

BUILDING HEALTHIER LIVES THROUGH INCREASED SNAP PARTICIPATION

Study Shows BDT's Outreach and Application Assistance Increases SNAP Participation More Than Seven-Fold, Reducing Medicaid Spending and Improving Health in North Carolina

Nearly 8 million individuals are eligible but not enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),¹ leaving millions of families hungry and billions of dollars in assistance unclaimed. Seniors age 60+ have some of the lowest rates of SNAP (also known as food stamps or FNS) participation: only 48% of eligible seniors participate in SNAP nationwide, and in North Carolina senior participation is even lower at 34%. Research has shown that access to vital assistance programs, like SNAP, improves people's health outcomes and financial security.

A study published in October 2021 in the **Annals of Internal Medicine** analyzed the relationship between SNAP participation and health outcomes among more than 115,000 North Carolina residents who were 65 and older and enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid, but not yet participating in SNAP.

Benefits Data Trust (BDT) was one of two data sources for the study, providing the researchers with data on BDT's outreach to these individuals between 2017 and 2020. Through a contract with North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), BDT has been conducting mail outreach and offering phone-based screening and comprehensive application-filing assistance since 2017.

"Given the clear connection between income and health, programs, like SNAP, that provide nutrition and income support to persons made vulnerable by the political economy are key tools for advancing health equity."

— **Seth A. Berkowitz, MD, MPH,** study's lead author and Assistant Professor of General Medicine and Epidemiology at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine

The study found that BDT's data-driven outreach and assistance in applying for SNAP significantly increases enrollment by older adults, and SNAP improves health and saves government funds:



Over 7 times more likely to enroll

- The SNAP enrollment rate was 7.6 times higher for individuals who received BDT's randomized outreach and application assistance compared to those who did not.



Improved health outcomes

- SNAP enrollment was associated with fewer emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and long-term care admissions.



\$2,360 in reduced Medicaid spending

- SNAP enrollment was associated with lower annual Medicaid spending by ~\$2,360 per person in North Carolina.

¹<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Trends2016-2018.pdf>

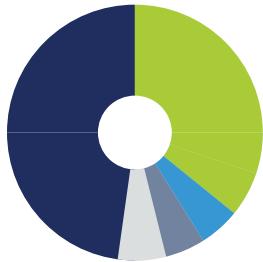
About the Study Participants

Nationally, 52% of eligible seniors are not enrolled in SNAP. Older adults who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid may be especially likely to benefit from receiving SNAP because of the program's association with fewer emergency room visits and decreased admissions to hospitals and long-term care facilities. The study analyzed over 115,000 North Carolina residents who were 65 and older and enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid but not yet participating in SNAP. Due to a combination of lower income and older age, this study group has both high rates of food insecurity and high healthcare use and costs.

Characteristics of Study Participants

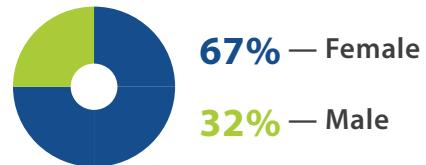
115,868 participants total

Demographic information



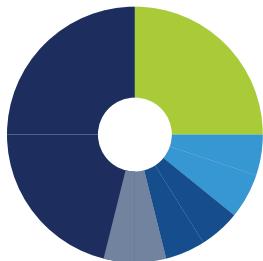
- 49% — Non-Hispanic White
- 35% — Non-Hispanic Black
- 5% — Hispanic
- 5% — Other Race/Ethnicity
- 6% — Unknown

Mean age of participants —
73 years old



- 67% — Female
- 32% — Male

Baseline clinical characteristics



- 44% — History of hypertension
- 22% — History of diabetes mellitus
- 13% — History of coronary heart disease
- 11% — History of chronic kidney disease
- 9% — History of depression

From the study: Older adults who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid may be especially likely to benefit from SNAP. Owing to a combination of low income and older age, this group has both high rates of food insecurity and high health care use and costs. Because eligibility requirements are similar, most persons who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid are also eligible for SNAP. However, many persons who are eligible for SNAP do not enroll.

BDT harnesses the power of data, technology, and policy to provide efficient and dignified access to assistance, improving people's health and financial security. Together with a national network of government agencies and other partners, we streamline public benefits systems and directly connect eligible families and individuals to programs that help pay for food, healthcare, housing, and more. A nonprofit since 2005, BDT has secured more than \$7.5 billion in benefits for households across the country, building pathways to economic mobility and a more equitable future.

Learn more at Bdtrust.org.

This study was funded by the National Institutes of Health. BDT's randomized benefits outreach and assistance studied in this research were made possible through state funding from North Carolina, federal SNAP Outreach Plan match dollars, and funding from the Walmart Foundation.