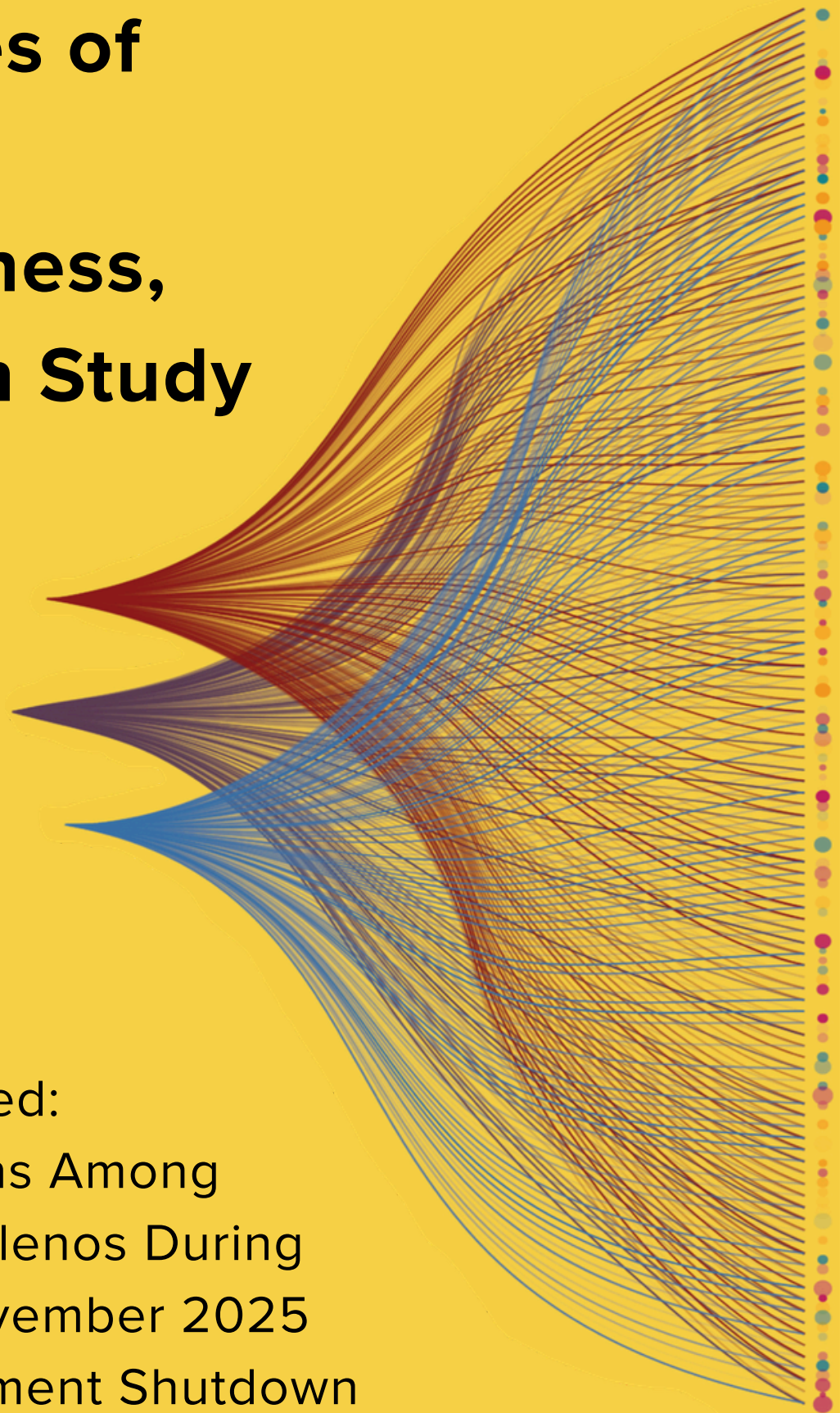


Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Homelessness, and Health Study (PATHS)

A Lifeline Delayed:
SNAP Disruptions Among
Unhoused Angelenos During
the October-November 2025
Federal Government Shutdown





**Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing,
Homelessness and Health Study (PATHS):**

A Lifeline Delayed: SNAP Disruptions Among Unhoused Angelenos
During the October-November 2025 Federal Government Shutdown

Peichen Liu, *Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, USC*

Jessie Chien, *Fielding School of Public Health, UCLA*

Randall Kuhn, *Fielding School of Public Health, UCLA*

Benjamin Henwood, *Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, USC*

INTRODUCTION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation's primary nutrition assistance program and is designed to ensure that individuals and families with very low incomes can meet basic food needs. Because SNAP is a means-tested entitlement, most people experiencing homelessness (PEH) meet the program's income eligibility criteria to access SNAP benefits as a critical source of food support. For individuals living in extreme poverty, SNAP benefits often represent one of the few stable resources available to help prevent severe food deprivation.

Despite this intent, many PEH do not consistently receive SNAP benefits. Administrative barriers—including difficulties maintaining documentation, replacing lost Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, completing recertification requirements, or maintaining reliable contact information—can interrupt participation even among those who are eligible. As a result, participation in SNAP among PEH is often unstable, and there is limited information about how consistently PEH receive benefits once enrolled.

Interruptions in SNAP benefits may be particularly consequential for people experiencing homelessness. Unlike many low-income households, individuals experiencing homelessness often lack food storage, cooking facilities, or reliable transportation to access food resources. They may also have limited access to informal support networks that could help buffer temporary financial disruptions or vehicles to drive to food banks. As a result, even short delays in benefits can quickly translate into missed meals or severe food deprivation.

In October 2025, a federal government shutdown disrupted funding for several federal programs, including SNAP. Although the shutdown was relatively short, delays occurred in benefit distribution as federal funding temporarily lapsed. In California, SNAP benefits are issued on a staggered schedule during the first ten days of each month. Because the shutdown affected the funding of SNAPs at the beginning of November, individuals scheduled to receive benefits early in the month were more likely to experience delays, while those scheduled to receive benefits later in the month were largely unaffected once federal funding was restored.

This timing effectively created a natural experiment: some SNAP recipients experienced unexpected delays in benefits while others received benefits as scheduled, allowing us to examine whether disruptions in SNAP benefits directly affected food insecurity.

This policy brief uses data from the Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Homelessness, and Health (PATHS) study to examine the role of SNAP among PEH in Los Angeles County and to assess the consequences of benefit disruptions during the government shutdown. Specifically, we address two questions:

1. Who among PEH receives SNAP benefits?
2. Did delays in SNAP benefits during the shutdown worsen experiences of food insecurity?

Understanding both participation in SNAP and the consequences of benefit interruptions is critical for strengthening the safety net for people experiencing homelessness.

METHODS

PATHS is a monthly cohort study that tracks health, housing, and service needs among a panel of PEH in Los Angeles County via monthly online surveys distributed through email and text message.

PATHS participants report their enrollment in SNAP benefits at baseline (study enrollment) and biannually thereafter (January & July each year). In the November 2025 monthly survey, distributed on November 17, 2025, we added a question assessing whether respondents experienced delays or did not receive SNAP benefits due to the recent federal government shutdown. This report focuses on the 410 PATHS participants who completed the November 2025 survey.

To address the first question, we first describe the sociodemographic, health, and housing characteristics associated with SNAP enrollment based on participants' most recent baseline or biannual survey prior to the government shutdown, and differences between groups were assessed using standard statistical tests. This cross-sectional analysis provides insight into who among

PEH receives SNAP benefits. Because participation in public benefits may fluctuate over time, we also examined SNAP participation across repeated survey waves among participants with multiple assessments. This analysis helps determine whether SNAP receipt among PEH is stable or whether individuals frequently move in and out of the program.

For the second questions, we compare food insecurity reported in the monthly surveys for October (before the government shutdown) and November (during the shutdown) among participants who reported delays and those who did not. Changes from October to November were assessed for statistical significance using within-person comparisons. This month-to-month analysis allows us to assess the impact of disruptions on food insecurity. Because SNAP participation may change over time, for this analysis, participants who reported a shutdown-related delay in benefits are treated as active SNAP recipients, regardless of their previously reported enrollment status; participants reporting no disruption include both SNAP recipients who received benefits normally and individuals not currently enrolled in SNAP.

RESULTS

SNAP participation among people experiencing homelessness

Among the 410 participants completing the November survey, 203 (49.5%) reported having received SNAP benefits in a survey prior to the shutdown.

Participation in SNAP varied across sociodemographic and housing characteristics. Women made up a larger share of SNAP enrollees compared with non-enrollees (50.7% vs. 40.1 %). Non-Hispanic White participants represented a larger share of SNAP enrollees than non-enrollees (38.9% vs 21.3%); in contrast, Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic Black/African American participants were disproportionately represented among those not enrolled in SNAP (Hispanic/Latino: 46.4% vs 32%; Black/African American: 25.1% vs. 19.2%). This pattern is consistent with prior research documenting racial and ethnic disparities in SNAP participation among eligible low-income households, often linked to structural inequities, discrimination, and concerns related to immigration policy, underscoring the need for culturally responsive and targeted outreach strategies. Participants reporting substance use conditions were more

represented among SNAP enrollees than non-enrollees (38.9% vs. 25.6%). One possible explanation is that engagement with behavioral health or treatment services may facilitate connection to public benefits, including SNAP.

Housing history also showed a strong association with SNAP enrollment. While over 83% of participants reported experiencing chronic homelessness, they were significantly less likely to report being enrolled in SNAP compared with those who were not chronically homeless (88.4% vs. 79.3%). Similarly, SNAP enrollment differed by primary shelter status in the past month, with unsheltered individuals overrepresented among non-enrollees (73.4% vs. 63.1%), while sheltered individuals were more represented among enrollees (36.9% vs. 26.6%). These findings align with existing evidence indicating that unsheltered and chronically homeless individuals face greater barriers to maintaining service access.

Table 1. Distribution of sociodemographic, health, and housing characteristics across SNAP enrollment status at their most recent assessment

Variables	Total (N=410)	SNAP enrollment status	
		Enrolled (N=203)	Not enrolled (N=207)
	%	%	%
Sociodemographics			
Age			
18-29	14	16	12.1
30-44	46	48	44
45-59	33	29.6	35.8
60 and older	7	6.4	8.2
Sex*			
Male	54	48.3	59.9
Female	45	50.7	40.1
Other	<1	<1	0
Race***			
White	30	38.9	21.3
Black/African American	22	19.2	25.1
Hispanic/Latino	40	32	46.4
Multiracial or other	9	9.9	7.3
Health characteristics			
Prior mental health conditions	62	65	58.9
Prior substance use conditions**	32	38.9	25.6
Housing Characteristics			
Chronically homeless*	84	79.3	88.4
Primary shelter status (past month)*			
Unsheltered	68	63.1	73.4
Sheltered	32	36.9	26.6

Differences between groups were tested for statistical significance; p-values are shown as *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Among participants with repeated SNAP assessments, approximately three quarters reported consistent SNAP status across surveys, while about one quarter changed SNAP enrollment status. These changes likely reflect common barriers to maintaining benefits among people experiencing homelessness, such as missed recertification deadlines, lost EBT cards, or difficulties maintaining documentation.

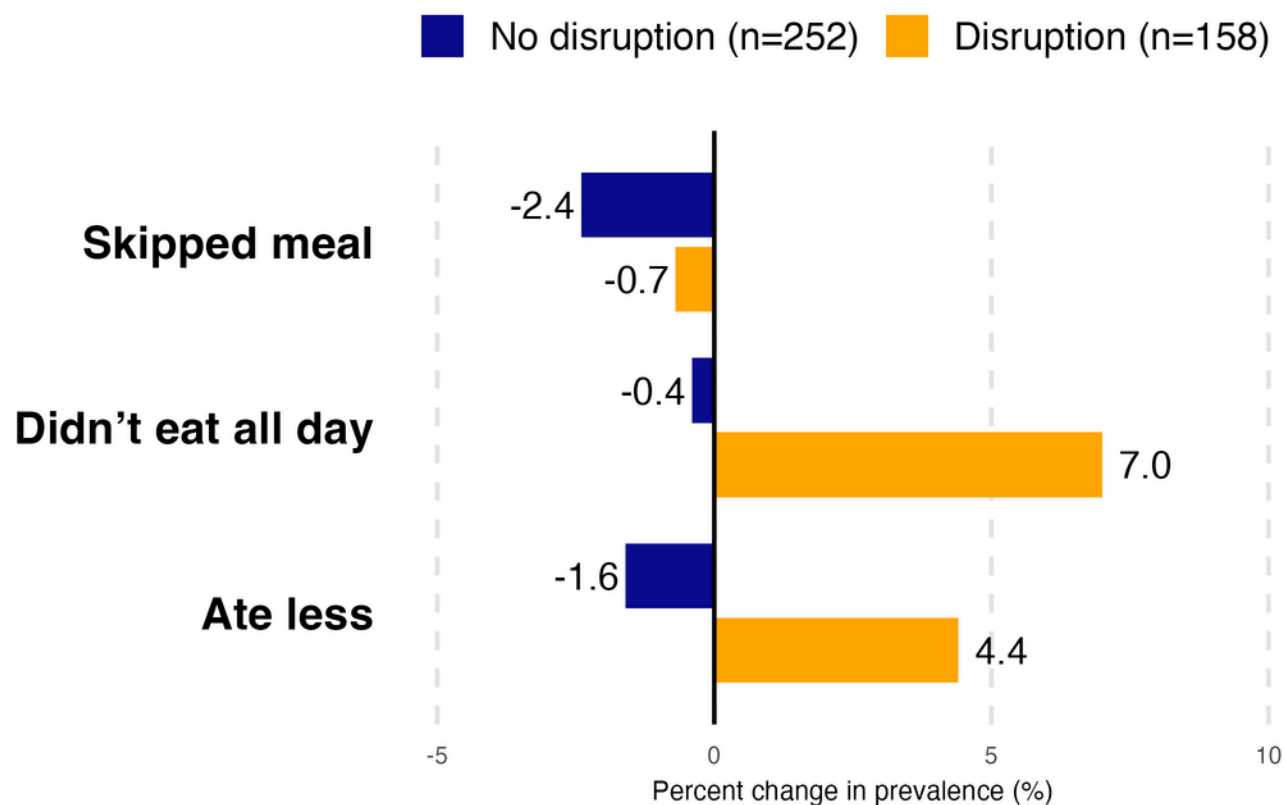
SNAP disruptions during the government shutdown

Among the 410 participants completing the November survey, 158 individuals (39%) reported experiencing a delay or disruption in SNAP benefits during the government shutdown. Of these, 60 individuals (15%) reported a delay, while 98 individuals (24%) reported not receiving benefits during this period.

To examine the consequences of benefit disruptions, we compared the proportion of respondents reporting different types of food insecurity between the October (pre-shutdown) and November (during the shutdown) PATHS surveys and calculated their percent change between time points.

Among participants who did not report SNAP disruptions, food insecurity indicators showed minimal changes between October and November. Among participants who did report SNAP disruptions, the prevalence of the most severe form of food insecurity—going an entire day without eating—increased significantly from 37.3% in October to 44.3% in November, representing a 7-percentage point increase. Eating less increased modestly (4.4%) while skipping a meal showed a minor decrease, but neither changes were statistically significant. These findings suggest that delays in SNAP benefits may push individuals into the most severe forms of food deprivation, even when other food insecurity indicators did not change substantially.

Figure 1. Experiences of food insecurity before and during the shutdown, by SNAP disruption status*



CONCLUSION & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

SNAP plays a critical role in helping PEH meet basic food needs. Yet participation remains incomplete and benefits are not always stable over time. This report demonstrates how delays in SNAP benefits can worsen severe food insecurity among PEH. More specifically, we found that participants who experienced benefit disruptions were significantly more likely to report going an entire day without eating. The fact that these impacts were not even more pronounced may reflect some combination of the short duration of the cuts and the difficult reality that food insecurity levels were already so high, making it difficult for them to get much worse.

Given that more disruptions may be more likely and that enrollment and renewal requirements have become more onerous, three key policy lessons emerge from these findings:

1. Increase SNAP enrollment among PEH

Although most PEH are likely eligible for SNAP, only about half of participants reported receiving benefits at any given time. Expanding outreach and enrollment assistance at shelters, service agencies, meal programs, and encampments could improve participation. Targeted outreach is especially important given disparities in enrollment. In this report, non-White individuals, as well as those who were unsheltered or chronically homeless, were less likely to be enrolled in SNAP, suggesting that those facing the greatest structural vulnerability continue to encounter barriers to accessing benefits.

2. Reduce barriers to maintaining benefits

Even among individuals who receive SNAP, participation may be unstable due to administrative barriers. Simplifying recertification processes, improving systems for replacing lost EBT cards, and reducing documentation requirements could help stabilize benefit receipt and reduce interruptions. These types of renewal supports can be more seamlessly integrated into existing client contacts with homeless outreach, social service, and field medicine systems.

3. Prepare for administrative disruptions

The government shutdown demonstrates that even short-term disruptions in benefit distribution can have immediate and serious consequences for PEH. Contingency planning for future shutdowns or administrative interruptions should include mechanisms to maintain benefit continuity and ensure access to emergency food resources. As during the initial days of the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency food services can be mobilized through a mix of food pantry information-sharing, increased support for soup kitchens, and pop-up food service through service delivery or mutual aid organizations.

Policies that expand SNAP enrollment, reduce administrative barriers, and protect continuity of benefits will be essential to strengthening the safety net for PEH.

Report designed by Saachi Pavani