What to Know About the SNAP Payment Error Rate

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What is the SNAP Payment Error Rate?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Payment Error Rate (PER) measures whether households received the correct SNAP benefit amount for a specific sample month. The PER compares the SNAP benefit amount a household actually received to the amount the household should have received under federal SNAP rules based on the household's circumstances during that specific sample month.

SNAP includes multiple integrity, oversight, and payment accuracy systems, including fraud investigations, claims recovery, quality control reviews, management evaluations, and data matching requirements. Notably, the PER is not a fraud rate. Fraud investigations are handled separately through Intentional Program Violation (IPV) investigations, administrative disqualification hearings, and criminal prosecution processes.

Today, the PER is often treated as a broader measure of state program integrity and overall program performance even though it was not designed to measure fraud, customer service, timeliness, or the overall accuracy of all SNAP cases processed statewide. This document outlines what PER does measure and its limitations as a proxy for program integrity.

What the PER Measures and Does Not Measure

The SNAP PER focuses specifically on payment accuracy for sampled SNAP cases reviewed through the federal Quality Control (QC) system.

PER Measures	PER Does Not Measure
Overpayments	**Fraud rates**
Underpayments	**Application denials**
Agency-caused errors	**Timeliness performance**
Client-caused errors	**Documentation/notice issues**
Technical eligibility and benefit calculation issues	**Customer service quality**

To learn more about SNAP Payment Error Rates and ways agencies are working to reduce them, reach out to Lexie Kuznick, APHSA Director of Policy and Government Relations at akuznick@aphsa.org.

10 Things to Know About the SNAP PER

1. **The PER is not a fraud rate.**
Most QC findings involve unintentional payment differences caused by complex eligibility or reporting rules—not intentional fraud or abuse. For example, errors may occur when a household does not realize it must report a temporary increase in income, when information changes between reporting periods, or when administrative or system processing mistakes occur.

2. **The PER is based on a statistical sample—not every SNAP case.**
Each state reviews approximately 1,000 SNAP cases per year through the QC system, even though SNAP serves more than 40 million people nationwide each month. Since the PER is based on sampled cases rather than all SNAP households, *a relatively small number of large or complex cases can significantly influence statewide results*.

3. **Larger benefit errors carry more weight than smaller errors.**
The PER is dollar-weighted, meaning a small number of high-dollar errors may affect statewide results more than hundreds or thousands of correctly processed lower-dollar cases. The PER reflects the total dollar value of errors—not simply the number of cases in error.

4. **SNAP benefit calculations are highly precise and complex.**
Unlike many other benefit programs, SNAP benefits are calculated for the entire household, adjusted in real time as household circumstances change, and determined down to the exact dollar amount based on each household's specific situation.

5. **The PER includes a tolerance level to account for this complexity.**
Federal policy allows a tolerance threshold, currently $58, to account for small discrepancies in monthly SNAP benefit calculations.

6. **A case can be correct at certification but later be found to contain an error.**
Eligibility workers make decisions using the best information available at the time of certification. QC reviews can occur several months later and may include information or verification that was not available during the original eligibility determination.

7. **QC reviews are more detailed than standard eligibility processing.**
QC reviewers use extensive federal review standards, including interviews, collateral contacts, and independent verification to reconstruct benefit amounts and assess payment accuracy. These requirements differ from standard SNAP eligibility processes. Additional information on key differences between QC and SNAP eligibility requirements is available here.

8. **Eligibility workers and QC reviewers operate under very different conditions.**
Eligibility staff process applications and changes under strict timeliness requirements and high workloads. In contrast, QC reviewers may spend substantially more time reviewing a single case and are required to collect significantly more documentation and detail.

9. **States have flexibility in SNAP policy, but all states follow the same QC process.**
States may adopt different policy options and waivers to meet the needs of their populations. However, all state QC teams must follow the same federal review process, which can create additional PER risk for states implementing more flexible or innovative policies.

10. **The PER does not measure overall SNAP program performance.**
The PER measures payment accuracy for sampled cases at a single point in time. It does not measure broader program outcomes such as access to benefits, participation rates, food security, customer service, timeliness, or overall program effectiveness.

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