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Introduction

As COVID-19 spread rapidly in early 2020, many households in the United States began ordering groceries online. For most SNAP participants, however, this option was unavailable. As of February 2021, 47 states and 12 retailers have been approved to participate in the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot (SNAP OPP) and accept online EBT grocery purchases, but many still lack access across the country. The program exhibits immense potential for encouraging COVID-19 social distancing, while also offering opportunities to transform access to fresh, nutritious, affordable food amongst individuals with limited mobility, time, or grocery store access. Several barriers, however, may hinder the program's effective and equitable expansion.

Purpose

We aim to highlight current barriers preventing the equitable expansion and use of SNAP OPP to inform policy, address income-based health disparities, and provide implementation recommendations.

Discussion

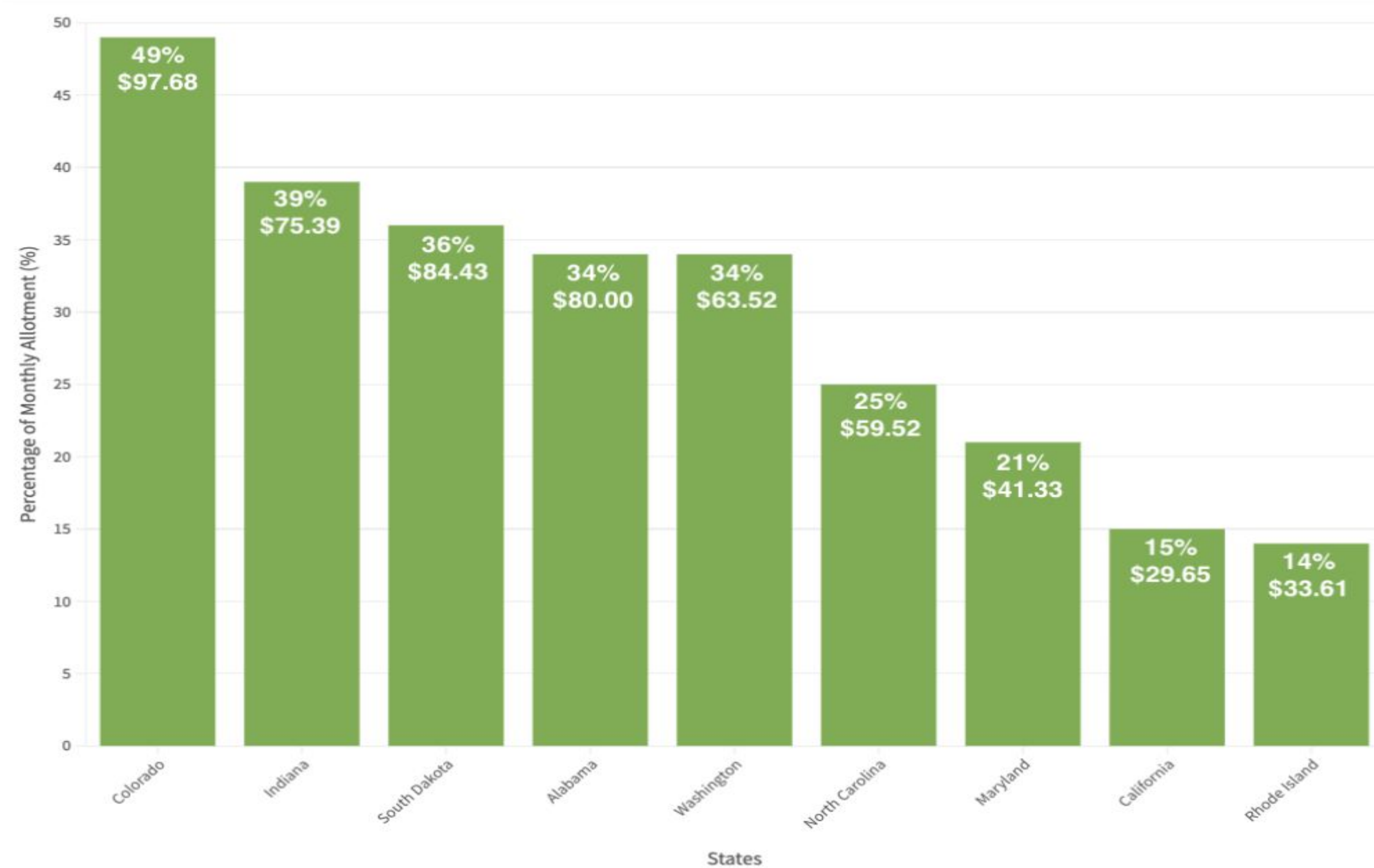
Despite many barriers, the program has experienced rapid uptake, exhibiting its potential. The findings in Figure 1 may suggest that while a relatively small percentage of the SNAP population is participating in online shopping, those who do may depend on this service to purchase a large portion of their household food products. Figure 2 shows plateauing of participation in SNAP OPP, which may indicate a saturation for that state's market or that greater program awareness is needed to maximize program participation.

Methods

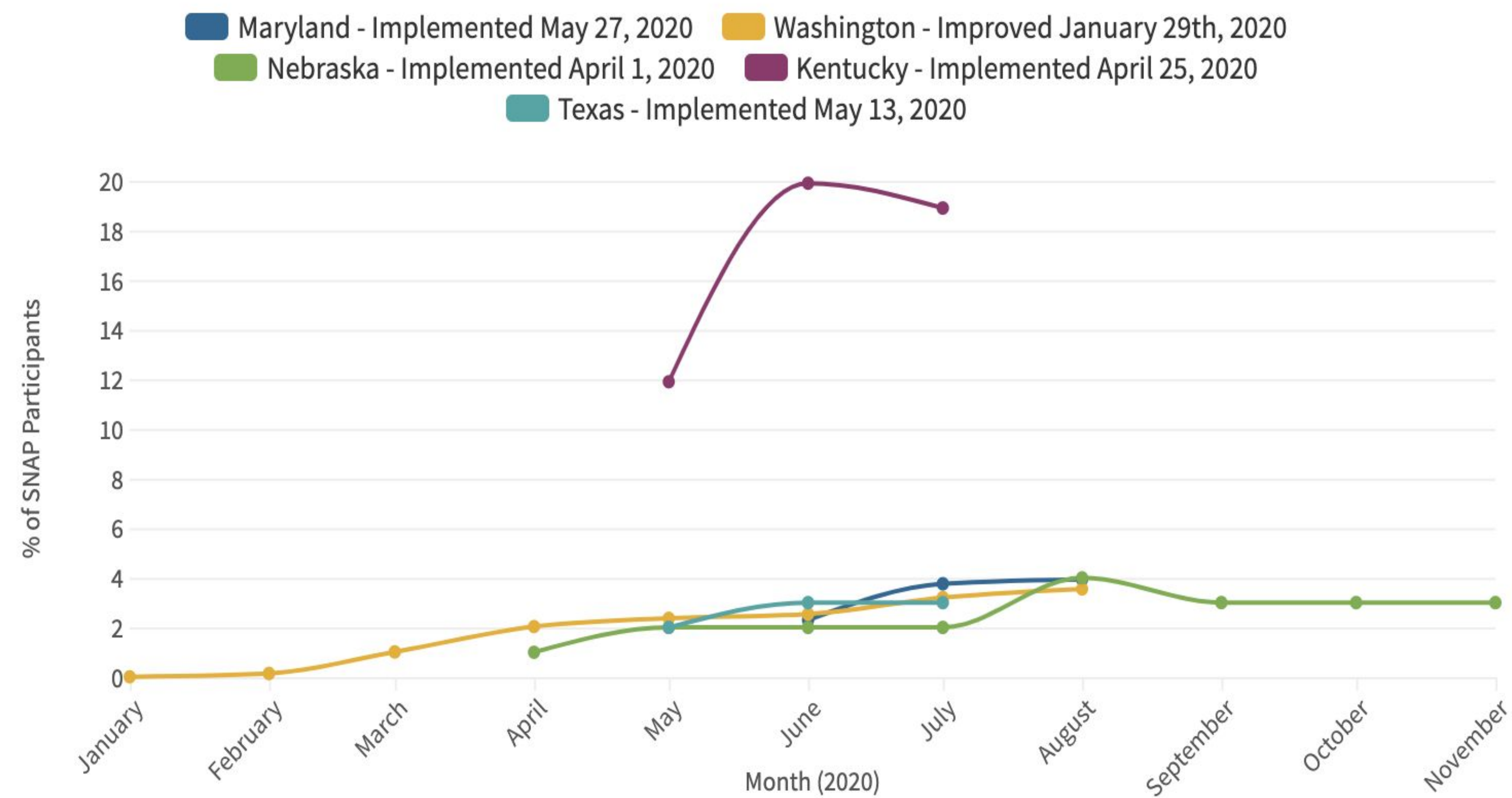
Data was collected by requesting information via state's SNAP offices and Public Records Requests. Data from the [2010 Census](#), [USDA's SNAP Data tables](#), the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' State-by-State Fact Sheets](#), the [USDA SNAP Eligibility Table](#), state social service agency websites, and local news sources were utilized. Figure 1: Percentages were calculated by dividing the total amount of SNAP online dollars spent over a given period by the total number of transactions during that period, then dividing by the maximum monthly SNAP allotment for one individual, and multiplying by 100. Figure 2: Kentucky provided monthly percentages of SNAP participants shopping online. All other states provided the unique number of SNAP online shoppers, which was divided by the states' total SNAP population in 2019, and multiplied by 100 to obtain a percentage.

Mean Online Transaction Size as a Percentage of State-Specific Monthly Maximum SNAP Allotment
 Date Ranges (2020):

Colorado (5/29 - 6/17), Washington (4/1 - 6/30), Indiana (6/3 - 6/18), South Dakota (7/1 - 7/30), Alabama (5/1 - 5/31), California (5/1 - 8/31), North Carolina (5/7 - 6/21), Maryland (6/1 - 8/31), Rhode Island (8/1 - 11/30)



Percent of SNAP Participants That Used EBT Online



Implications

Legislators should ensure financial resources are deployed in response to insights from data analysis and from engaging stakeholders (e.g. SNAP participants and retailers) for a user-centric design approach. Increasing and diversifying the number and type of retailers participating is necessary for supporting all SNAP-accepting stores and improving the reach and coverage of the program. This can be possible through legislation, including the [Expanding SNAP Options Act of 2020](#). Targeted resources and guides should be made available to improve program accessibility and usage.

Literature Cited

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the continued support and insight from all members of the larger unBox working group. We are also thankful for the insight shared from the many state SNAP offices and SNAP directors.

For more info visit unboxproject.org or contact unBox at info@unboxproject.org

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