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Iowans have missed out on \$141 million in SNAP benefits since April

IOWA (October 12, 2022) — As food banks and food pantries break records across the state, Iowans have collectively missed out on \$141 million in benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the months from April through August 2022.

This translates to an estimated loss of \$217 million in gross domestic product (GDP) for the state of Iowa. According to the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS), every \$1 in SNAP benefits issued results in [\\$1.54 in estimated economic impact](#).

In April 2022, SNAP participants in Iowa [lost access to additional SNAP benefits](#) due to the governor's decision to lift the Public Health Disaster Emergency Proclamation earlier this year. Total SNAP benefits in Iowa decreased by 43% from March to April. On average, households have been receiving \$200 less in benefits every month. The [average SNAP benefit per meal](#) for individuals in Iowa was \$1.56 in August 2022. In October 2022, annual cost of living adjustments for SNAP increased the average benefit amount by 12.5%.

"If the SNAP Emergency Allotments were still in place today, I'd be receiving \$281 a month for groceries. In actuality, I'm getting \$23," said **Tara Kramer** of Des Moines. "Navigating my new normal on a fixed income involves me planning trips to food pantries multiple times a week. I'm nervous about unexpected expenses; having to choose between paying for a medical service or buying food. I'm so tired. I'm not sleeping enough, I don't wake up feeling refreshed anymore."

"We have a 3 year old and a 1 year old at home, and with the recent reduction in SNAP benefits, we're having to make hard choices about what we can afford, and stress a lot more about making sure nothing gets wasted," said **Cecelia Proffit** of Iowa City. "We try not to pass that stress and anxiety on to our kids, but the unnecessary reduction in benefits takes a toll on us not just nutritionally, but mentally and emotionally as well. Money is tight, especially with prices going up for everything and no commensurate pay increases. It was nice to not have to worry so much about how we'd feed our kids. Now that's been added back to our pile of things to worry about."

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) allowed states to issue the maximum allowable benefit to all SNAP participants through [Emergency Allotments](#). In

order to distribute Emergency Allotments, states are required to have a public health emergency in place. Iowa is one of 17 states that have ended Emergency Allotments for SNAP.

“Hunger is a policy choice, and I can’t think of a more clear example that illustrates this,” said **Luke Elzinga**, chair of the Iowa Hunger Coalition. “Not only has the loss in SNAP benefits harmed the physical and mental health of people experiencing hunger and food insecurity, it has put a tremendous strain on anti-hunger organizations who are breaking records to make sure Iowans stay fed.”

Food banks and food pantries across the state of Iowa are facing historic numbers of people seeking assistance. Organizations attribute some of the increased traffic to rising food costs, but clearly note the significant effect the loss in SNAP benefits is having.

“More of our neighbors than ever before are turning to us for support,” said **John Boller**, Executive Director of the Coralville Community Food Pantry. “Since April 1, we have seen an overall increase of 55% compared to the same period in 2021. Inversely, we have experienced a decrease in our food supply: food donations are down and we still face limited availability of universally needed staples like meat, eggs, rice, peanut butter, and canned fruit. Our shelves and coolers are literally bare by the end of each pantry shift.”

“Unfortunately we have seen the increase that we predicted was coming our way,” said **Andrea Cook**, Program Director at Johnston Partnership Place. “Higher food costs, high gas prices, and the governor’s end to the emergency declaration have given rise to increased traffic at food pantries. We are seeing faces we haven’t seen in six years or more, not to mention the increase in families who have never needed this type of help before.”

“With limited inventory at the food bank, high costs for our food purchases, continued supply chain shortages, reduced community donations, and the increased client need, it is a constant struggle to keep our shelves stocked,” said **Nicole McAlexander**, Executive Director of the Southeast Linn Community Center. “We have a generous community, dedicated staff and wonderful volunteers, but without government support or systemic changes, this trajectory is unsustainable. We can prevent hunger in Iowa, but it cannot happen through food pantries and community generosity alone.”

278,514 Iowans participate in SNAP as of August 2022, the lowest SNAP enrollment has been in nearly 14 years. [According to the USDA](#), 63% of Iowans enrolled in SNAP in 2018 were children, seniors, and disabled adults. While states cost-share with the federal government on the administration of the SNAP program, SNAP benefits themselves are fully funded by the federal government.

“While the actual case counts of COVID had decreased by April, we saw counts rise again throughout the summer,” said Elzinga. “And regardless of the case counts, the impacts from COVID are still being felt - and felt the hardest by lower-income members of our communities.”
