

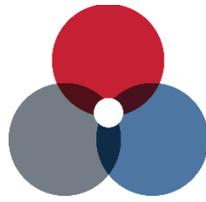
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# Growing Numbers of Cuyahoga County Seniors Seeking Hunger Relief; Underscoring Importance of Reauthorizing SNAP

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Later this year the U.S. Congress will take up the reauthorization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) via the Farm Bill. While the role of SNAP in helping needy families, children and the disabled is fairly well understood, SNAP is also critically important for reducing senior hunger and improving senior health. In Cuyahoga County, SNAP plays an increasingly large role in addressing the problem of senior hunger. The Cuyahoga County Division of Senior and Adult Services recently released data showing Cuyahoga County residents age 60 and older have increased their usage of the SNAP program by 20% over the past 5 years; growing two times faster than the share of the 60+ population in the county. Surprisingly, some of the largest percentage increases are in suburban communities like Rocky River, Euclid and Broadview Heights.

SNAP, previously called food stamps, helps needy low-income families, persons with disabilities and the elderly afford healthy food. The current program, along with rest of the Farm Bill, is set to expire on September 30, 2018. In November 2017, approximately 216,324 persons in Cuyahoga County were receiving SNAP benefits. Just more than 35,000 of these beneficiaries were 60 years of age or older. A higher percentage of Cuyahoga County SNAP beneficiaries are older than 60 when compared to the State of Ohio as a whole.

**Table 1: The 10 Cuyahoga County Zip Codes with Highest SNAP Growth among Adults Age 60 and Older**

<b>ZIP CODE</b>	<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<b>% INCREASE</b>	<b># 2013</b>	<b># 2017</b>
44119	CLEVELAND (COLLINWOOD)	57%	235	369
44147	BROADVIEW HEIGHTS	51%	100	151
44123	EUCLID	50%	300	449
44135	CLEVELAND (PURITAS)	48%	633	935
44142	BROOKPARK	45%	166	241
44129	PARMA	44%	308	444
44132	EUCLID	41%	272	383
44017	BEREA	38%	186	257
44138	OLMSTEAD FALLS	37%	149	204
44116	ROCKY RIVER	36%	159	216

Source: Cuyahoga County Department of Senior and Adult Services

Despite these increases, too many eligible older adults in Ohio aren't enrolling in SNAP. In 2017, the Center for Community Solutions issued a report entitled *Ohio Seniors Missing Out on \$50 Million in Hunger Aid*. Among the findings were that only 40 percent of eligible seniors (age 60 and older) participate in SNAP, compared to 87 percent of all eligible Ohioans. That translates to 260,000 Ohio seniors missing out on as much as \$150 million in nutrition assistance. Perhaps this is why Ohio ranks among the worst states for senior hunger, with nearly half a million seniors experiencing food insecurity. That means those seniors are worried about where their next meal is coming from.

Senior food insecurity and hunger can manifest itself in the form of poor health. A study conducted at John Hopkins University, and published last year in *Population Health Management*, found that increased SNAP enrollment and even modest increases in benefits were associated with a reduction in costly hospital admissions for low-income older adults who were dually enrolled in Medicaid and Medicare. Additional findings from the study published in *BMC Geriatrics* showed that increased SNAP enrollment and modest increases in benefits were also associated with decreased admission to long-term care facilities.

There are a number of measures that the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services could undertake to improve SNAP participation among eligible seniors. These include phone-based enrollment with "on-demand interviews" (currently being piloted in Stark County), implementing a standard medical deduction, developing a simplified application for seniors and targeted outreach to those already enrolled in Medicaid. But, all of these measures are dependent on Congress reauthorizing and strengthening SNAP before it expires in September 2018.

Ohio policy makers are well poised to influence the renewal of SNAP when Congress takes up the farm bill later this year. US Senator Sherrod Brown serves on the Senate Agriculture Committee and Representatives Marcia Fudge and Bob Gibbs sit on the House Committee on Agriculture. Rep. Fudge also sits on the important Nutrition Subcommittee. Among the measures they could adopt are:

- Increase SNAP benefit allotments on the more adequate Low-Cost Food Plan.
- Adopt a nationwide standard medical deduction for older Americans so they aren't forced to choose between food and medicine.
- Increase the SNAP minimum monthly benefit, which many seniors receive, to \$25 per month.
- Protect SNAP from cuts and other harmful structural changes that were included in last year's Presidential budget.



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