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GAO: More Than Half of Potentially Eligible College Students Are Not Receiving Food Assistance Benefits

According to a Dec. 2018 report by GAO, less than half of the 3.3 million college students who are potentially eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the main federal safety net for food-purchasing assistance, were enrolled in 2016.

The report identified several risk factors associated with food insecurity among student populations, such as low income, disabilities, homelessness or former foster care, single parenthood, and first-generation college enrollment. Nationally, 39 percent of U.S. undergraduate students fit at least one of these categories.

GAO also investigated what steps colleges have taken to address food insecurity on campus, including student and staff education about benefits and strategies, nutrition and cooking classes, food pantries, special emergency aid, and centralized student services.

Share of potentially SNAP-eligible college students enrolled in SNAP = 5,000 college students

1,413,525 (43%)
enrolled in SNAP benefits



1,842,455 (57%)
not enrolled in SNAP benefits



Source: GAO, "Food insecurity: Better information could help eligible college students access federal food assistance benefits"

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