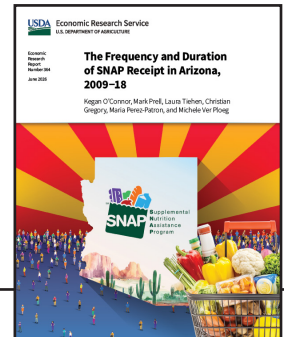




A report summary from the Economic Research Service

The Frequency and Duration of SNAP Receipt in Arizona, 2009–18

Kegan O'Connor, Mark Prell, Laura Tiehen, Christian Gregory, Maria Perez-Patron, and Michele Ver Ploeg



Key Points

- This report used a 10-year panel for January 2009 to December 2018 of monthly Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) administrative data in the State of Arizona to examine the duration and frequency of SNAP participation. The analysis used SNAP administrative data that covered a significantly longer participation time frame than most prior work.
- The study found that, among households in Arizona that participated in SNAP at some point in the 10-year study period, about half (51.3 percent) had a single spell of benefit receipt, about one-fifth (21.8 percent) had two spells, 11.7 percent had three spells, 6.8 percent had four spells, and 8.4 percent had five or more spells. About three out of five (59.0 percent) households ever on SNAP during the study period received SNAP benefits for a cumulative total of 12 months or less. Roughly a quarter (24.2 percent) of these SNAP households received SNAP benefits for a total of 6 months or less over the 120-month study period, while at the other extreme of the distribution 7.5 percent of SNAP households received SNAP benefits for 97 months or more out of the 120 months in the study.
- There was a wide variation in the participation patterns of SNAP households. For some households, SNAP served as a long-term source of support, as evidenced by the almost 20 percent of households who received benefits for at least 61 cumulative months from January 2009 to December 2018.
- The analysis found that, among spells of SNAP receipt that begin during the study period—that is, among new SNAP spells—the median spell length was 7 months. About 51.7 percent of these spells lasted 8 months or less, while about 20.1 percent lasted at least 24 consecutive months (summary figure). Among those households that still receive SNAP 5 months after they began receipt, 30.7 percent leave SNAP in the sixth month. This was consistent with the most common length of SNAP eligibility certification periods in Arizona, at the end of which a household must recertify its eligibility to remain in the program.

Why Does This Matter?

SNAP is the largest Federal food assistance program and one of the largest safety net programs in the United States. While it is well established that the number of households receiving SNAP changes over time, responding to changes in economic conditions and SNAP policies, information is much more limited on how long SNAP benefits are received at the individual household level, and how often SNAP benefits are received by those who exit the program only to return at a later date. A diverse array of households

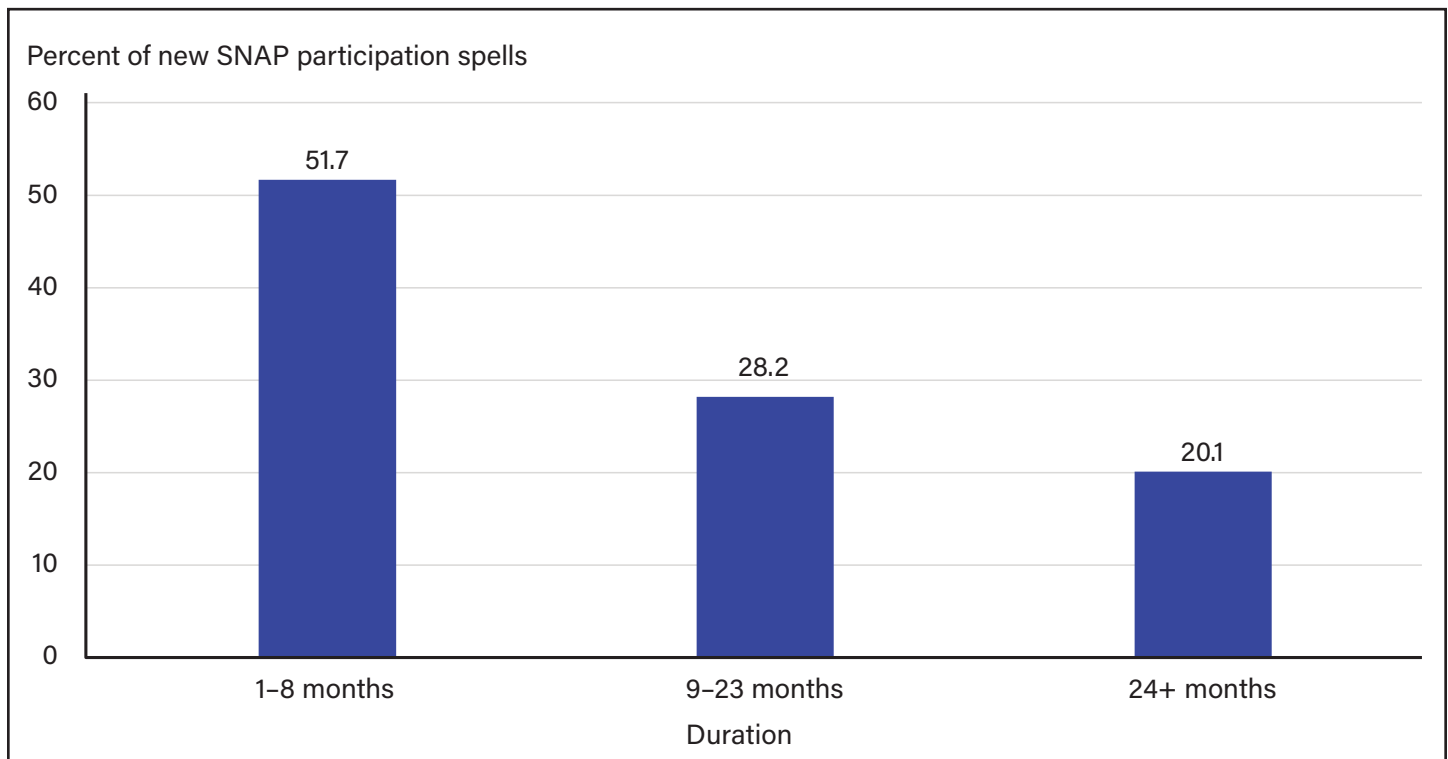
access the program, some of whom exhibit relatively short SNAP enrollment periods while others exhibit relatively greater program dependency. Households that rely on SNAP for longer periods of time are more likely to be part of a sample of participating households at a given point in time. Households that experience shorter spells of SNAP participation may not appear at that given point in time but can be captured more readily in a panel of data that covers a longer period. Observing all SNAP households and all SNAP spells over a 10-year period allowed us to document a wider range of participation patterns than would

be observed in cross-sectional data or even in a shorter panel, which adds to the information available to policymakers and program managers. The study results reflect how SNAP serves a diverse array of lower-income households and that program recertification policies have substantial influence on the duration of SNAP participation.

A Few More Details

This work leveraged the SNAP administrative data acquired through the Census-FNS-ERS Joint Project, a cross-agency partnership among the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, and USDA's Economic Research Service in cooperation with State SNAP agencies. The use of program administrative records allowed us to observe the monthly participation of all SNAP participants and avoid the problem of underreporting SNAP participation in household survey data.

Duration of new SNAP spells in Arizona, February 2009–December 2018



SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Note: The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census has ensured appropriate access and use of confidential data and has reviewed these results for disclosure avoidance protection (Project 7532295: CBDRB-FY24-CES005-013). The calculation of duration of new spells omits January 2009.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service calculations based on SNAP administrative records from Arizona, 2009–18.

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