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SNAP Helps Almost 1.5 Million Low-Income Veterans, Including Thousands in Every State

By Lexin Cai

Almost 1.5 million veterans live in households that participate in SNAP (formerly food stamps), CBPP analysis of data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey finds.¹ In every state, thousands of low-income veterans use SNAP to help put food on the table; two states have more than 100,000 veterans participating: Florida (124,000) and Texas (103,000). In eight states, at least 10 percent of veterans live in households that received SNAP in the last year. (See Table 1 for state-by-state data.)

The 1.5 million figure, an annual average for the 2014-2016 period, represents veterans who received SNAP at *any point* during the previous year. For low-income veterans, who may be unemployed, working in low-wage jobs, or have disabilities, 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 8.8 million people above the poverty line in 2014, including 4 million children.²

Some veterans returning from service face challenges in finding work and making ends meet. For example, young veterans who leave active duty may have little work experience beyond military service. Searching for a new job can be especially difficult while they are in the military. Young recent veterans have higher unemployment rates and lower labor force participation rates than similar civilians, according to a recent Congressional Budget Office report. The unemployment rate for male veterans ages 22-24 who were neither in school nor functionally disabled was about 2 percentage points higher than that of comparable civilians over the 2008-2015 period, on average, and their labor force participation rate was 1.1 percentage points lower.³ Similarly, the Bureau of

¹ We defined veterans as those individuals who indicated they have ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.

² CBPP analysis of Census Bureau data from the March Current Population Survey; corrections for underreported benefits from Department of Health and Human Services/Urban Institute TRIM model. These numbers are slightly different from previously published numbers because the Census revised these files in September 2017.

³ Congressional Budget Office, "Labor Force Experiences of Recent Veterans," May 2017, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/115th-congress-2017-2018/reports/52418-laborforceveterans_0.pdf. Recent veterans refer to veterans who left active-duty service since September 2001.

Labor Statistics finds that the unemployment rate for veterans ages 25-34 was higher than that of civilians in the same age group in 2016.⁴

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 food as households that do not include someone with a disability.⁵ More than a third (1.4 million) of recent veterans reported a service-connected disability in 2016.⁶ This can make it harder for them to provide for their families. About 20 percent of households receiving help through the charitable food assistance network (which includes food banks, pantries, and shelters) include a veteran, one study found.⁷ For veterans struggling to overcome obstacles to feed their families, SNAP makes a crucial difference.

TABLE 1

Veterans Receiving SNAP Benefits, 2014-2016 Average

State	Estimated number of veterans receiving SNAP	Estimated total number of veterans	Estimated share of veterans receiving SNAP
Alabama	27,000	337,000	8%
Alaska	4,000	65,000	5%
Arizona	37,000	489,000	7%
Arkansas	17,000	203,000	8%
California	96,000	1,649,000	6%
Colorado	21,000	373,000	6%
Connecticut	12,000	177,000	7%
Delaware	5,000	67,000	7%
District of Columbia	3,000	27,000	12%
Florida	124,000	1,456,000	9%
Georgia	61,000	646,000	9%
Hawaii	10,000	107,000	9%
Idaho	8,000	114,000	7%
Illinois	52,000	609,000	9%
Indiana	28,000	395,000	7%
Iowa	14,000	196,000	7%
Kansas	11,000	183,000	6%
Kentucky	25,000	279,000	9%

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment Situation of Veterans: 2016,” March 22, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>.

⁵ 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. 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).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Feeding America, “Hunger in America 2014,” August 2014, <http://help.feedingamerica.org/HungerInAmerica/hunger-in-america-2014-full-report.pdf>.

State	Estimated number of veterans receiving SNAP	Estimated total number of veterans	Estimated share of veterans receiving SNAP
Louisiana	23,000	257,000	9%
Maine	10,000	106,000	9%
Maryland	27,000	373,000	7%
Massachusetts	24,000	320,000	7%
Michigan	55,000	581,000	10%
Minnesota	16,000	320,000	5%
Mississippi	16,000	173,000	9%
Missouri	32,000	425,000	8%
Montana	5,000	84,000	6%
Nebraska	6,000	126,000	4%
Nevada	17,000	208,000	8%
New Hampshire	5,000	103,000	5%
New Jersey	17,000	344,000	5%
New Mexico	12,000	147,000	8%
New York	67,000	753,000	9%
North Carolina	56,000	666,000	8%
North Dakota	2,000	47,000	4%
Ohio	64,000	758,000	8%
Oklahoma	24,000	276,000	9%
Oregon	39,000	298,000	13%
Pennsylvania	63,000	800,000	8%
Rhode Island	6,000	61,000	10%
South Carolina	27,000	367,000	7%
South Dakota	5,000	61,000	8%
Tennessee	44,000	442,000	10%
Texas	103,000	1,484,000	7%
Utah	7,000	123,000	6%
Vermont	4,000	41,000	10%
Virginia	34,000	686,000	5%
Washington	53,000	548,000	10%
West Virginia	13,000	134,000	10%
Wisconsin	27,000	357,000	8%
Wyoming	2,000	46,000	4%
United States	1,459,000	18,888,000	8%

Notes: Estimates are for veterans living in households that received any SNAP income during the past 12 months. 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, 2014 to 2016

Notes on Methods

CBPP analyzed the 2014-2016 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS) for this state-level analysis. Veterans were identified as individuals who indicated that they had ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. The figures presented here represent our best estimate of the number of veterans living in households that receive SNAP at some point during the year.

The analysis combines data for three years (2014 through 2016) to improve the reliability of the state estimates. The figures, which total 1.5 million veterans nationwide for the three-year average, refer to veterans living in households where anyone received SNAP benefits at any time in the past 12 months. The ACS surveys housing unit addresses and residents of group quarters facilities, including shelters. The survey omits any homeless individuals who are not staying at an address (e.g., with friends or family) or at a shelter at the time of survey. Given the transient nature of this population, the ACS likely undercounts the homeless, including homeless veterans.