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# A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN ANTI-RACIST VISION FOR SNAP

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**CLASP**  
The Center for Law and Social Policy

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September 2022

## THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP GROUP

**The Community Partnership Group (CPG)** is a diverse collective of activists from across the United States who partner with nonprofits, administering agencies, and policymakers to ensure that their work is grounded in the expertise of people directly impacted by poverty and/or anti-poverty policies (e.g., the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP). Each member of the CPG has developed their expertise through direct experience with public benefits programs—whether through participation or discriminatory exclusion—and their ongoing advocacy to eliminate poverty and barriers to access and inclusion within their communities. The CPG was convened by independent consultants and staff on the income and work supports team at CLASP with an aim of dismantling the transactional and often traumatizing relationship between people with lived experiences of poverty and the government agencies and non-profit partners designed to support them. To read more about the CPG and the co-authors, visit [www.clasp.org/cpg](http://www.clasp.org/cpg).

### CPG CO-AUTHORS

**Alice Aluoch** is the senior manager, membership and development at Global Health Council.

**Maryann Broxton** is an ATD Fourth World activist and an independent consultant.

**Yolanda M. Gordon**, from Fort Mill, South Carolina, is the mother of three children.

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**Tamika Moore** runs a non-profit organization called VisionWorkz.

### CLASP'S INCOME AND WORK SUPPORTS TEAM CO-AUTHORS

**Parker Gilkesson** is a senior policy analyst.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend a special thank you and gratitude to every single activist with the lived experience of poverty who is advocating for issues that greatly affect their lives. We see you, and we thank you for the work you're doing.

We also want to express our thanks to CLASP's communications team, and to the income and work support team's research assistant, Jessi Russell for the hours of hard work and support they provided to complete this project.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provide critical care and support for families with low incomes. However, they also reinforce structures of oppression. Historical context shows “welfare reform” in America is rooted in anti-Blackness, xenophobia, and other forms of racism. False racist narratives have left an ingrained mark on the system of public benefits and disproportionately affect communities of color with low incomes.

Our public policies far too often focus on scrutinizing individual people experiencing poverty rather than identifying systemic barriers, the root causes of poverty, and solutions for ending poverty. This report offers recommendations for changes to the SNAP program that move it in an anti-racist direction. This includes examining issues around sufficiency; availability; trauma; trust; respect; promotion of opportunity; and the perspectives of participants. By rejecting racist assumptions and not limiting ourselves to what is politically possible today, we can envision a program that truly centers what people with low incomes, of all races and ethnicities, need.

**This paper** was written as a partnership between CLASP staff and people with direct lived experience of poverty who are members of the Community Partnership Group.

### ***To Meet the Need, SNAP Benefits Must Be Sufficient***

SNAP must offer benefits that are adequate enough to provide healthy meals and allow people to purchase food that honors varied cultures. This includes considering special diets that cost more.

Addressing the need for sufficiency will require that SNAP administrators make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs of all recipients. Those adjustments must include defending the improvement to the Thrifty Food Plan, increasing overall benefit levels, improving deductions that SNAP recipients can take to increase their benefits, ensuring that all the food plans include culturally appropriate foods and spices, and expanding farmer’s market benefits to all grocery stores for fresh fruits and vegetables.

### ***SNAP Must Be Available to All Who Need It***

Making the program available and accessible to all who need it is essential. But it requires SNAP administrators to make changes to SNAP rules that are currently restrictive and block access to benefits for many potential recipients.

Those changes must include removing the five-year bar for qualified immigrants, making SNAP available to residents in Puerto Rico, removing the ban on SNAP benefits to people with prior drug felony convictions, and lifting restrictions like work requirements.

### ***Using A Trauma-Informed Lens to Better Meet the Needs of Recipients***

State Administrators of SNAP and other public benefits programs must train workers in trauma-informed services. This includes recognizing that people are not stereotypes – they are human beings who deserve respect, trust, and kindness. Administrators should use feedback loops to gather input directly from SNAP recipients on the agency’s effectiveness, its customer service, and asset-based language. They should conduct mandatory and ongoing unconscious bias training for workers in their agency.



### ***Trust and Respect in The Application/Renewal Process***

Increasing trust and confidence in the application and renewal process for recipients means getting rid of the administrative barriers that make it more difficult for people to apply for or renew their SNAP benefits. This should include less frequent renewals, elimination of unnecessary verifications, and a more simplified application process.

### ***Trust and Respect from Policymakers on The Use of SNAP Benefits***

To demonstrate trust and respect in SNAP recipients who are fully capable of making the best choices for their families, legislators must lift the restrictions on prepared foods, better support online purchasing by mandating free delivery for SNAP recipients, and take away the stigma attached to EBT cards.

### ***Promote Opportunity Among Recipients***

Administrators and policymakers should use strategies that provide access to greater opportunities for education, better jobs, and supportive services. Voluntary Employment and Training (E&T) programs help to connect people to high-quality jobs. Raising the gross income limit, eliminating asset limits for all, and mandating a simplified self-employment deduction are ways that administrators and policymakers can better promote opportunity within the SNAP program.

### ***Value SNAP Participant's Perspective***

In all dimensions of the SNAP program, what matters is the feedback and consultation with community members who receive SNAP. Administrators must acknowledge and incorporate the important perspectives that comes from those who are directly impacted by the program. States should seek advice from participants on program design, effectiveness, and evaluation. They should track and report on customer satisfaction, and be required to meet face to face rather than just surveying them.

Taken together, these recommendations can make substantive changes to SNAP, helping to redress the racist underpinnings of the program. These critical changes are necessary to move SNAP toward becoming an anti-racist program.

**[Read the full report here.](#)**

