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State Ranks 42nd in Food Stamp Utilization*Easier Applications, More Outreach Can Boost National Ranking***Executive Summary**

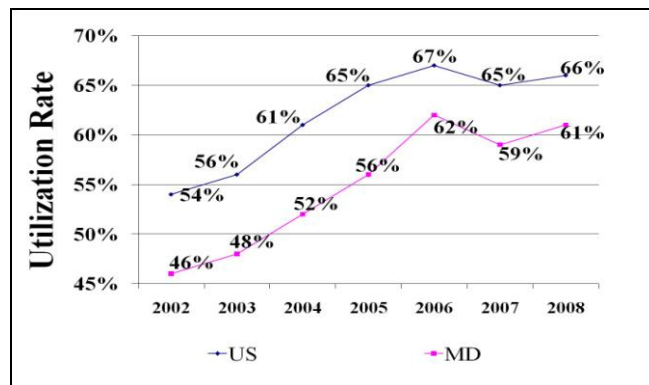
The percentage of eligible families in Maryland getting food stamps has increased slightly. However, the State fell to 42nd in the country in food stamp utilization. The total number of families receiving food stamps has increased, but because of the economic crisis more children are going hungry. Application barriers and insufficient outreach are the primary causes for Maryland's poor ranking. Families facing long delays getting food stamps have sued the State. Federal officials want "lagging" states to improve enrollment efforts. Solutions include hiring more eligibility workers, doing eligibility interviews by phone and allowing families to complete applications for food stamps and other benefits at one-stop centers across the State.

Background

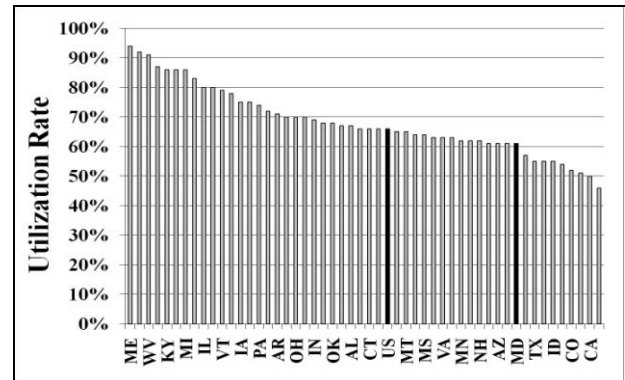
Because of the economic crisis, more Marylanders are receiving food stamps. However, not all eligible families are receiving food stamps. This report looks at the latest data on food stamp utilization.

Findings

61 percent of eligible Marylanders received food stamp benefits. This compares to a national utilization rate of 66 percent. It is a slight increase from the previous year, when only 59 percent received food stamp benefits. Maryland's food stamp utilization rate ranks 42nd in the country, a drop from the previous year.¹



¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Reaching Those in Need* (2010). The report reflects data from 2008.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Federal officials recently emphasized the need for "lagging" states to do more to enroll eligible families.² Despite increased enrollment in food stamps, more children are going hungry.³ In Maryland, families filed a lawsuit about long delays in the processing of applications. Advocates for Children and Youth are working with state agencies to implement cost-effective solutions, including:

1. Finalize a comprehensive, five-year plan.
2. Use phone, instead of face-to-face, interviews to confirm eligibility.
3. Let families apply for food stamps and other benefits at the same time and in one place.
4. Ensure that there are enough eligibility caseworkers.
5. Coordinate with applications for Free-and Reduced-priced Meals in schools.
6. Track food stamp utilization on a monthly basis.
7. Expand community-based benefits counseling and outreach programs.
8. Use state income tax returns to let families know they are eligible for food stamps.

² See Jason DeParle & Robert Gebeloff, "Across U.S., Food Stamp Use Soars and Stigma Fades," *New York Times* (Nov. 29, 2009).

³ U.S.D.A. Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2008* (Nov. 2009).