The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has been an important food safety net for more than 50 years. There is a problem, though: The program has no nutrition standards – meaning 45 million Americans could face health problems due to unhealthy diets. A policy statement from the American Heart Association examining the program recommends keeping it strong while improving diet quality.

**THE HEALTH IMPACT**

Strong nutrition standards are important because studies show diets heavy in sugary drinks, processed foods, and other low-nutrient foods can increase risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, and other health problems.

Research has found DIET QUALITY to be worse FOR SNAP PARTICIPANTS:

- **61%** more sugar-sweetened beverages purchased by SNAP participants compared to non-participants.
- **72%** of sugary drinks purchased in SNAP households were paid for with SNAP benefits.

**SNAP RECIPIENTS CONSUMED**

- **39%** fewer whole grains
- **46%** more red meat than non-SNAP participants

**How can we FIX IT?**

Research shows increasing the monthly SNAP benefit improves diet quality.
**OTHER PROBLEMS**

**Taxpayers pay for the healthcare costs of diet-related chronic disease.**

- **73%** of Medicaid cost growth fell in Massachusetts after SNAP benefits increased, especially for people with chronic illnesses with high sensitivity to food insecurity.

- **93%** of Medicare spending goes to fee-for-service beneficiaries with multiple chronic conditions, according to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

- **1%** of Medicaid beneficiaries account for **25%** of total Medicaid expenditures. Among this top 1%, 83% have at least three chronic conditions and more than 60% have five or more chronic conditions.

**Unhealthy diets can lead to lower job productivity, absenteeism, and diminished military readiness.**

- **7.8%** of the Defense Department’s active-duty forces were diagnosed as overweight or obese in 2015, up from 4.5% in 2011.

- **73%** increase was seen in overweight and obesity diagnoses among military service members of all age groups over five years.

- **73%** reduction in job performance found among employees with unhealthy diets.

- **7%** reduction in job performance found among employees with unhealthy diets.

**How can we FIX IT?**

Several initiatives have shown it’s feasible to adjust the SNAP program to improve nutrition without increasing stigma on the beneficiaries or burden on the retailers.

Research estimates banning sugary drink purchases through SNAP could avert 52,000 heart attack and stroke deaths over the decades and many thousands of diabetes cases.