

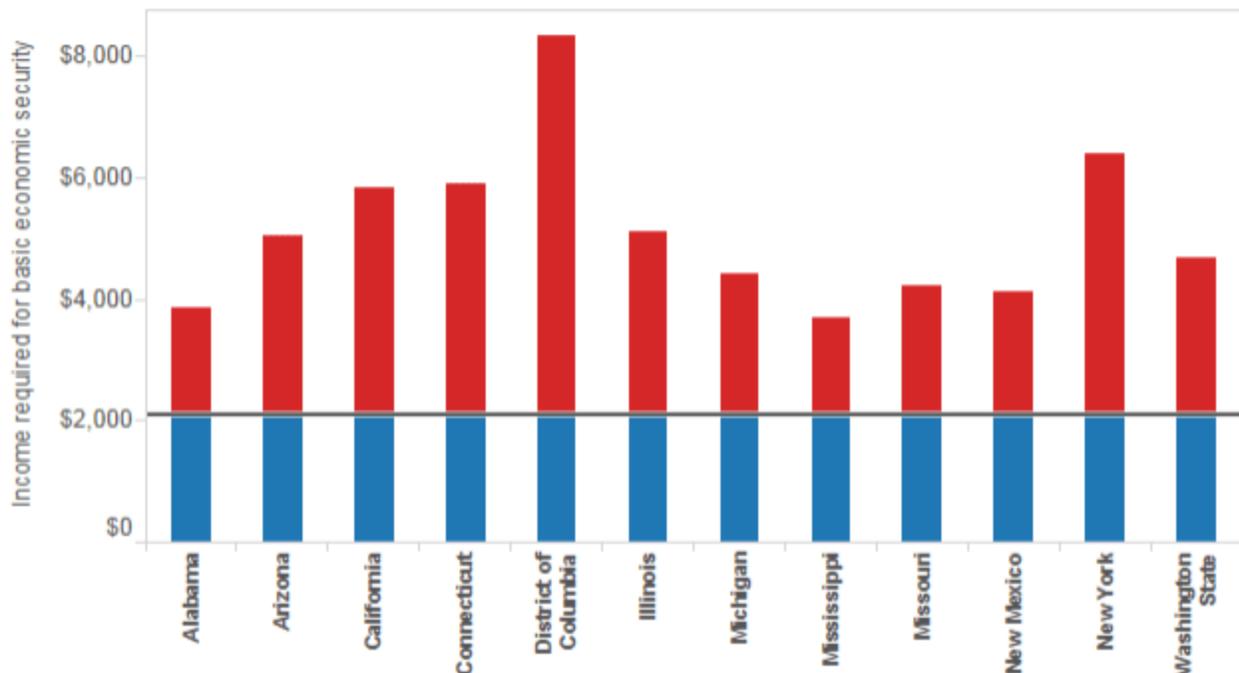


The Gap Between SNAP and Basic Economic Security

by John Light: June 28, 2013

There's a wide gap between the income cutoff for government food assistance and the income required to provide children with a nutritious diet. As of early 2013, nearly 48 million Americans received food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). That's about 15 percent of the country. Despite those numbers, a May 2013 report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which oversees SNAP, found that 21 percent of families with children experienced food insecurity in 2011 — meaning that at least some family members couldn't get enough to eat to lead "active, healthy lives."

The SNAP gap for a family of three



BEST index data supplied by Wider Opportunities for Women. Interactive chart by BillMoyers.com



To qualify for SNAP — which, until 2008, was called the Federal Food Stamp Program — a family can earn no more than 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline, which is established each year by the Department of Health and Human Services. Until October 2013, that figure is set at \$2,069 per month (\$24,828 @ year) for a family of three; after that, it will be bumped up by about \$50. But many antipoverty advocacy groups point out that 130 percent of the poverty guideline is hardly a comfortable income for a family with children.

The nonprofit group Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) has developed its own indicator for economic security called the Basic Economic Security Tables index, or BEST index. The index differs from state to state, and even between cities within a state, because of differences in the cost of living, including the price of food and childcare. WOW found that across the country, the actual income required for a family of three (one adult and two children) to be economically secure is 200 or 300 percent of the federal poverty guideline, not the 130 percent the USDA uses as the cutoff for SNAP.

That leaves many families — especially those headed by a single parent — in an uncomfortable place where they may not make enough money to buy quality food, but make too much to qualify for government assistance. The chart above shows that gap in a handful of states across America. Mouse over each bar for details.
