

Dispelling Myths, Increasing Access

examining common fears and barriers experienced by Spanish-speaking immigrants applying for SNAP benefits in Maryland

Isabella Dresser
Maryam Taysir



INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the misconceptions and barriers facing immigrant and mixed-citizenship status Marylanders applying for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)?

Objective: Create a toolkit that details the SNAP application process for Spanish-speaking immigrant & mixed-citizenship status households. The Toolkit aims to promote racial equity via transparency and language access.

ABSTRACT

Surveying former clients revealed:

- That survey participants identify the MDHS hotline as a valuable tool;
- Translation services were one of the least helpful factors when applying for SNAP;
- And that there is anxiety & confusion about the long timeline to process and receive their benefits, verification documents, and eligibility

Barriers, for immigrant households, work to disengage and discourage households with mixed-citizenship status from the application process

Interviewing SNAP Assistance Providers for institutional knowledge highlighted the bigger picture of a current public benefits system that places barriers for immigrants, especially those households with undocumented folks.

RESEARCH METHODS

Phase I: Fact Finding for Individuals' Lived Experiences

Hotline Client Digital Survey

- In total 10 clients were surveyed
- Digital survey that was distributed to 97 clients for one week
 - multiple choice & optional short answer responses
- Sampling:
 - Spanish as a proxy
 - Only former Maryland Hunger Solutions' hotline callers
 - Clients whose cases were completed between July 2021 - September 2021

Limitations:

- Sampling relied on information collected from MDHS call sheet, limited information on details of case led to using language (Spanish) as a proxy for immigrant households
- Cold contacted via email and phone number led to low response rate (9.7% of response rate)
- Findings are not representative of the entire immigrant or Spanish-speaking population in MD

RESEARCH METHODS

Phase II: Interviewing for Institutional Knowledge at Maryland Hunger Solutions

Semi-structured interview with two coordinators of the SNAP Assistance Outreach Team

- **One of the two coordinators specializes in Spanish-speaking clients**



Acquire institutional knowledge

- Understand myths and perceived issues in SNAP application process for immigrant households
- Get insight on outreach team's practices
- Get insight on relationships between key players (MDHS, DHS, clients)

LITERATURE REVIEW

**Overview of the sociopolitical and legal landscape for
immigrant SNAP applicants**

Demographic Overview of Immigrant Marylanders

The immigrant population in Maryland is vast...

- Immigrants comprised 15% of the population in 2018; over half (54%) are naturalized U.S. citizens
- 1 in 8 U.S. natives have at least one immigrant parent

...and diverse

- Top 3 national origin: El Salvador (11%), India (6%), and China (5%)
- 68% of Marylanders speak Spanish as their primary language; 3% Chinese-Mandarin; 3% Sub-Saharan
- 53.6% of the Latino population in MD are foreign born
- Of all immigrant adults in MD over the age of twenty-five, 22% have a Bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree

Undocumented immigrants constitute a large presence in MD & the wider immigrant population:

- 29% of the total immigrant population are undocumented—making up 5% of the entire state & 6% of the workforce
- 7% of U.S. born children in Maryland have at least one undocumented family member
- Approximately 10,000 Maryland college students were undocumented in 2019

Poverty & SNAP Participation in Maryland

Statistical evidence shows a disparate impact of poverty in immigrant households, nationwide

- While the national poverty rate is 14.8%, immigrant households have a poverty rate of 30%

In Maryland, natives and immigrants with & without citizenship/documentation below 100% of the FPL are compared:

- **8.3%** of foreign born naturalized citizens; **10%** of U.S. natives; and **15.3%** of undocumented residents

Similarly reflected in (1) median income and (2) SNAP participation across the 3 groups:

1. **\$101,000** for foreign-born naturalized citizens; **\$89,000** for U.S. natives; **\$74,000** for undocumented residents
2. **13.4%** of foreign born naturalized citizens; **12.6%** of U.S. natives; **12.2%** undocumented residents

Such figures exemplify the nuanced ties between poverty and citizenship—foreign-born undocumented residents in Maryland experience poverty and access to food security at higher rates, compared to their foreign-born naturalized U.S. citizen and U.S. native counterparts. Immigrants who do acquire citizenship status, on the aggregate, fare better than even U.S. natives.

Labor & Food Assistance Policies - Federal

PRWORA restricts access to SNAP for some legal immigrants and denies access to undocumented people.

Heads of households or household members who are undocumented are excluded from SNAP, but can still apply on behalf of their household if other members are eligible.

Labor is a tool to determine deservingness and criminality; one way that this is accomplished is through Social Security

- Social Security benefits are unavailable to unauthorized immigrants residing in the U.S. and to any noncitizen without a work authorized SSN at some point in time
- Theoretically, work that is “legal” requires a SSN; meaning their labor is to be taxed and contribute to government spending for public goods

HOWEVER, undocumented workers DO pay into Social Security while being excluded from public benefits

“Estimated \$13 billion in payroll taxes from unauthorized immigrant workers and their employers in 2010”

- Approximately \$1 billion of those total payroll taxes were benefits paid back
= Approximately a \$12 billion cash flow into the Social Security program from unclaimed benefits

Federal rulings restrict state autonomy in regards to immigration policing, yet also has predatory policy

- *Arizona v. United States*
- *Chae Chan Ping v. United States*
- *Murphy v. N.C.A.A.*
- Secure Communities Program
- The JEM program

Social Security Administration, *Effects Of Unauthorized Immigration On The Actuarial Status Of The Social Security Trust Funds*
University of Baltimore School of Law, Elizabeth Keyes, *Examining MD Views on Immigrants & Immigration*

Immigration & Food Assistance Policies - Maryland

Immigration and Food Assistance policy is determined on the Federal level. Maryland have bounced between adhering to federal policy to pushing via executive authority and increased enforcement/criminalization.

Undocumented people are prohibited from receiving public benefits, although they are allowed to receive emergency services & health care from Maryland state

Under programs like the Secure Communities and JEM programs, certain MD jurisdictions closely collaborate with ICE enforcement

- Skewed towards politically conservative countries who experienced increase pop of Latinos; example of Frederick County (Latino pop increased by 147% two years prior) entered a formal agreement in 2008 that allows ICE to deputize local law enforcement officials to work as federal immigration officials; 60% of immigration arrests were for minor traffic violations

The Maryland DREAM Act

- Provides in state tuition at both community & state colleges
- Requires parents filed at least three tax returns

MD is one of a handful of states that does not require E-Verification for undocumented people

- E-Verification mandates employers to report their employees' citizenship status

In a 2018 memorandum from the State AG, they advised to local law enforcement:

- that local agencies alone will burden all costs & legal abilities of policing immigrant communities beyond the scope of *Arizona*
- State and local officers may not be prohibited from, OR required to, sharing information about a detainee's citizenship or immigration status with federal immigration officials

How do non-citizens apply to SNAP vs citizens

Non-Citizens:

Eligible Groups

- a. Lawfully admitted for permanent residence
- b. Asylees
- c. Parolees
- d. Deportation (or Removal) Withheld
- e. Cuban or Haitian Entrants
- f. Battered Non-Citizens
- g. Refugees
- h. Trafficking Victims
- i. Iraqi & Afghan Special Immigrants (SIV)
- j. Certain American-Indians born abroad
- k. Hmong or Highland Laotian tribal members
- l. Conditional Entrants (under §203(a)(7) of the INA)

*some eligible, non-citizen groups from select countries have restrictions based on when they arrived in the U.S.

(Native U.S.) Citizens

Eligibility Requirements

- a. Citizenship Information
- b. Household Size
- c. Household Income
- d. Additional Resources (e.g. property)
- e. Household Expenses

How do non-citizens apply to SNAP?

To be eligible for SNAP, most non-citizens (LPRs, those granted parole for at least one year, conditional entrants, and battered non-citizens) must be in a qualified alien category and meet **one additional condition**. Other non-citizens listed in the previous slide are eligible **without a waiting period of 5 years** and without having to meet one additional condition.

Non-Citizens Additional Information:

- a. **5 years of residence:** has been a qualified alien living in the U.S. for 5 years since the date of their entry
- b. **40 qualifying work quarters:** A Lawful permanent resident (“green card holder”) with credit for 40 qualifying work quarters.
- c. **Children under 18:** any qualified alien under 18 years of age who lawfully resides in the U.S.
- d. **Blind or Disabled:** blind or disabled receiving benefits or assistance for their condition regardless of entry date.
- e. **Elderly born on or before 8-22-31 who lawfully resided in the U.S. on 8-22-96.**
- f. **Military connection**

Next Steps: All eligible applicants for SNAP are required to prove citizenship and/or proof of legal immigration status. **However, undocumented heads of household can apply on behalf of eligible (legal citizens) household members.** Undocumented folks applying for others are not required to give DHS information beyond a form of ID and their income.

DHS is only required to:

- 1) Categorize an ineligible non-citizen and/or the household member(s) as a “non-applicant” and;
- 2) DHS (and all state agencies) must cease their efforts in acquiring immigration documentation

State agencies are not allowed to:

- 1) Request information about the citizenship or immigration status of anyone who is not applying for SNAP;
- 2) Deny SNAP to applying household members because a non-applying household member has not disclosed their citizenship or immigration status or Social Security number; or
- 3) Attempt to establish or verify immigration status through any means other than the procedures outlined below. The Department of Homeland Security has the primary responsibility for determining the status of non-citizens."

Who are Maryland Hunger Solutions?

Maryland Hunger Solutions was founded by the Food Research & Action Center in 2007.

The mission of MDHS is to eradicate hunger and enhance the nutrition, health, and overall well-being of individuals, families, and children in Maryland. MDHS aims to eliminate barriers and establish sustainable connections between Maryland residents and nutritious food sources. In pursuit of this goal, MDHS collaborates with various state and community partners to achieve the following objectives:

- Educate the public on the extent of hunger in Maryland and effective solutions to food insecurity
- Advocate for & improve policy changes to address food insecurity and poverty
- Connect eligible residents to available nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP and school meal programs, **via an in-house hotline**

FINDINGS

Analysis from surveying former clients & interviewing SNAP Assistance Providers

PHASE I: Fact Finding for Individuals' Lived Experiences

Summary of Findings from the Client Survey

When evaluating the factors and resources available to them, client responses indicated that...

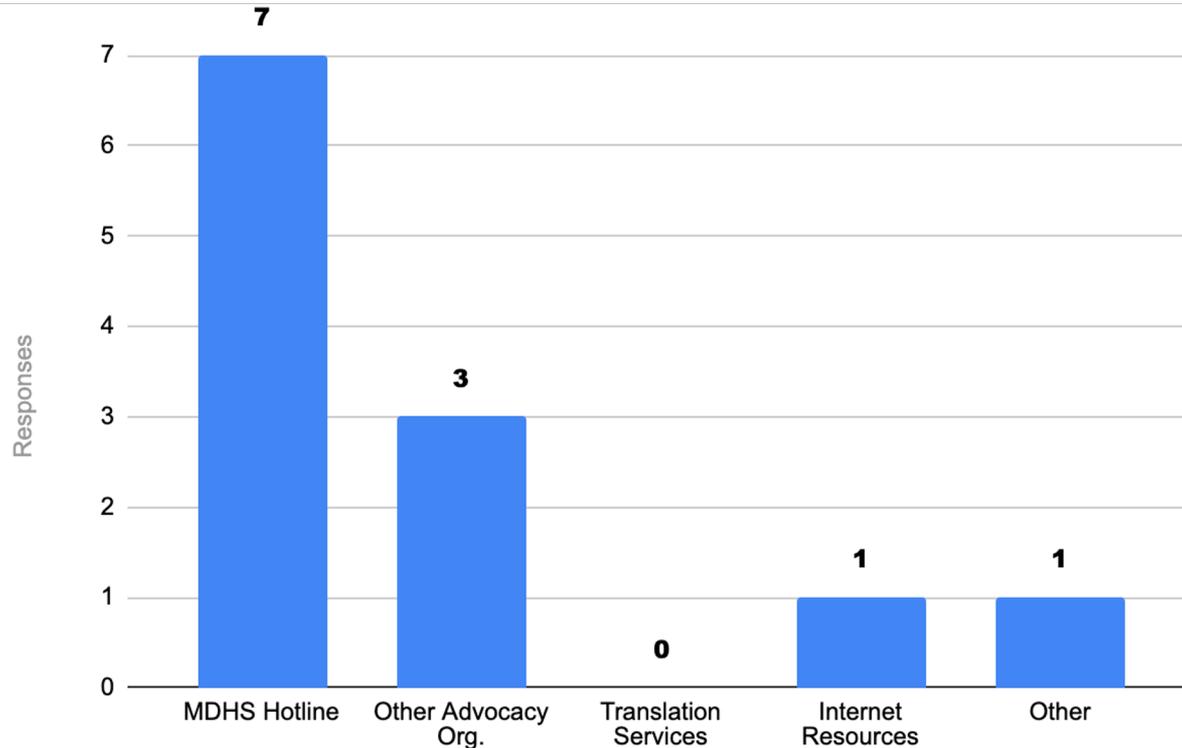
- The MDHS hotline is a valuable tool
- Translation services were one of the least helpful factors when applying for SNAP

Going into the application process, **survey participants wish they had known more information about the following:**

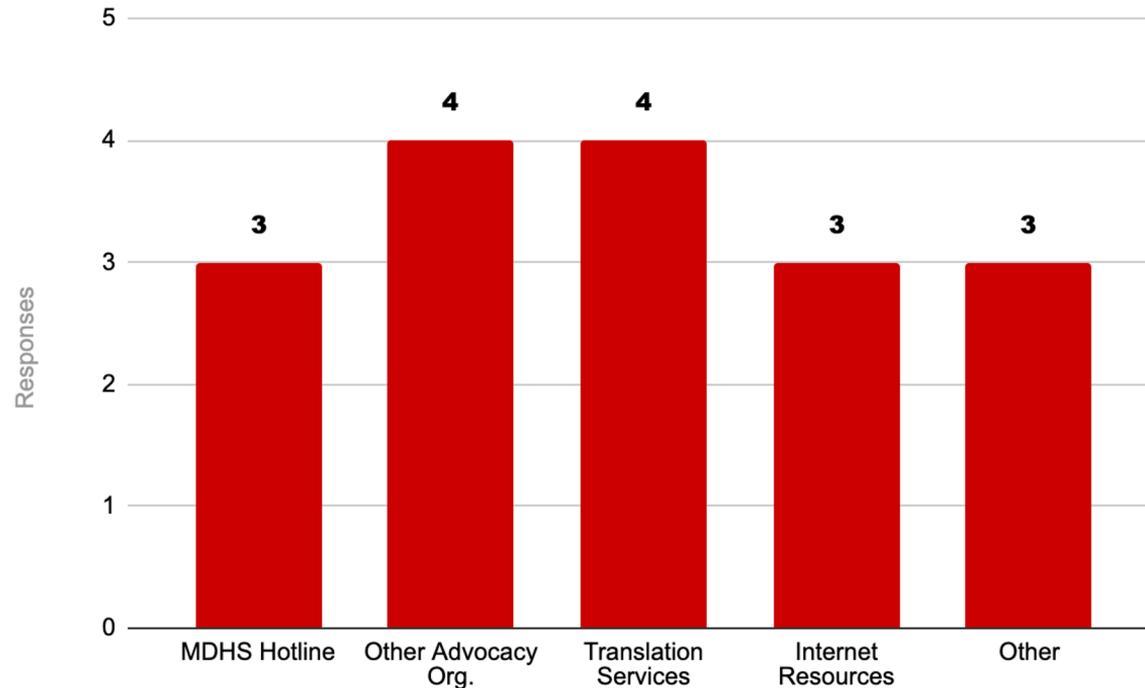
- The necessary verification documents
- The (oftentimes arduous) timeline of the entire application

Interestingly, when asked about what fears or concerns they faced when applying for SNAP, survey participants identified **concerns about eligibility (6) and lack of translation services (5).**

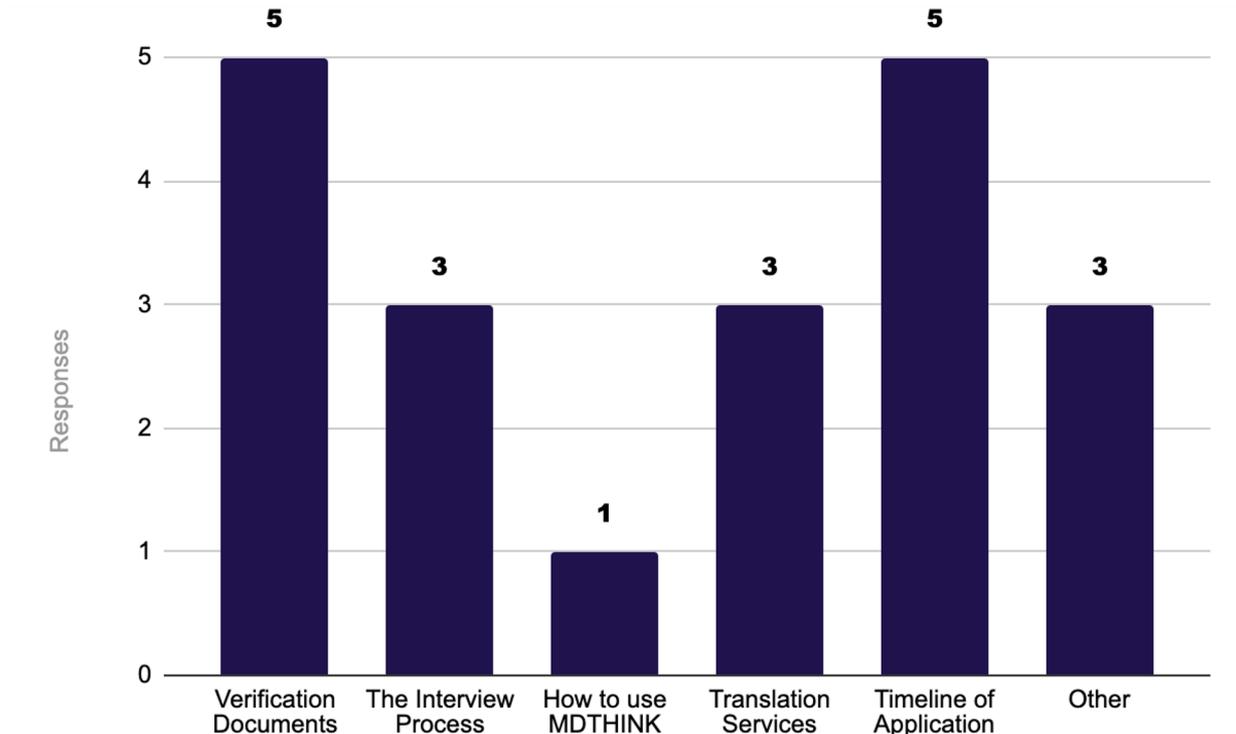
Q1. What factors were most helpful throughout the SNAP application process?



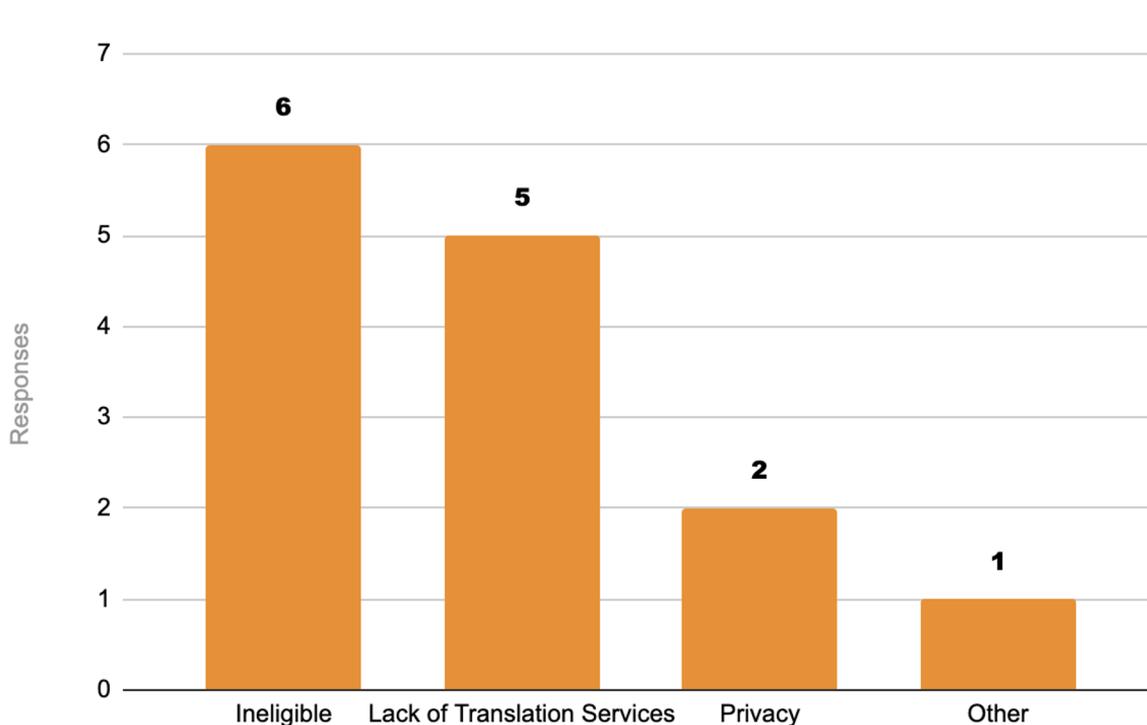
Q2. What factors were least helpful throughout the SNAP application process?



Q3. What information did you wish you had known before applying?



Q4. What fears or concerns, if any, did you have before calling the MDHS hotline?



PHASE II: Interviewing for Institutional Knowledge

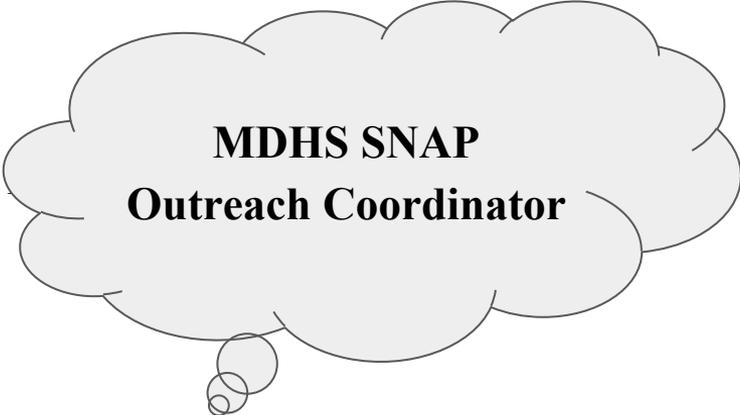
To gain further insight into the **systemic barriers** that prevent Spanish-speaking immigrants from accessing SNAP benefits, we conducted interviews with two MDHS SNAP Outreach Coordinators and identified two key themes:

1. Institutional Hindrances

2. Fears & Mistrust

These two themes are interconnected. The systemic barriers preventing Spanish-speaking immigrants from accessing the benefits of SNAP are deeply rooted in xenophobia, criminalization tactics, and fear of deportation. These fears discourage non-English speaking households from participating in the SNAP application process, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and limiting their access to critical food resources.

“There is such an excessive amount of information that is making this process more burdensome. This raises the question of: how many more barriers are we introducing to mixed-citizenship clients?”



**MDHS SNAP
Outreach Coordinator**

Institutional barriers, in this context, pertain to the systemic obstacles that hinder non-English speaking immigrants and people of color from obtaining SNAP benefits. Institutional obstacles perpetuate racial prejudices, contributing to difficulties such as complicated and prolonged application processes for undocumented applicants. This exacerbates the challenges faced by this population and hinders their access to essential food resources.

Language Access

- There is a lack of translation services. Oftentimes, non-English speaking applicants will be hung up on by their caseworker or have a caseworker that lacks the client's trust.

Department of Human Services Error

- MDThink's design inadequately accommodates the needs of undocumented and immigrant households. For instance, the platform does not offer the option for the Head of Household to opt out of applying for benefits, which is a requirement for undocumented individuals. Instead, additional letters and materials are required to be submitted to explain that the Head of Household is not applying for themselves.

Caseworker Error

- In instances where caseworkers lack proper training or opt to disregard client confidentiality protocol, they may probe for further personal information to record in MDThink for undocumented individuals who have indicated that they are not seeking benefits.

Immigrant and mixed-citizenship households face myriad of messaging on the **threats or even dangerous myths** of applying for public benefits. Unfortunately, there are numerous valid factors that sow mistrust in the community—as well as verifiable falsehoods that stoke fear and confusion.

Fears that are Myths:

- Forced draft into military
- Children/parents pay back benefits
- Will affect children's citizenship status
- Will affect anyone associated with undocumented "applicant"
- Family separation
- Application will be delayed/dismissed if they advocate for themselves (e.g. requesting translator)
- Being deported or reported to ICE

Fears that are True:

- Being a victim of a scam
- Being a victim of misinformation
- May experience a prolonged application process due to their undocumented or non-citizen status
- Policies change quickly, so applicants CAN become ineligible or have any "myths" become reality



Fear of Questioning Authority: Immigrant households often fear retaliation for advocating for their needs in the application process due to barriers such as limited language access and the perpetuation of harmful myths. This reinforces the ongoing marginalization and exclusion of immigrant communities.

“There seems to always be a hesitation to speak up for themselves because of this very real fear of *“are my children going to be taken away.”* That fear is now a part of the process [of applying for SNAP benefits].”



**MDHS SNAP
Outreach Coordinator**
(Spanish-Speaking Specialist)

OUTCOMES

TOOLKIT

The toolkit, [*Solicitá SNAP*](#), includes an overview of:

1. Applicants right to a translator
2. Eligibility requirements
3. Required verification documents
4. DHS obligation for timely processing
5. Links to other resources



Recommendations

Next Steps:

Distribute the toolkit to Spanish-speaking SNAP applicants through MDHS' website, on social media, and during outreach appointments.

Recommendations for future endeavors:

- Translate the toolkit to other languages
- Continue surveying for a larger, representative sample of former clients
- Expand research beyond surveying; potentially conducting focus groups and interviews to get a richer understanding of former clients' perceptions & experiences of the application process

THANK YOU



SOLICITÁ SNAP

Maryland Hunger Solutions | Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship

ELEGIBILIDAD PARA SNAP	1
TRADUCCIÓN DE IDIOMAS	2
VERIFICACIÓN DE DOCUMENTOS	3
EL TIEMPO DE SOLICITUD	4
OTROS RECURSOS	5

Negación:

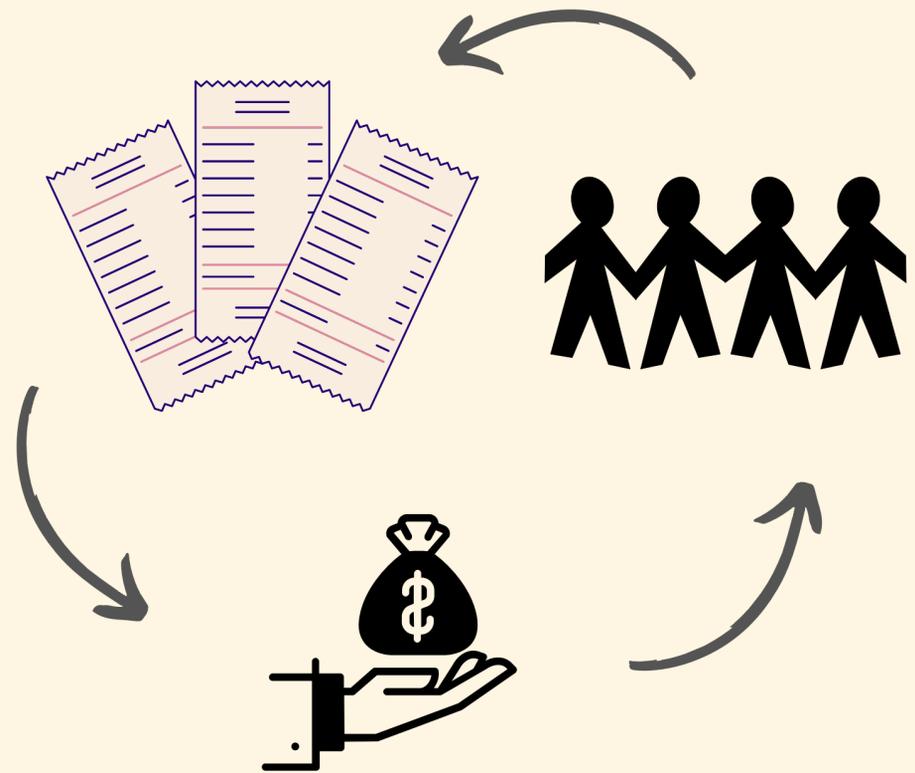
SNAP es un programa federal. El programa SNAP en el Estado de Maryland está obligado a cambiar de acuerdo con las leyes federales. Este documento fue escrito en **Enero del 2023**.

Researchers: Isabella Dresser & Maryam Taysir
Author & Design: Isabella Dresser
Translation: Claudia Gonzalez

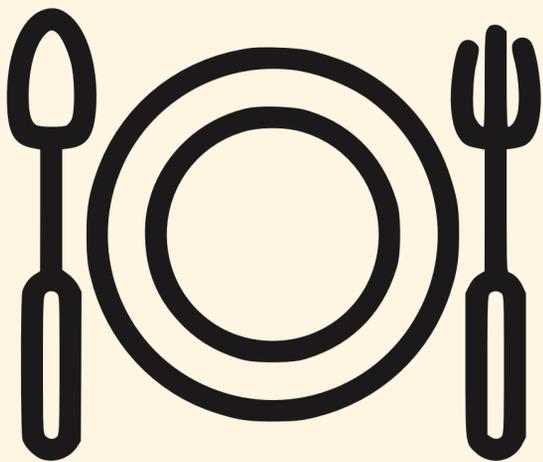
ELEGIBILIDAD PARA SNAP

Información solicitada para la aplicación:

1. ingresos de su hogar
2. recursos de su hogar
3. tamaño de su hogar
4. estado de ciudadanía



hogar = personas en su hogar que compran y comparten alimentos juntos



Si usted no califica elegible, pero sus hijos sí, aún puede acceder a este beneficio para comprar alimentos saludables para su familia, incluyendo pan, frutas, verduras, carnes, productos lácteos, agua embotellada y alimentos para bebés.

Aplicar a SNAP no tendrá consecuencias migratorias para los que apliquen o sus familias.

**Para ver si califica, llame a Maryland Hunger Solutions:
1-866-821-5552 o [Calculadora de Cupones para Alimentos](#)**

SERVICIOS DE TRADUCCIÓN

Departamento de Servicios Humanos:

La agencia que distribuye y maneja los beneficios de SNAP en Maryland se llama el Departamento de Servicios Humanos (DHS)



El código de Maryland 10-1103 indica que la agencia de **DHS ofrece servicios de traducción a sus clientes.**

¿Cómo puede ver estos servicios de traducción que ofrece DHS?

1. La agencia de DHS le dará una persona que pueda traducirle durante su llamada;
2. Le ofrecerán un programa electrónico que traduzca su comunicación con la oficina de DHS;
3. y/o traducirle documentos por escrito

VERIFICACIÓN DE DOCUMENTOS

Miembros del hogar que califican

- Prueba de identidad
- Números de Seguros Social
- Prueba de domicilio actual
- Prueba de ingresos

Los inmigrantes indocumentados

SOLAMENTE:

- Prueba de identidad
- Prueba de ingreso

Otros Gastos

Estos otros gastos son detalles **opcionales** para su solicitud que pueden ayudar a calificar a su hogar para obtener más beneficios. Necesitara comprobar estos gastos para recibir estos beneficios. Ejemplos de gastos adicionales son:



- cuánto paga el cuidado de dependientes como niños y/o adultos;
- manutención de menores
- gastos de vivienda y gastos de servicios públicos;
- gastos médicos de más de \$35 al mes para miembros del hogar que tienen 60 años o más o que reciben ciertos pagos de incapacidad.

Llame a Maryland Hunger Solutions:
1-866-821-5552

Aplicar a SNAP no tendrá consecuencias migratorias para los que apliquen o sus familias.

EL TIEMPO DE SOLICITUD

Si la oficina determina que usted califica, deberá recibir sus beneficios de SNAP a más tardar **30 días de la fecha en que presentó la solicitud por primera vez.**

Si necesita ayuda de inmediato, puede calificar para los beneficios de SNAP **acelerados dentro de los 7 días.**

Aplicar a SNAP no tendrá consecuencias migratorias para los que apliquen o sus familias.

PREPARESE

El procesamiento puede demorar más de 30 días si DHS solicita documentos de verificación adicionales.



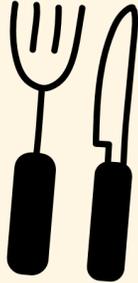
inmigrantes indocumentados del hogar tienen que ofrecer 1) prueba de identidad y 2) prueba de ingresos, SOLAMENTE

LLAME A DHS PARA VERIFICAR ESTATUES DE SU SOLICITUD: 1-800-332-6347
MARYLAND HUNGER SOLUTIONS: 1-866-821-5552

OTROS RECURSOS

hacer clic en el siguiente enlace or llame

COMIDA



[MD Food Bank](#)

[Capitol Area Food Bank](#) (Prince George County)

Baltimore City [Food Resource Map](#)

Para encontrar un lugar que ofrece un programa de comidas para [niños menores de 18 años](#)

Para asistencia de WIC (Mujeres, Infantes y Niños/as): **1-800-242-4942**

Legal

[Legal Aid - Maryland](#)

[Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition](#): **202-331-3320**

[Annapolis Immigrant Justice Network](#): **717-584-4860**

[Casa de Maryland](#): **301-431-4185**



Salud y Seguridad

[Care-a-Van](#):

443-676-2825 el centro médico de Johns Hopkins

[Adelante Familia](#):

Línea en **Español 410-889-7884**, oprima 8.

Línea 24-hora **410-889-7884**