

REACHING THE UNDERSERVED ELDERLY AND WORKING POOR IN THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: EVALUATION FINDINGS FROM THE FISCAL YEAR 2009 PILOTS – SUMMARY

Background

In 2009, Congress provided funds to the Food and Nutrition Service to test approaches to facilitate access to SNAP among two underserved populations: the elderly and working poor. FNS competitively awarded \$500,000 to each of six States to operate pilot projects for up to 3 years beginning in September 2009.

Three States (Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania) targeted the elderly and three (Massachusetts, Washington, and Wisconsin) targeted the working poor. Each State identified local communities in which to test their strategies. Nondemonstration (or comparison) sites were chosen within each State for the purpose of the evaluation.

Demonstration Activities

The demonstration States employed two or more of three strategies:

- First, all States conducted one or more *forms of engagement* – developing and testing messages educating the public about SNAP, developing lists of participants in other assistance programs who are likely to be eligible for SNAP, and disseminating information about SNAP to those likely to be eligible through print materials, media ads, and collaboration with community organizations and employers.
- Second, in all States, contractors or subcontractors provided *application assistance* directly to clients.
- Finally, two States (Michigan and Pennsylvania) created *simplified application processes* by obtaining waivers from FNS allowing demonstration staff to conduct eligibility interviews, and by relaxing requirements for documenting income and expenses that could be verified through existing sources.

Two pilots targeting the elderly – Michigan and Pennsylvania – increased access to SNAP. After controlling for SNAP-related trends and economic factors, the demonstrations had a statistically significant impact on SNAP participation among the elderly during the project period. These were the only two States that simplified the SNAP application process in addition to providing application assistance.

There were no participation impacts on the elderly in Ohio. That project primarily provided application assistance but struggled to identify sites frequented by low-income seniors who were not already participating in SNAP.

Two pilots targeting the working poor – Massachusetts and Wisconsin – had strong demonstration projects but did not increase access to SNAP. Although participation among the working poor increased in these two sites, participation increases in the comparison sites were similar. This may be because the services provided to the working poor were similar to preexisting activities in the pilot sites.

In Washington, the third pilot targeting the working poor, the demonstration activities were modest and implemented during a time when the State was supporting many other efforts to increase SNAP access.

For More Information

Kauff, Jacqueline, et al. (2013). *Reaching the Underserved Elderly and Working Poor in SNAP: Evaluation Findings from the Fiscal Year 2009 Pilots*. Prepared by Mathematica Policy Research for the Food and Nutrition Service (available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).