

A Government Shutdown Will Increase Food Insecurity

Each month, millions of people trust that federal nutrition programs will be there to help them through tough times—a government shutdown threatens benefits in these programs and harms individuals experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, a shutdown could have a devastating impact on millions of employees of the federal government and federal contractors. If these workers miss paychecks, it could jeopardize their ability to put food on the table and cover other household expenses. During previous shutdowns, food banks across the country saw large spikes in demand for emergency food assistance, with many people seeking help for the first time.

Feeding America urges Congress to avoid a shutdown by swiftly passing fiscal year 2024 appropriations legislation or a continuing resolution that provides strong funding for nutrition programs.

How will a shutdown affect federal nutrition programs?

A shutdown jeopardizes vital federal nutrition programs, potentially leaving individuals and families in your district and across the country with delayed, reduced or even zero benefits.

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Any government shutdown has the potential to disrupt SNAP benefits for families if there is a lack of funding, a delay in processing benefits, or both. USDA has confirmed that states will have the funds to distribute October SNAP benefits in full and on time. The ability of states to distribute monthly SNAP benefits in November is unknown, and disruptions are expected. As food prices remain high, confusion around SNAP benefit timing during a prolonged shutdown or the sudden loss of this grocery purchasing support would jeopardize food access for roughly 42 million people who receive support from SNAP. [Learn about the impact of SNAP in your state.](#)
- **USDA commodity food purchases and administrative funds:** During a shutdown, food banks will not receive fiscal year 2024 (FY24) funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) for food orders or storage and distribution. This could delay the order and delivery of TEFAP foods in FY24. Additionally, food deliveries and administrative funds for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) could be disrupted. During previous shutdowns, FDPIR sites facing funding gaps were forced to furlough workers, which had a cascading impact that interrupted food deliveries and distributions to individuals and families.
- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** The WIC program currently serves nearly 6.7 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children. A shutdown that disrupts nutrition benefits and other WIC services would harm children at a time of critical developmental importance. If a shutdown occurs

on Oct. 1, WIC benefits and services will continue for as long as possible, though disruptions are possible later in the month. The timing of potential disruptions to October WIC benefits would vary from state to state.

- **Child nutrition programs:** A prolonged shutdown threatens the timing of administrative reimbursements and general support for these programs, including school breakfast and lunch as well as afterschool meals provided through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), due to the impact of federal workers being furloughed.

How will a shutdown affect food banks?

Food banks are facing a food supply crisis. Many are struggling to meet sustained and heightened need in communities across the country, while feeling the compounded effects of continued supply chain disruptions, increased food purchase and transportation costs, and a significant decrease in USDA foods. A Feeding America survey found that around 70% of responding food banks reported seeing demand for food assistance increase or stay the same in July 2023 compared to June.

Food banks will continue to do all they can to serve their communities, but their food and funds can only go so far. A surge in demand for charitable food assistance from federal employees, people working for federal contractors, active-duty military members, and federal nutrition program participants impacted by a shutdown would be more than many already strained food banks could manage.

How will a shutdown affect individuals and families?

If the government shuts down on Oct. 1, more than 2 million federal employees will lose pay starting in mid-October. Active-duty military members and people working for federal contractors could also find themselves temporarily without a paycheck and facing hunger. Food banks will be the first, and potentially only, option for assistance for millions of people whose paychecks or federal benefits did not arrive as expected.

Impact of the 2018 Government Shutdown

The partial government shutdown in 2018 lasted 35 days, and some 800,000 federal employees missed paychecks. All federal employees were eventually repaid, but federal contractors were not. Over a million contractors lost more than 10% of their annual income during this shutdown.

The timeline for loading SNAP benefits onto EBT cards was disrupted for the first time in history for all 40 million participants, creating mass confusion and challenges to family budgeting.

