

Keeping America's Commitment: Ensuring Our Veterans Are Food Secure

VETERANS' HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCE FOOD INSECURITY AT RATES HIGHER THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION

- Post 9/11 veterans have nearly **double the average rates of food insecurity**.
- Households that include a veteran with a disability are nearly **twice as likely to lack access to adequate food** as households that do not include someone with a disability.
- Barriers keeping veterans from accessing assistance include lack of awareness and/or misconceptions about available programs, transportation, stigma, pride, difficulty navigating the application process, and time limit for ABAWDs.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE THROUGH SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as "food stamps," is the cornerstone of all federal nutrition assistance programs, currently helping nearly 46 million Americans put food on the table.

- Average monthly SNAP benefit nationwide is approximately \$127 per person (about \$1.40 per meal).
- SNAP benefits boost the income of struggling families, helping with food purchases and **lifting millions of Americans out of poverty**.
- According to the most recent data from the American Community Survey in 2014, **8% of veterans - roughly 1.5 million - received SNAP at some point during the past year**.
- And yet, **veterans' households participate in SNAP at lower rates than non-veteran households**.



"I want people who are going through financial difficulties to know that there is hope, that the resources are out there now, and that there is a light at the end of the tunnel... but it needs to be a shorter road to get to that light."

- Joe Gaston, Disabled Veteran
Bozeman, Montana

OPPORTUNITY

We propose greater coordination and partnership between USDA and the VA to identify veterans struggling with food insecurity and connect them with available assistance through SNAP.

- Interventions to reduce food insecurity and promote healthier eating among veterans are a smart investment, reducing long-term health-care costs for obesity, diabetes, and other chronic conditions associated with food insecurity and poor nutrition.
- Having VA personnel do screenings for food insecurity and make referrals for assistance would be a relatively easy, and impactful intervention.
- Performing SNAP eligibility screenings and offering SNAP application assistance at VA facilities could make an even more significant difference in fighting veteran hunger.

There is precedent for taking action to better connect a specific population facing food insecurity with SNAP and other nutrition assistance. In October, the American Academy of Pediatrics urged pediatricians to screen all patients for food insecurity and to refer parents to appropriate agencies so children do not go hungry.

For more information and to discuss opportunities to better address veteran food insecurity, contact Josh Protas, Director of Government Affairs: jprotas@mazon.org or (202) 888-6526.