



RESEARCH IMPROVING PEOPLE'S LIVES

Making SNAP Work for Families

Overview

The Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is an important federal program for millions of families in the United States, and cost \$68 billion in fiscal year 2017. **RIPL partnered with Rhode Island to develop a low-cost, data-driven pilot to leverage a bigger impact for families for each dollar spent on SNAP.**

Breaking the Cycle of Food Insecurity

The once-monthly distribution of SNAP encourages recipients to spend their benefits at the beginning of the month, often all at once.¹ This rush to spend may contribute to a monthly cycle of food insecurity where caloric intake and fresh food consumption fall at the end of the month, and families face additional hardships including increased crime, school infractions, and hospital admissions.^{1,2,3,4,5,6}

To solve this challenge, RIPL partnered with Rhode Island to develop “Split Issuance,” a simple change to SNAP disbursement wherein families receive two payments over the course of the month instead of one lump sum. This change provides a steadier stream of income, and helps families smooth their purchases over the course of the month. We developed the following:

1. **A comprehensive pilot plan for implementing Split Issuance at no cost to the state.** Split Issuance uses electronic disbursement systems to benefit SNAP-enrolled families. All it requires is a small change in computer code. RIPL also developed a marketing and communications plan, engagement with food pantries and advocacy groups, and communications, community engagement and outreach. We found that consumer appetite for Split Issuance is high: 70% of SNAP beneficiaries that RIPL interviewed in Rhode Island also preferred a Split Issuance system.
2. **A comprehensive pilot plan for measuring the impact of Split Issuance on cost savings and family outcomes.** Our leading experts designed a data-driven evaluation the success of Split Issuance for families in terms of food and economic security, incarceration, nutrition, and cost savings to government programs such as Medicaid usage and other important safety net programs.
3. **Research to support fact-based decisions about SNAP.** RIPL experts measured the impact of SNAP on spending and nutrition. Major findings include that every \$100 a household receives in SNAP benefits leads to an additional \$50 to \$60 extra dollars of food spending per month, while an equivalent cash benefit would lead to much smaller increases in food spending; and that enrolling in SNAP has only a small effect on the nutritional quality of purchased grocery foods. With these facts at their fingertips, Rhode Island policymakers can make informed decisions about how to keep improving the impact of SNAP for families.

Split Issuance can benefit communities by reducing the cycle of food and economic insecurity through a steadier benefit stream; saving government money by reducing the usage of social safety net programs, and improving nutrition by helping families plan meals in the here and now. **This pilot will make partner states leaders in delivering simple, innovative changes to improve lives for families in their communities.**