In July 2021, most Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants suffered cuts to their monthly SNAP benefits. This affected more than 114,098 households in Arkansas.\(^1\)

When this “hunger cliff” hit, on average, SNAP participants lost $82 a month, causing the average SNAP benefits to fall to a meager $6 a person a day.

The “hunger cliff” affected all age groups and all parts of Arkansas. The steepest cliff has been for many older adults who only qualify for the minimum SNAP benefit — dropping from $281 a month to $23.

The SNAP cuts were due to Arkansas ending its Public Health Emergency. While Arkansas had the opportunity to avail itself of continued additional benefits until March 2023, it ended them 20 months earlier than the federal Public Health Emergency (PHE), prematurely ending SNAP Emergency Allotments (EAs). These benefit boosts aimed to mitigate food insecurity and stimulate the economy for the duration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.\(^2\)

In total, Arkansas’s SNAP participants lost 23,956,843 in federal food benefits per month when the EAs ended.\(^3\) Not surprisingly that loss has exacerbated food insecurity and hardship in Arkansas. 15 percent of households in Arkansas are experiencing food insecurity.\(^4\) Emergency food providers are struggling to fill this gap. Even before the cuts, food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens reported high demand for assistance. SNAP provides nine times the number of meals the food bank network does, according to estimates from Feeding America.\(^5\)

In May, the federal PHE ended, which removes several administrative flexibilities that supported SNAP households, particularly populations, including college students with low incomes and unemployed and underemployed adults, struggling in the labor market. This will deepen the hunger cliff for these populations.

- For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 22,000 working-age adults without dependents were enrolled in SNAP, and the suspension of the time limit rule was critical in ensuring they were able to access food resources.\(^6\)

- Mitigating the “hunger cliff” has important health and economic impacts. Research shows SNAP improves food security, health, and well-being. Moreover, each $1 in SNAP benefits during a downturn generates between $1.50 and $1.80 in economic activity, benefiting all parts of the food chain — from farmers, ranchers, and food manufacturers, to truckers, retailers, and store employees.\(^7\)

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