

The SNAP Nutrition Security Act of 2023:

Measuring and Reporting How SNAP Impacts Access to Nutritious Food

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke are the leading causes of death and disability in the United States.¹ Chronic diseases create a serious burden for individuals and society, negatively impacting quality of life, health care costs, and military readiness.^{2,3,4} One of the leading risk factors for chronic disease development is low diet quality.⁵ Although people across all income levels in the U.S. generally struggle to achieve a healthy diet, individuals with lower incomes face systemic, political, and structural barriers that inequitably limit household food choice and financial resources.⁶ These systemic factors can in turn lead to adverse consequences for health and wellbeing. Currently in the United States, half of our population has pre-diabetes or has type-2 diabetes.⁷ People experiencing food insecurity and people with lower incomes are disproportionately impacted by chronic disease.⁸ All told, the economic cost of nutrition-related chronic diseases has been estimated at \$16 trillion over the period from 2011 to 2020.⁹

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a powerful food safety net program with many positive public health impacts. The program helps to reduce poverty, health care expenditures, the risk of chronic diseases later in life, and food insecurity.^{10,11} Food security is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”¹² There is a growing interest in additionally evaluating SNAP participants’ ability to specifically acquire healthy food. This is related to the concept of “nutrition security” which USDA defines as “consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being.”¹³ Nutrition security is closely related to yet distinct from food security. Nutrition security builds on food security by emphasizing the coexistence of hunger and diet-related chronic disease that disproportionately impacts individuals with low incomes.

The [SNAP Nutrition Security Act of 2023](#) would:

- Measure and annually report on nutrition security and diet quality, as USDA currently does for food security.
- Define diet quality.
- Add food and nutrition security reporting to annual state SNAP-Ed reports.
- Collect and report every four years on national and state SNAP sales data. Data will be collected in the aggregate and de-identified to protect the identity of SNAP shoppers and retailers.
- Add improving nutrition security and diet quality to Congress’s declaration of policy for SNAP, which provides Congressional rationale for the program.

The need to define, measure, and report on nutrition security and diet quality

The USDA's definition of nutrition security focuses on access to more *nutritious* food, where food security focuses on access to *all* foods. Both are critically important measures for understanding SNAP's impact and identifying ways to mitigate hunger and malnutrition while improving access to healthy food to mitigate chronic disease disparities. This bill also defines and requires reporting on "diet quality," which is a distinct term from nutrition security referring to meeting key recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The USDA currently does not provide consistent data or reporting on nutrition security or diet quality, and as such the impact of SNAP on nutrition security is unknown.¹⁴

The USDA's system for monitoring food security is more highly developed. The agency monitors the extent and severity of food insecurity in U.S. households through an annual, nationally representative survey sponsored and analyzed by the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS).¹⁵ This legislation would add nutrition security to the USDA's existing and annual reporting which will generate, for the first time, data needed to determine how SNAP impacts nutrition security.

Helping states determine ways to improve food and nutrition security through SNAP

The bill (S.2326) also requires annual reporting on food and nutrition security in state SNAP Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Grant Program (SNAP-Ed) reports. Currently, annual SNAP-Ed reports do not include data on food security status or nutrition security because metrics are still being established. This bill would add both to annual SNAP-Ed reporting which will help states determine how they can improve food and nutrition security.

Collecting de-identified data from retailers to better understand SNAP's impact on nutrition security

Understanding and strengthening the impact of SNAP also requires more regular data collection. The bill sets forth a nationally- and state-representative SNAP sales report every four years. Sales data would be de-identified and reported in the aggregate to protect the identity of both SNAP participants and retailers. This report would give insight into affordability of foods, the timing of purchases within a monthly benefit issuance cycle, and the types of products typically purchased overall, in person and online. Knowing when certain foods are purchased and what type of food is being purchased can help inform opportunities to improve food and nutrition security. For example, data on fruit and vegetable purchases may be used to inform the need for incentive programs.

For more information, please contact the Center for Science in the Public Interest at policy@cspinet.org

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- ⁵ National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2023.
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