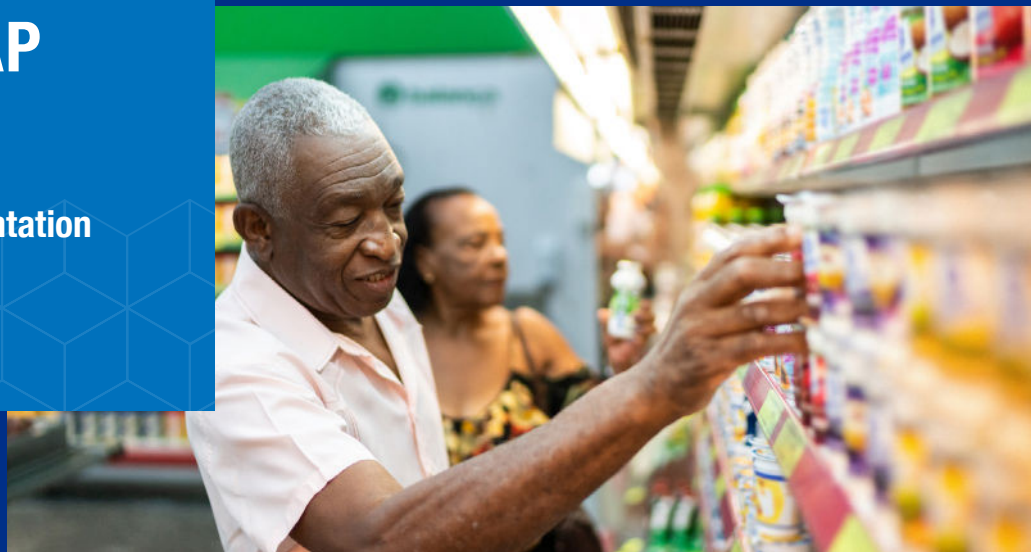


Simplifying SNAP Through ESAP

A 2025 Scan of State Implementation and Lessons Learned

NOVEMBER 2025



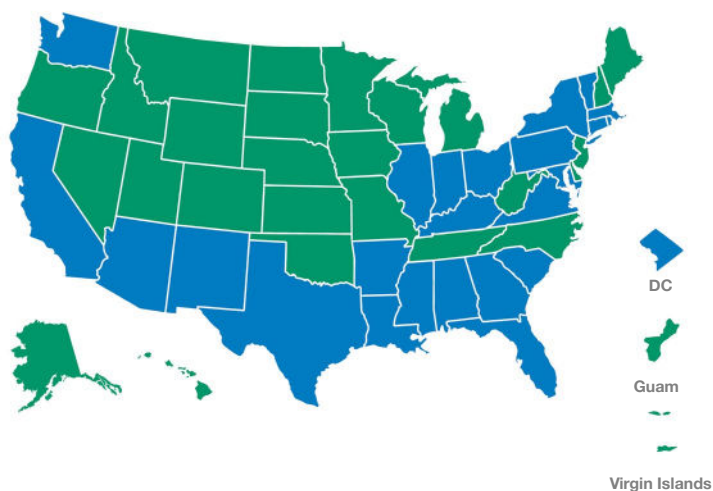
The Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) is a demonstration project that states and territories may pursue to make the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) more accessible to eligible older (age 60+) adults and/or people with disabilities with no earned income.

Older adults consistently have the lowest enrollment rates for SNAP nationally, with just 34 percent of all eligible seniors participating in the program in Fiscal Year 2022.¹ Researchers have linked this low participation rate to the increased administrative challenges that this population faces, making ESAP a critical opportunity to improve food security for older adults by supporting enhanced access to and enrollment in SNAP.^{2,3,4}

State SNAP agencies have tested ESAP for over 20 years to reduce administrative burden for both state agencies and SNAP participants. Under ESAP, states can adopt a range of policy options, such as longer certification periods, eliminating periodic reporting, waiving recertification interviews, or reducing verification requirements, all with the goal of streamlining the process for participants and state agencies alike. As of October 2024, 24 states and Washington, DC implement ESAP with one or more of the processing options listed above (see Figure 1 below).⁵

FIGURE 1: States Implementing ESAP

<p>ESAP (25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alabama Arizona Arkansas California Connecticut District of Columbia Florida 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Illinois Indiana Kentucky Louisiana Maryland Massachusetts Mississippi New Mexico 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New York Ohio Pennsylvania Rhode Island South Carolina Texas Vermont Virginia Washington
<p>No ESAP (28)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alaska Colorado Delaware Guam Hawaii Idaho Iowa Kansas Maine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Minnesota Missouri Montana Nebraska Nevada New Hampshire New Jersey North Carolina North Dakota 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oklahoma Oregon South Dakota Tennessee Utah Virgin Islands West Virginia Wisconsin Wyoming



Source: Food and Nutrition Service SNAP 2025 State Options Report



About Our Survey

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) has consistently heard from its membership that implementing ESAP leads to improved administrative functions and uptake in SNAP-eligible older and disabled participants, but there can also be barriers that prevent states from being able to adopt and effectively implement the program. With the support of a grant from AARP Foundation, APHSA issued a survey to better quantify the perspectives of state agencies and understand from both ESAP implementors and non-implementors about the biggest challenges and opportunities in the demonstration project. The survey was conducted from May to June 2025 and received responses from a total of 32 states, of which 10 have not yet implemented ESAP. The survey was conducted prior to the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1)⁶ and therefore reflects state experiences and priorities at that time. Additional reflections and next steps considering H.R.1 implementation are provided at the end of this brief.

In addition to surveying state agencies, APHSA also surveyed community-based organization (CBO) staff from states that operate ESAP to understand their perspective of the implementation. Most respondents were CBO staff that provide direct service to SNAP participants (72 percent), with additional representation of direct service supervisors, strategic outreach and partnership coordinators, policy advocates, technical assistance providers, and contracts managers.

The questions on this survey were informed in part by interviews with subject matter experts working in food access, research and evaluation, and policy analysis, and drafts were reviewed by three state agency partners. This survey was intended to provide APHSA with a better understanding of the ESAP landscape to evaluate practices, successes, challenges, participant perspectives, barriers to implementation, and opportunities for improvement.

Survey Results

Overall, both state agencies and CBOs in states that have adopted ESAP reported positive experiences with the project, citing streamlined administration, decreased administrative burden, reduced churn (i.e., SNAP participants rapidly leaving and re-enrolling in the program), and improved customer access and experience.

Planning for Implementation

SNAP agencies exploring demonstration projects must carefully weigh the expected benefit of a project with considerations such as evaluation and reporting requirements, technology updates, and availability of funding. In exploring this decision, states that implement ESAP listed their greatest motivators as improving access and reducing administrative burden on their participants (84 percent ranked this as their number one reason), reducing staff administrative burden, and interest in modernizing and/or streamlining administrative processes and systems.

For states that have not yet adopted ESAP, data and technology limitations and competing state priorities were equally cited as the most important factor in considering whether to implement ESAP. Other key factors included funding or financial resources, the administrative burden of maintaining a demonstration project, and cost neutrality requirements. While coordination with community partners, developing quality control sampling plans, and building political leadership were noted, these were generally viewed as less immediate barriers compared to the operational and resource challenges above.

When sharing their experiences of considering ESAP adoption, 11 agencies reported that they consulted with other states that were already implementing ESAP by modeling their own projects after others', meeting with those states for advice and guidance, or referring to resources such as policy guidelines or outcome reports; of respondents who had state mentorship or peer support, 83 percent cited it as helpful or very helpful.

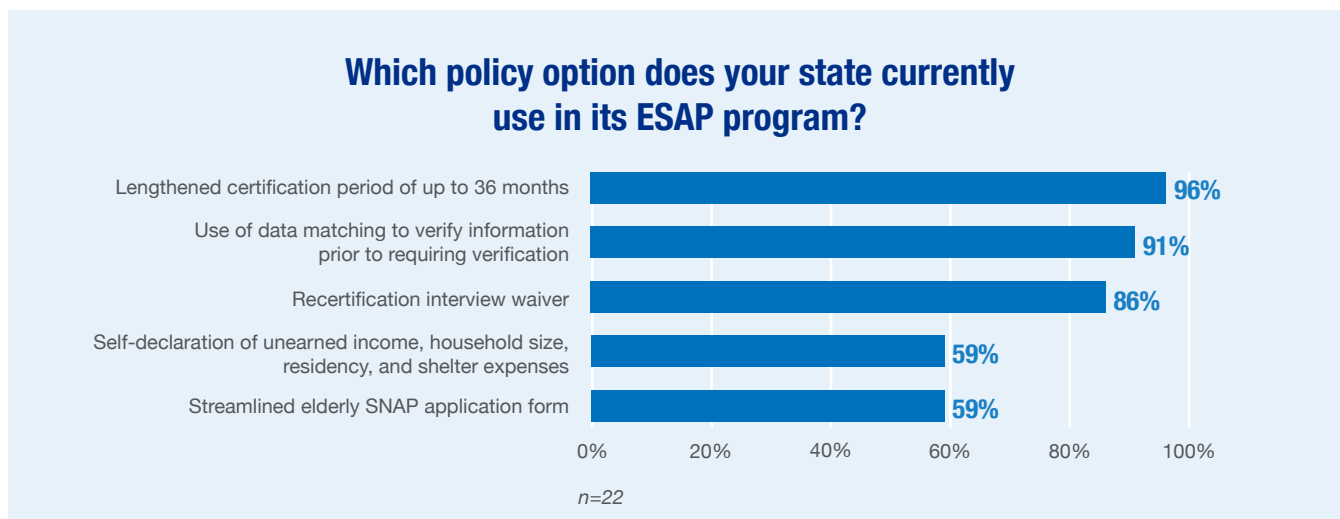


“I believe for ESAP and for other programs and processes, it is always helpful to have an example of a state that has implemented the change. It helps to see what they did in their system, what information they released to their staff, notice to the public, etc.”

– SNAP Program Manager

Implementation

States may integrate a number of policy and administrative options into their ESAP operations. When asked, most respondents reported using lengthened certification periods, data matching to reduce verification requirements, and recertification interview waivers (96 percent, 91 percent, and 86 percent respectively). Fewer states reported using a streamlined application or self-declaration of information such as unearned income, household size, residency, and shelter expenses unless the information is questionable (both 59 percent).



In addition to these administrative options, states may also extend eligibility to people with disabilities and/or households with children under 18. In these cases, every adult member of the household must be over 60 years old and/or disabled and no household members may have earned income. This is a somewhat popular option, with 68 percent of respondents extending eligibility to one or both of these groups (36 percent to people with disabilities only, 32 percent to both people with disabilities and households with children). States and counties also have flexibility in how they administer their programs, with some dedicating separate teams for ESAP processing during the initial eligibility and enrollment process, at recertification, or both. Individual states vary in their approach to policy and operational approaches, informed by factors such as existing system capabilities or limitations, state policy preferences, quality control priorities, staffing levels, or the desire to align ESAP with other SNAP processes.

In discussing the most helpful resources for implementing and maintaining ESAP, respondents cited technical assistance from the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Regional Offices as most helpful (71 percent listed as very helpful). Following that, states also appreciated instructional guides and manuals, templates, and technical assistance from the FNS National Office.

In response to a question on what they wish they had known before implementing ESAP, states cited challenges and limitations they encountered while integrating ESAP into their legacy IT systems, how long it would take to fully implement, and the full breadth of policy options available under ESAP or other supportive waivers.

“[i]t would have been good if we had been aware of additional options such as twenty-four or thirty-six-month certification periods with no periodic report.”

– SNAP Program Manager

CBOs were similarly asked what recommendations they would share with states to improve ESAP implementation. Common themes included improved communication with participants, agency direct service workers, and CBO staff (including CBOs that were not SNAP Outreach Partners) about changes to policy and its impact on operations; developing a streamlined application across modalities (e.g., applications should be similarly simplified when completed online, on paper, via telephone, or on mobile app); ensuring that notices and forms are concise, sent at the appropriate intervals, and in plain language; and improved training and information sharing to ensure that staff and participants alike understand the differences and benefits of ESAP when compared to standard SNAP processes.

Impact & Outcomes

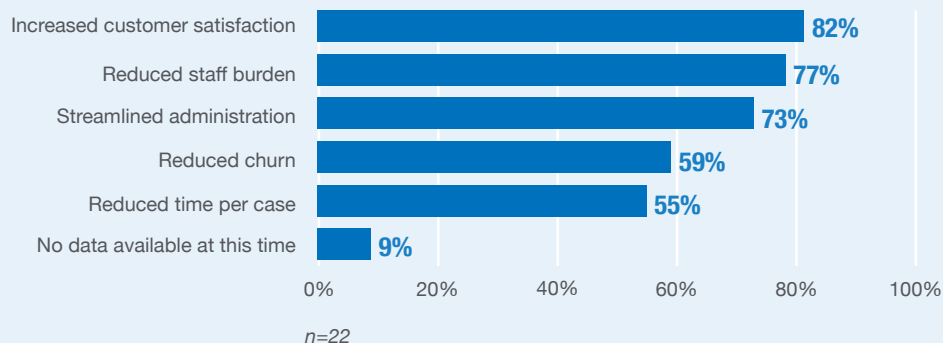
When asked about observed outcomes of implementing ESAP, states and CBOs (77 percent and 82 percent respectively) agreed that its greatest benefit has been improved participant access and satisfaction. State agencies additionally highlighted reduced staff burden (77 percent) and streamlined administration (73 percent) as major benefits, with reduced churn and reduced time per case seen as secondary benefits. CBO staff consistently emphasized that ESAP helps their clients by reducing confusion around applications, eligibility, and recertification requirements; lowering anxiety and stress, especially during reporting and renewal; and making it easier to stay enrolled. However, CBOs reported a more mixed impact on their own staff workload: 40 percent said it had decreased or stayed about the same, while 19 percent noted an increase. This increase can be largely attributed to a higher caseload, as well as challenges in communicating and consistently applying policy, process, and eligibility rules, especially during rollout. In some cases, workers are submitting simplified ESAP applications separately from other benefits in states where integrated applications were not simplified for ESAP households.

In discussing the impact of specific policy options, both state and CBO respondents cited the lengthened certification period as most helpful and appealing to participants. States additionally shared that the recertification interview waiver and reduced verifications were helpful, while CBOs shared the value of a shortened application both for direct service staff completing applications and applicants completing the application on their own.

“The design of the program removed program access barriers for the elderly population. The modifications to eliminate periodic reporting for these households decreased churn as clients did not understand the periodic reporting process.”

– SNAP Program Administrator

What have been the positive impacts, if any, of ESAP implementation in your state?



Recommendations & Key Takeaways

Feedback on ESAP from implementing states was generally positive, with non-implementing states eager to learn more. Based on responses to the state agency and CBO surveys, we have compiled key takeaways and best practices. While many of these recommendations could be informative to either implementing or non-implementing states, they have been organized loosely by each category.

Implementing States

- 🔧 **Align ESAP, standard SNAP, and other program processes.** States and CBOs noted that aligned IT processes, such as systems automatically assigning households ESAP status, generating notices at appropriate intervals without worker intervention, requesting only required information, and aligning certification periods between SNAP and other programs (such as Medicaid) were advantageous to improving administrative burden.



-  **When possible, adopt a simplified ESAP application.** Respondents, particularly CBOs, shared that applicants and staff benefit from a shorter, streamlined application that is distinct from a standard SNAP application. Creating a streamlined application might include omitting questions that are not applicable to ESAP populations (such as student status), creating a paper ESAP application that is visually distinct from a standard SNAP application, and emphasizing information that tends to be more relevant to ESAP populations (for example, detailing how to report and document medical expenses). Respondents also noted the importance of shortening burdensome forms and notices and ensuring that simplified applications are built into mobile, online, and integrated benefits systems.
-  **Strengthen agency-community relationships and communication,** including providing ESAP-specific training for CBO staff and partners, outreach messaging resources, and routine updates and guidance on policy changes. Only 45 percent of CBO respondents reported receiving training on ESAP, including webinars, in-person sessions, written guidance, or internal briefings, and 27 percent felt that they were not at all familiar or only slightly familiar with ESAP. Those who were more familiar shared that increased information and training would lead to more accurate applications, ease of overcoming concerns (e.g., if applicants are intimidated by reporting requirements), and improved advice on navigating the application and enrollment process. Furthermore, these relationships can offer unique insight into customer experience that might not be reflected through other feedback mechanisms, providing opportunities to engage in user testing or gather informal participant feedback to improve materials and processes.
-  **Provide clear information to ESAP households about when and how they should report changes between certifications,** including those that might impact their eligibility or benefit amount. Some agencies and CBOs shared that their ESAP population was very aware of and adept at mid-certification reporting, while others noted that this process is a distinct pain point for their participants. Because ESAP populations' situations are largely stable, survey respondents focused on increased medical expenses; however, this could be true of any change in circumstances (e.g., changes to income or household members).
-  **Train staff on ESAP-specific processes.** For states in which the same staff handles both ESAP and standard SNAP cases (rather than having a separate ESAP unit), providing training tailored to ESAP can ensure that processes are followed accurately, reducing the possibility of procedural errors.

“With ESAP’s 36-month certification period, households need to proactively report changes to increase the amount of benefits they are eligible to receive. For example, if a member of an ESAP household has a new medical expense, they need to contact their agency to report the expense to potentially increase their benefits. Otherwise, they may not receive a medical deduction for the new expense for a few years. We mitigate this through the annual outreach letter and member education.”

– SNAP Program Administrator

Non-implementing States

Of the 10 state agency respondents that have not adopted ESAP, six are currently exploring implementation, with two taking formal steps toward implementation (such as having secured leadership buy-in, drafting a workplan, and/or allocating resources). For states exploring ESAP implementation, they should consider the following:

-  **Prepare to offer multiple simplified ESAP application methods,** including online, mobile, paper, and telephone (for states that accept telephonic signatures), and consider how people applying for multiple programs may still be able to benefit from a simplified process even with an integrated application.
-  **Involve and generate buy-in from participants and community groups early in the planning phase and throughout the implementation phase.** CBOs cited the level of community engagement, including communication and resource sharing prior to policy changes, as having a significant impact on how they perceived ESAP rollout’s success in their state. Working closely with participants and CBOs to understand their process, communication, and resource needs can lead to a smoother rollout even

when unexpected complications arise. In a question on which supports would improve the impact of ESAP on older participants, CBOs listed expanded outreach and enrollment assistance (94 percent selected this as very or extremely helpful), increased community partnerships (92 percent), and staff training on ESAP protocols and requirements (89 percent) as most helpful.

- ❁ **Conduct preliminary research** to inform processes, notice language, and end user experience. This could include observing participants or direct service staff as they engage with digital or analog applications or materials (usability testing), collecting webpage analytics to identify existing problem areas, consulting successful ESAP implementers on their best practices, or soliciting feedback directly from participants and staff (as mentioned above).
- ❁ **Understand how ESAP might interact with other projects and waivers that impact older and disabled applicants**, such as the Combined Application Project (CAP) and Standard Medical Deduction (SMD). CAP and SMD can be powerful tools to increase access to SNAP, especially when combined with ESAP, but may also present unexpected challenges if not integrated thoughtfully. Understanding their nuanced differences, creating clear resource materials, and building compatible workflows can ensure that both participants and agencies get the most out of these projects and waivers.
- ❁ **Stagger certification times on rollout**. State agencies and CBOs shared that assigning all newly ESAP-eligible households the same certification period on rollout resulted in significantly increased administrative burden around those periods. Instead, staggering these certification periods will lead to a more even workload and improved staff and participant experience.



Exploring ESAP as a Permanent State Policy Option

In addition to recommendations for state agencies, members have also informed APhSA's recommendations for broader, federal improvements to SNAP that would support older and disabled populations. This has largely come in the form of supporting the transition of ESAP into a permanent state policy option as opposed to a demonstration project. As previously mentioned, ESAP has existed for over two decades, and over half of states currently participate in or are in the process of adopting ESAP. This indicates that states find significant value in the project for both their agencies and their participants and are willing to take on the additional work to continue to prove its efficacy.

Non-implementing states agree: 60 percent of respondents from states that do not yet implement ESAP shared that they would be more likely to implement ESAP if it were a standard state option rather than a demonstration project. State agencies that do implement ESAP expanded on their reasoning for supporting ESAP as a permanent state option, responding that the most significant benefit from transitioning ESAP from a demonstration project would be the reduction in evaluation requirements, with 86 percent of respondents selecting this. Other benefits include decreasing demand on staff that must uphold project reporting requirements (68 percent) and the removal of cost neutrality (50 percent).

Conclusion & Next Steps

State SNAP agencies continue to seek streamlined application and enrollment mechanisms to enhance participant access and experience, ease administrative burden, and effectively deliver vital services to our most vulnerable populations. ESAP is an evidence-based intervention that has assisted states in achieving their core missions of improving the health and well-being of their older and disabled populations—which is especially impactful in states where a significant percentage of their SNAP applicants and enrollees are ESAP-eligible.

“This demo project is clearly a win for the eligible populations.”

– SNAP Program Administrator

At the time of this publication and since this survey was completed, state SNAP agencies are still grappling with the impacts of changes to their SNAP program following the passage of H.R. 1. For ESAP, a significant change will be that work requirements now apply to participants up to age 64. This creates challenges for households who may be currently benefiting from ESAP and in the 60-64 age range. Furthermore, states will be faced with significant cost shifts that require them to pay more of the share for administering the program and, potentially, pay a portion of SNAP benefits if they have a Payment Error Rate above 6 percent. While ESAP is known to decrease administrative burden for both state agencies and SNAP participants as we have discussed throughout this paper, it can also result in errors if participants have a change in circumstance and do not report it during their elongated certification period.

While this survey provides a snapshot of how states and community partners are currently experiencing ESAP, its role and potential evolution may shift as states begin implementing new federal requirements, and states will need to make thoughtful decisions about how to proceed and continue to support those who are uniquely impacted. In the next phase of this work, APHSA, with the support from AARP Foundation, will continue to support peer-to-peer learning of H.R. 1 and ESAP implementation, facilitate peer exchanges among states on ESAP, and develop a best practices toolkit (anticipated for release in the latter half of 2026).

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Endnotes

¹ AARP. 16 Million Eligible Adults Ages 50 and Older Are Not Enrolled in SNAP. <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/topics/health/food-insecurity/16-million-eligible-adults-ages-50-older-not-enrolled-in-snap.doi.10.26419-2fpfi.00361.001.pdf>

² AARP. Older Adult SNAP Access: Final Report Submitted to AARP Foundation. https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/aarp_foundation/pdf/2021/spr-older-adult-snap-access-report-full-report.pdf

³ National Council on Aging. Lifting Barriers to SNAP: Real Stories from Older Adults. Link: <https://www.ncoa.org/article/lifting-barriers-to-snap-real-stories-from-older-adults/>

⁴ AARP. Improving SNAP Uptake Among Eligible Older Adults: Federal Policy Options to Simplify and Streamline Administrative Processes. Link: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2023/4/improving-snap-uptake-among-eligible-older-adults-federal-policy-options-to-simplify-and-streamline-administrative-processes.doi.10.26419-2fpfi.00191.001.pdf>

⁵ To read the full 2025 State Options Report, see the following link: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-stateOptionsReport-17edition.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Congress. (2025). H.R. 1 – *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*. [Congress.gov.https://www.congress.gov/bills/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text](https://www.congress.gov/bills/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text)