

Food and Finances: Connecting Hardworking Families to Federal Nutrition and Income-Support Programs

By Hannah Kohanzadeh and Sakeenah Shabazz

For the last 10 years, [D.C. Hunger Solutions](#) and [D.C. Community Tax Aid](#) have partnered on an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) campaign to connect income-eligible residents to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) during tax season. The 2018 campaign launches today, February 1, with free tax preparation and SNAP application assistance offered at five [locations across DC](#). Federal nutrition programs like [SNAP](#) and state and federal [EITC](#) are among the [most effective anti-poverty programs](#), and can bring more food and financial resources into low-wage households.

[DC VITA tax sites](#), where volunteers assist tax filers with SNAP applications, are open evenings and weekends. D.C. Hunger Solutions is contracted with the Department of Human Services and submits clients' materials to a caseworker, saving a days' worth of time for the client. Last year, 760 people were pre-screened for SNAP eligibility at VITA tax sites.

Applying for SNAP benefits can be a challenging and time-consuming task, especially if the applicant has an inflexible work schedule. Filing taxes is an equally time-consuming activity that can, in some instances, [drain financial resources](#) from already cash-strapped households. Income eligibility for free tax assistance overlaps with SNAP eligibility, creating an opportune moment to reach people with low-wages.

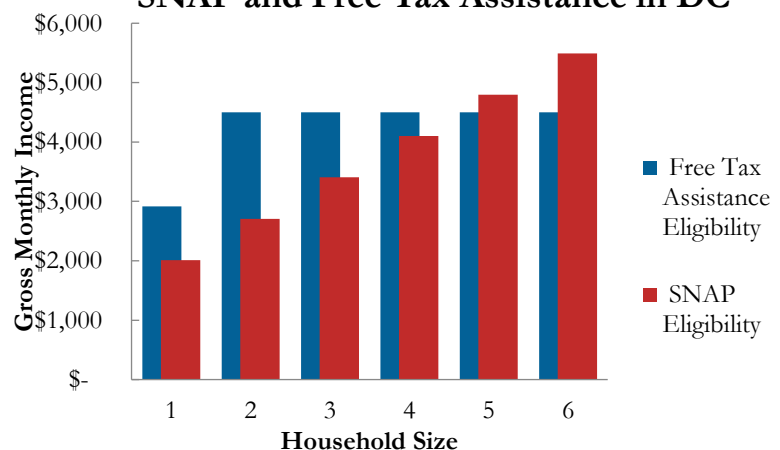
[Nearly 30 percent](#) of DC jobs offer wages at or below \$15 per hour. High living costs make it hard for families with low incomes to meet their basic needs. [Rising food prices](#), especially for fresh fruits and vegetables, and [poor grocery store access](#) in Wards 7 and 8 hit low-wage earners the hardest. In the District, low-wage earners are likely to qualify for SNAP but unlikely to participate. In 2015, [38 percent of low-wage earners](#) who were income eligible for SNAP benefits did not receive them.

In 2014, the DC Council strengthened the [local EITC](#) by expanding income qualifications for adults without dependents.

The expansion increased the claimable DC

credit to \$500 and increased the maximum earnings for single filers claiming the EITC to \$24,000. As a

Overlapping Income Eligibility for SNAP and Free Tax Assistance in DC



Source: D.C. Hunger Solutions

result, in 2015, 10,300 more workers claimed the EITC and a total of \$8.3 million went back to workers with low earnings in the District.

SNAP allows families and individuals to maintain a healthy, low-cost diet. In fact, [one in five DC residents](#), 135,000 people, took advantage of SNAP in 2016. With SNAP, parents and individuals can better provide filling, well-balanced meals for themselves and their families, accessing not just healthier options at grocery stores but also at [farmer's markets](#) and other small retailers.

Programs like the EITC and SNAP work together to help families experiencing poverty. The money tax filers get back from the EITC goes towards household and family needs. Similarly, SNAP helps families and individuals put healthy food on the table and increases disposable income can that be used on other household priorities. Together, these programs help people working hard to make ends meet provide for their families and themselves.

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