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## **Caseload and Benefit Trends for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Formerly The Food Stamp Program)**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, provides monthly benefits to low-income households that can be used to buy food at most grocery stores and other food retailers. SNAP is funded by the federal government and operated by DC and the states. Recipients use SNAP benefits to buy food using an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card similar to a debit card.

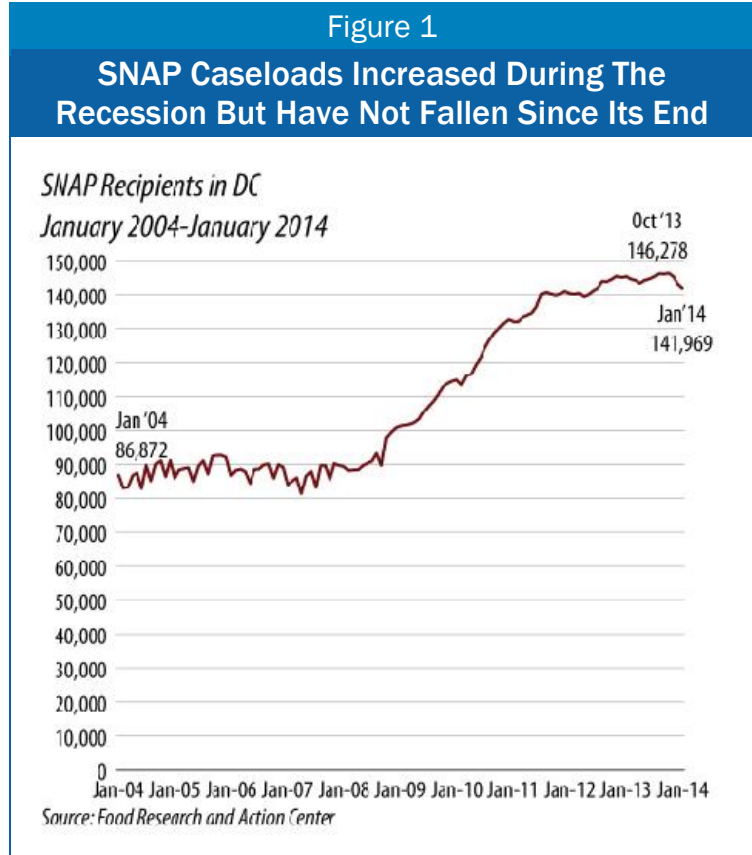
**SNAP Benefits:** SNAP benefits vary by family size. For example, the maximum benefit for a family of three is \$497 per month. Under federal rules, residents must have gross incomes below 130 percent of poverty to be eligible for benefits. This equals \$25,400 for a family of three. After various deductions allowed by the program, adjusted income must be below 100 percent of poverty. The District adopted legislation in 2009 to create “categorical eligibility” for SNAP benefits, which means that some families are deemed to meet the gross income test because they participate in certain other public benefits. Categorical eligibility allows some households with incomes up to 200 percent of poverty to qualify for SNAP benefits.

SNAP benefits were cut in November 2013 because a temporary benefit increase granted by the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) expired. ARRA provided a 14 percent benefit increase to SNAP recipients. The expiration of the temporary benefit increase resulted in \$15 million in cuts to SNAP benefits in DC in 2014, reducing the maximum benefit by \$29 per month for a family of three.

The District has taken steps to protect SNAP benefits in the face of federal cuts. The District, along with several other states, participates in an initiative referred to as “Heat and Eat,” under which SNAP recipients are eligible for higher monthly benefits if they receive any amount of energy assistance. Currently, DC SNAP recipients are given a very small energy assistance subsidy — typically just a dollar — which automatically increases their monthly SNAP benefit. In 2014, Congress raised the minimum qualifying amount of energy assistance to \$20. A bill currently being considered in the Council called the “LIHEAP Administration and Heat and Eat Act of 2014” (B20-0727) would raise the amount of automatic energy assistance benefits SNAP recipients get to ensure they are still eligible for higher benefits. Mayor Gray included funding in his proposed budget for fiscal year 2015 to provide a minimum of \$20 in energy assistance to all SNAP households, so that the higher SNAP benefits from Heat and Eat will be maintained.

**SNAP Caseloads:** Over the past 20 years, DC's SNAP caseload has generally responded to the rise and fall of the economy. As a result of the recession, the number of DC residents receiving food stamps has skyrocketed since 2008. However, that number has not fallen much since the official end of the recession. DC's SNAP caseload reached the highest level in two decades in October 2013. Since that time, the number of participants has started to decline but only modestly.

- The District's SNAP caseload rose from about 86,900 in January 2004 to a peak of about 146,300 in October 2013. This was an increase of nearly 70 percent.
- Since October 2013, the number of SNAP recipients has fallen, but only modestly. In January 2014 it fell to about 142,000.



- Between fiscal year (FY) 2012 and 2013, the average per-person monthly food stamp benefit decreased by 2 percent to about \$135<sup>1</sup>. This is likely the result of a decrease in the DC Standard Utility Allowance, a deduction from gross income used to calculate adjusted income for determining benefit levels. The average benefit will likely fall in 2014 as a result of the expiration of the ARRA increase in benefits.

<sup>1</sup> Source: US Department of Agriculture, [http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/18SNAPavg\\$PP.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/18SNAPavg$PP.htm)