



Supporting Older Workers with SNAP Employment & Training

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SNAP and SNAP E&T for Older Adults

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is critical in addressing food insecurity for older adults. However, among all demographic groups receiving SNAP, older adults continue to have a lower-than-average participation rate. Nationally, in 2021, 4.8 million older adults were enrolled in SNAP,¹ which unfortunately means three out of five older adults who qualify for SNAP do not receive any benefits.²

Accessing SNAP improves older adults' access to food and nutrition supports as well as opening access to SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) services that promote economic growth and skills development for older adults who can and wish to work. Many choose not to apply for SNAP due to the stigma around the program, while others are unaware of their eligibility for benefits. This brief explores opportunities to support the older worker and job seeker population and uncovers promising practices on how human services agencies can leverage SNAP and SNAP E&T to improve the health, nutrition, and economic outcomes for older workers.

Opportunities and Challenges for Older Job Seekers

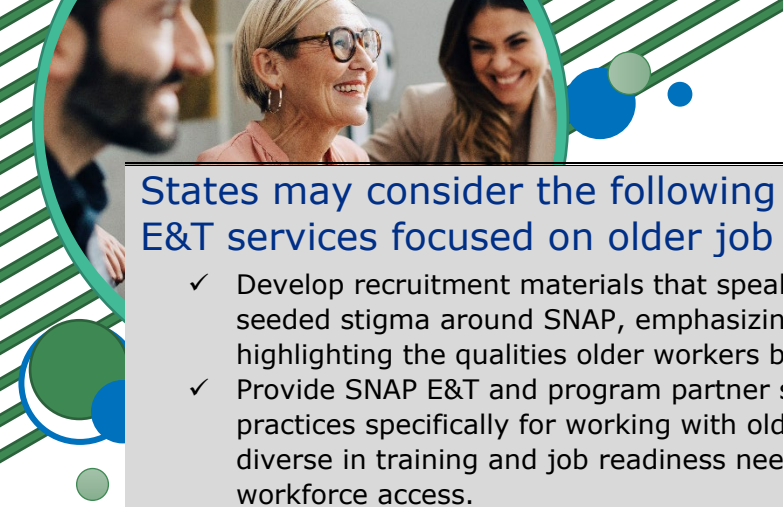
Poor Health Outcomes

Older adults with low incomes are more likely to be in poor health and suffer from co-morbidities, including diabetes, depression, hypertension, and heart disease. Consequently, older people's out-of-pocket health care expenditures remain consistently high, limiting their ability to purchase healthy foods. This is crucial as food insecurity among senior citizens directly leads to negative health outcomes.³ Enrollment of eligible older adults in vital health supports, such as Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs) or the Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) for the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit, also remains low, decreasing the affordability of healthy foods for this population.⁴ Cross-enrollment between SNAP and Medicaid programs could improve access to other beneficial programs for older adults, allowing them to improve health outcomes.

Employment Challenges

In addition to health challenges, older adults face employment barriers. The technological demands of today's work environment impede the ability of many older workers to secure employment.⁵ Due to rapid advancement and the transition to a knowledge-based economy requiring highly skilled workers, older job seekers may not be as competitive as other demographics. Additionally, older adults may experience decreased mobility which negatively affects their health, economic, and social well-being. Due to a lack of accessible transportation options, adults with low incomes may face difficulties getting to work and other important activities. Transportation barriers are even more acute for those living in rural areas.

Additionally, older job seekers' ability to attain employment is hindered by age discrimination. Older job seekers face the negative and often incorrect perception that they lack digital literacy skills or the ability to learn new skills when, in fact, the majority of older workers have technology skills, and have a high level of engagement and reliability at work.⁶ While some older adults will be exempt from SNAP work requirements, those who are able to and want to work may volunteer to participate in SNAP E&T for employment, training, and supportive services that promote access to employment opportunities.⁷



States may consider the following when developing SNAP and SNAP E&T services focused on older job seekers:

- ✓ Develop recruitment materials that speak directly to older workers dispelling deeply seeded stigma around SNAP, emphasizing the value of SNAP and SNAP E&T, and highlighting the qualities older workers bring to the workforce.
- ✓ Provide SNAP E&T and program partner staff with training on case management best practices specifically for working with older adults, understanding that they are incredibly diverse in training and job readiness needs but share similar barriers to training and workforce access.
- ✓ Encourage SNAP E&T providers to develop short-term training that aligns with in-demand local industries and addresses the barriers to employment older job seekers face.
- ✓ Connect with labor and industry to promote the value of hiring older workers completing SNAP E&T programs, including diverse experience, high engagement, professionalism, and reliability.

Programs Across States Leading the Way

The following examples are from the SNAP E&T 50+ Training and Technical Assistance Project, a project by AARP Foundation in collaboration with Seattle Jobs Initiative intended to develop workforce programs' communication and outreach to 50+ job seekers, identify best career paths, adapt curriculum, and disseminate best practices for serving older job seekers.

Massachusetts

To build a more inclusive program for older job seekers, Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), Boston, surveyed clients over 50, finding opportunities for improved recruitment, intake processes, and training industry fit. First, survey results indicated that older job seekers feel the stigma surrounding SNAP and have a reluctance to apply for benefits or engage with SNAP E&T services. JVS developed an outreach video addressing common concerns and touting the value SNAP E&T offers. Second, survey responses led to the identification of existing in-demand training pathways, Pharmacy Technician and Biomanufacturing, and a new pathway, Substance Addiction Assistant, to be best fits for the interests and skill sets of older clients. Lastly, JVS updated the curriculum of its Bridges to College program, shortening the duration from nearly six months to three months, and focusing on skills clients would need to be successful in the Substance Addiction Assistant Pathway.

Tennessee

Focusing on reaching Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) participants, Workforce Mid-South and the Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board developed a co-enrollment model to expand access to employment training and supports utilizing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and SNAP E&T partnerships. Utilizing the infrastructure of American Job Centers (AJC), these groups integrated SNAP E&T outreach materials in existing SCSEP and WIOA materials to broaden the visibility of SNAP E&T and understanding of the benefits of co-enrollment. AJC staff also received training and technical assistance on best practices for serving this specific population. Co-enrollment of SCSEP, WIOA, and SNAP E&T opened greater opportunities for supportive services, short-term training options, job readiness supports, and job search assistance for older job seekers. Tennessee has also solidified the SCSEP and SNAP E&T relationship in its WIOA State Plan.

¹ <https://www.ncoa.org/article/7-facts-about-older-adults-and-snap>

² *Ibid.*

³ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/senior-hunger-research/senior-health-consequences-2014.pdf>

⁴ https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-future-of-snap#_ftnref11

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2846373/>

⁶ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/targeting-et-services-unique-snap-populations>

⁷ Adults over the age of 59 are exempt from the general work requirement. Adults over the age of 52 are exempt from ABAWD work