

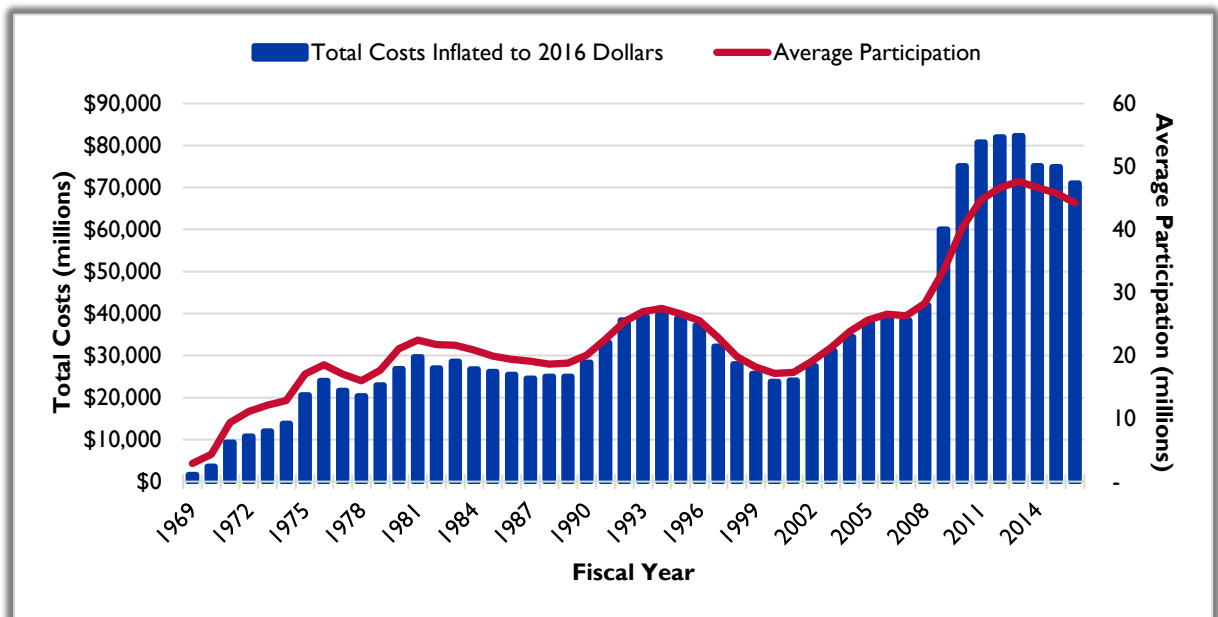
DATA SNAPSHOT: CHANGES TO GEORGIA'S SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food access to nearly 43 million individuals in need throughout the United States.¹ Previously known as the Food Stamp Program, SNAP has been active for more than 50 years.² It

is the largest safety net program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with benefits funded entirely by the federal government.³ In 2016, total costs reached \$71 billion, and the program averaged \$125.50 in monthly benefits per person.⁴

Figure 1. National SNAP Participation and Total Costs, 1969 to 2016 (in millions)



¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. June 9, 2017. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation and Costs — National Level Annual Summary."

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. 2014. "50 Years of SNAP."

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. April 7, 2017. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation and Costs — National Level Annual Summary."

⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1 shows that average SNAP participation and its total costs have generally trended upward since the program began. However, the massive growth in participation and costs after the start of the Great Recession in late 2007 was unprecedented. Although the Great Recession officially ended in June 2009, recovery has been slow, reflected in the sustained high participation in SNAP nationwide. SNAP participation in Georgia has mirrored the growth at the national level, peaking at nearly 2 million in 2013. Georgia SNAP saw enrollment declines in 2014 for the first time since 2000, but participation remains significantly higher than in the pre-recession years. (For more information, see: Fiscal Research Center’s “Data Snapshot: Georgia SNAP.”⁵)

SNAP in Georgia

More than 1.7 million Georgians relied on SNAP in 2016 — a significant increase over the 1 million participants in 2008 before the Great Recession — with the monthly benefits per person averaging \$128.^{6,7} One of the major drivers of SNAP enrollment during and after the Great Recession was the inclusion of more able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), stemming from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The expansion of ABAWD eligibility during the Great Recession provided food access to more than 100,000 Georgians who were previously ineligible.⁸

ABAWD individuals are between the ages of 18 and 49, do not have a certified medical disability, and do not care for dependents like minor children.⁹ Under SNAP rules, unemployed ABAWDs can receive benefits for

three months in a three-year period. To receive benefits beyond this time limit, they must work or volunteer at least 20 hours per week or participate in a comparable number of hours of approved training courses.

States have the authority to request statewide or partial waivers to the benefits time limit from the federal government during periods of economic hardship. The high unemployment rates during the Great Recession resulted in many states receiving such waivers, allowing unemployed ABAWDs access to benefits for longer than three months. As the economy has improved, however, many states no longer qualify for statewide exemptions based on unemployment rates and job availability, but they may apply for partial waivers for counties with high unemployment rates.

When looking at Georgia as a whole, the majority of the counties in Map 1 are gray, indicating that they still have waivers in place that suspend the limit of three months of benefits in three years. Out of the 159 counties in Georgia, 24 no longer have waivers. Cobb, Gwinnett and Hall counties, in light blue, were the first to transition off waivers in 2016, followed by several adjacent counties the next year. In 2017, Brooks and Lowndes counties, in dark blue, became the only counties in the southern half of the state without waivers. The majority of the other counties without waivers are located in or near the metro-Atlanta area. Bartow, Forsyth, Paulding, Heard, Coweta, Walton, Barrow and Fayette counties in metro Atlanta reinstated time limits in 2017. Fulton, DeKalb and Clayton counties remain under waivers.

⁵ August 2016. frc.gsu.edu/files/2016/08/Georgia-SNAP-Policy-Brief_August-2016.pdf

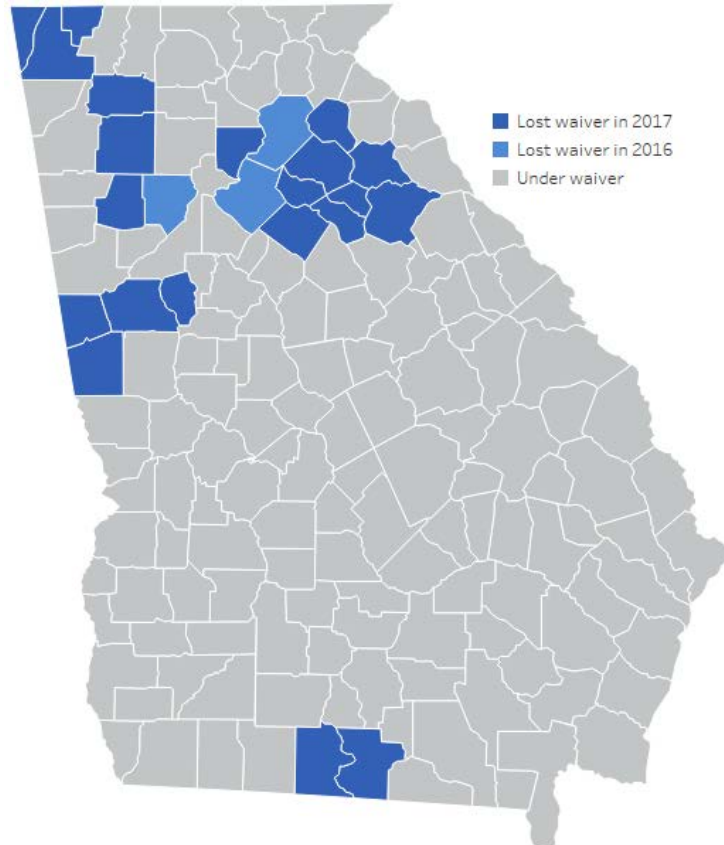
⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. January 23, 2017. “Georgia Food Stamp Program.” Web. 19 April 2017.

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. 2008. “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) State Activity Report.”

⁸ Author’s calculation based on potential ABAWD cases in January 2008 compared to March 2013 from Georgia SNAP data.

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. April 2017. “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs).”

Map I. Georgia SNAP Time-Limit Waivers by County



Map 2 uses Georgia SNAP administrative data to show the percentage of likely ABAWD SNAP cases out of the total SNAP cases in each county.¹⁰ Because the SNAP data do not explicitly identify ABAWDs, we narrowed the SNAP population to likely ABAWD individuals: heads of household, ages 18-49, who do not have a disability or dependents and are currently receiving SNAP benefits.¹¹ For example, in Fulton County, likely ABAWD individuals account for more than 17.5 percent of the total number of SNAP cases in that county. The legend indicates the number of counties of each color in parentheses.

In 2016, Cobb, Gwinnett and Hall counties lost waiver eligibility because of their improved employment situations. As a result, the number of ABAWDs receiving benefits in those counties fell 75 percent from

6,102 to 1,490.¹² Map 2 illustrates that likely ABAWD cases in Gwinnett and Hall counties, in pale blue, represent less than 10 percent of total SNAP cases; these counties are two of only eight counties in Georgia with less than 10 percent of the SNAP cases being likely ABAWDs. In 2017, 21 additional counties lost their waiver eligibility. There are 12,000 ABAWDs in these counties, many of whom may exhaust their SNAP benefits if they are unemployed after the time limit takes effect once again.¹³ Overall, more than half of Georgia's counties have likely ABAWD cases representing 15 percent or more of total SNAP cases. Many of these counties are still under time-limit waivers, but as the economy improves and states no longer qualify for waivers, these individuals may no longer be eligible for SNAP benefits.

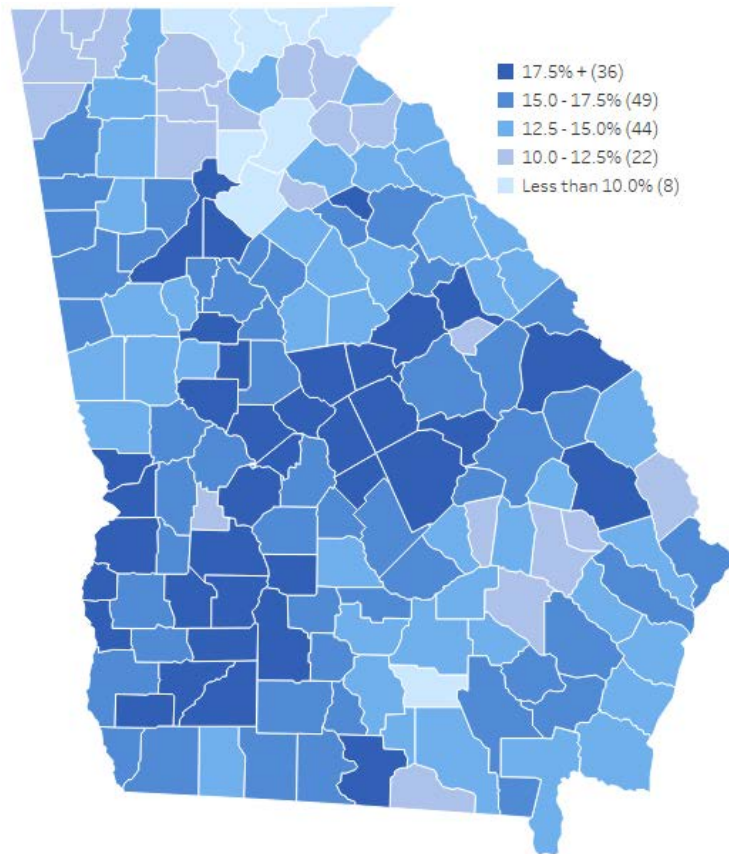
¹⁰ SNAP data obtained from the Georgia Department of Human Services.

¹¹ Exceptions to SNAP reductions may exist based on additional factors like employment status and pregnancy.

¹² Schneider, Craig. April 6, 2017. "Amid Georgia Food Stamp Crackdown, a Question of Who Can Work." *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

¹³ Schneider, Craig. March 27, 2017. "Able-Bodied Food Stamp Recipients Could Lose Benefits." *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

Map 2. Share of Georgia SNAP Cases That Are Likely ABAWDs, by County, December 2016



Future Changes to Georgia SNAP

Georgia SNAP may see significant changes in the future, as the president's fiscal year 2018 budget introduced more than \$191 billion in reductions to SNAP over the next decade.¹⁴ The plan includes narrowing SNAP eligibility and adding further work requirements. The largest proposed change alters the cost-sharing burden of SNAP benefits. Currently, as mentioned above, the

federal government shoulders 100 percent of SNAP benefit costs. As described in the proposed budget, a new cost-sharing plan gradually shifts the benefit costs to the states.¹⁵ Beginning with an average rate of 10 percent in 2020, the proposed cost shifting to states will increase to a national average of 25 percent by 2023. Any of the proposed changes will likely result in substantial declines in SNAP participation in Georgia.

¹⁴ U.S. Office of Management and Budget. 2017. "Budget of the U.S. Government: A New Foundation for Greatness, Fiscal Year 2018."

¹⁵ Ibid.

About the Author

Alex Hathaway is a research associate with the Fiscal Research Center. He holds a master's degree in public policy with a concentration in health policy from Georgia State University, a professional doctorate in chiropractic medicine from Life University, and a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia. His research interests include healthcare finance, aging, state fiscal practices, higher education policy, and program evaluation.

Lakshmi Pandey is a senior research associate with the Fiscal Research Center. He specializes in working with administrative data and also provides analytical and technical support on research projects, such as welfare to work, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and unemployment insurance for U.S. Department of Agriculture, census data analysis, geographical information systems, incorporation and cityhood studies, and many others. He received his doctorate from Banaras Hindu University in India and has worked at Washington State University and State University of New York at Buffalo prior to Georgia State University.

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