

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands: SNAP Feasibility Study

Client: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service

Overview

This study assessed the feasibility of providing nutritional assistance to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) instead of through its Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP), funded by an annual block grant since 1982. The study, mandated by The Agricultural Act of 2014, provided Congress and the Food and Nutrition Service with information to aid policymakers in understanding the potential impacts of requiring the CNMI to use the same laws and regulations states use for administering SNAP. Specifically, the study focused on five major research objectives: (1) history of the CNMI's NAP, (2) socioeconomics of the CNMI, (3) changes that would be needed to transition to SNAP in the CNMI, (4) capabilities needed to transition to SNAP and potential barriers, and (5) alternative modifications to current SNAP requirements.

For this project, Insight used eight complementary analytic methods:

A document and literature review provided a comprehensive understanding of the history of the CNMI's NAP.

- A descriptive analysis of the socioeconomic conditions in the CNMI versus the United States shaped the context of the research and identified trends in the data.
- An operations analysis examined NAP services and how the program was designed and operated, providing a comparative analysis of NAP and SNAP to identify all requirements for operating SNAP and the similarities and differences between the two programs.



- Implementation/system change analysis identified specific changes needed for the CNMI to transition to SNAP through infrastructure, administrative capacity, and controls.
- Stakeholder analysis identified the potential impacts of these changes on participants, authorized retailers, employers, and low-income CNMI residents; this analysis also identified the context and challenges of NAP to ascertain barriers to SNAP implementation.
- A capabilities assessment focused on five administrative areas (participation, electronic benefit transfer, SNAP employment and training, SNAP quality control, and administrative costs).
- Alternatives analysis identified alternatives to each of the five administrative areas (listed above) and evaluated the benefits, weaknesses, and costs associated with each alternative and implementation barriers.
- An administrative cost assessment estimated the total administrative costs for the CNMI to convert from NAP to SNAP and the costs to implement an alternative SNAP-like model.

Products

Report to Congress (2016)