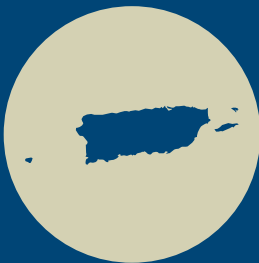


Older Adult Food Insecurity and NAP

STATE FACT SHEET: PUERTO RICO



In **PUERTO RICO**, **38** percent of adults over 60 had incomes below the poverty level. Removing administrative barriers to the Nutrition Assistance Program could connect more older adults to nutrition assistance, reducing hunger, supporting health, and improving economic security.

» FOOD ASSISTANCE IS A CRITICAL SUPPORT FOR OLDER ADULTS

Many older adults in the territory rely on fixed incomes and face rising costs for basic needs such as food, medicine, medical care, and housing. Throughout the U.S., the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps households by providing monthly financial assistance for food purchases. SNAP is not available in Puerto Rico; instead, the island participates in the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), a block-grant program that provides food assistance to those who qualify. NAP, like SNAP, helps eligible older adults afford groceries by providing monthly benefits to purchase food, which reduces food insecurity and helps households avoid difficult tradeoffs, such as skipping meals to pay for medication.



Research shows that Nutrition Assistance Program participation among older adults is linked to improved nutrition, better health and medication adherence, lower health care costs, and reduced hospital and nursing home admissions.¹

» PROGRAM CHURN REFLECTS ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS TO BENEFITS

Churn — when households temporarily lose benefits and reapply within 90 to 120 days — contributes to the SNAP gap among older adults.² While some churn results from short-term changes in income, it most often stems from administrative hurdles, such as multistep application and recertification processes, complex eligibility rules, extensive documentation requirements, difficulty of reaching a caseworker, confusing notices, and easily missed paperwork during recertification, not from loss of eligibility. Churn disrupts access to food, increases stress, and creates added workload for state agencies.³

IN PUERTO RICO:

38% of older adults had income below the poverty level.⁴

THE OLDER ADULT NAP PARTICIPATION:

30% While NAP participation rates are not available for older adults in Puerto Rico, we know that older adults age 60+ make up **30 percent** of all NAP recipients, highlighting how Puerto Rico's older adults face high levels of food insecurity.⁵



NAP is not as robust as SNAP.

Because NAP is a block grant program, rather than an entitlement, the amount of funding that **Puerto Rico** receives for benefits is capped. This means that NAP cannot expand to serve all in need in times of economic crisis — when more people enroll, benefits are reduced.³

REDUCING CHURN AND STRENGTHENING NUTRITION BENEFIT ACCESS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Reducing churn is essential to maintaining consistent benefit access for older adults and minimizing the administrative burden on both participants and state agencies. Proven best practices include:



SIMPLIFIED REPORTING AND LONGER CERTIFICATION PERIODS: Extending certification to 24 or 36 months for older adults with stable income and household circumstances helps reduce the frequency of paperwork and the risk of missed deadlines.⁶ Streamlining forms, reducing documentation requirements, and allowing phone or online interviews make it easier for older adults to stay enrolled.



IMPROVED COMMUNICATION: Sending clear, early reminders via mail, phone, or text about upcoming deadlines can help older adults complete recertification on time.



INCREASED CALL CENTER STAFFING: Ensuring that older adults can call the agency and speak to someone without waiting on hold for hours means people will be able to get answers to questions and resolve issues — such as missed benefits — quickly and easily.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: Leveraging trusted local partners — senior centers, health clinics, and food banks, for example — to provide one-on-one enrollment and recertification support can prevent unnecessary benefit loss.



Most states do not measure SNAP churn or track it by age. This is explored in the Food Research & Action Center's (FRAC) research brief *The Hidden Cost of Hunger: How SNAP Churn Harms Older Adults and Strains States*.⁷



Reducing program churn is essential to ensuring older adults maintain consistent access to food assistance. By addressing administrative barriers and ending avoidable churn, **PUERTO RICO** can help eligible older adults avoid unnecessary benefit loss and keep eligible older adults connected to the nutrition support they need to thrive.

NUTRITION BENEFITS WORK. STRONGER ACCESS MEANS HEALTHIER OLDER ADULTS, STRONGER COMMUNITIES, AND A MORE SECURE PUERTO RICO.