U.S. Government Accountability Office

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Federal Actions Needed to Help Veterans Access Benefits

GAO-27-108111
Q&A Report to Congressional Requesters
October 1, 2026

Accessible Version

Why This Matters

According to a 2023 RAND report, 1.4 million veterans lived in food-insecure households on average each year from 2015 to 2020, meaning they did not have enough food for an active and healthy life. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—the largest federal nutrition assistance program—provides monthly benefits to low-income households to buy food at authorized retailers. While SNAP aims to reduce food insecurity, research shows that food-insecure veterans are less likely than their nonveteran peers to participate in the program.

SNAP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA)—formerly known as the Food and Nutrition Service—in partnership with states. States have the option to conduct SNAP outreach to increase awareness of the program among low-income households. States may opt to target SNAP outreach to certain groups, such as veterans.

At the federal level, USDA and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have collaborated in recent years on issues related to veteran food security. VA operates the nation's largest health care system through its Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and serves about 9 million veterans annually. VA medical facilities include 170 VA medical centers and 1,193 outpatient clinics, which can assist veterans experiencing food insecurity.

We were asked to review how states have targeted SNAP outreach to veterans in their annual outreach plans and worked with veterans service organizations and other nongovernmental organizations to help connect veterans to SNAP. This report provides information on state and federal efforts to conduct SNAP outreach to potentially eligible veterans as well as challenges selected stakeholders have faced when conducting outreach to veterans.

Key Takeaways

- In fiscal year 2026, 47 states had a SNAP outreach plan. Most of those states (39 of 47) identified veterans as a target group in their plan. States included a range of outreach activities in their plans, such as providing veterans service organizations with information about SNAP eligibility and how to apply.
- However, selected stakeholders we interviewed reported that veterans' misconceptions about SNAP and difficulties with the application process hinder outreach efforts. USDA has a webpage for military families and veterans that includes basic information about SNAP, but it lacks more detailed resources such as a handout or talking points dispelling SNAP myths, including whether veterans receiving VA benefits are eligible for SNAP. Several stakeholders said such outreach materials would aid their efforts to help connect veterans to the program. In addition, USDA's SNAP

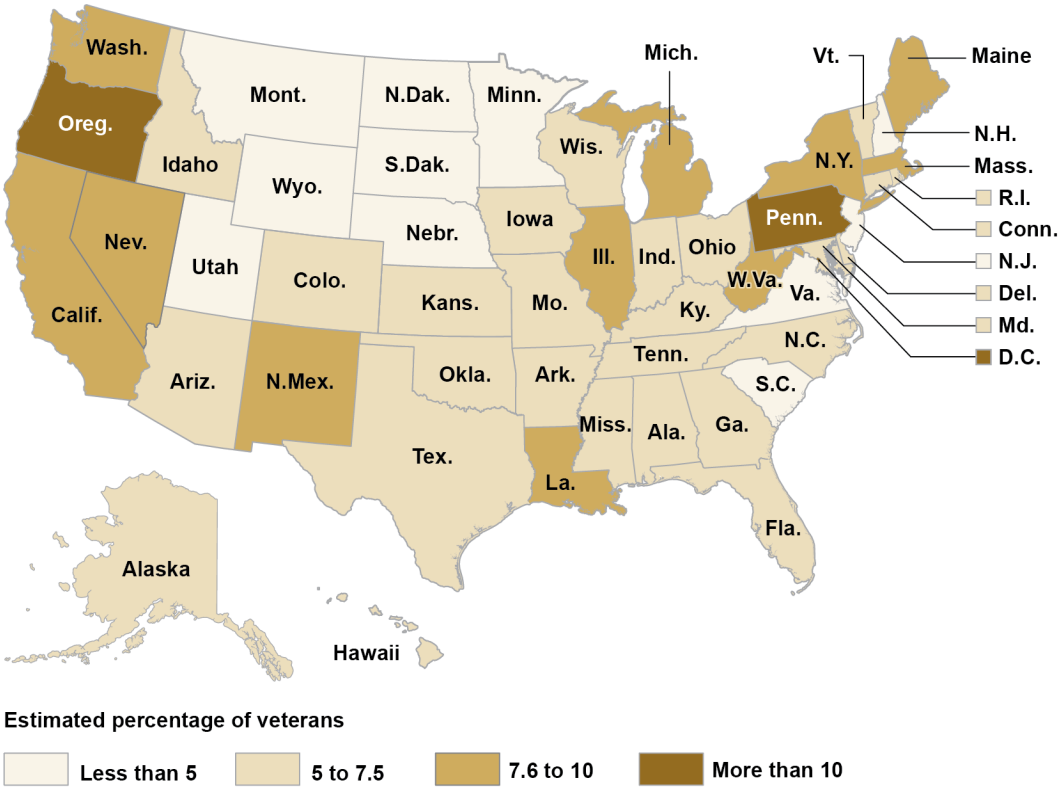
eligibility website includes outdated information about whether veterans are subject to time-limited SNAP benefits if they do not meet work requirements.

- USDA and VA have both taken actions in recent years to increase awareness of SNAP among potentially eligible veterans. For example, staff at VA medical centers have been screening veterans for food insecurity since 2017 and providing information about SNAP directly or through community partners. In addition, USDA and VA's VHA signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) in September 2023 to formalize their collaborative efforts on veteran food security-related initiatives. These efforts slowed in April 2025 following the loss of key staff at USDA, according to VHA officials. Agency officials told us they consider the MOA to still be in place; however, the agencies have not reviewed the MOA as specified in the agreement, making the current status of the MOA unclear.
- We recommend that USDA develop additional SNAP outreach materials tailored to veterans and update its SNAP eligibility website to reflect recent changes to SNAP rules. We also recommend that USDA and VA ensure a formal mechanism is in place to collaborate on their efforts to address veteran food insecurity. This could involve reviewing and updating the existing MOA as needed.

What share of veterans receive SNAP benefits?

An estimated 6.9 percent of veterans lived in households that received SNAP benefits in 2024, according to our analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent American Community Survey data. The share of veterans in households receiving SNAP benefits in each state ranged from a low of 2.2 percent in South Dakota to a high of 12.7 percent in Oregon. In 37 states, the share was between 5 and 10 percent (see fig. 1). See appendix I for the national and state estimates with the 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 1: Estimated Percentage of Veterans Who Lived in Households Receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits by State in 2024



Source: GAO analysis of American Community Survey Data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Map Resources. | GAO-27-108111

Accessible Data for Figure 1: Estimated Percentage of Veterans Who Lived in Households Receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits by State in 2024

Estimated percentage of veterans	State
Less than 5	Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, Utah, Wyoming
5 to 7.5	Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Wisconsin
7.6 to 10	California, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Washington, West Virginia
More than 10	District of Columbia, Oregon, Pennsylvania

Source: GAO analysis of American Community Survey Data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Map Resources. | GAO-27-108111

What is the process to apply for and maintain SNAP benefits?

All individuals, including veterans, must complete several steps to apply for and maintain SNAP benefits. To apply for SNAP, individuals must first apply to their state SNAP agency online, through a paper application, or by providing the required information over the phone. They must also complete an eligibility interview in person or over the phone and submit documentation to provide proof of certain information in their application.

To be eligible for SNAP, an applicant's household income must fall below a certain threshold. Applicants are also subject to certain non-financial rules, including rules related to residency and crime-related restrictions. Generally, to be eligible for SNAP benefits under federal law, a household's gross income cannot exceed 130 percent of the federal poverty level.[1]

To maintain SNAP benefits, recipients generally must adhere to work requirements, unless they meet an exception.[2] Recipients are also generally expected to report certain changes in their household circumstances to their state SNAP agency.

What is the SNAP time limit and how are veterans affected?

The SNAP time limit restricts able-bodied adults without dependents to 3 months of benefits in any 36-month period if they do not meet work requirements. From September 2023 to July 2025, there were exceptions to the SNAP time limit for certain able-bodied adults without dependents, including veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and those 24 and younger who aged out of foster care.[3] These exceptions were removed by Pub. L. No. 119-21, commonly known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA).[4]

Veterans are now subject to the SNAP time limit unless they meet a different exception. However, USDA's SNAP eligibility webpage contains outdated information that suggests veterans may not be subject to the SNAP time limit. As of September 2026, FNA had not updated its SNAP eligibility webpage to reflect the changes to the SNAP time limit exceptions made by the OBBBA. The webpage has a banner at the top indicating that FNA is in the process of updating the page with the changes made by the OBBBA. Federal internal control standards state that agency management should communicate relevant and quality information externally so that appropriate external parties can help the entity achieve its objectives.[5] Until USDA updates its website, veterans seeking information on SNAP eligibility rules will receive misleading information.

What is SNAP outreach?

In this report, we use the term "SNAP outreach" to refer to informational activities that increase awareness of SNAP among low-income households and support for individuals who apply to the program, such as assistance filling out the application. State SNAP agencies often partner with local community-based organizations to conduct outreach.

States have the option to conduct SNAP outreach and can receive federal reimbursement for a portion of their costs if they have an outreach plan approved by FNA. Currently, FNA reimburses up to 50 percent of the state's allowable administrative costs, including the salaries of staff conducting outreach activities. On October 1, 2026, the federal reimbursement will decrease to 25 percent, in accordance with a provision in the OBBBA. As a result, the state share of SNAP administrative costs will increase to 75 percent.

FNA guidance suggests that states' SNAP outreach plans describe the specific outreach activities they plan to conduct, target audiences, and goals. In addition, FNA directs states to complete a SNAP outreach report annually and suggests states include information on their accomplishments and any challenges that affected their ability to implement the outreach plan.

In recent years, FNA issued SNAP outreach priority memos that encouraged states to focus on certain underrepresented or vulnerable populations. FNA encouraged states to prioritize SNAP outreach to veterans each fiscal year from 2022 through 2025. FNA officials said the agency does not plan to issue an outreach memo for fiscal year 2026 or 2027.

How many states described conducting SNAP outreach to veterans in their plans?

Of the 47 states with an FNA-approved SNAP outreach plan in fiscal year 2026, most states (39) identified veterans as a target group in their plan.[6] This included states with high and low rates of food insecurity. Several states provided more details on their planned SNAP outreach for veterans (see table 1).

Table 1: Examples of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach for Veterans Described in State Plans for Fiscal Year 2026

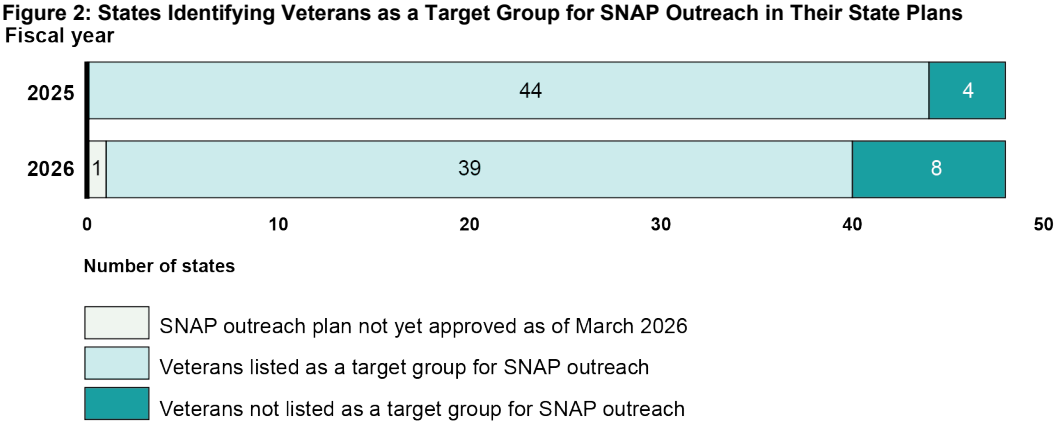
Description of outreach activity	Number of states
Deliver information about SNAP and application assistance at veterans facilities, programs, or centers, such as Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers, VA transitional housing, and veterans centers on college campuses	13
Provide information or training about SNAP to government or nonprofit organizations that work with veterans	11
Provide information about SNAP at veterans events, such as a VA Stand Down event[a] or a veteran resource fair	6

Source: GAO review of fiscal year 2026 state SNAP outreach plans. | GAO-27-108111

[a]A Stand Down event is typically a 1- to 3-day event that provides supplies and services to veterans experiencing homelessness, such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, and other assistance.

Fewer states identified veterans as a target group in their outreach plan for fiscal year 2026 compared with fiscal year 2025 (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: States Identifying Veterans as a Target Group for SNAP Outreach in Their State Plans



Source: GAO analysis of state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach plans. | GAO-27-108111

Accessible Data for Figure 2: States Identifying Veterans as a Target Group for SNAP Outreach in Their State Plans

Number of states	Fiscal year 2025	Fiscal year 2026
SNAP outreach plan not yet approved as of March 2026	0	1
Veterans listed as a target group for SNAP outreach	44	39
Veterans not listed as a target group for SNAP outreach	4	8

Source: GAO analysis of state Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach plans. | GAO-27-108111

What SNAP outreach activities for veterans have selected states reported?

Stakeholders from our three selected states reported conducting SNAP outreach at food banks, on college campuses, and at veterans' events (see table 2).

Table 2: Examples of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach Activities for Veterans in Selected States

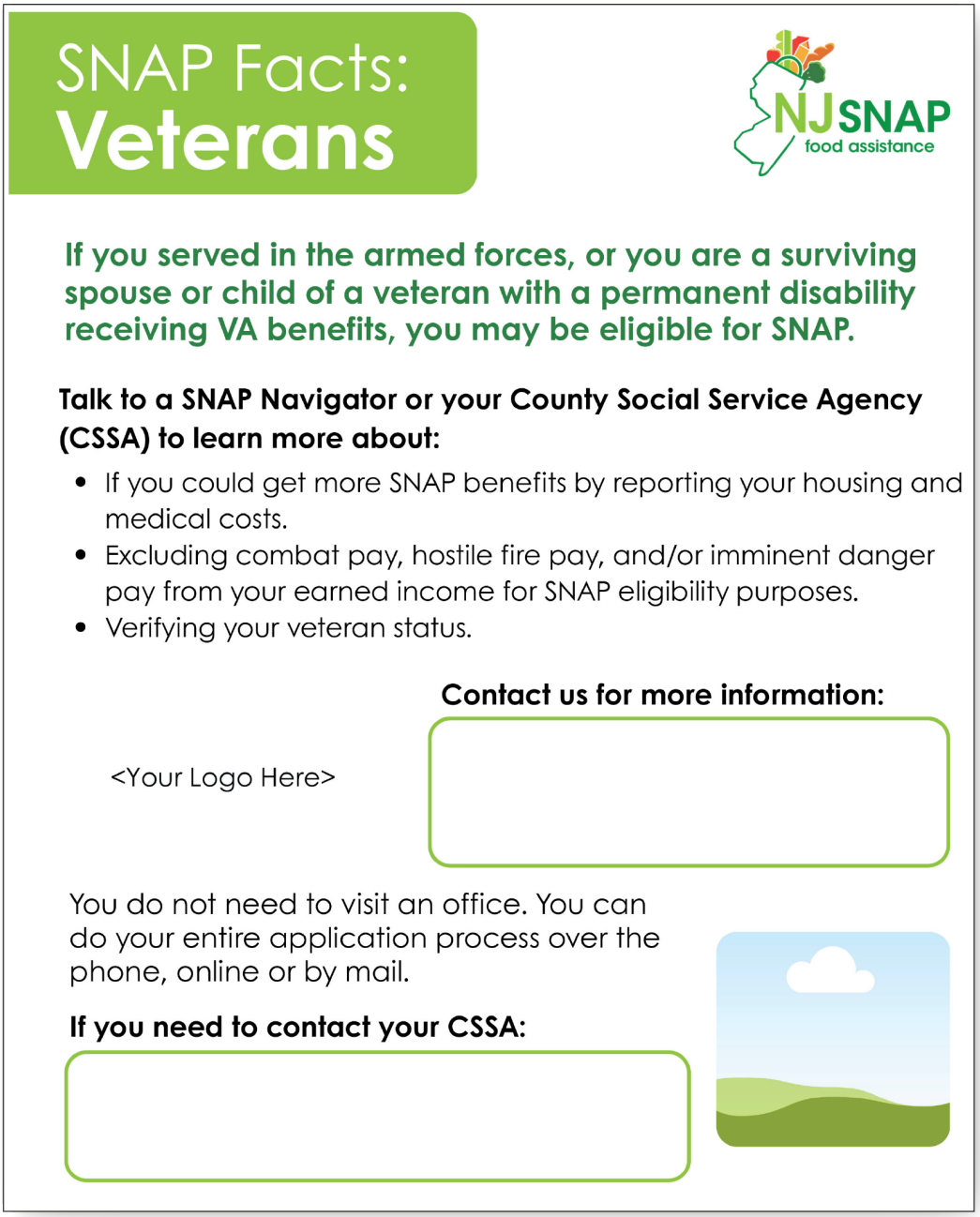
State	Description of outreach activities
Missouri	One of the state's SNAP outreach partners conducted SNAP outreach to student veterans at several 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. This outreach included disseminating SNAP materials and providing application assistance over the phone and in person, including at on-campus veteran centers.
New Jersey	The state SNAP agency customized SNAP outreach materials for veterans. The state agency also provided training on SNAP to veterans benefits officers at the state's Office of Veterans Affairs. The state agency partnered with several organizations called SNAP Navigators, which provide information about SNAP and free application assistance to veterans and others. For example, one of the state's SNAP Navigators conducted outreach to veterans and others who visit local food banks. SNAP Navigator staff also conducted SNAP outreach at veterans' events, such as a veteran resource fair held near a military base, and provided information about SNAP to staff at Department of Veterans Affairs outpatient clinics to share with patients.
Oregon	The state SNAP agency worked with veterans' groups to staff a SNAP outreach table at veterans' events. One of the state's SNAP outreach partners provided information about SNAP and application assistance to student veterans at on-campus veteran centers.

Source: GAO interviews with selected state officials and SNAP outreach partners and review of relevant documentation. | GAO-27-108111

Note: GAO selected these three states because they cover different geographic areas, vary in the percentage of veterans in the state receiving SNAP benefits, and were actively connecting veterans with SNAP benefits based on information in their SNAP outreach plans.

Figure 3 shows an excerpt of a flyer that New Jersey's state SNAP agency created as part of its customized SNAP outreach materials for veterans. Organizations, including SNAP Navigators, can customize the flyer with their contact information.

Figure 3: Excerpt from New Jersey's Flyer for Communicating to Veterans About Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits



Source: State SNAP agency documentation. | GAO-27-108111

Accessible Data for Figure 3: Excerpt from New Jersey's Flyer for Communicating to Veterans About Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits

SNAP Facts: **Veterans**

NJ SNAP food assistance

If you served in the armed forces, or you are a surviving spouse or child of a veteran with a permanent disability receiving VA benefits, you may be eligible for SNAP.

Talk to a SNAP Navigator or your County Social Service Agency (CSSA) to learn more about:

- If you could get more SNAP benefits by reporting your housing and medical costs.
- Excluding combat pay, hostile fire pay, and/or imminent danger pay from your earned income for SNAP eligibility purposes.
- Verifying your veteran status.

<Your Logo Here> **Contact us for more information:**

You do not need to visit an office. You can do your entire application process over the phone, online or by mail.

If you need to contact your CSSA:

Source: State SNAP agency documentation. | GAO-27-108111

Some stakeholders reported strategies that they found helpful when conducting SNAP outreach:[7]

- **Work with a trusted source to deliver information about SNAP.** For example, one SNAP outreach partner said trusted members of the veterans' community can be more effective at providing veterans information about SNAP because they will better understand the veteran's situation.
- **Make one-on-one assistance available, including in person.** Another SNAP outreach partner noted that many people feel vulnerable when applying for SNAP benefits. It may help to sit down with someone from the community and complete the process together.
- **Use technology to facilitate communication.** Use of a texting platform improved a SNAP outreach partner's ability to follow up with individuals interested in applying for SNAP. Officials from one state SNAP agency reported investing in a mobile SNAP application and using an automated system to send interview appointment reminders.

What factors can affect whether food-insecure veterans can receive SNAP?

Stakeholders we interviewed said that several factors, such as income limits and work requirements, may present challenges to food-insecure veterans receiving SNAP benefits.

Income limits. Several stakeholders said that veterans may not be eligible for SNAP because they receive income from other sources, such as VA disability benefits, that raises their income above the eligibility threshold for SNAP. A 2023 RAND study found that food-insecure veterans who received VA disability payments and other VA benefits had lower SNAP participation rates compared to those who did not receive VA benefits.[8] According to the most recent USDA report on the characteristics of households receiving SNAP, 0.6 percent of SNAP households had income from veterans benefits in fiscal year 2024.[9]

Work requirements. Some veterans may not be able to maintain eligibility for SNAP because they cannot meet work requirements, according to some stakeholders we interviewed. For example, veterans experiencing homelessness may have difficulty finding employment, and veterans living in rural areas may have limited employment opportunities. We previously reported that a higher percentage of veterans live in rural areas compared to nonveterans.[10]

Access to technology. Some stakeholders told us that veterans experiencing homelessness may not have access to a cell phone or a permanent mailing address, which can make it more difficult for them to apply and meet program requirements.

What challenges do stakeholders cite facing when conducting SNAP outreach to veterans?

Stakeholders cited various challenges conducting SNAP outreach to veterans, including overcoming veterans' reluctance to seek help and misconceptions about SNAP, navigating the complicated application process, and maintaining contact with certain veterans. Some of these challenges were similar to those that states discussed in their annual SNAP outreach reports to FNA, indicating that these challenges are not unique to veterans.

- **Reluctance to seek help.** Several stakeholders said veterans may be reluctant to apply for SNAP benefits due to either personal pride or stigma about the program. For example, one stakeholder said a veteran may find it

difficult to accept help since, as a former service member, they were often providing assistance to others.

- **Misconceptions about SNAP.** Several stakeholders said addressing veterans' misconceptions about SNAP eligibility was a challenge. For example, some stakeholders said that veterans may believe that applying for SNAP would result in them taking a benefit away from someone else or that they would be ineligible if they already receive other benefits, such as VA benefits.
- **Complicated application process.** Several stakeholders said that the SNAP application is complicated, which may deter veterans from applying. In addition, some SNAP outreach providers found it difficult to help veterans through the application process. For example, one stakeholder said that the application questions are complicated and request personal information that can be burdensome to provide. Another stakeholder said that their state's application is 12 pages and can be intimidating for some veterans to complete.
- **Communication challenges.** Some stakeholders said it was challenging to maintain contact with veterans to help them obtain documentation and participate in the interview with their state SNAP agency, a required step in the application process. For example, one stakeholder said it can be difficult to follow up with veterans experiencing homelessness, which may result in the veteran missing important notifications about applying or recertifying for benefits.

In some cases, states reported similar challenges in their SNAP outreach reports to FNA, which included information about general challenges faced when conducting SNAP outreach in fiscal year 2024 (see examples in text box).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach Challenges Described in State Reports for Fiscal Year 2024

- Thirteen states reported that SNAP outreach partners faced communication challenges, such as difficulty following up with individuals due to changes in the individuals' contact information, inconsistent telephone access, or lack of response.
- Five states reported challenges related to program stigma and misconceptions about SNAP. For example, one state reported that program stigma made it challenging for a food bank to raise awareness of SNAP. Another state reported challenges countering misconceptions about SNAP eligibility, such as the view that individuals would need to give up their assets to be eligible for the program.

Source: GAO review of fiscal year 2024 state SNAP outreach reports. | GAO-27-108111

Several stakeholders said that it would be helpful to have more SNAP outreach materials tailored to veterans. For example, a representative from one veterans service organization said it would be helpful to have information about whether SNAP treats VA benefits as income when determining SNAP eligibility and where to direct individuals needing assistance. Representatives from a military family organization suggested additional SNAP outreach materials should aim to reduce stigma and confusion with veteran-centered messaging and myth-busting, especially about VA benefits and SNAP. A representative from another veterans service organization suggested training on SNAP that includes talking points they could use to communicate more effectively with veterans. Other suggestions we heard from stakeholders include SNAP materials tailored to veterans (e.g., brochures or templates) and a frequently asked questions handout that addresses misconceptions veterans may have about SNAP eligibility.

FNA has a website for military and veteran families with basic information about SNAP and links to state SNAP agencies where service members and veterans can apply. FNA officials said the agency has not developed other SNAP outreach

materials tailored to veterans within the past 5 years, including training or talking points that organizations can use. FNA officials said states and outreach partners in the field are typically responsible for creating tailored outreach materials.

USDA and VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) have a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with a shared goal to increase veteran food security. One of the objectives of the MOA is to equip staff interfacing with veterans with the tools needed to effectively communicate about applicable food and nutrition programs, such as SNAP. Under the MOA, USDA and VA are jointly responsible for producing training, informational webinars, or educational materials on an annual basis.

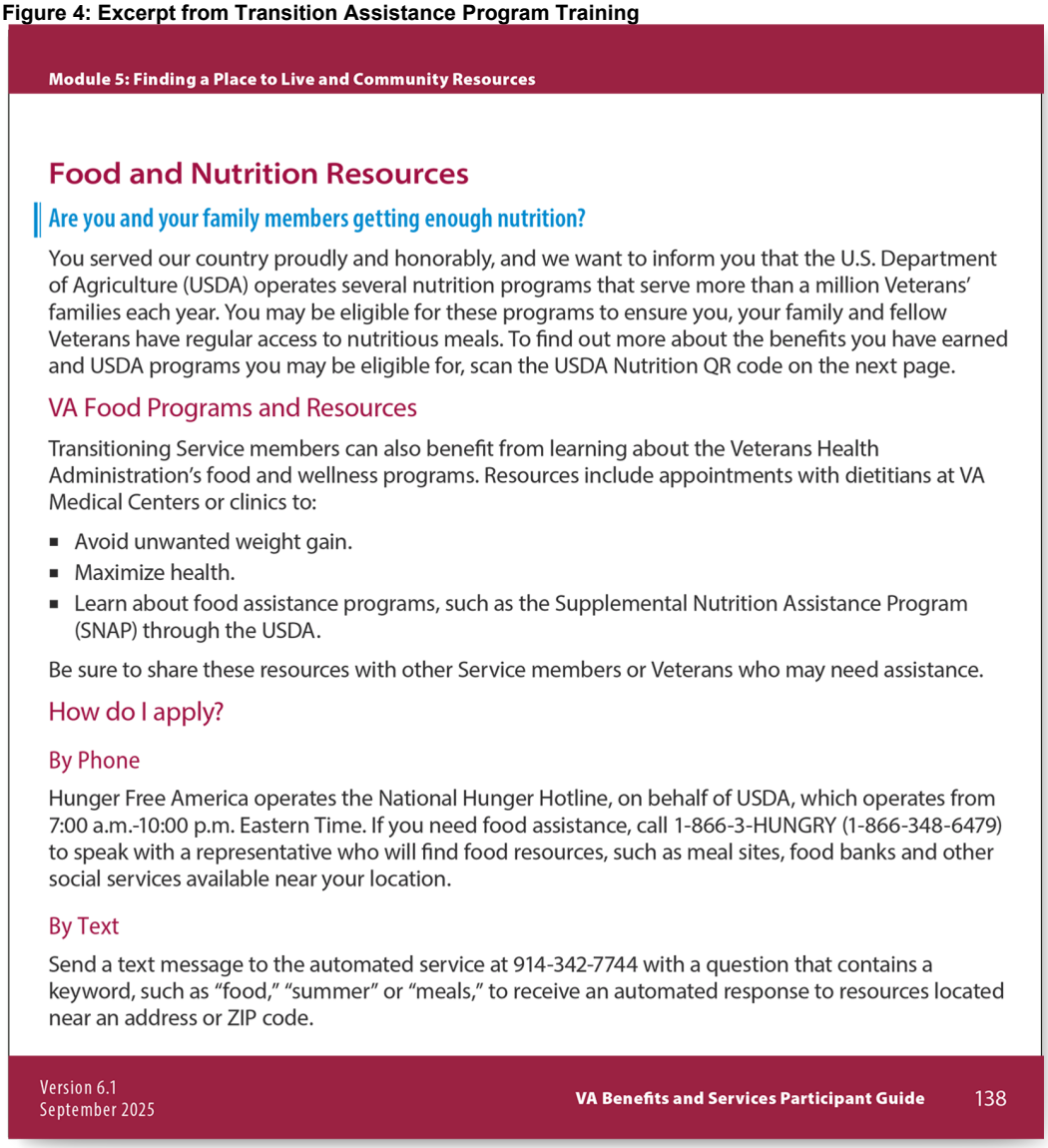
Given the recent changes to the SNAP time limit exception for veterans at the national level, it is especially important for FNA to work with VA to develop SNAP outreach materials targeted to veterans that could be adapted by states and outreach partners. Providing such materials could help ensure that these trusted messengers have accurate, up-to-date, and veteran-friendly information on the program to share with veterans. These materials could be posted on USDA's website for military and veteran families and disseminated to veterans service organizations. Developing additional SNAP outreach materials tailored to veterans would also help the agencies reach their shared goal to increase veteran food security.

How does VA provide information about SNAP to service members and newly separated veterans transitioning to civilian life?

Since 2021, VA has provided information about SNAP in two programs aimed at helping service members and newly separated veterans transition to civilian life: the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Solid Start Program.

TAP. An introduction to SNAP is included in one of the in-person required TAP training courses, according to VA officials. TAP is provided to service members prior to leaving the military (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Excerpt from Transition Assistance Program Training



Module 5: Finding a Place to Live and Community Resources

Food and Nutrition Resources

Are you and your family members getting enough nutrition?

You served our country proudly and honorably, and we want to inform you that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) operates several nutrition programs that serve more than a million Veterans' families each year. You may be eligible for these programs to ensure you, your family and fellow Veterans have regular access to nutritious meals. To find out more about the benefits you have earned and USDA programs you may be eligible for, scan the USDA Nutrition QR code on the next page.

VA Food Programs and Resources

Transitioning Service members can also benefit from learning about the Veterans Health Administration's food and wellness programs. Resources include appointments with dietitians at VA Medical Centers or clinics to:

- Avoid unwanted weight gain.
- Maximize health.
- Learn about food assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through the USDA.

Be sure to share these resources with other Service members or Veterans who may need assistance.

How do I apply?

By Phone

Hunger Free America operates the National Hunger Hotline, on behalf of USDA, which operates from 7:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m. Eastern Time. If you need food assistance, call 1-866-3-HUNGRY (1-866-348-6479) to speak with a representative who will find food resources, such as meal sites, food banks and other social services available near your location.

By Text

Send a text message to the automated service at 914-342-7744 with a question that contains a keyword, such as "food," "summer" or "meals," to receive an automated response to resources located near an address or ZIP code.

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Source: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) documentation. | GAO-27-108111

Accessible Data for Figure 4: Excerpt from Transition Assistance Program Training

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Source: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) documentation. | GAO-27-10811

Solid Start. Solid Start is an outreach program launched in 2019 to help connect new veterans to their benefits and other available supports. Solid Start program representatives began proactively emailing information about SNAP to newly separated veterans in December 2021 in response to a prior GAO recommendation.[11] See figure 5 for scripted questions and information that Solid Start representatives can use when discussing SNAP with veterans. Since January 1, 2022, 30 recently separated service members have asked for assistance with food insecurity through the Solid Start program. VA officials said that this low number may reflect the fact that veterans find out about SNAP through other sources.

Figure 5: Examples of How Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Information Is Shared with Veterans Through the Solid Start Program

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs documentation. GAO (icons). | GAO-27-108111

Accessible Data for Figure 5: Examples of How Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Information Is Shared with Veterans Through the Solid Start Program

Icon of person and phone

“I am sorry you are dealing with these financial challenges. Is this also impacting your ability to purchase food for yourself and your family?”

“Are you and your family able to purchase the food you need?”

“There are resources available to help with food security concerns. Is it okay if I provide those resources to you via email?”

Email icon

If you or your family are experiencing food insecurity, connect with resources at:

www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility or www.nutrition.va.gov/Food_Insecurity.asp

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs documentation. GAO (icons). | GAO-27-108111

How does VA conduct SNAP outreach to veterans at VA medical centers?

Staff at VA medical centers conduct SNAP outreach to veterans through screening, one-on-one meetings and, in some cases, at medical center food pantries.

Screening. VA staff screen veterans for food insecurity at VA medical centers. Veterans who screen positive for food insecurity are offered a referral to a VA social worker who can help connect the veteran to a local food pantry or another community-based program or apply for SNAP. In fiscal year 2025, VA reported screening 4.4 million veterans. About 103,000 veterans (2 percent) screened positive for food insecurity, and most of those (about 78,000) accepted a referral to a VA social worker or dietician for further assistance.

As of September 2025, VA is assessing medical center experiences in implementing a food insecurity clinical reminder and how the process could be improved. The reminder, first implemented in 2017, is an alert in VA's electronic health records system for staff to screen veterans for food insecurity.

One-on-one meetings. VA social workers conduct SNAP outreach to veterans through one-on-one meetings, according to VA staff at the three medical centers we selected. VA social workers may provide information on SNAP or intensive application assistance to veterans, such as those receiving care through VA housing or residential programs. VA social workers from all three medical centers told us they have met with veterans to help them complete paper, online, or phone applications and can accompany veterans on phone calls or in-person interviews at SNAP offices if needed.

Food pantries. VA medical center staff or partner organizations conduct SNAP outreach at the center's on-site food pantry at two of the three medical centers we selected, according to our interviews with VA staff.

VA also has other efforts underway to address veteran food insecurity more broadly:

Food hubs. VA launched a Food Hub pilot in January 2025 at 13 VA medical centers in 11 states across the country. Food Hubs are food pantries at VA medical centers that offer same-day access to food and connection with social work and nutrition services for longer-term support. During the pilot year, the Food Hub program served over 6,000 veterans. In fiscal year 2026, the program expanded to include additional sites for a total of 18. VA is planning to add new sites for fiscal year 2027.

Produce prescription pilot. As of 2025, VA was evaluating its Fresh Connect Produce Prescription Pilot for veterans who are experiencing or are at-risk for food insecurity. Through a partnership with a non-profit organization and VA medical centers, veteran participants received $100 on a pre-loaded debit card each month for 12 months to purchase fresh produce. Participants also received nutrition education and ongoing coaching.

Rural food insecurity. VA's Office of Rural Health is working to develop evidence-based strategies to address food insecurity for veterans living in rural areas. One initiative launched in April 2026 aims to improve rural veterans' access to reliable food resources by making groceries tailored to address individual veterans' medical conditions available through food lockers at VA medical centers. Other projects for rural veterans in Vermont and Iowa provide participating veterans with a weekly box of fresh produce.

Partnership with Feeding America. VA held a joint webinar in September 2025 with Feeding America to share information between VA and Feeding America food bank staff about best practices for helping veterans access SNAP, among other things.

Pilot program to combat food insecurity. VA officials said that the agency will implement pilot initiatives that will award grants to support partnerships that address food insecurity among veterans and their family members who receive services through VA-designated facilities, as required by the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.[12] Pilot projects are conducted through a partnership between VA-affiliated researchers and community organizations. VA expects to begin awarding the grants in 2027. Grantees will be expected to use the funds to increase veterans' enrollment in federal assistance programs, including SNAP, among other things.

To what extent have VA and USDA collaborated to address veteran food insecurity?

VA and USDA formally partnered in recent years to improve veteran food security, but according to VHA officials, progress slowed in the spring of 2025 after USDA lost key staff who were leading an interagency workgroup.

VA and USDA established their veteran food security MOA in September 2023 to formalize a previously existing informal interagency workgroup. In March 2022, we reported that VA and USDA's informal workgroup had followed some leading collaborative practices, such as involving all relevant participants and identifying needed resources.[13] However, we found that addressing other leading practices related to establishing outcomes and accountability, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and documenting key agreements related to the group's collaboration, could enhance how the agencies support veterans who are experiencing food insecurity. We recommended that USDA take steps to enhance collaboration with VA through a written agreement that addressed these leading practices. The agencies' MOA formally established the workgroup and articulated a shared goal to increase food security, access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education that supports the quality of life of veterans.

The MOA also designated the Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison (MVAL) office as the lead from the department level at USDA. The MVAL's primary role is to connect veterans to agriculture and agricultural opportunities at USDA, but the MVAL had been leading the informal workgroup between VA and USDA since 2020. The MOA also designated the lead from FNA to be the External and Government Affairs team.

Since the agreement was signed, VHA and USDA have collaborated by sharing information and developing related materials (see table 3).

Table 3: VHA/USDA Joint Food Security-Related Initiatives, Fiscal Years 2024-2026

Initiative	Description
Veteran food security summit	On July 23, 2024, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) held an in-person Veteran Food Security summit. The event aimed to increase awareness of federal and community partnerships and resources; highlight the unique needs of women and veterans living in rural areas; increase the number of facilities participating in activities supporting food security; and highlight quality interventions, innovations, and promising practices in food security.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) training webinars for VHA staff	In fiscal year 2024, USDA held two webinars with VA clinicians to educate them on legislation impacting veterans' access to food support. The training aimed to give VA clinicians the knowledge to better support and inform veterans regarding laws affecting them. The webinars covered SNAP-related provisions in the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023; USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children program; and summer feeding programs.
Veterans Health Administration (VHA) community of practice conference calls with USDA	In September 2025, VA's Food Security Office hosted USDA on a community of practice conference call with over 100 attendees. The call included an update from USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture on various grant programs, such as grants to non-profits to help veterans gain knowledge and skills for careers in the food and agricultural sector. In March 2026, VA's Food Security Office hosted USDA on a community of practice conference call with over 100 attendees. The call included an update from USDA's Deputy Undersecretary of Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. The presentation provided information on how USDA's Food and Nutrition Administration supports veterans and military families and discussed the release of new Dietary Guidelines.

Source: GAO review of USDA and VHA documents. | GAO-27-108111

However, the agencies' collaboration to address veteran food insecurity slowed after key staff, including the MVAL, left USDA in April 2025, according to VHA officials. Despite being the lead agency, USDA has not held a workgroup meeting since then. As we have previously reported, transitions and inconsistent leadership can weaken the effectiveness of any collaborative mechanism.[14]

In addition, the agencies have not reviewed the MOA due to the attrition at USDA, according to VHA officials. The MOA has a period of performance of 1 year, followed by 4 option years. According to the MOA, the agencies should review the agreement annually to determine if the partnership is still needed, the goals are being achieved, expectations are being met, and the roles and responsibilities of each partner are being fulfilled.

VHA officials said that efforts were underway to reestablish their partnership with USDA and resume the collaboration. They said that they anticipated continuing regular meetings and working with USDA, as outlined in the MOA. VHA officials added that they plan to include reviewing the MOA as an action item for their future work with USDA.

USDA officials said that the agency considers the MOA to still be in place but did not respond when we asked why the MOA had not been reviewed. Officials said that FNA plans to be involved in reviewing the MOA with VHA but noted that the designated lead within FNA is subject to change.

By ensuring a formal mechanism to collaborate on efforts to improve veteran food security is in place, VHA and USDA can enhance how they work together to support veterans experiencing food insecurity. This could include reviewing and updating the existing MOA or drafting a new one. Through this process, VHA and USDA can clarify or revise roles and responsibilities, as needed, and reassess or reaffirm other aspects of their partnership, such as outcomes and performance measures.

Conclusions

Over one million veterans are estimated to face food insecurity. While some veterans may be ineligible for SNAP due to the other benefits they receive, others could be eligible but are unaware of or have misconceptions about the program.

Given recent policy changes to SNAP affecting veterans, it is imperative that USDA's website accurately reflects key aspects of eligibility for veterans and other groups.

It is also important for USDA to collaborate with VA to develop and disseminate clear and appropriate messaging to make it easier for eligible veterans to understand and access the benefits to which they are entitled. Additional SNAP outreach materials tailored to veterans may help veterans service organizations and other stakeholders connect food-insecure veterans to the program.

Finally, by ensuring a formal mechanism is in place to guide their collaboration, VHA and USDA can revisit the roles and responsibilities and plans to effectively monitor progress on their efforts to ensure low-income veterans and their families have access to the food they need for a healthy, active life.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making a total of four recommendations, including three to USDA and one to VA. Specifically:

The Secretary of Agriculture should ensure FNA's SNAP eligibility website includes up-to-date information about exceptions to the SNAP time limit. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Agriculture should ensure FNA develops and disseminates additional SNAP outreach materials tailored to veterans, in collaboration with VHA. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Agriculture should ensure a formal mechanism is in place to collaborate with VA on efforts to address veteran food insecurity. This could include reviewing the MOA and updating the agreement as needed. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs should ensure a formal mechanism is in place to collaborate with USDA on efforts to address veteran food insecurity. This could include reviewing the MOA and updating the agreement as needed. (Recommendation 4)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to VA and USDA for review and comment. VA provided written comments, which are reprinted in appendix II. VA concurred with our recommendation to VA. USDA generally concurred with our recommendations and stated that actions are underway to update FNA's SNAP eligibility website.

How GAO Did This Study

We reviewed relevant federal laws and guidance as well as relevant USDA and VA documentation. We also conducted a content analysis of SNAP outreach plans and reports; analyzed data on SNAP receipt among households with veterans; and interviewed officials from USDA and VA, officials from three selected states, and other knowledgeable stakeholders.

Content analysis. We analyzed the FNA-approved state SNAP outreach plans for fiscal years 2025 and 2026 to identify planned outreach activities for veterans. We also analyzed information about the general challenges states faced when

implementing SNAP outreach in fiscal year 2024, according to the most recent available state SNAP outreach reports at the time of our review.

We identified SNAP outreach activities for veterans when the state plan listed veterans as a target audience for the outreach, the specific outreach activity mentioned veteran organizations or VA facilities, or the term “veteran” was included in the description of an outreach activity. These state-reported outreach activities were planned activities and therefore may or may not have been provided to veterans.

Data analysis. To describe the share of veteran households receiving SNAP benefits, we analyzed the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) for 2024, the most recent year of data available at the time of our analysis. We assessed the reliability of the data by reviewing relevant Census Bureau documentation and reviewing prior reports that used the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of reporting estimates of veterans’ participation in SNAP.

Interviews with federal officials and knowledgeable stakeholders. We interviewed federal officials from FNA and VA. We interviewed the USDA’s Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison (MVAL) in March 2025.

We also interviewed 16 stakeholder organizations with expertise on food assistance or veterans issues. The stakeholders included representatives from state SNAP agencies, VA medical centers, and SNAP outreach partner organizations in three selected states—Missouri, New Jersey, and Oregon. We selected states that were actively connecting veterans with SNAP benefits based on information in their SNAP outreach plans and for variation in geographic region and in the percentage of veterans in the state receiving SNAP benefits. In the selected states, we also interviewed (1) outreach partners that provided specific SNAP outreach activities for veterans according to the state’s outreach plan (e.g., food banks) and (2) VA medical centers that had an on-site food pantry. The VA medical centers we selected include two serving urban areas and one serving rural communities.

We also interviewed stakeholders from the following six organizations: (1) American Legion, (2) Blue Star Families, (3) Disabled American Veterans, (4) Feeding America, (5) MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, and (6) Military Family Advisory Network. We selected these organizations because they have national perspectives on veterans food security issues. We reached out to three additional veterans service organizations, but their representatives told us they did not have any information to share about SNAP outreach.

Throughout the report, we use the following terms to refer to the number of stakeholder organizations that expressed a particular viewpoint: “several” refers to five to eight stakeholders, and “some” refers to two to four stakeholders. No more than eight stakeholders we interviewed expressed the same viewpoint. The views of stakeholders we interviewed may not be representative of the stakeholder population as a whole.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2025 to October 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

List of Addressees

The Honorable Derrick Van Orden
Chairman
The Honorable Chris Pappas
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Mike Levin
House of Representatives

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

GAO Contact Information

For more information, contact: Kathryn A. Larin, Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security, at LarinK@gao.gov.

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Staff Acknowledgments: In addition to the contacts named above, Rachael Chamberlin (Assistant Director), Cathy Roark (Analyst in Charge), Youjin Chung, Kevin Donovan, Brian Egger, Alex Galuten, Melissa Jaynes, Kirsten Lauber, Mimi Nguyen, Stacia Odenwald, Jasmine Porter, Stacy Spence, and Will Stupski made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Nkenge Gibson, Erika Navarro, and Rebecca Rust Williamson.

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Appendix I: Veteran SNAP Participation Rates by State, 2024

This appendix shows estimates of the percentage of veterans who lived in households that received SNAP benefits in each state in 2024, according to our analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data. The table shows the estimates by state, along with the lower-bound and upper-bound of the 95 percent confidence interval.

Table 4: Estimated Percentage of Veterans Who Lived in Households Receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits by State, 2024

State	Percent of veterans receiving SNAP	95 percent confidence interval[a]
Alabama	6.4	(5.5, 7.4)
Alaska	7.0	(4.5, 10.7)
Arizona	5.8	(5.1, 6.7)
Arkansas	5.4	(4.1, 7.0)
California	9.3	(8.7, 9.9)
Colorado	6.0	(5.2, 6.8)
Connecticut	6.9	(5.3, 8.9)
Delaware	7.0	(4.8, 10.0)
District of Columbia	12.5	(7.7, 19.7)

State	Percent of veterans receiving SNAP	95 percent confidence interval[a]
Florida	5.6	(5.2, 6.1)
Georgia	7.2	(6.4, 8.0)
Hawaii	5.8	(4.5, 7.3)
Idaho	5.8	(4.5, 7.2)
Illinois	9.3	(8.4, 10.4)
Indiana	5.7	(4.9, 6.6)
Iowa	5.7	(4.7, 6.9)
Kansas	5.1	(3.9, 6.6)
Kentucky	7.4	(6.5, 8.5)
Louisiana	9.4	(7.9, 11.1)
Maine	7.6	(6.1, 9.5)
Maryland	7.1	(6.1, 8.2)
Massachusetts	8.8	(7.5, 10.2)
Michigan	7.7	(6.8, 8.7)
Minnesota	4.9	(3.7, 6.3)
Mississippi	6.1	(4.8, 7.7)
Missouri	5.3	(4.4, 6.4)
Montana	2.8	(1.7, 4.6)
Nebraska	4.3	(3.0, 6.2)
Nevada	9.2	(7.7, 11.0)
New Hampshire	4.3	(2.7, 6.8)
New Jersey	4.7	(3.8, 5.7)
New Mexico	9.0	(7.5, 10.8)
New York	9.9	(9.1, 10.7)
North Carolina	6.4	(5.7, 7.3)
North Dakota	3.9	(2.3, 6.7)
Ohio	7.5	(6.7, 8.3)
Oklahoma	7.2	(6.2, 8.4)
Oregon	12.7	(11.2, 14.4)
Pennsylvania	10.1	(9.2, 11.0)
Rhode Island	5.6	(3.3, 9.3)
South Carolina	4.8	(4.0, 5.8)
South Dakota	2.2	(1.3, 3.8)
Tennessee	5.1	(4.4, 5.9)
Texas	5.9	(5.3, 6.5)
Utah	3.5	(2.6, 4.8)
Vermont	6.5	(4.1, 10.2)
Virginia	4.7	(4.2, 5.3)
Washington	8.8	(7.8, 9.9)
West Virginia	7.6	(5.9, 9.7)
Wisconsin	6.2	(5.1, 7.6)
Wyoming	2.3	(1.1, 4.8)
Total (U.S.)	6.9	(6.8-7.1)

Source: GAO analysis of 2024 1-Year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Data from the U.S. Census Bureau. | GAO-27-108111

[a]The confidence interval is the range that would contain the actual population value for 95 percent of the samples that could have been drawn.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Veteran Affairs

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

August 25, 2026

Ms. Kathryn A. Larin
Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Larin:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reviewed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report: ***Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Federal Actions Needed to Help Veterans Access Benefits*** (GAO-26-108111). The enclosure contains our response to the draft report recommendation to VA.

Sincerely,

Curt Cashour
Chief of Staff

Enclosure

Enclosure

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Comments to the
Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Federal Actions Needed to Help Veterans Access Benefits
(GAO-26-108111)

Recommendation 1: The Secretary of Veterans Affairs should ensure a formal mechanism is in place to collaborate with USDA on efforts to address veterans food insecurity. This could include reviewing the MOA and updating the agreement as needed.

VA Response: Concur. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) concurs with the Government Accountability Office's recommendation. VA will provide the actions to be taken to address the recommendation in the 180-day update to the final report.

Accessible Text for Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Veteran Affairs

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VA Response: Concur. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) concurs with the Government Accountability Office's recommendation. VA will provide the actions to be taken to address the recommendation in the 180-day update to the final report.

Endnotes

[1]7 C.F.R. § 273.9. Household gross income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level is the standard income requirement to qualify for SNAP benefits for households that do not include a member age 60 or older or with a disability. In most states, the 130 percent of poverty threshold was $2,888 per month for a family of three for fiscal year 2026. States may also adopt broad-based categorical eligibility policies that expand automatic eligibility for SNAP to households that are eligible for or receiving benefits from another assistance program, which may apply to a larger group of low-income households.

[2]Among other things, SNAP general work requirements generally call for adults to register for work with the state SNAP agency, accept suitable job offers, and participate in certain state programs if required by the state.

[3]Pub. L. No. 118-5, § 311, 137 Stat. 10, 36-37 (2023).

[4]Pub. L. No. 119-21, § 10102, 139 Stat. 72, 81 (2025). The OBBBA also added exceptions to the SNAP time limit for able-bodied adults for individuals caring for a dependent child in the household under age 14 and for members of an Indian tribe, also referred to as Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Indigenous Peoples, and Tribal Members.

[5]Principle 15 – Communicate Externally, from GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-25-107721 (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2025).

[6]In this report, "states" refers to the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

[7]We collected information from 16 stakeholder organizations. Throughout the report, we use the following terms to refer to the number of stakeholder organizations that expressed a particular

viewpoint: “several” refers to stakeholders from five to eight organizations, and “some” refers to stakeholders from two to four organizations. No more than eight stakeholders we interviewed expressed the same viewpoint.

[8]T. Dubowitz, A. S. Richardson, T. Ruder, and C. Gadwah-Meaden, *Food Insecurity Among Veterans: Examining the Discrepancy Between Veteran Food Insecurity and Use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP*) (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, September 2023).

[9]U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Evidence, Analysis, and Regulatory Affairs Office, *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2024* (Alexandria, VA: 2026).

[10]GAO, *VA Health Care: Opportunities to Improve Access for Veterans Living in Rural Areas,* GAO-24-107559 (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2024).

[11]See GAO, *Nutrition Assistance Programs: Federal Agencies Should Improve Oversight and Better Collaborate on Efforts to Support Veterans with Food Insecurity*, GAO-22-104740. (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 24, 2022).

[12]See Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 5126(f), 136 Stat. 2395, 3217-19 (2022). The law required VA to implement the pilot within 18 months of enactment. VA officials said implementation of the pilot program was delayed because it required the development and approval of new regulations and supporting documentation in accordance with federal requirements. As of July 2026, VA officials said the draft regulations were going through internal review.

[13]See GAO-22-104740.

[14]GAO, *Government Performance Management: Leading Practices to Enhance Interagency Collaboration and Address Crosscutting Challenges*, GAO-23-105520 (Washington, D.C.: May 24, 2023).