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SNAP Helps Roughly 1.7 Million Struggling Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State

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Roughly 1.7 million veterans live in households that participated in SNAP (formerly food stamps) at some point during the past 12 months, CBPP analysis of data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey finds. In every state, thousands of struggling veterans use SNAP to help put food on the table; in two states, more than 100,000 veterans do: Florida (132,100) and Texas (119,200). In ten states, at least 10 percent of veterans lived in households that received SNAP in the last year. (See Table 1 for state-by-state data.)

The 1.7 million figure, a three-year average for 2011 through 2013, represents the number of veterans in households that received SNAP at *any point* during the previous year. About 980,000 veterans lived in households that participated in SNAP in an *average* month in 2013, data from a different Census survey (the Current Population Survey) show. (For additional information on the difference between these two methods, see "Notes on Methods" below.)

For low-income veterans, who may be unemployed, working in low-wage jobs, or disabled, SNAP provides an essential support that enables them to purchase nutritious food for their families. Nationwide, SNAP is a powerful anti-hunger and anti-poverty tool: it kept 4.8 million people above the poverty line in 2013, including 2.1 million children.

Many veterans returning from service face challenges in finding work and making ends meet. While the overall unemployment rate for veterans is below the national average, the unemployment rate for *recent* veterans (serving between September 2001 and the present) remains high, at 9 percent in 2013.¹

In addition, more than one-quarter of recent veterans reported service-connected disabilities in 2013,² which can make it harder to provide for their families: households with a veteran who has a disability that prevents him or her from working are about twice as likely to lack access to adequate

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Situation of Veterans: 2013," <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>.

² *Ibid.*

food as households that do not include someone with a disability.³ About 15 percent of households that receive help through the charitable food assistance network (which includes food banks, pantries, and shelters) include a veteran, a recent study found.⁴ For veterans struggling to overcome obstacles to feed their families, SNAP makes a crucial difference.

Table 1 Veterans in Households Receiving SNAP Benefits in the Last Year, 2011-2013 Average		
State/Territory	Estimated number of veterans in households receiving SNAP	Estimated share of veterans in households receiving SNAP
Alabama	33,000	8%
Alaska	4,900	6%
Arizona	43,700	8%
Arkansas	19,300	8%
California	98,200	5%
Colorado	23,500	5%
Connecticut	14,200	6%
Delaware	6,700	8%
District of Columbia	4,400	13%
Florida	132,100	8%
Georgia	66,500	9%
Hawaii	7,400	5%
Idaho	11,000	9%
Illinois	58,200	8%
Indiana	34,200	8%
Iowa	17,600	8%
Kansas	12,500	5%
Kentucky	30,800	10%
Louisiana	30,000	10%
Maine	14,100	11%
Maryland	28,500	6%
Massachusetts	25,700	7%
Michigan	73,100	11%
Minnesota	16,800	5%
Mississippi	20,100	10%
Missouri	44,900	9%
Montana	7,800	8%
Nebraska	7,000	5%
Nevada	15,800	7%

³ Alisha Coleman-Jensen and Mark Nord, “Food Insecurity Among Households With Working-Age Adults With Disabilities,” Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, ERR-144, January 2013. About one-third (33.5 percent) of households with a working-age member who was out of the labor force due to disability were food insecure. While the food insecurity rate was slightly lower (30.5 percent) for households with a *veteran* who was out of the work force due to disability, this rate is still much higher than households with *no* working-age adults with disabilities (12 percent).

⁴ Feeding America, “Hunger in America 2014,” <http://help.feedingamerica.org/HungerInAmerica/hunger-in-america-2014-full-report.pdf>.

Table 1
Veterans in Households Receiving SNAP Benefits in the Last Year, 2011-2013 Average

State/Territory	Estimated number of veterans in households receiving SNAP	Estimated share of veterans in households receiving SNAP
New Hampshire	5,600	5%
New Jersey	19,500	5%
New Mexico	14,900	8%
New York	73,700	8%
North Carolina	61,400	8%
North Dakota	2,400	4%
Ohio	80,200	10%
Oklahoma	26,300	8%
Oregon	43,200	14%
Pennsylvania	64,600	7%
Rhode Island	4,900	7%
South Carolina	34,200	8%
South Dakota	4,700	7%
Tennessee	54,100	11%
Texas	119,200	7%
Utah	10,900	8%
Vermont	4,100	8%
Virginia	41,000	5%
Washington	59,500	10%
West Virginia	13,700	9%
Wisconsin	30,600	8%
Wyoming	2,200	4%

Notes: Estimates shown are for veterans living in households that received any SNAP income during the past 12 months. Monthly estimates of SNAP participation would be lower. Estimates use three-year averages due to small sample sizes in some states in one-year data; these three-year estimates are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source: CBPP Analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011 to 2013

Notes on Methods

CBPP analyzed the American Community Survey (ACS) for this state-level analysis. The figures presented here represent our best estimate of the number of veterans who live in households that receive SNAP at some point during the year.

The analysis combines data for three years (2011 through 2013) to improve the reliability of the state estimates. The figures, which total 1.7 million veterans nationwide for the three-year average (the 2013 figure was 1.6 million), refer to veterans who live in households where anyone received SNAP benefits at any time in the past 12 months. We also estimate, based on Census' Current Population Survey (CPS), that 980,000 veterans lived in SNAP households in an average month in 2013.

The two figures differ for three reasons. First, the number of veterans in SNAP households at any point in the year is necessarily larger than a monthly average. Second, the figures come from different surveys, and the CPS tends to undercount SNAP recipients more than the ACS does. Third, they cover different periods — 2011 through 2013 for the ACS estimate versus 2013 alone for the CPS estimate. Both surveys likely badly undercount homeless veterans, though the ACS probably misses fewer.