More Americans Using Federal Food Assistance Since Recession Ended, Carsey Institute Finds

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DURHAM, N.H. – The number of Americans turning to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, has substantially increased since the recession began and has continued to climb as many Americans have struggled with the economic hardships of the post-recession, weak economy, according to researchers from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

“In the context of high poverty and unemployment, SNAP is one of the most responsive federal programs, providing immediate benefits and helping millions of families to put food on the table,” said Jessica Bean, vulnerable families research associate at the Carsey Institute.

The percentage of Americans receiving SNAP benefits increased 61.2 percent since 2007. In December 2010, 44 million people received SNAP benefits, compared with 35.9 million in July 2009, and 27.3 million in November 2007, according to the Food and Research Action Center. By 2010, nearly 12 percent of all American households reported receiving SNAP benefits, an increase of 4 percentage points since the recession began in 2007, and 1.6 percentage points since 2009.

From 2007 to 2010, the percentage of urban households receiving SNAP benefits increased from 9.8 percent to 14.8 percent, and rural households saw an increase from 10.6 percent to 14.6 percent. Suburban households receiving SNAP benefits increased from 5.4 percent to 9 percent during the period.

Reliance on SNAP was very high among single parents in 2010, rising 10 percentage points nationally among single mothers and fathers since the recession began. In 2010, 42 percent of single mothers and 25 percent of single fathers relied on SNAP; in rural places, the rate was as high as one in two single mothers.

“These findings suggest that not only did SNAP receipt continue to rise in 2010, but it rose at an accelerated pace among households struggling the most, providing critical support to families in a tough economy,” Bean said.

This analysis is based upon U.S. Census Bureau estimates from the 2007, 2009, and 2010 American Community Survey. For more details or information, please refer to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The complete Carsey Institute report about this research is available at http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=178.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development. The institute gives policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

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