

POSITION STATEMENT:

Modernize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to Reduce Food Access Inequities

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SUMMARY STATEMENT:

The Society of Behavioral Medicine supports modernizing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to expand food access and promote utilization, via online redemption options, developed through co-design processes with technological support to ensure quality implementation.

THE PROBLEM:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest federal food assistance program in the U.S., designed to assist low-income families and their children in purchasing healthy foods.^[1] Currently, 42 million Americans receive SNAP benefits; SNAP reduces household food insecurity,^[2] poverty, sick days and doctor's visits, and increases healthful eating and self-reported overall health. However, SNAP's restrictive technology platform hampers access and utilization that limit the Program's population reach and beneficial health impacts. To address these barriers, SNAP must be modernized to allow online grocery purchasing among eligible families.^[3] Technological modernization of this Program could reduce food access inequities in areas with limited grocery store options, increase food access for individuals with limited mobility or transportation options, and increase access to fresh produce in areas where grocery stores primarily stock non-perishable items.^[4, 5]

CURRENT POLICY:

The 2014 Farm Bill was a step towards modernizing SNAP by mandating a demonstration project known as the SNAP online purchasing program.^[6] This tested the feasibility of allowing retail food stores to accept SNAP benefits through online transactions in some states. The 2018 Farm Bill then amended its definition of "retail food store" to include online entities and required a nationwide demonstration project for the implementation of the SNAP online purchasing program.^[7] Most recently, [the American Rescue Plan Act 2021](#) provided up to \$25 million for technological improvements for the SNAP online purchasing program and electronic benefit transfer (EBT) to support mobile payments. Importantly, technical assistance was also included to educate food retailers, including smaller



retailers and farmers, on the processes and technical requirements for online SNAP benefit redemption and payments.^[8]

Preliminary results from states participating in the SNAP online purchasing program showed rapid uptake among SNAP participants.^[9] For example, in June 2020, ~20% of SNAP households redeemed their benefits via the SNAP online purchasing program, and the average online SNAP transaction in many states comprised ~50% of a household's estimated monthly SNAP allotment.^[9] Given the documented benefits of the SNAP online purchasing program, the [Expanding SNAP Options Act](#) was introduced in 2021 to require the implementation of online SNAP purchasing in every state and provide funding for an online redemption portal and technical assistance center. Currently, the Expanding SNAP Options Act has been introduced, but not passed into law. This is an opportune time to endorse these recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation #1: Co-sponsor the Expanding SNAP Options Act to expand food access and promote greater utilization by allowing online redemption options under SNAP. This includes:

1. Online SNAP transactions: Developing an online SNAP transaction platform to facilitate purchasing interactions between SNAP participants, food retailers, third-party EBT card processing, and delivery vendors that allows for split-tender transactions.
2. Online redemption portal: Allowing SNAP participants to

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use online or mobile electronic benefits transactions, via EBT cards, to purchase SNAP-eligible foods and make online payments to eligible SNAP retailers

3. Food purchase delivery: Providing food purchase delivery for SNAP participants utilizing online SNAP redemption portals
4. Equitable expansion of online SNAP transactions: Supporting the participation of diverse retailers, including small retailers, retailers specializing in ethnic foods and farmers, who face challenges in e-commerce technology.
5. Online SNAP in-language: Timely provision of instructions in at least two languages English and Spanish with plans for other popular language translations based on population data.

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ENDORSEMENTS:

