

Maryland Continues to Lag Behind on Food Stamp Use

More Outreach, Easier Process Needed To Enroll Eligible Families

Executive Summary

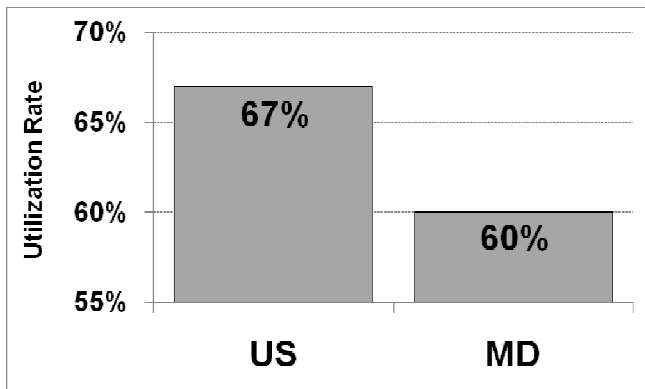
Newly released data shows that the percentage of eligible Marylanders using food stamps continues to lag behind the national average, despite recent increases. Four out of every ten eligible Marylanders are not receiving food stamps. As the economy continues to decline, the State needs to ensure that all families are aware of their eligibility for benefits.

Background

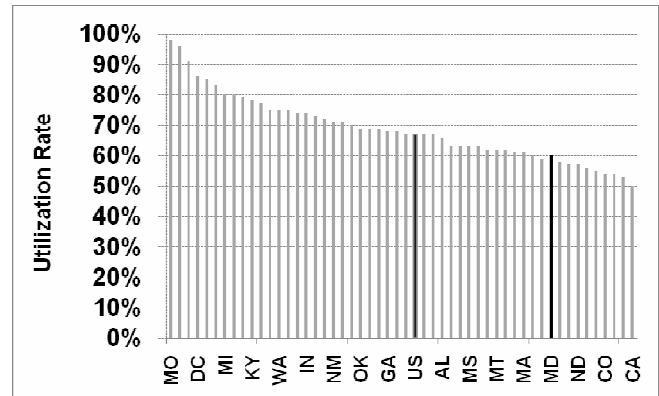
The Food Stamp Program is the largest anti-hunger program in Maryland, helping over 350,000 people purchase food each month.¹ Half of Maryland food stamp benefits go to households with children.² The entire cost of food stamp program benefits is paid by the federal government.

Findings

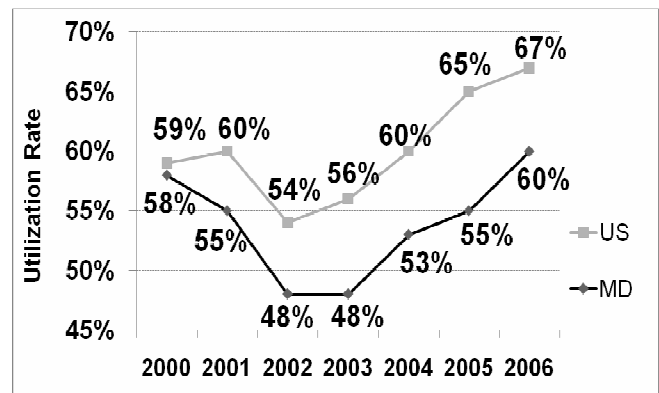
The latest data shows that only 60 percent of eligible Marylanders received food stamp benefits, compared to a national utilization rate of 67 percent.³



Maryland's rate ranks in the bottom quarter of states, as shown below.



Despite recent increases in Maryland's food stamp utilization rate, the State continues to lag behind the national average.



Recommendations

1. The State needs to take full advantage of a federal waiver it has received which allows families to renew their food stamp eligibility over the phone rather than come in for a face-to-face interview. Only one county is currently using the waiver.
2. The State needs to examine successful efforts to increase use of other benefits. For example, the State Comptroller is reviewing state tax returns and informing parents that their children may be eligible for health insurance.
3. The State needs to consider a one-stop application process for all economic supports, including food stamps, so that families do not have to go to multiple locations to apply.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Preliminary Data (2008). See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/15SNAPpartPP.htm>. Congress changed the program name to the "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" in 2008. For simplicity, the old name is used here.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2007* (2008).

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2006* (Nov. 2008). The data just released shows utilization rates from 2006. Since then, enrollment in food stamps has increased in Maryland and nationally. This largely reflects increasing numbers of eligible families because of the economy. The utilization rates may remain unchanged.

