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# Expanding SNAP access during the COVID-19 emergency

Postsecondary students' perspectives

Published January 2024

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*“My performance in school really does depend on it.”*



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## Executive Summary

Food insecurity is associated with poorer educational achievement among postsecondary students. Compared to their food-secure peers, food-insecure students receive poorer grades and are less likely to complete a postsecondary degree. However, qualifying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal program that provides food-purchasing assistance for Americans with low incomes – thereby lowering food insecurity, is more difficult for postsecondary students than for those not enrolled in higher education. In addition to meeting the usual SNAP eligibility requirements, they must meet a specific student exemption.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 introduced two temporary exemptions to expand postsecondary student access to SNAP during the public health emergency. Students with work study and with an expected family contribution of zero dollars on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) became eligible for SNAP assistance.

To better understand the impact of this access for Minnesota postsecondary students, the Minnesota Department of Human Services surveyed Minnesota students receiving SNAP in 2022 and analyzed administrative data. Some of the key findings are below:

- With expanded student exemptions, SNAP served 37% more postsecondary students in November 2022 compared to December 2019.
- Receiving SNAP lowered food insecurity of survey respondents from 73% to 32%.
- Most surveyed undergraduate students receiving SNAP are first-generation students (67%), compared with 31% of Minnesota undergraduates overall.
- Undergraduate students receiving SNAP are more likely to be people of color, female or older than 24 than undergraduates not receiving SNAP.
- Receiving SNAP enabled students to focus on academics.

**Improving students' food security with SNAP helps them to achieve their academic goals so they can be prepared for higher-wage jobs in the future. Expanding access to the program for postsecondary students will increase equity because it will have an outsized benefit for non-traditional students and populations that historically have had reduced access to education.**

Policy Recommendations:

- Remove the requirement that students attending an institution of higher education meet a student exemption to qualify for SNAP.
- If this is not possible, increase SNAP availability for postsecondary students by making the temporary exemptions from the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 into permanent student exemptions.
- Increase funding and support for SNAP outreach on college campuses.

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## Background

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*“Without SNAP I’d be worried about how or what I was gonna be able to eat. Not having that worry decreased my stress level so I could focus on school”*

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The college student population experiences a high rate of food insecurity. According to a 2016 Students Against Hunger report, 25% of students at community colleges and 20% of students at four-year schools have very low food security and food insecurity is more prevalent among students of color. For Minnesota specifically, 24% of all students experienced food insecurity, and rates were significantly higher for non-Hispanic Black students (43%) and for first-generation students (33%) (Laksa et al., 2020).

This food insecurity negatively impacts students’ academic performance. Postsecondary students experiencing food insecurity are more likely to receive lower grades (Weaver et al 2020, Hagedorn & Olfert 2018, Umeda et al 2023) and to drop individual classes (Mechler et al. 2021). They are also less likely to complete their degree program (Wolfson et al 2022, Mechler et al. 2021).

College students struggling with food insecurity and its negative impact on their academic performance could benefit from the food-purchasing assistance provided through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). But SNAP policy makes it difficult for them to qualify. In addition to meeting the program’s basic eligibility requirements, students attending an institute of higher education must meet a specific student exemption – such as working 20 or more hours per week, participating in a work study program, caring for a young child or having a physical or mental disability.

SNAP’s student exemptions were based on the concept of a “traditional” college student, i.e., an 18- to 22-year-old, financially supported by their parents, who enters college immediately after high school. However, the “traditional” college student is no longer the norm. As of October 2023, the Lumina Foundation website states that 37% of students at U.S. institutions of higher learning are over 25 (in Minnesota it was 30% in 2019). Nationwide, nearly two thirds of today’s college students (64%) work while in college, and 26% have dependents of their own. Increasingly, college students are partially or wholly supporting themselves.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity increased among higher education students while higher education enrollments decreased (Hope Center 2021). The federal government, as part of its response to the public health emergency, included billions of dollars of pandemic relief in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. Among other provisions, the relief added two temporary exemptions for postsecondary students applying for SNAP assistance: work-study eligibility (with or without a work placement) or having an expected family contribution of \$0 on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The temporary exemptions, which expanded SNAP availability for postsecondary students, were effective for SNAP applications or renewals made between January 2021 and June 2023.

## Method

In November 2022, over a year after the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 temporary exemptions went into effect and the department conducted a brief survey of postsecondary students receiving SNAP benefits in Minnesota. Survey invitations were sent to 1,514 adult postsecondary students receiving SNAP via a text message including a link to the questionnaire. Participants who consented to the study completed a 14-question online survey and received an electronic gift card approximately one week after the survey closed. In addition to English, participants had the option of completing the survey in Somali or Hmong – the most common non-English languages used by students in our sample.

We received 216 unique responses which were matched to administrative data stored in the department's data warehouse. Respondents included 181 undergraduate students (84%), 20 graduate students (9%), and 15 technical college students (7%). For comparison, we also summarized administrative data for all postsecondary students receiving SNAP benefits and for all those invited to receive the survey - regardless of whether they responded (see Tables 2-4).

## Results

### SNAP serves a demographically distinct population of Minnesota postsecondary students.

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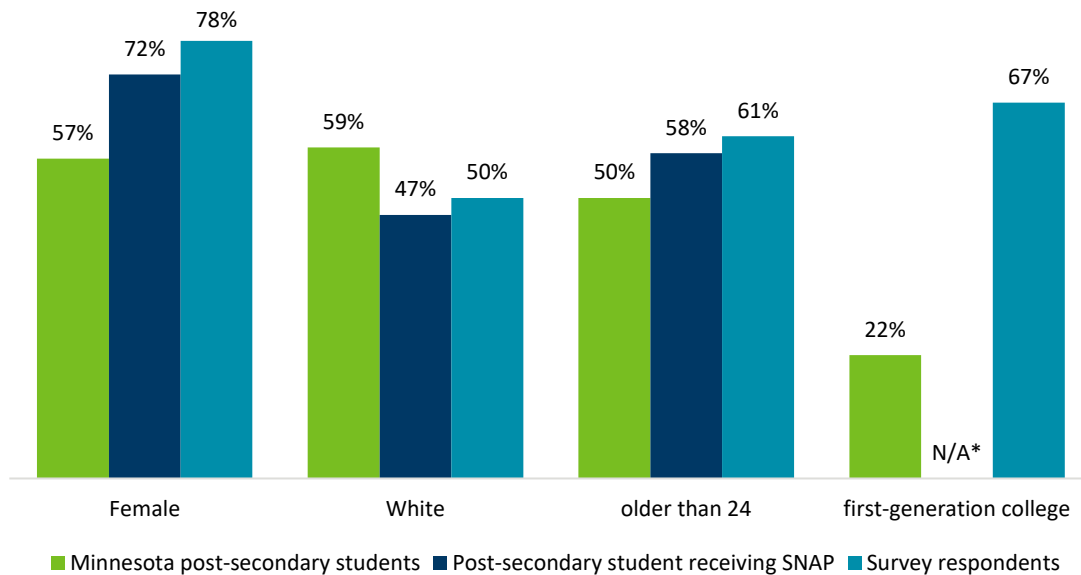
*“Being a first generation student is already hard because my family does not come from a lot of money.”*

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A comparison of the demographics of Minnesota's postsecondary student population and those students enrolled in SNAP shows that Minnesota undergraduate SNAP recipients are demographically different than the overall undergraduate student population. **Student SNAP recipients are more likely to be female (72% vs. 52%), less likely to be white (47% vs. 59%), and more likely to be older than 24-years-old (58% vs 50%) than college students overall. Additionally, SNAP recipients are considerably more likely to be first-generation college students** - i.e., to not have a parent who completed an undergraduate degree (67% of survey respondents vs. 22% of Minnesota undergraduates). For detailed demographics of these groups, see Tables 2 through 4 in the appendix, which are based on data from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and this survey.

Survey results can be generalized to the broader population of postsecondary students receiving SNAP with reasonable confidence. Survey respondents are similar in proportions of undergraduate students (84% vs. 86%), Females (78% vs. 72%), BIPOC students (49% vs. 51%), and students aged 25 or older (61% vs. 58%).

**Figure 1: Demographics comparison between Minnesota postsecondary students, postsecondary students receiving SNAP, and Survey respondents**



\*First-generation student status not available for all postsecondary students receiving SNAP.

## The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 expanded postsecondary students' access to SNAP.

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*"This should be readily available to all students. I along with many others are trying to better our lives with education and it's expensive, going to school full time is a full time job"*

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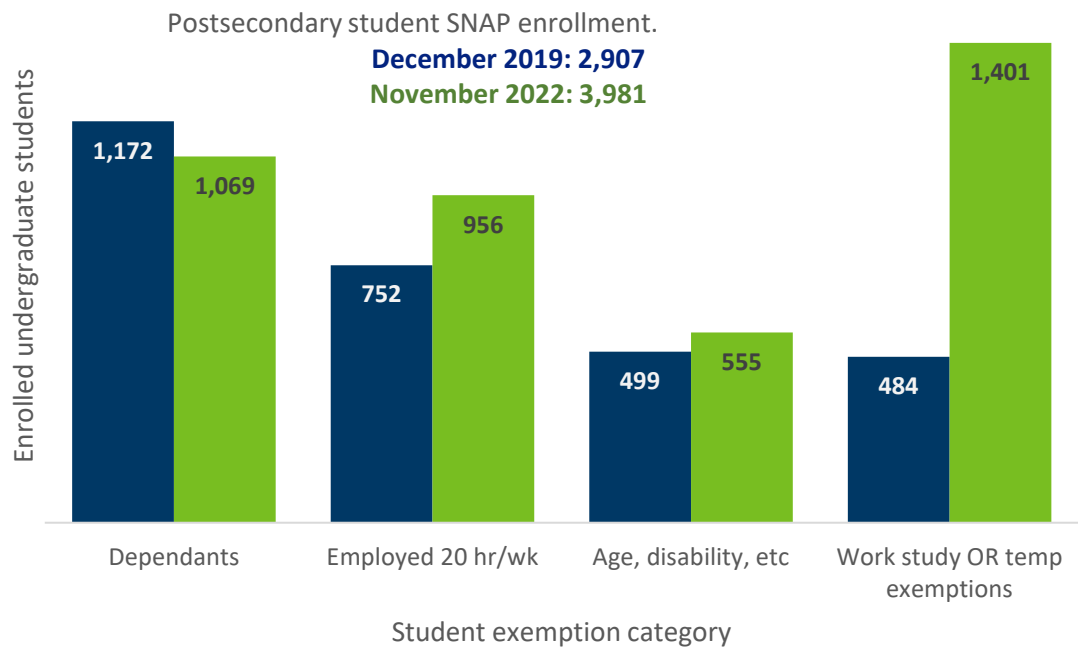
The department compared postsecondary student enrollment in SNAP before the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 went into effect (December 2019) to when the survey was administered (November 2022) – after it had been in effect for several academic semesters. Overall, the number of students enrolled in SNAP in November 2022 (3,981) was 37% greater than in December 2019 (2,907). A more detailed timeline can be seen in Table 1. One relevant question is: How much of this increase can be attributed to the temporary exemptions enacted in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021?

Figure 1 compares the exemption categories under which postsecondary students became eligible for SNAP before Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 and at the time of the survey. Prior to the public health

emergency and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (i.e., December 2019), most students qualified for SNAP because they were caring for dependents or they were employed for 20 hours or more each week. By 2022, these proportions had shifted, with a 9% decrease in students exempt due to dependent care and a 27% increase in students exempt due to employment. The portion of students qualifying based on a disability determination were similar before and after the exemption changes included in Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021.

The combined work study or temporary student exemption category showed the greatest change, with a dramatic 189% increase. (Work study and temporary exemptions cannot be differentiated because of the unique circumstances surrounding temporary exemptions.) Because this change overshadows the enrollment changes in other student exemption categories, we conclude that most of the enrollment increase between December 2019 and November 2022 can be attributed to the temporary exemptions.

**Figure 2: Minnesota postsecondary student SNAP enrollment counts in a single month by student eligibility reason (exemption reason) before and after Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 temporary exemptions.**



Comparison of postsecondary students’ exemption category determined at time of SNAP application. In cases where a student met more than one exemption, the one likely to create eligibility for the longest time was used.

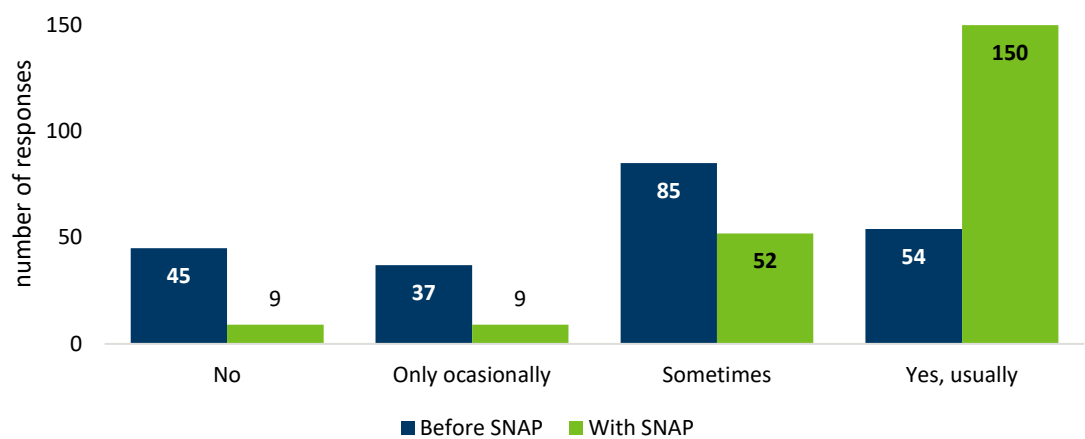
SNAP increases food-security for postsecondary students.

*“Honestly, SNAP has made me be able to feel food secure as a student.”*

Food security depends both on the availability of food and the ability to access and afford food. When asked, “In the year before receiving SNAP benefits, did you have reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food?” only 27% of survey respondents said that before receiving SNAP they usually had access to enough food. However, food security improved when they received SNAP; when asked about their access to food while receiving benefits, 68% said they usually had reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food. Overall, SNAP reduced food-insecurity by 44 percentage points (from 73% to 32%). When comparing food access before and after receiving SNAP, 60% of survey respondents indicated at least some increase in their ability to access nutritious food due to receiving SNAP.

SNAP helps students afford food (83% of respondents say their SNAP benefits account for over half of their food budget), but another contributor to food security is its availability and accessibility. Since only 42% of students agree or strongly agreed that “nutritious food is readily available on or near my college campus,” it is likely that some of the food insecurity not alleviated when a student enrolls in SNAP would be helped by increased availability of nutritious food near their school.

Figure 3. Survey responses to "did you have reliable access to enough affordable nutritious food?"

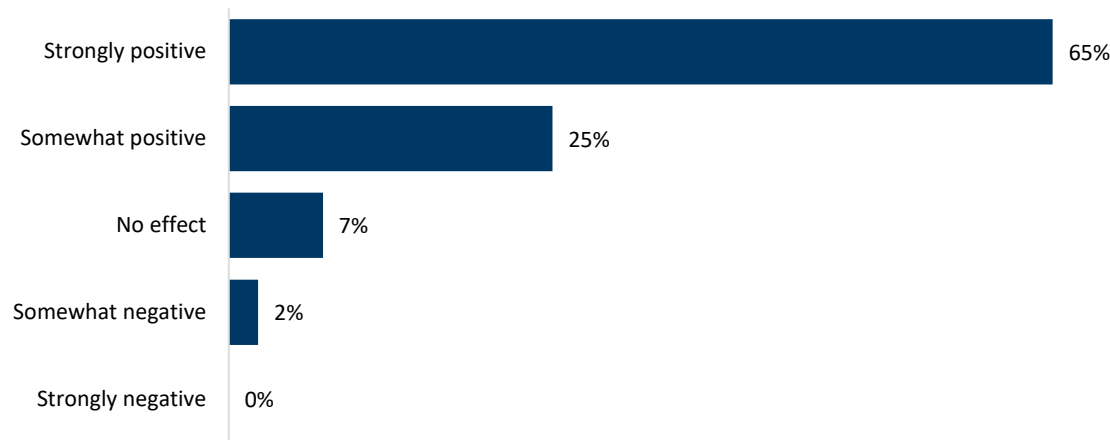


Receiving SNAP improved academic performance.

*“SNAP really helped me be able to focus more on my schooling. I didn’t have to worry about picking up random jobs to get money and try to make time to get my schooling done.”*

Survey respondents agreed that receiving SNAP had a positive effect on their academic performance. While an objective analysis of grades was beyond the scope of this study, previous research has established a positive relationship between food security and academic performance (Weaver et al 2020, Hagedorn & Olfert 2018, Wolfson et al 2022, Mechler et al 2021).

**Figure 4. Response to "What effect did receiving SNAP food benefits have on your performance in school?"**



Improved academic performance with food assistance could be due to the effect of improved nutrition on cognitive ability. Previous research has established a correlation between nutrition and academic performance across the lifespan (e.g., Reuter et al 2021, Burrows et al 2017, Florence 2008), and several survey respondents mentioned that SNAP allowed them to eat more healthfully and that they had observed a positive impact on health indicators such as blood pressure. However, the observed correlations in the literature may not account for variations in socioeconomic status and the acute and chronic effects of living with a low income.

Improved academic performance with food assistance could also be attributed to a reduction in the stress caused by food insecurity. As noted in the report of the Deep Poverty Project led by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (2020), the stress of poverty can have acute and chronic negative effects on cognitive and biological functioning. Similarly, a recent Australian study found that food insecure students are more likely to experience psychological distress which contributes to lower grades (Brownfield et al, 2023). Both indicate that

living with food insecurity is extremely stressful, and the stress of food insecurity harms students' ability to focus on academic achievement. This connection between stress and academic achievement was a recurring theme in survey respondents' comments. Students said that **receiving SNAP reduced students' stress levels and allowed them to focus on achieving their academic goals.**

### **SNAP utilization depends on awareness and support.**

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*"The financial worker I have is phenomenal, I felt like she went out of her way to make sure I received support and all my questions were answered."*

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Estimates of income-eligible postsecondary parents in Minnesota compared to the number of postsecondary enrolled parents utilizing SNAP suggest that this resource is underutilized by these students. The system takes some skill to navigate. Referrals from those who know the system and assistance with navigating the system, help food-insecure students access this supportive program.

The first step toward utilizing SNAP is awareness. Anecdotal reports indicate that many postsecondary students are not aware they may be eligible for SNAP. Referrals to SNAP come from many sources, with survey respondents most commonly citing word of mouth sources – through friends, family, and fellow students (48%). Other common sources were online (22%) or academic staff (18%), with the remainder of referrals coming from a variety of sources including other school staff, and staff involved in providing other sources (e.g., social workers, shelter staff). Other students mentioned that they knew about SNAP because they were previously enrolled or worked with SNAP.

Once applying for SNAP, respondents are split between finding the process easy and difficult. Those finding it difficult mention unclear instructions, documentation requirements that don't reflect a student's circumstances, and difficulty scheduling interviews. They also mention gratitude for the individuals who helped them through the application process.

## Discussion

### Providing students with SNAP reduces poverty and improves racial equity.

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*“It has really helped me to continue my education by not having to worry about providing food or having enough money to provide food for myself and my children.”*

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The interactions between education, poverty, and race are complex and multidirectional. Postsecondary education – particularly completing a postsecondary credential – leads to increased income (Leibert 2021). College graduates’ median lifetime earnings are approximately twice as much as high school graduates’ earnings (Hamilton Project, 2020). Supporting postsecondary enrollment and completion aligns with the anti-poverty goals of the SNAP program.

However, poverty interferes with academic performance. Individuals with low incomes are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education, receive lower grades when they are enrolled, and are less likely to complete a postsecondary credential if they do enroll (Umeda et al 2023). Respondents surveyed in the Minnesota Deep Poverty Project report cited stress – saying that it is difficult to focus on academics when food and shelter are not secure. Respondents in the current survey said when SNAP removed or reduced their food insecurity, they were more able to focus on academics and saw their grades improve. We can conclude that **increasing availability of SNAP for postsecondary students can help them achieve their academic goals, increase future income, and reduce poverty.**

In Minnesota, this is also a racial equity issue. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development has found stark differences in economic indicators between white and Asian Minnesotans versus those of American Indian, Black or African American, and Hispanic or Latino origin. Compared to their white and Asian counterparts, American Indian, Black or African American, and Hispanic or Latino Minnesotans are less likely to enroll in college and to complete a credential if they do enroll (Grunewald et. al., 2021). They also have lower median household incomes and are more likely to be living in poverty. Since SNAP specifically serves individuals with low incomes, **providing food-insecure postsecondary students with SNAP is one way improve Minnesota’s racial equity.**

Since food insecurity is higher among students of color and first-generation students, improving the food security of Minnesota postsecondary students will contribute to improving equity in the state. The education gap between the state’s white and nonwhite students is considerable. (Minnesota Compass, 2022). Additionally, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education reports that high school graduates from households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty level are considerably less likely to enroll in college within two years of high school graduation than are their peers from more well-off families (60% vs. 83%). **Increasing SNAP access for**

postsecondary students in low-income households can increase enrollments and completions for these populations.

### Students receiving SNAP benefits Minnesota's workforce.

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*"My performance in school really does depend on it."*

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Analyses of Minnesota's workforce projections predict that the current workforce shortage in Minnesota requires an "all hands on deck" approach, which includes decreasing Minnesota's high racial employment disparities (Minnesota Compass).

The jobs of the future increasingly require postsecondary education. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that occupations requiring an associate degree or higher are expected to grow faster than average between 2020-2030 (bls.gov, July 2023). Similarly, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development estimates that over half of the 169,900 jobs Minnesota will add between 2020 and 2030 will require postsecondary education (see Table 5). The fastest growth will be in jobs with a graduate degree (9.7%) or a bachelor's degree (8.4%).

To meet these challenges, Minnesota's new budget includes considerable investment in Minnesota's workforce - with the Drive for 5 Workforce fund focusing on preparing workers to enter five of the state's most critical occupational categories. Many of these jobs will require postsecondary education. **Expanding the availability of SNAP for postsecondary students will increase student success and help fill these critical occupations.**

### Increasing outreach would enable SNAP to help more students.

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*"I wish that it was more publicized. I could have been receiving SNAP all four years of college, but I didn't start receiving it until later just because I didn't even know I qualified."*

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Students come to SNAP in many ways, yet many more do not know that it is available to them. Because of the student exemptions, workers who can help them enroll may also think they are ineligible and turn them away. Simplifying SNAP policy by eliminating the student exemption requirement would help.

Funding specialized SNAP outreach staff dedicated to working with postsecondary students could help these students receive the help they need. These staff could become specialists on application requirements and students' needs and help students obtain SNAP assistance and could act as a bridge between the language and requirements used by the program versus those used by educational institutions.

One specific pathway being explored at five Minnesota community colleges, is enrolling students in SNAP through SNAP Employment and Training. Though this pathway is only available to students enrolling in specific, Perkins loan eligible programs, it can help Minnesota meet the governor's Drive for Five goals of preparing new workers to enter critical occupational categories with high-growth jobs and family-sustaining wages. Such partnerships currently exist at a few community colleges, but they are underfunded and currently only able to serve a small number of students.

## Policy Recommendations

The findings from this study have implications for future policy considerations. To address food insecurity and increase equitable student outcomes, we recommend:

- **Remove the requirement that students attending an institution of higher education meet a student exemption to qualify for SNAP.**  
Under current Federal SNAP policy, students are required to meet a student exemption to qualify for SNAP, which drastically limits the number of students who can access the program. Completely eliminating the student exemption requirements would expand eligibility to more students and simplify the necessary outreach around the program.
- **If removing the requirement for students is not possible, increase SNAP availability for postsecondary students by making the temporary exemptions from the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 into permanent student exemptions.**  
While eliminating the requirement for students to meet an exemption would be the best opportunity to address students' food insecurity, this would be a positive step. Expanding the possible student exemptions helped to address this limitation and has broader implications for the student success beyond the end of the health emergency.
- **Increase funding and support for SNAP outreach on college campuses (such as SNAP Employment and Training).**  
Our findings indicate the importance of education around SNAP benefits. If students don't know they are eligible, then they will not know to apply. Similarly, if the application process seems inaccessible, many will not know how to effectively access supports. This education will also be important to inform students about any policy changes.

## Data tables

Note, reported percentages may sum to greater than or less than 100% due to rounding.

**Table 1. Enrollment over time**

| Year | Minnesota higher-education students | SNAP December enrollment | SNAP December postsecondary student enrollment |
|------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 2022 | *                                   | 399,792                  | 3,954                                          |
| 2021 | 251,424                             | 350,944                  | 3,336                                          |
| 2020 | 262,835                             | 357,310                  | 1,167                                          |
| 2019 | 274,731                             | 332,964                  | 2,909                                          |
| 2018 | 282,193                             | 346,105                  | 2,908                                          |
| 2017 | 288,749                             | 362,514                  | 3,459                                          |
| 2016 | 297,731                             | 380,816                  | 3,736                                          |
| 2015 | 306,216                             | 399,367                  | 5,283                                          |
| 2014 | 316,172                             | 420,511                  | 5,692                                          |
| 2013 | 327,448                             | 465,875                  | 7,668                                          |

Higher education enrollment counts source: Minnesota Department of Higher Education.

\* 2022 Minnesota higher-education enrollment not available at time of writing

**Table 2. Race & ethnicity characteristics of postsecondary students**

|                          | Minnesota<br>postsecondary<br>students | SNAP<br>postsecondary<br>students | Survey<br>invitees | Survey<br>respondents |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Asian/Pacific Islander   | 21,231                                 | 461                               | 116                | 17                    |
| % Asian/Pacific Islander | 6%                                     | 8%                                | 8%                 | 8%                    |
| Black                    | 55,541                                 | 1591                              | 377                | 58                    |
| % Black                  | 16%                                    | 28%                               | 25%                | 27%                   |
| White                    | 208,664                                | 2651                              | 737                | 107                   |
| % White                  | 59%                                    | 47%                               | 49%                | 50%                   |
| Hispanic/Latino          | 24,267                                 | 390                               | 126                | 15                    |
| % Hispanic/Latino        | 7%                                     | 7%                                | 8%                 | 7%                    |
| American Indian          | 2,273                                  | 185                               | 37                 | 6                     |
| % American Indian        | 1%                                     | 3%                                | 2%                 | 3%                    |
| Multiple                 | 12,261                                 | 174                               | 58                 | 7                     |
| % Multiple               | 3%                                     | 3%                                | 4%                 | 3%                    |
| Unknown                  | 18,705                                 | 175                               | 55                 | 6                     |
| % Unknown                | 5%                                     | 3%                                | 4%                 | 3%                    |
| International student    | 12,731                                 | -                                 | -                  | -                     |
| % International student  | 4%                                     | -                                 | -                  | -                     |

Minnesota postsecondary student data source: Minnesota Department of Higher Education. Fall 2021

**Table 3. Enrollment characteristics**

|                                | Minnesota<br>postsecondary<br>students | SNAP<br>postsecondary<br>students | Survey<br>invitees | Survey<br>respondents |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Count                          | 355,673                                | 5627                              | 1506               | 216                   |
| Undergraduates                 | 241,244                                | 4829                              | 1255               | 181                   |
| % Undergraduate                | 68%                                    | 86%                               | 83%                | 84%                   |
| Graduate                       | 114,429                                | 445                               | 145                | 20                    |
| % Graduate                     | 32%                                    | 8%                                | 10%                | 9%                    |
| Full-time                      | 220,320                                | 3925                              | 1071               | 156                   |
| % Full-time                    | 62%                                    | 70%                               | 71%                | 72%                   |
| First generation (undergrad)   | 52,123                                 | -                                 | -                  | 122                   |
| % First generation (undergrad) | 22%                                    | -                                 | -                  | 67%                   |

Minnesota postsecondary student data source: Minnesota Department of Higher Education, Fall 2021

**Table 4. Age characteristics of postsecondary students**

|                | Minnesota<br>postsecondary<br>students | SNAP<br>postsecondary<br>students | Survey<br>invitees | Survey<br>respondents |
|----------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Less than 24   | 178,643                                | 2339                              | 627                | 84                    |
| % Less than 24 | 50%                                    | 42%                               | 42%                | 39%                   |
| 25 or older    | 176,521                                | 3288                              | 879                | 132                   |
| % 25 or older  | 50%                                    | 58%                               | 58%                | 61%                   |
| Not reported   | 377                                    | -                                 | -                  | -                     |
| % Not reported | 0%                                     | -                                 | -                  | -                     |

Minnesota postsecondary student data source: Minnesota Department of Higher Education, fall 2021

**Table 5. Projected employment change by typical educational requirement in Minnesota, 2020-2030**

| Typical Education Required | 2020 Estimate | 2030 Estimate | Total Change | Percent Employment Change 2020-2030 |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| High school or less        | 1,880,531     | 1,962,541     | 82,010       | 4.4%                                |
| Associate degree           | 153,753       | 163,888       | 10,135       | 6.6%                                |
| Vocational Training        | 163,888       | 176,844       | 12,956       | 7.9%                                |
| Bachelor's degree          | 620,148       | 671,947       | 51,799       | 8.4%                                |
| Graduate degree            | 116,827       | 128,215       | 11,388       | 9.7%                                |
| No typical education       | 3,736         | 3,844         | 108          | 2.9%                                |
| Total employment           | 2,975,300     | 3,145,200     | 169,900      | 5.7%                                |

Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Employment Outlook, Typical Educational Requirements

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## Appendix

### Method details

#### Participants

In November 2022, DHS sent a survey invitation via SMS to individuals who matched the following criteria from the data warehouse (MAXIS):

- Enrolled in SNAP as of November 1, 2022
- Age 18 or older
- Postsecondary student
- Indicated they are willing to receive text messages (SMS) from DHS.

These criteria yielded a sample size of 1,514 students, with ages ranging from 18 to 65.

This population overwhelmingly identified as using English as their written language. The most common non-English languages listed in MAXIS were Somali (30), Hmong (10), Karen (8), Spanish (5) and Arabic (4).

The survey received 228 responses. After screening for duplicates, incomplete surveys and invalid data, 216 unique responses remained: 181 undergraduate students (84%), 20 graduate students (9%), and 15 technical college students (7%).

Additionally, data were summarized from MAXIS for SNAP participants who met the first three criteria above but were not sent the survey ("SNAP students"). This yielded 4,114 records.

#### Survey Protocol

Survey invitations with a link to the questionnaire on Snap Survey were sent via a text message. Eligible participants who had Somali or Hmong listed as their preferred written language in MAXIS were sent invitation text messages in their preferred language, and all other participants received the English version. Clicking the link brought participants to a screen to select their preferred language for the questionnaire (English, Somali, or Hmong), then to a consent page which included a link to an FAQ for additional information. Individuals who completed the consent page were brought to the survey. Individuals who did not respond after several days were sent a single reminder text message.

Following their consent, participants completed the 14-question survey and provided an email address for delivery of an e-gift card to thank them for their participation. Gift cards were emailed approximately one week after the close of the survey, along with an infographic summarizing several of the preliminary survey results.

Additional data reported in this brief was retrieved from the Department of Human Services administrative data warehouse (MAXIS). This data warehouse contains data collected and saved as part of application and administration of SNAP benefits. Survey respondents' data was linked to their data warehouse records through their phone number.

## Survey questions

1. In the year before receiving benefits, how were you referred to the SNAP program? (select all that apply)
  - a. Family Member/Friend
  - b. Fellow Student
  - c. Academic Staff
  - d. Internet
  - e. Online Media
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. In the year before receiving SNAP benefits, did you have reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food? [Single]
  - a. Yes, usually
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Only occasionally
  - d. No
3. Have you previously applied for SNAP and been denied? If so, what was the reason given for your denial? [single, with short free-format text]
  - a. Yes. I was denied because \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
4. Did you know about a rule change to SNAP eligibility criteria for students that went into effect in December 2021? [Single, with short free-format text]
  - a. Yes, it was \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
5. Did one or both of your parents complete a four-year college or university degree?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not sure
6. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) that is calculated based on the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) fairly reflects someone’s ability to provide for themselves while being a full/half-time student”
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neither agree nor disagree
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly Disagree
7. Are you eligible for state or federally funded work study through your school? (regardless of whether you have a work study job)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I don’t know

8. This semester, how many hours per week are you working on average? (include both work-study hours and any other paid employment)
- None
  - 9 hours or less
  - 10-19 hours
  - 20-29 hours
  - 30+ hours
9. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Nutritious food is readily available on or near my college campus."
- Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree
10. In the last month, approximately what percentage of your food expenses did SNAP cover?
- \*Use numeric slider control with points 0% 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%
11. While you have been receiving SNAP benefits do you have reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food?
- Yes, usually
  - Sometimes
  - Only occasionally
  - No
12. What effect did receiving SNAP food benefits have on your performance in school?
- Strongly positive
  - Somewhat positive
  - No effect
  - Somewhat negative
  - Strongly negative
13. What else would you like to tell us about the experience of **applying for** SNAP benefits as a student? (optional)

What else would you like to tell us about **receiving and using** SNAP benefits as a student? (optional)