

SUMMER EBT IMPLEMENTATION IN 2025:

State Agency Survey Brief



Overview

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (SEBT, also known as SUN Bucks) provides grocery benefits to eligible families during the summer months. The program has grown substantially since launching in 2023. Now, information on changes to program performance and key facilitators in recent years is needed.

The objective of this brief is to describe SEBT implementation in 2025 and summarize utilized outreach, communication, and technology strategies to inform potential challenges and best practices for future program years.

Methods

This brief summarizes data from two sources:

1. Program and administrative data collected by NKH from state agency surveys, administrative data requests, debriefs with agency staff, or state websites. A total of 37 states had these data available.
2. An online survey of state agencies containing a series of closed-and open-ended items about SEBT program implementation, including overall impact, redemption and issuance of benefits, outreach and communications, and use of data and technology. A total of 18 states responded to the survey.

Reach

In 2025:

- The majority of respondent states (n=12, 63%) saw program maintenance or growth compared to 2024 (Figure 1).
- Seven states (37%) reported reaching fewer kids in 2025 than 2024.

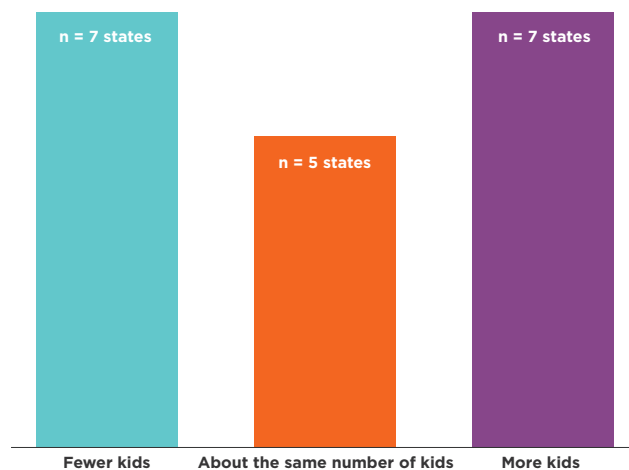
Certification and Approval

Families receive SEBT in two ways: streamline certification and application.

In 2025:

- 99% of SEBT benefits were issued to streamline-certified kids in 17 states, on average.
- In the thirteen states where application data was available, the median application approval rate was 36% with a wide range across states.
- The most common reason that applications were denied was that the child was already streamline-certified.

Figure 1: Changes to SEBT reach across respondent states (2025 versus 2024)



Redemption

Redemption is a key indicator of program implementation and reach, signifying how many families were able to access and use their SEBT benefits. Few states provided estimated redemption rate data. For those that did:

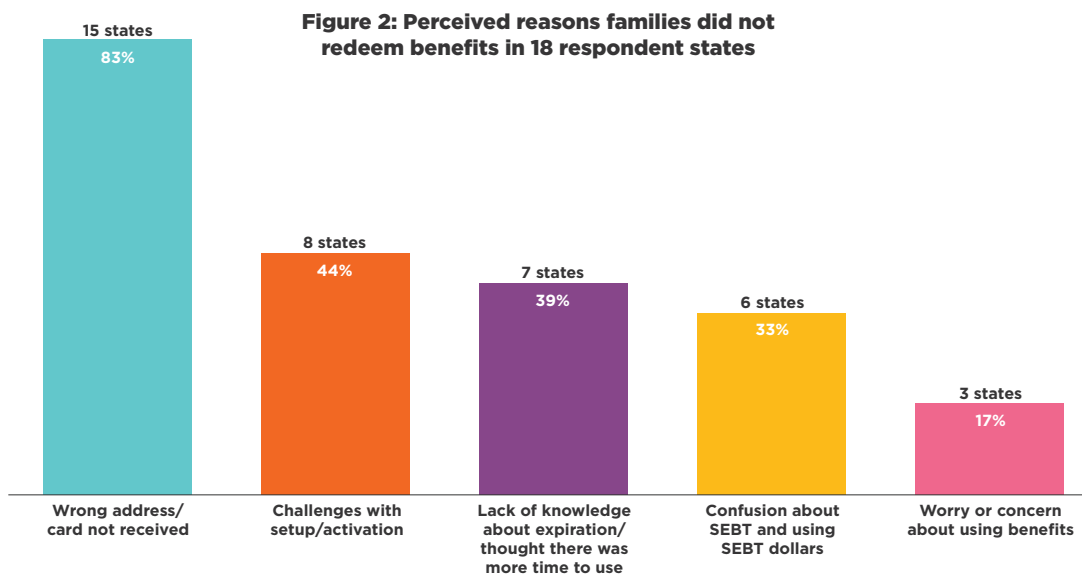
- The average estimated redemption rate was 78% in 2025.
- The range of estimated redemption rates was 60-88%.

The online survey included the following question about family redemption of benefits:

“What do you think were the biggest reasons families didn’t redeem their benefits this summer? (Select top 3).”

Over 80% of state agency respondents reported “[t]he wrong address/card not received” was the top reason families didn’t redeem benefits (Figure 2).

Other top cited reasons included: challenges with setup/activation of SEBT cards, lack of knowledge about benefits expiry dates, and confusion about the program and SEBT dollars use.



Outreach and Communications

All programs communicate important information to families. In the online survey, state agencies were asked about when and how they communicated with families.

- Over 75% of responding states reported three or more communication touchpoints.
- Key communication touchpoints reported by respondent families include: upon certification (78%); close to benefit expiration / expungement (89%); when cards were mailed (56%); and when benefits were loaded (56%).
- The most common types of communication were letters (n=15, 83%), followed by social media (n=13, 72%). Flyers, email, robo-calls, and SMS texts were used less.

INNOVATIONS IN OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Some states reported innovative strategies to communicate with stakeholders and meet family needs. Examples include:

- A Microsoft Teams channel to serve as a bridge between state and local teams;
- Enlisting other state agencies to help with call center overflow;
- An intensive outreach program in which staff called families who responded yes to a survey question about need for additional resources.
- For further information and resources, the NKH Outreach Playbook for Summer EBT Resources is a toolkit with materials and best practices for outreach and communication.

Use of Data and Technology

- Technology is an important resource for SEBT operations. States were provided with a list of nine technology solutions and asked to indicate whether these were already implemented, planned for future implementation, or not planned to be implemented.
- The most implemented technologies in 2025 or earlier were a web-based standalone SEBT application (89%), a general eligibility screener (80%), and data matching software for program integrity (69%, Figure 3).
- The top-planned technologies were a web-based change of address process (69%), a child/household level enrollment checker (47%), and a web-based request for replacement cards (43%).

Figure 3: Technology implementation in respondent states, 2025

