Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

1275 First Street NE, Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20002

Tel: 202-408-1080

info@cbpp.org
www.cbpp.org

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SNAP Helps 1.2 Million Veterans With Low Incomes

Nearly 1.2 million veterans lived in households that participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) between 2022 and 2024.[1] Veterans in every state — who may be unemployed, working in low-paying jobs, or have disabilities — use SNAP to supplement their low incomes to put food on the table for themselves and their families. (See Table 1 for state-by-state estimates.)

Yet the harmful 2025 Republican reconciliation law eliminated the work requirement exemption for veterans, which research consistently shows cuts many people off SNAP without increasing employment or earnings.[2] If these veterans can't show that they are working 20 hours a week or prove that they qualify for a different exemption, they are limited to three months of SNAP benefits every three years. According to one estimate, about 260,000 veterans may be subject to the time limit and less than half of them reported usually working the hours needed to meet the requirement.[3] The law is taking food assistance away from millions of households with low incomes, including veterans,[4] who turn to SNAP for help affording groceries. Since the 2025 reconciliation law was enacted, the number of people receiving SNAP has declined sharply by 5.5 million (13 percent), even though there is no sign that the decline is due primarily to an improving economy.[5]

These losses reflect, in part, states' response to the significant new fiscal pressures the 2025 reconciliation law created. Starting in October 2027, states must pay a portion of benefit costs for the first time in the program's history. States' obligations will be based on their "payment error rate," a measure of states' overpayments and underpayments of benefits from earlier years that largely reflect administrative mistakes. Faced with the threat of hundreds of millions, or even billions, of dollars in new annual costs,[6] states are scrambling to reduce their error rates. Congress should delay the new law's cost shift for all states before the end of 2026, not just the few states already granted a delay under the reconciliation law, to give them time to improve payment accuracy without taking assistance away from eligible people, including veterans.

Many Veterans Face Employment, Health, Other Challenges

While veterans are a diverse group (see Figure 1), many face challenges making ends meet.

Lower employment rates. Historically, veterans have been slightly more successful than non-veterans at finding jobs when they look for work. However, a smaller share of all veterans are employed compared to non-veterans.[7] Veterans' lower employment rate is largely due to the fact that fewer veterans are looking for work, since they have more health conditions and lower educational attainment.[8]

Also, Black and Latino veterans experience higher unemployment rates than white veterans — a reflection of biased hiring practices, redlining, and other past and present systemic factors that limit economic mobility and opportunity.[9] The Department of Veterans Affairs projects that the share of veterans who identify as a race other than non-Hispanic white will grow from about 28 percent to 39 percent of the veteran population by fiscal year 2053.[10]

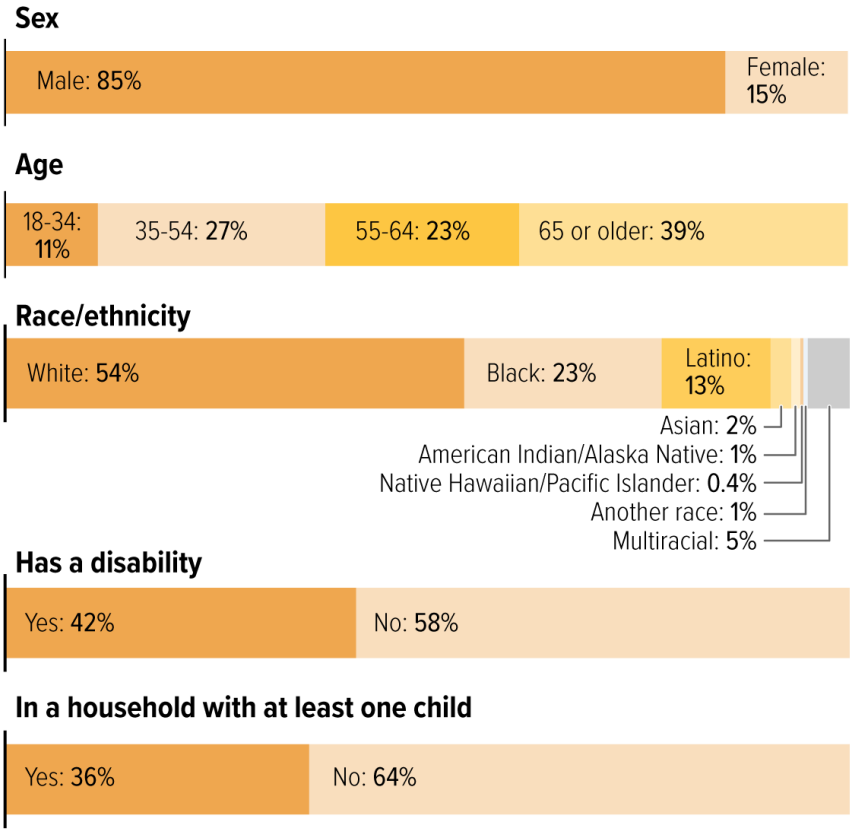
Veterans may face barriers to employment such as little work experience beyond military service, trouble finding employment that matches their skills, discrimination by employers, or lack of access to support services (e.g., military-to-civilian transition and veteran hiring services).[11] Many younger veterans are highly skilled, but civilian employers often undervalue their military experience. As a result, a larger share of younger veterans hold jobs for which they are overqualified compared to younger non-veterans with similar skills, which can add to job dissatisfaction and turnover. Also, some veterans are only offered low-paying jobs, which can make it difficult for them to meet their basic needs.[12]

Health conditions. Some veterans also face challenges from physical and mental health conditions related to their service that can affect their well-being. For example, some conditions that are more prevalent among recent veterans, such as traumatic brain injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder, have been linked to negative outcomes such as reduced labor force participation, increased risk of poor physical and mental health, and worse quality of life, including difficulty with community reintegration.[13] About 34 percent of all veterans have a service-connected disability – more than double the 2008 rate. And post-9/11 veterans, the youngest cohort, are more likely to have a service-connected disability than other veterans.[14]

Homelessness and other hardships. Due in part to the above factors, many veterans struggle to meet basic needs. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's annual point-in-time survey in January 2025, over 32,000 veterans were experiencing homelessness, about 5.3 percent of all homeless adults.[15] Veterans with disabilities and without health insurance are also more likely to experience difficulty paying medical bills.[16] Veterans who lack stable employment, housing, or resources to cover medical expenses are likely to have difficulty affording enough to eat.

FIGURE 1

Veterans Participating in SNAP Are Diverse by Several Measures



Note: These figures represent the annual average of veterans who received SNAP at any point during the 12 months prior to being surveyed. Veterans are individuals who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces but were not on active duty at the time of surveying. All race/ethnicity categories other than Latino are non-Latino; those identifying as Latino may be of any race.

Source: CBPP analysis of data from the 2022-2024 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey

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SNAP Can Help Address Food Insecurity Among Veterans

According to the Department of Agriculture, 11 percent of veterans ages 18 to 64 experienced food insecurity in 2015–2019.[17] Veterans were 7 percent more likely than non-veterans to experience food insecurity, after controlling for a range of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics that may contribute to differences in food insecurity rates between the two groups. Veterans of color were more likely than white veterans to experience food insecurity. In addition, veterans who had a disability, were unemployed, or had lower educational attainment were at greater risk of food insecurity. Another study found that among veterans, depression and suicidal thoughts were more common among those who were food insecure.[18]

For veterans struggling to feed their families, SNAP can make a crucial difference. However, research suggests that low-income veterans are less likely to participate in SNAP than the low-income population.[19] Among veterans, SNAP participation is higher for those who are most likely to be food insecure, including those who are young, have lower educational attainment, or are unemployed.[20]

In every state, low-income veterans rely on SNAP to help feed their families. California has the largest number of veterans participating in SNAP (118,000), followed by Texas and Florida (95,000 and 87,000, respectively). Oregon and Washington, D.C. have the highest *share* of veterans participating in SNAP, with about 14 percent of veterans living in households that receive SNAP, followed by New Mexico, Louisiana, and New York with about 10 percent.

SNAP provides critical support for veterans across the country who are struggling to feed their families after returning home from military service.

TABLE 1

Veterans Receiving SNAP Food Assistance, 2022-2024 Average

State	Estimated Number of Veterans Receiving SNAP	Estimated Total Number of Veterans	Estimated Share of Veterans Receiving SNAP
Alabama	21,000	302,000	7%
Alaska	4,000	57,000	7%
Arizona	29,000	443,000	7%
Arkansas	9,000	172,000	5%
California	118,000	1,260,000	9%
Colorado	23,000	333,000	7%
Connecticut	9,000	131,000	7%
Delaware	4,000	61,000	7%
District of Columbia	3,000	19,000	14%
Florida	87,000	1,325,000	7%
Georgia	49,000	606,000	8%
Hawai'i	6,000	83,000	8%
Idaho	6,000	111,000	5%
Illinois	42,000	461,000	9%
Indiana	17,000	321,000	5%
Iowa	8,000	159,000	5%
Kansas	7,000	149,000	5%
Kentucky	16,000	224,000	7%
Louisiana	22,000	210,000	10%
Maine	7,000	94,000	8%
Maryland	21,000	324,000	6%
Massachusetts	20,000	236,000	9%
Michigan	37,000	449,000	8%
Minnesota	11,000	258,000	4%
Mississippi	9,000	148,000	6%
Missouri	20,000	344,000	6%
Montana	4,000	82,000	4%
Nebraska	4,000	99,000	4%
Nevada	17,000	194,000	9%
New Hampshire	4,000	87,000	4%
New Jersey	13,000	261,000	5%
New Mexico	14,000	130,000	10%
New York	56,000	568,000	10%

TABLE 1

Veterans Receiving SNAP Food Assistance, 2022-2024 Average

State	Estimated Number of Veterans Receiving SNAP	Estimated Total Number of Veterans	Estimated Share of Veterans Receiving SNAP
North Carolina	47,000	618,000	8%
North Dakota	2,000	42,000	4%
Ohio	44,000	589,000	8%
Oklahoma	20,000	237,000	8%
Oregon	33,000	238,000	14%
Pennsylvania	61,000	624,000	10%
Rhode Island	3,000	43,000	7%
South Carolina	20,000	348,000	6%
South Dakota	2,000	55,000	4%
Tennessee	24,000	397,000	6%
Texas	95,000	1,408,000	7%
Utah	5,000	109,000	4%
Vermont	3,000	33,000	8%
Virginia	34,000	612,000	5%
Washington	39,000	464,000	8%
West Virginia	10,000	106,000	10%
Wisconsin	17,000	276,000	6%
Wyoming	1,000	39,000	2%
United States	1,175,000	15,939,000	7%

Notes: Estimates are for veterans living in households that received any SNAP income during the 12 months prior to being surveyed. Estimates of SNAP participation in a given month 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 thousand and may not add up to totals.

Source: CBPP analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year series, 2022 to 2024

Notes on Methods

CBPP analyzed the 2022 to 2024 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample for this state-level analysis. Veterans were identified as individuals who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces but were not on active duty at the time of surveying.

The figures presented here represent our best estimate of the number of veterans living in households that received SNAP at some point during the 12 months prior to being surveyed. The analysis combines three years of data to improve the reliability of the state estimates. The ACS includes housing unit addresses and residents of group quarters, including shelters, but it omits any individuals experiencing

homelessness who are not staying at an address for more than two months (e.g., with friends or family) or at a shelter at the time of surveying. Given that the Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2025 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report found that 42 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness were unsheltered, the ACS likely undercounts homeless veterans. Additionally, survey respondents, including those in the ACS, often underreport program participation.

Disability as defined in Figure 1 includes anyone who self-reported having a disability in at least one of six core areas: hearing, seeing, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and/or independent living. SNAP's definition of disability, for purposes of receiving special consideration within the program, is narrower and does not cover all individuals who may have disabilities. SNAP considers a person as disabled if they receive at least one of several types of disability benefits.

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[1] CBPP analysis of data from the 2022 to 2024 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. This figure represents the annual average number of veterans who received SNAP at any point during the 12 months prior to being surveyed. Veterans are individuals who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces but were not on active duty at the time of surveying. These estimates likely undercount veterans who receive SNAP because they omit veterans who are unsheltered; see Notes on Methods.

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