

RIDGE PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Public Support and Evidence for More Frequent SNAP Benefit Distribution

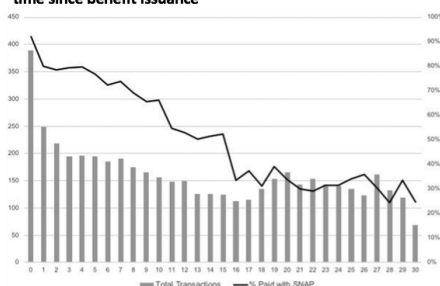


Monthly issuance of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits results in higher SNAP spending earlier in the benefit month across all food categories, and popular support exists for policy changes that could affect these spending patterns, based on new findings from Rebecca Franckle and Eric Rimm at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health.

SNAP benefits are issued once a month, and most SNAP households spend the majority of their benefits in the first two weeks. This early depletion of benefits is associated with worsened food security, dietary quality, and nutrition-related health outcomes later in the month. **Rebecca Franckle** and **Eric Rimm**, 2017 grantees of the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Program, explore monthly spending patterns for specific food groups across the SNAP issuance cycle using retailer scanner data. Additionally, they consider public opinion of SNAP policy alternatives that could improve the nutrition of program participants, including increased frequency of SNAP issuance.

In Supermarket Purchases over the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefit Month: A Comparison between Participants and Nonparticipants, Franckle, Rimm, and colleagues use retailer scanner panel data with individually linked purchases to novelly explore how spending fluctuations across the SNAP issuance cycle differ by food category. Comparing total food and beverage spending in the first two weeks to the last two weeks of the month, SNAP participant spending decreased 37% (\$58.06 to \$36.37), a significantly larger decrease than nonparticipant spending, 3% (\$63.46 to \$61.56). This decline was observed across all food categories of interest, with larger decreases in poultry (-48%), convenience foods (-40%), and red meat (-37%) relative to sugar-sweetened beverages (-30%), fruits (-27%), and vegetables (-25%). The authors suggest these patterns could be related to SNAP's once-monthly issuance, retailer response to issuance timing, or more broadly inadequacy of total benefit.

Proportion of SNAP participants paying with SNAP benefits by time since benefit issuance



One policy recommendation made in light of these spending patterns and associated outcomes is the issuance of SNAP benefits twice per month, or split issuance. More frequent distribution could smooth SNAP participant spending and reduce associations of timing of SNAP benefit distribution with retailer marketing and promotion efforts. The research group assessed SNAP participant and nonparticipant perceptions of nutrition-driven SNAP policy changes in **Support for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Policy Alternatives among U.S. Adults**, notably gauging public opinion on changes to the timing and frequency of SNAP benefits for the first time. In response to how frequently SNAP benefits should be issued, 14% of the public indicated once monthly, 31% indicated twice monthly, 21% suggested allowing program participants choose the frequency, and 30% indicated no preference, with no significant differences between SNAP participant and nonparticipant responses.

New findings of public support for changes to the frequency of SNAP distribution, including amongst SNAP participants, and further evidence of the deleterious cycle of SNAP spending motivates a future pilot assessing the feasibility and impact of several issuance options. "RIDGE funding was critical for jumpstarting our research on the impact of the monthly SNAP benefit cycle on supermarket purchasing, and for demonstrating high levels of public support for policy proposals related to SNAP. We're thankful to RIDGE for supporting this work!"

Franckle R. L., Polacsek M., Bleich S. N., Thorndike A. N., Findling M. T. G., Moran A. J., Rimm E.B. (2019), Support for SNAP policy alternatives among U.S. adults, 2018. *Am J Public Health*. doi: [10.2105/AJPH.2019.305112](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305112).

Franckle R. L., Thorndike A. N., Moran A. J., Hou T., Blue D., Greene J., Block J. P., Polacsek M., Rimm E. B. (2019), Supermarket purchases over the SNAP benefit month: a comparison between SNAP participants and non-participants. *Am J Prev Med*. doi: [10.1016/j.amepre.2019.07.025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2019.07.025).



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