

Feeding Wyoming:

Solutions for a Stronger SNAP System



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INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the Wyoming Community Foundation partnered with the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) to find out how many of our Wyoming community members qualify for SNAP but do not receive benefits.

Seventy eight percent of eligible households are not accessing this important program. It's a program that works to ensure hardworking Wyoming families and their children don't go hungry.

WYSAC found a large "SNAP gap." This report explores why that gap exists.

WYSAC gathered input through interviews and focus groups with service providers, and a survey of current SNAP users and likely eligible individuals. This report highlights barriers to our hardworking friends and neighbors who are trying to make ends meet and could use SNAP. It also offers solutions to help more eligible people access the program in Wyoming.

WHY IS THERE A SNAP GAP?

1. Lack of awareness
2. Stigma and pride
3. Complex application process
4. Geography and transportation
5. Mistrust of government
6. Benefits don't stretch far enough
7. System gaps and red tape

1

Lack of Awareness

One of the most common reasons eligible people do not receive SNAP benefits is that they do not know they qualify.

"The one thing I constantly see is people think that either their income level is too high, or they just don't really know exactly what SNAP would offer them." — Service Provider

Additionally, outreach efforts appear to be minimal and don't seem to reach many of our neighbors who are eligible for assistance, especially those with fluctuating incomes, seniors, and single adults without children. Often, only those folks who are already connected with a community agency or another program receive outreach.

Survey Insight:

10%

did not know they were eligible to receive SNAP

36%

did not think they would qualify for SNAP

2

Stigma and Pride

Self-reliance runs deep in the Equality State and many people avoid applying because of the stigma. Many Wyomingites fear being judged by others or judge themselves. Many people hold negative perceptions about government assistance. Some people, especially older generations, equate SNAP with failure or dependency. But the truth is, pulling yourself up by your bootstraps only works if you have bootstraps to begin with.

"We don't wanna be somebody who's on food stamps." — Focus Group Participant

"Only poor people need it, and I'm not poor." — Service Provider

Survey Insight:

6%

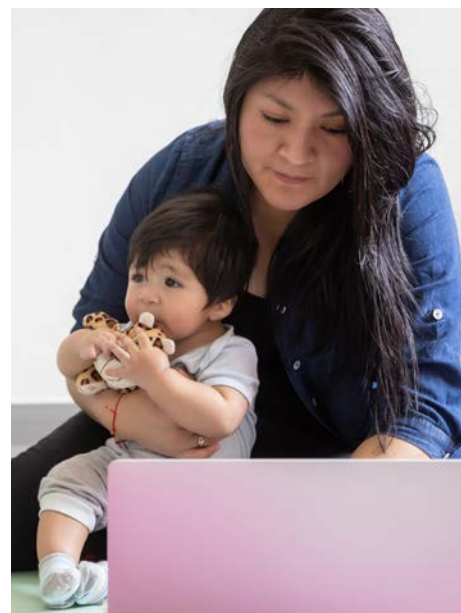
did not apply for SNAP because of stigma or judgment



3

Complex Application Process

Many people from our communities described the SNAP application process with the Department of Family Services as overwhelming. This is especially true for people with limited literacy, mobility, or disabilities that may impact things such as memory, organization, or completing multi-step tasks. The current process to apply for SNAP includes long forms, documentation requirements, and interviews that some found confusing or intrusive that leaves some of our community members behind.



"More forms, more questionnaires, more fill all this out and make sure you don't make an error and, understanding that process, living in that process gets to be tiresome." — Service Provider

"And then I think there are times, some of my even more impoverished families who do have food insecurity, they sometimes even struggle with transportation to get to the offices where they fill out paperwork or they have literacy issues where they're just really struggling to do the paperwork and to honestly complete a task from start to finish." — Service Provider

Survey Insight:

11% said the application process was too difficult or time consuming.



4

Geography and Transportation

Wyoming's rural and frontier areas make it hard for many people to access the services they qualify for. Some participants said they had to travel long distances just to turn in a SNAP application at a Department of Family Services (DFS) office. The truth is, for people without reliable transportation or internet access, applying can feel nearly impossible.

"The closest office is 40 miles from here." — Focus Group Participant

"If they don't have transportation, getting to the DFS office to get an application, that can be difficult too or take it back to turn it in." — Service Provider

5

Mistrust of Government

People who have prior negative experience with the government, including Indigenous populations, are often wary of or resistant to participating in public assistance programs.

"I think the Native population is probably really different because there's such a strong historical trauma around the government." — Service Provider

Survey Insight:

5% did not want government assistance



6

Benefits Don't Stretch Far Enough

Despite working hard to make ends meet, even with help from SNAP, many members of our community still can't get by. Recent increases in grocery prices have made it even harder. On average, Wyoming households who get SNAP benefits receive \$381 per month. For a family of four, that amounts to just \$3.13 per person, per day.ⁱ Participants described running out of money before the end of the month and struggling to afford fresh, healthy food.

When asked if they could change one thing about SNAP in Wyoming, people said things like:

"Benefit amount when groceries are priced high", "Giving people below 200% of poverty a realistic amount to use", and "Receive more benefits. The cost of healthy and fresh food has been on the rise." — Survey Participants

Survey Insight:

81% run out of benefits before the end of the month

14% did not think the benefit amount would be worth the effort to apply.

Benefit Cliff

People worry that working just a few extra hours could cost them all their benefits. In Wyoming, SNAP has strict income limits, \$2,500 in take-home pay per month for a family of four. These are hard cutoffs. If a family earns even a little more, they can lose their benefits entirely. There's no gradual reduction. As a result, some families end up worse off after getting a small raise or taking on more work, because their food assistance disappears all at once.

"It's like they, no matter how much they love working, a lot of them love waitressing they would have loved to have put thirty-five, forty hours in, but it didn't make sense. Because if they did that, then they would lose their benefits."
— Focus Group Participant

When asked what the main reasons were that they have not applied for SNAP or no longer receive benefits, people said things like:

"No longer eligible", "Make too much", and "Income slightly over qualifying". — Survey Participants

SNAP INCOME LIMITS

\$2,500
take-home pay for a family of four



7

System Gaps and Red Tape

Despite being designed to support hardworking people facing food insecurity, Wyoming's SNAP system has gaps that make it difficult for people to access and maintain benefits.

Centralized Call Centers Replaced Local Offices

People described how the shift from local offices to a centralized call center created new barriers for applicants. What used to be a personal interaction with a local case worker turned into a frustrating experience of long wait times and limited support.

"A big difference that I've seen is that they switched over from you can have an appointment to talk to a caseworker. Now you have to call a call center, and it takes forever. Sometimes you call wait for hours and speak to somebody." — Focus Group Participants

People further described experiencing delays and missed follow-ups from the call center.

"And even when you fill out an application, they said they're gonna call you. They don't call you, and then they say that when you call them, you have to call the call center. And, it takes hours and hours, sometimes wait for them. Sometimes have to call multiple days, and that's very stressful."

— Focus Group Participants

Survey Insight:

5% had issues
renewing their
benefits

They reported challenges like "hours on hold to have a phone interview – some attempts I was on hold so long that they closed and I was disconnected" and "I was on time and it took 3 weeks to get a call back."





HOW CAN WE CLOSE THE SNAP GAP?

The honest feedback highlights the many challenges to accessing SNAP benefits in Wyoming. But community members and service providers also pointed out programs and strategies that are working, and they shared several ideas for how to build on those successes.

1. Support from nonprofits and service providers
2. Improve local outreach
3. Build trust through relationships
4. Improve messaging about SNAP
5. Make SNAP more accessible

Support from Non-Profits and Service Providers

Some people in Wyoming are already finding community support for help with their SNAP applications. Nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, and service providers play an important role. These groups can assist with filling out forms, answering questions about the program, and guiding people through the application or renewal process. They provide a sense of community and trust. Ensuring that every community has access to this kind of support would be hugely beneficial.

"We have victims' advocates who are pretty well resourced with SNAP and other types of benefits." — Service Provider

Because these workers already have relationships with people in need, they are in a strong position to connect them with programs like SNAP in a way that feels more personal and less intimidating.



Improve Local Outreach

Some community organizations are already working to raise awareness about SNAP by attending local events, setting up tables in public places like libraries and fairs, and sharing flyers at food pantries and health clinics. Others are using social media platforms, like Facebook, to reach more people.

"I attend a lot of kids' fairs and a lot of outreaches through public health, and we work together to give people information about whatever they need—SNAP or whatever they're looking for." — Service Provider

Even with these efforts, many people still do not hear about SNAP until they are already in crisis and seeking help through another program. This suggests that community outreach often is not reaching people early enough.

"I know the other pantry down the street also does [share information about SNAP], but I don't think that word gets out there enough in my county." — Service Provider



To strengthen outreach, many participants suggested bringing resources directly to people. This includes offering in-person support with SNAP applications at familiar, accessible locations such as libraries, senior centers, soup kitchens, and community events. Trained staff who can explain the program and assist with paperwork on the spot may help overcome common barriers like confusion, stigma, or lack of transportation.

"If I was going to do it... I'd go out and set up tables in different public places— have staff there who can get the application done for people." — Service Provider

"It would be great if there were people in rural areas that could assist in filling out the applications." — Focus Group Participant

Survey Insight:

23%

wanted help from service providers or community organizations to complete the SNAP application process.

Build Trust Through Relationships

Many people are more likely to accept help if it comes from someone they know and trust. When service providers take the time to listen without judgment and follow through with support, it creates trust and makes people more willing to apply for benefits like SNAP.

"If there were more nonprofits who were willing to step in and assist people... that would be probably life changing for people."
— Service Provider

This is especially important for older adults and people from communities that may already feel overlooked or mistreated by the government.

"Once again breaking that barrier that it's okay, and it's there to help." — Service Provider

Organizations can also build stronger networks with each other to increase referrals and make sure no one falls through the cracks.

"Working with them [other providers] regularly so that they know who we are and what we do... and we can offer that." — Service Provider

Another important step is setting up an easy way for people to give feedback about SNAP, so the program can continue to improve.

"I think it's really important to have people listen to the needs and concerns... whether it's in your community or statewide." — Focus Group Participant



Improve Public Messaging About SNAP

Stigma and shame emerged as major themes. Service providers suggested using more positive messaging and reminding people that SNAP is a temporary resource. It's a tool that allows hardworking families to make it through a tough time; it's not a handout.

"Just because you need that in the moment right now doesn't mean you have to use it forever." — Focus Group Participant

Communicating that SNAP is a smart choice, like budgeting, can encourage more people to apply without feeling embarrassed.

"This isn't a handout. You worked before... now you need help."
— Service Provider



Some people also said that sharing success stories or examples of how SNAP helped others could be effective in changing community attitudes.

"Make it more of a positive message... this is how we can help you." — Service Provider

Survey Insight:

39% reduced stigma around receiving benefits would make it easier for people to apply for and receive SNAP.

Make SNAP More Accessible

Many people said SNAP would be easier to use if the information and application were more accessible. That means making sure websites are clear, easy to use, and mobile-friendly. It also means using tools like social media to share accurate and simple information, especially for people who may not see flyers or attend local events.

"I think marketing could be done a lot better, especially where I'm at."
— Service Provider

Survey Insights:

41% wanted more outreach and education about eligibility



Online tools are important, especially for younger people and those who live in rural areas. Making the SNAP application more mobile-friendly, will encourage more hardworking Wyomingites who qualify to apply. Making the process simpler and faster would also help.

When asked what would make it easier for people to apply for and receive SNAP benefits:

51%
said a mobile-friendly online application

40%
said a simpler application process

28%
said faster processing times

27%
said fewer documentation requirements

i U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): National and/or State Level Monthly and/or Annual Data – Persons, Households, Benefits, and Average Monthly Benefit per Person & Household." Food and Nutrition Service, July 2025. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.



CONCLUSION

Every family in our community should be able to gather at their table to enjoy a meal together. We must be honest in recognizing that most people in Wyoming who qualify for SNAP are not enjoying the freedom of gathering without worry. There are many reasons why. But there are also many ways to do better for our friends and neighbors.

More outreach, less stigma, simpler applications that work on phones, and stronger benefit policies could help close the SNAP gap. Making that happen will take teamwork across many groups. Wyoming has a chance to make a big impact in the lives of our community members.



Feeding Wyoming:

Solutions for a Stronger SNAP System

<https://wysac.uwyo.edu/wysac/>
<https://wycf.org/>