



# New York City SNAP Recipients Express Anxiety Over Federal Policy

Brief

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The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a lifeline for over a million New York City (NYC) [households](#), providing essential food support to low-income individuals and families. In recent months, federal policy decisions have created two distinct but interconnected threats to that lifeline: a government shutdown in fall 2025 that temporarily disrupted federal programs, and work requirements that are being enforced as of March 1, 2026—requiring approximately [123,000 New Yorkers](#) to prove they meet the work requirement.

For NYC residents who depend on SNAP, federal uncertainty produces immediate material consequences. During the shutdown, recipients

reported skipping meals, turning to food pantries, borrowing money, and cutting back on groceries. The looming enforcement of work requirements could result in a repeat of these behaviors as households are faced with reductions or loss of SNAP benefits.

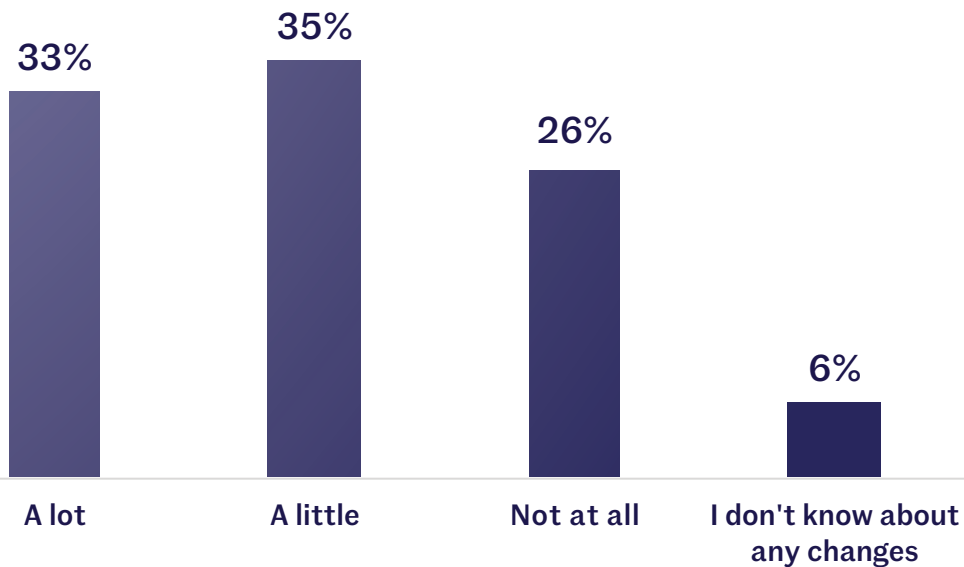
This brief presents findings from a survey of 827 current NYC SNAP recipients fielded in January and February 2026, examining how they are responding to both the threat of new work requirements and the aftermath of the fall shutdown. The data paint a consistent picture: anxiety about federal SNAP policy is widespread, rooted in genuine structural barriers, and has already caused measurable hardship across the city.

# SNAP work requirements are triggering widespread concern

On March 1, 2026, New York State began new enforcement of federal SNAP work requirements. Under the new [rules](#), adults ages of 18 and 64 without a qualifying exemption and who do not live with a child under 14 must work, train, or volunteer for at least 80 hours per month to maintain eligibility. That is approximately 123,000 SNAP users in NYC. Excluding those who were exempt from work requirements due to their age or other reason, our survey found that **over two-thirds of NYC SNAP recipients are already worried that these requirements could cause them to lose their benefits**. Only about one in four said they are not worried at all.



**Figure 1: How worried are you that SNAP work requirements being enforced could cause you to lose your food benefits?**



## Structural barriers make compliance difficult

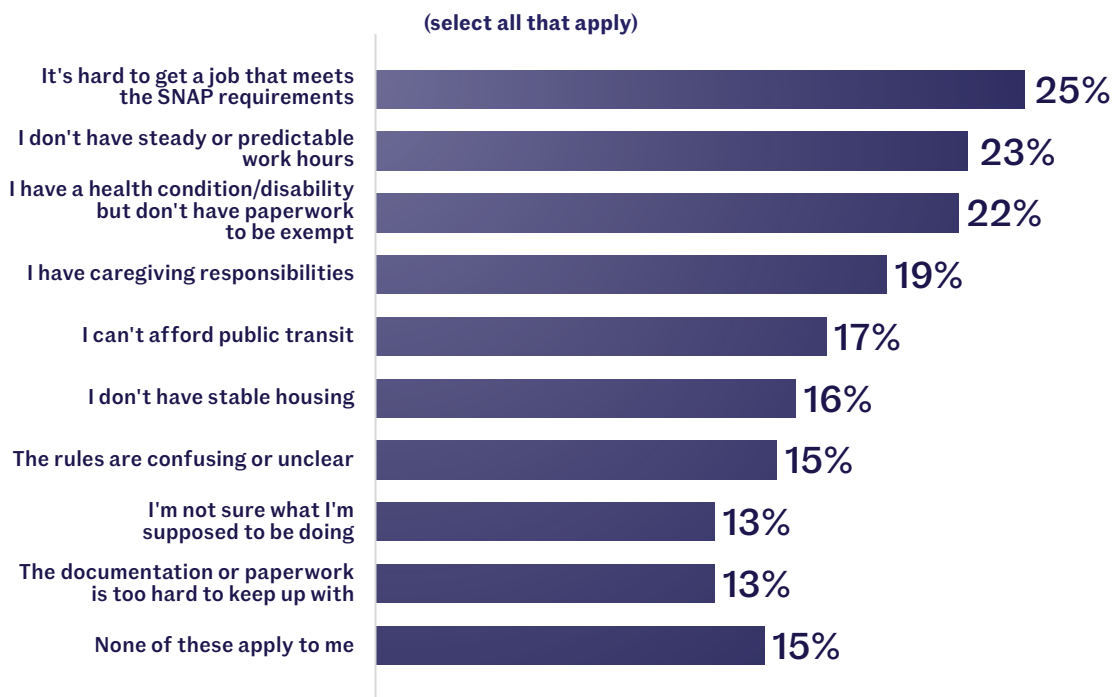
Among respondents who said they were worried, we asked a follow-up question about what makes it hard—or might make it hard—to meet the new requirements. As shown in Figure 2, the barriers recipients cited most often related to labor market obstacles, and health and caregiving constraints that may not meet the threshold for an official exemption. Only 15 percent said that none of the barriers listed applied to them—meaning 85 percent face at least one significant obstacle to compliance.

SNAP recipients described these challenges in their own words when asked a broader question about what they would change about the SNAP program. One Brooklyn resident pointed to a tight labor market: “The work requirements can be reduced since **finding work in the city is rather hard.**” A Queens resident described how

circumstances beyond his control can make compliance genuinely out of reach: “I would change the work to receive benefits because some people can’t get a job in time,” pointing out that if you are “**in a shelter and have curfew, it disrupts the hours to try and work.**” Some pointed to the need for more time, as one Brooklyn respondent simply put it: “Take away the time for work requirements, **need more than 3 months grace period.**” And for some, the stakes could not be more concrete: “A lot of us are looking for jobs,” one Manhattanite said, and if SNAP benefits get cut, it means that “**if we don’t work, we don’t eat.**”

That last point cuts to the heart of what is at risk. For recipients who cannot meet the requirements, losing SNAP benefits might mean losing access to food.

**Figure 2: What makes it hard—or might make it hard—for you to meet the new SNAP work requirements?**



# The shutdown shows what happens when SNAP benefits feel at risk

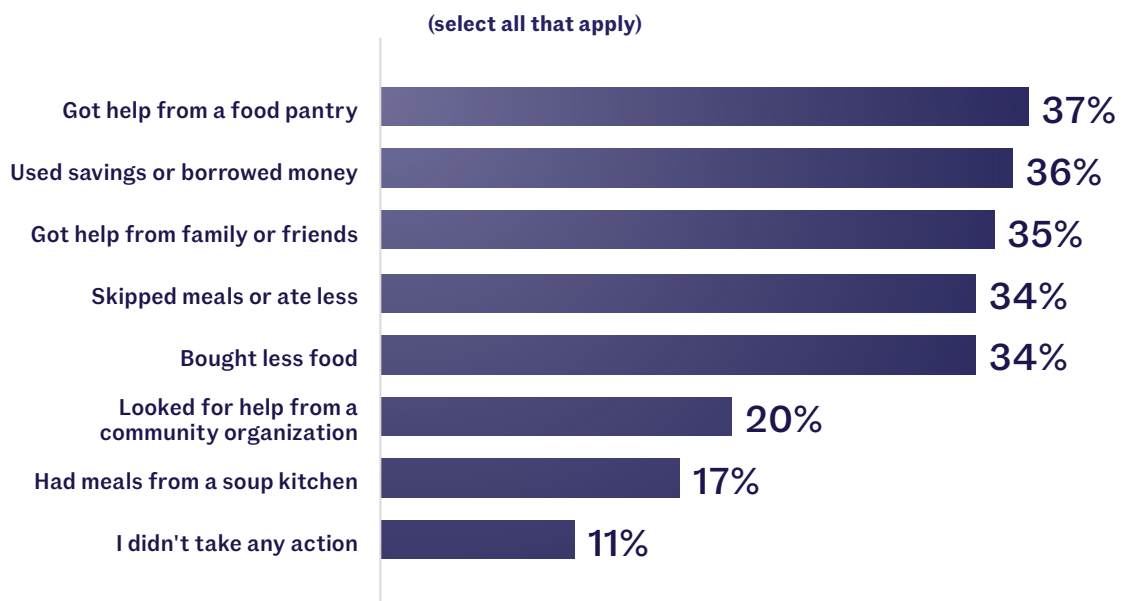
The fall 2025 federal government shutdown offers a window into what happens when SNAP recipients believe their benefits are at risk. When parts of the federal government temporarily closed between October and November 2025, the impact on NYC SNAP recipients was immediate and significant. Although October SNAP benefits were not affected, November benefits were delayed, resulting in a nine-day gap in access for many households. When we asked respondents how worried they had been during the fall shutdown about losing or delaying their SNAP benefits, more than three-quarters (77 percent) stated that they were “very worried” or “somewhat worried.” Less than a quarter said they were “not too worried” (15 percent) or “not at all worried” (8 percent).

Under Governor Hochul’s direction, households began receiving SNAP benefits on [November 9th](#), before the shutdown ended. Still, uncertainty

**77%** of NYC SNAP recipients surveyed were worried during the fall 2025 shutdown that their SNAP benefits would be lost or delayed.

during that period prompted many recipients to change their behavior. When asked if they had taken any actions because they were worried about losing their SNAP benefits, respondents reported on a full range of coping strategies. More than one-in-three reported relying on food pantries, reducing food consumption, and getting help from family and friends. Although the interruption in SNAP benefits lasted less than two weeks, recipients altered their behavior in response to the disruption and uncertainty. Only 11 percent reported taking no action.

**Figure 3: Did you take any of the following actions because you were worried about losing your SNAP benefits in October and November 2025, when parts of the federal government temporarily closed?**



## Work requirements risk amplifying these effects

The shutdown data provide a clear preview. When NYC SNAP recipients perceive their benefits to be threatened, that worry causes material hardship: they reduce food consumption, draw on savings or borrow money, and turn to food pantries. The new work requirement enforcement is likely to prompt similar behavioral responses—potentially at greater scale and for a longer duration. Several features of the current environment heighten this risk:

- **Worry is widespread.** Two-thirds of recipients report concern about work requirements, indicating a broad population-level effect.
- **Barriers are structural and not easily resolved.** Unstable employment, a [tough NYC job market](#), undocumented disabilities, and caregiving responsibilities are not conditions recipients can quickly resolve. As enforcement ramps up, many will remain vulnerable to losing benefits.
- **The exemption process leaves gaps.** More than one in five worried recipients cited having a health condition without the documentation for official exemption. These individuals may lose benefits not because they are ineligible, but because they lack the necessary paperwork to prove it.
- **The food assistance network is already stretched.** Food pantries and community organizations absorbed increased demand during the shutdown and are [already stretched thin](#). Sustained SNAP disenrollment due to work requirements could further strain capacity.



New York, NY. 12th Nov, 2025. People line up to get free food items at a mobile pantry distribution point.

## Immediate steps to mitigate harm

Based on these findings, we urge community and health organizations and New York City and State policymakers to take the following steps:

- **Provide documentation support for individuals with health conditions.** Given that 22 percent of worried recipients report having a health condition without the paperwork to be exempt, health providers and community organizations should be ready to provide clients with documentation and help them submit it.
- **Expand support for food pantries.** These organizations served as a critical buffer during the shutdown and are likely to face sustained increased demand as work requirements are enforced.
- **Monitor disenrollment and food security outcomes closely.** Longitudinal tracking of SNAP caseloads and food insecurity indicators will be essential to understanding the real-world impact of enforcement and identifying where to target additional intervention.

## Survey Methodology

The 2026 NYC Benefits Survey was designed and conducted by the Community Service Society of New York in partnership with Seven Letter Insight to capture New York City residents' recent experiences applying for, renewing, or recertifying public benefits. Between January 7 and February 9, 2026, 2,000 NYC residents completed the survey via online panels and text-to-online outreach. Surveys were completed in English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese.

The sample included 1,000 respondents who had applied for or recertified for SNAP within the past three years. For the

analysis presented in this brief, data were weighted to reflect the demographic and geographic characteristics of NYC SNAP participants. The margin of error for the SNAP sample is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.

Among the 1,000 SNAP respondents, 827 were currently receiving benefits; this group was asked questions about the federal shutdown. Questions about concern regarding new work requirement enforcement were asked of the 758 respondents who reported they were not exempt from work requirements due to age or other allowable exemptions.

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