During the pandemic, however, a change in federal law made more students temporarily eligible for SNAP benefits—those eligible for state or federal work study or have an estimated family contribution of \$0 are eligible as long as other program requirements are met. Up to three million students are newly eligible for SNAP following the change in federal law.

With temporary eligibility requirements set to end 30 days after the pandemic declaration expires on May 11, college students must recertify now to retain their SNAP benefits. To access these benefits while they remain in effect, a student not currently receiving SNAP must apply for benefits no later than June 9, and students already receiving SNAP must recertify for their benefits by June 30. Once these dates pass, however, the temporary flexibilities will end, and thousands of college students will once again face tremendous barriers to accessing SNAP.

SOLUTION

Congress can increase low-income college students' access to SNAP by permanently expanding eligibility to students who are eligible for federal or state work-study programs, who meet the financial eligibility criteria for the maximum Federal Pell Grant, or are an independent student whose household is otherwise eligible for SNAP.