SUMMER EBT IN 2025:

Findings from State Agencies

CURRENT PRACTICES, LESSONS LEARNED, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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BACKGROUND

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (Summer EBT, also known as SUN Bucks) provides grocery benefits to eligible families during the summer months when school is out. SEBT is implemented by state agencies and helps to lower food insecurity and increase access to healthy food. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 made SEBT a permanent, nationwide program.

This report describes state agency experiences implementing SEBT in 2025. These learnings are based on two primary data sources. The first was 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 this survey. The second data source was program and administrative data collected by No Kid Hungry (NKH) from state administrative data, debriefs with agency staff, or state websites. The 37 states that participated in Summer EBT in 2025 had these data available. Due to differences in SEBT requirements and implementation across Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and US territories, this report focuses only on data provided by states. It highlights successes, challenges, and opportunities to improve the program in future program years.

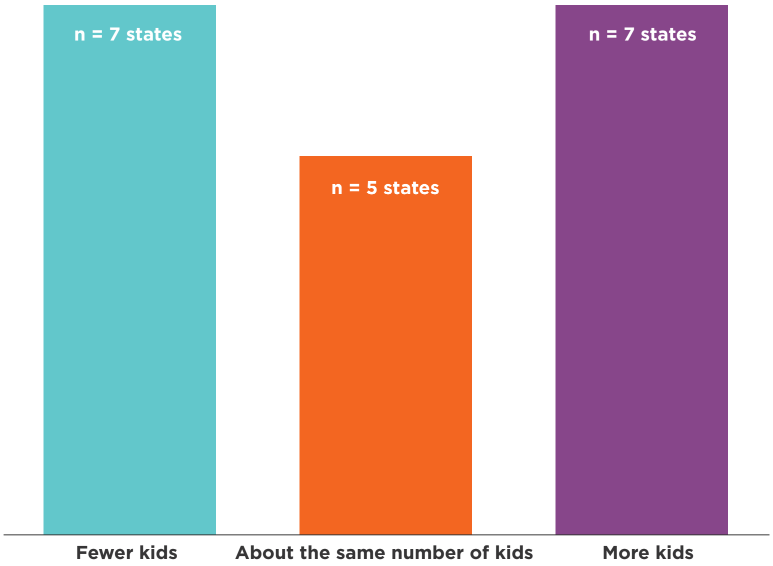
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- SEBT is a valuable resource for families, with two-thirds of states reporting that the number of kids served was about the same or higher in 2025 compared to 2024.
- Almost all kids receive SEBT benefits via streamlined certification. States rely on data from multiple partners to ensure eligible kids are enrolled.
- Preliminary insights from a small number of states show redemption rates are around 80%. Improved communication between state agencies and eligible families could increase redemption rates and ensure more kids get food over the summer.
- Many states have introduced key technology solutions such as online SEBT applications and eligibility screeners. However, there are opportunities to expand technology and improve program processes for state agencies, local offices, and families.

REACH

In 2025, SEBT was a relatively new program. Reach — specifically, estimated number of kids served — is an important metric of how the program grew over its first years. Based on data pooled from the state agency survey, 18 state agencies had data available about program reach in 2025 and how this compared to 2024.

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



The majority of respondent states saw program maintenance or growth in 2025. Five states served about the same number of children in 2025 as in 2024, while seven served more children (Figure 1). Just over a third of responding states (N=7, 37%) reported serving fewer kids in 2025.

Four of the states that served fewer kids elaborated on potential reasons for the change. Two state agencies cited changes to Medicaid that affected streamlined certification, leading to lower enrollment. Another two mentioned the change in the certification process for kids at Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools, as these families needed to apply for benefits in 2025 but were automatically certified in 2024.

CERTIFICATION AND APPROVAL

Broadly, where SEBT is offered, many eligible children are automatically enrolled based on participation in programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or certain other income-based assistance programs. In addition, children who attend schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) and who are approved for free or reduced-price meals are generally automatically enrolled. Households whose children are not automatically enrolled may still qualify based on income and other eligibility requirements, and can apply to receive benefits.

Streamlined certification data were available from several programs for all 37 implementing states (Table 1). All states used SNAP, and the National School Lunch Program / School Breakfast Program. Approximately three-quarters of states used Medicaid and/or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for streamlined certification, and about half used data from Homeless, Foster, Runaway and Migrant Children. Fewer states reported using Head Start, Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations, or Other data sources.

Table 1: Sources of SEBT certification data in 37 state agencies, 2025

DATA CERTIFICATION SOURCE	# AGENCIES	% AGENCIES
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	37	100%
National School Lunch Program / School Breakfast Program	37	100%
Medicaid	29	78%
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	28	76%
Homeless, Foster, Runaway, and Migrant Children	20	54%
Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations	5	14%
Head Start	9	24%
Other data source	11	30%

**Respondents were able to select all that apply; therefore, the number of agencies and percentages of agencies exceed 37 and 100%, respectively.*

From these program data sources, states used different methods to verify student enrollment. According to survey respondents, the most common method was direct access to a database, followed by querying a database or another enrollment method (Table 2). Only two state agencies reported contacting someone at the agency that managed student program data to verify enrollment.

Table 2: Methods of verifying student enrollment data in 16 states, 2025

VERIFICATION METHOD	# AGENCIES	% AGENCIES
Direct access to a database to verify student enrollment	6	38%
Queries/pings a database confirming student enrollment	4	25%
Asks someone at the agency that manages student enrollment data to confirm enrollment	2	13%
Other	4	25%

The seventeen states that provided administrative data in the state agency survey reported that an overwhelming majority of kids – on average, 99% – were directly certified.[1]

1 Administrative data was provided by very few of the surveyed states, so these findings should be interpreted with caution

Income-eligible kids who were not directly certified could still receive SEBT benefits via an application process. Thirteen states estimated application approval rates in the state agency survey. For 11 states, the estimated approval rate was less than 50%. Across all 13 respondent states, the median approval rate was 36%, with a wide range from 8%-98%. Only five states reported reasons for application denials, but among these, the top reason that applications were denied was that the child was already streamlined certified.

BENEFIT ISSUANCE AND MANAGEMENT

For 2025, the annual SEBT benefit amount set by the USDA Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) for most states was $120 per child over the summer operational period. Hawaii had slightly higher benefits at $177 per child to account for the higher cost of living. The Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) allowed states to choose the most cost-effective and legally viable path for benefit delivery based on their existing EBT processor contracts. This resulted in small variations in benefit issuance and management across participating states, including how benefits were issued.

BENEFIT DELIVERY. States could deliver SEBT benefits through a household's existing EBT account (e.g., SNAP, NAP, TANF, WIC) or through a standalone account just for Summer EBT. In 2025, about 40% of states used only standalone SEBT accounts, while the majority made benefits available through either an existing EBT account or a new SEBT account or card.

HOUSEHOLDS WITH MULTIPLE ELIGIBLE CHILDREN. States could also choose how to issue cards to households with multiple eligible children (e.g., siblings). Over half of the states (N=23, 61%) combined household benefits onto a single card issued to the primary head of household, while 14 states issued individual cards to every eligible child in the household, and one state issued all SEBT benefits on a single card assigned to the oldest sibling in the household.

COMPULSORY AGE RANGE. States define the compulsory age ranges of children served (Table 3). The exact age range covered varied from state to state, but most started coverage at early elementary age and covered through late adolescence. Out of 36 states with data, over 80% (N=30) mandated that benefits be provided to kids starting at either age five or six. About half of the states (N=20) provided benefits to kids up to age 18, with another quarter (N=8) providing benefits through age 17.

Two states defined the compulsory age range as "school aged" without providing specific numbers.

Table 3: Compulsory age ranges covered by SEBT in responding states, 2025

AGE CATEGORY	# AGENCIES	% AGENCIES	AGE CATEGORY	# AGENCIES	% AGENCIES
Youngest Age			**Oldest Age**		
Five	9	25%	Fifteen	1	3%
Six	21	58%	Sixteen	7	19%
Seven	5	14%	Seventeen	8	22%
Eight	1	3%	Eighteen	20	56%

Benefit timing and cadence. The summer operational period generally started in May or June, with 31 states (84%) beginning to issue benefits in one of these two months. One state issued benefits as early as April, while five (14%) issued benefits starting in July. Almost all states issued their benefit a single time. Only one state broke up the SEBT issuance into three disbursements of $40 each.

REDEMPTION

In the context of SEBT, redemption is the percentage of total issued food benefits (dollar amounts) that are spent by families at authorized grocery retailers. Unlike standard SNAP benefits - which can sit on a card for up to 9 months - SEBT had a strict statutory 122-day limit, after which benefits expired. Redemption is therefore a key indicator of program implementation and reach.

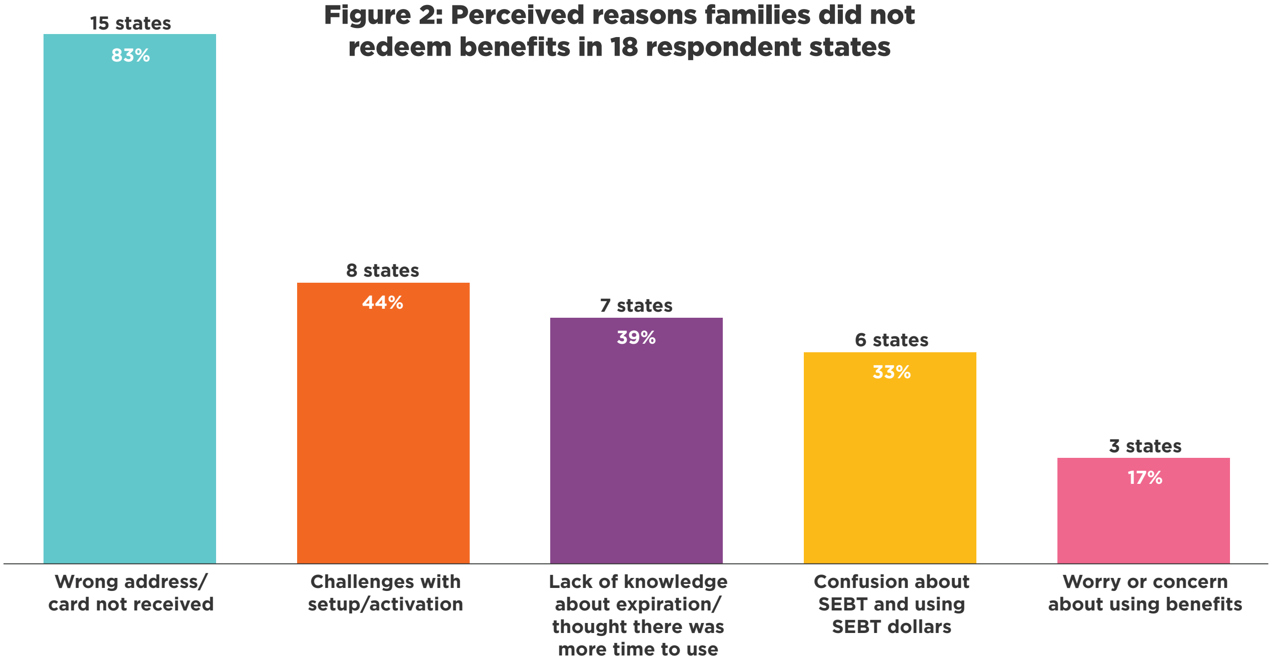
Among the few states that shared redemption data, the average redemption rate reported by responding state agencies in summer 2025 was slightly higher than in 2024, at 78% (Table 4). Redemption rates in responding states ranged from 60%-88% in 2025, compared to 61%-96% in 2024. However, it should be noted that these findings come from a small number of states and additional research will be needed to understand SEBT redemption patterns.

Table 4: Redemption rates reported by state agencies, 2024 vs 2025

YEAR	AVERAGE	RANGE [MIN-MAX]
2024 (N=8)	72%	61% - 96%
2025 (N=11)	78%	60% - 88%

The online survey asked state agencies to select the top three reasons why families didn't redeem their benefits. Over 80% of state agency respondents reported that "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 the use of SEBT dollars.

Figure 2: Perceived reasons families did not redeem benefits in 18 respondent states



It should be noted that these early insights are from state agencies, not from families. Future research is needed to better understand family barriers to SEBT benefit redemption and ways to improve it.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a critical support for SEBT operations. In 2024, FNA released $100 million in state funding to develop, improve, and maintain the technology systems used to operate and manage SEBT. Technology was therefore a key focus of the state agency survey in 2025. Respondents were asked to indicate how they had or were planning to implement certain technological solutions. Seventeen states responded to at least one of the technology questions in the survey.

CURRENT TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS. Among responding states, the most commonly implemented technology in 2025 was the web-based standalone SEBT application, which 88% had implemented in 2025 or earlier. Other common technological solutions were a general eligibility screener (80%) and entity resolution (data matching) software (to assist with data deduplication and SEBT benefit issuance), reported by 75% of responding states.

PLANNED TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENTS. In general, there were not many states reported plans to implement new technologies for SEBT in 2026. Approximately one-quarter of responding states indicated plans to implement a child/household-level enrollment checker. Similarly, one-quarter of responding states planned to implement a web-based change of address process.

Some states indicated plans to implement technologies in 2027 and beyond. For example, about half of the responding states indicated plans for a web-based change-of-address process. Web-based integrated benefits portals and web-based requests for replacement cards were also cited as future solutions by about 46% of states each.

Table 5: Heatmap of technology implementation in responding states

TECHNOLOGY	IMPLEMENTED 2025 OR EARLIER	WILL IMPLEMENT 2026	PLAN TO IMPLEMENT 2027 & BEYOND	NO PLANS TO IMPLEMENT	TOTAL RESPONSES
General eligibility screener	12 (80%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	15
Child/household-level enrollment checker	3 (21%)	4 (29%)	3 (21%)	4 (29%)	14
Web-based standalone SEBT application	15 (88%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	17
Web-based SEBT application (integrated)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	11 (73%)	15
Web-based self-service portal for SEBT	5 (33%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	4 (27%)	15
Web-based integrated benefits portal	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	5 (36%)	8 (57%)	14
Web-based change of address process	3 (23%)	3 (23%)	6 (46%)	1 (8%)	13
Web-based request for replacement cards	4 (31%)	2 (15%)	4 (31%)	3 (23%)	13
Entity resolution (data matching) software	8 (67%)	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	0 (0%)	12

Self-service portals. Five state agencies reported having a web-based self-service portal specifically for SEBT. Such a portal could make it easier for families to apply for and track their benefits throughout the SEBT operational period. Therefore, the states with self-service portals were asked about 10 different features and whether they were available to participants. These features covered key points of SEBT including viewing eligibility status, submitting and tracking applications; updating contact information; submitting documentation; viewing card status and balance; and requesting a new card.

Of the five states that had self-service portals, one had implemented one feature, three had implemented two features, two had implemented five features, and one had implemented seven features.

The most common feature was allowing families to submit an application, reported by four out of five states. Other common features had to do with updating contact information: features allowing users to update parent/caretaker information, to update child information, and to update mailing address were reported by three states each.

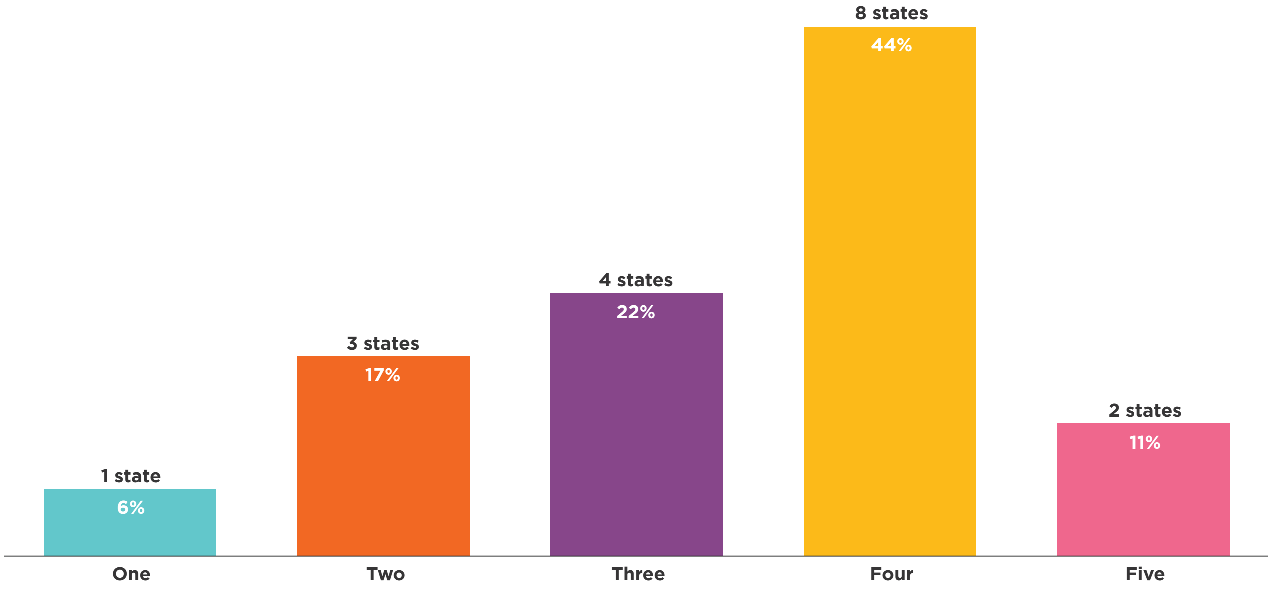
Overall, there are many opportunities for states to expand their use of technology in the SEBT program. Expanding the use of technology and improving upon technologies currently in use could improve the integrity, implementation, and reach of future SEBT programs.

OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

SEBT is a relatively new program. It can be confusing for families due to the dual-enrollment pathway, as well as differences in issuance and program operations across states. Families may not understand who administers the program, how to qualify, how and when benefits are issued, and how to resolve questions about the program. Outreach and communications are therefore key in addressing some of this confusion and ensuring that eligible families can access their benefits.

In the state agency survey, 18 agencies provided information about their outreach and communications to families at key points throughout program implementation. Two-thirds of state agencies reported 3-4 communication touchpoints (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of communication touchpoints in 18 respondent states



The most common communication touchpoint was close to benefit expiration/expungement, with nearly 90% of states communicating with families at this point in the operational period (Table 6). Over three-quarters of state agencies also communicated with families at the time of certification. More than half of responding agencies also communicated when cards were mailed and when benefits were loaded.

Table 6: Reported communication with families at different time points in 18 states, 2025

COMMUNICATION TIMING	# AGENCIES	% AGENCIES
At the time of certification	14	78%
When cards were mailed	10	56%
When benefits were loaded	10	56%
Reminder after benefits were loaded	7	39%
Reminder close to expiration/expungement	16	89%
Other	5	28%

States were asked separately about their communications with families who were streamlined certified and with families who needed to apply for SEBT. Generally, more communication went out to streamlined certified families than to families that needed to apply. All the 18 respondent states reported at least one type of communication with SEBT families. However, one-third of responding states reported that they did not communicate to families that needed to apply. Letters were the most common form of communication to streamline-certified families, followed by social media. Social media was the most common method of communicating with families who needed to apply.

Table 7: Types of communications with families in 18 states, 2025

COMMUNICATION TYPE	STREAMLINE-CERTIFIED FAMILIES N (%)	FAMILIES WHO NEEDED TO APPLY N (%)
Letters	15 (83%)	4 (22%)
Social media	9 (50%)	10 (56%)
Email	6 (33%)	1 (6%)
Flyers	4 (22%)	4 (22%)
Robocalls	3 (17%)	0 (0%)
SMS/MMS	2 (11%)	2 (11%)

**Respondents were able to select all that apply; therefore, the number of agencies and percentages of agencies exceeds 18 and 100%, respectively.*

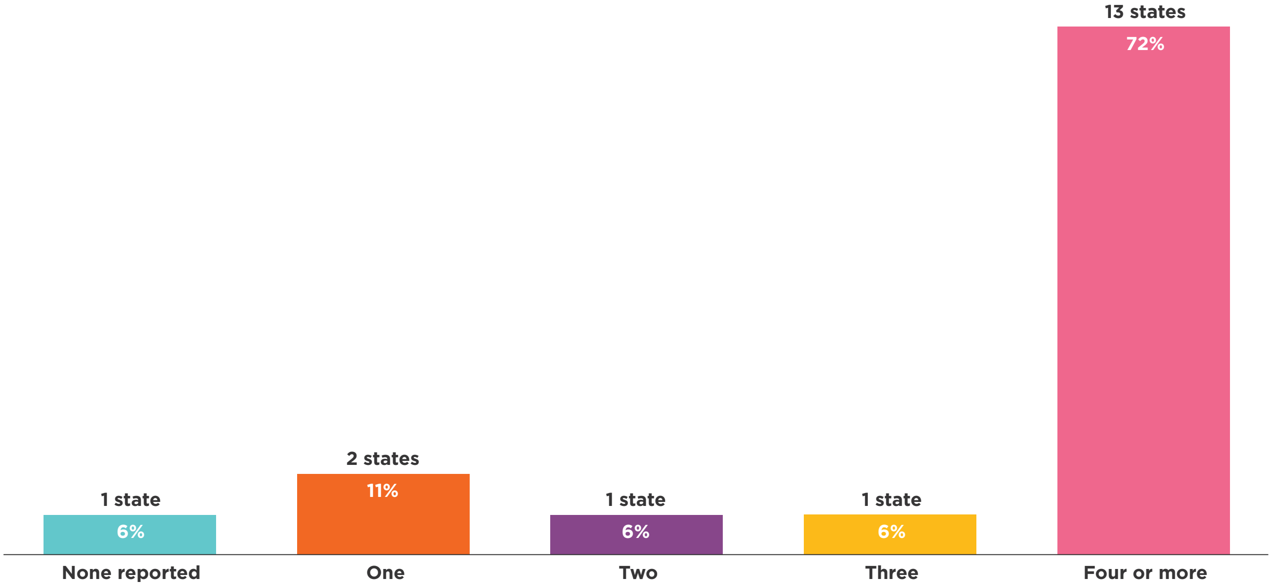
OUTREACH PARTNERS

A key facilitator of SEBT outreach and communications is partnering with other organizations. In 2025, state agencies collaborated with a variety of partners to conduct outreach to and communicate with families. The state agency survey asked states about their experience working with these partners.

Most states (15/18, 83%) relied on more than one partner, and nearly three-quarters partnered with four or more additional entities (Figure 4).

The most frequent collaborations were between state agencies, specifically state SNAP agencies and state education or child nutrition agencies, with 13 states each reporting working together. Schools were also key source of outreach partnerships: 11 states indicated working with school nutrition departments; and 10 worked with school personnel. Local educational agencies were also frequent partners. Fewer states reported working with partners such as summer meals sponsors, retailers, or healthcare agencies.

Figure 4: Outreach and communication partners among 18 respondent states



PROMISING PRACTICES IN OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Several states reported practices in outreach and communications beyond the standard touchpoints. The table below highlights these promising practices and how they can be used to improve communications between state agencies, local offices, and families.

Table 9: Promising state agency practices in outreach and communications

PROMISING PRACTICE	IMPACT ON SEBT	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTE
Direct outreach to eligible families	Provide more program information, referrals, and/or resources to eligible families.	"[We had an] Intensive Outreach Program. A short survey was sent to SNAP households asking them if they need any additional resources. If responded yes, Eligibility Staff would call to discuss their situation and provide referrals for additional resources."
Collaboration between state agencies and local offices	Provide resources and support to local office staff; enable local staff to better communicate with families.	"The Summer EBT policy team created a statewide Microsoft Teams chat that allowed a direct communication channel for local office support staff who are interfacing with families at local offices, and they encounter questions that the support staff isn't sure how to answer."
Collaboration with other state agencies	Use capacity of other state agencies to improve customer service.	"We enlisted the help of other State agencies with call center capacity to assist with overflow. This allowed us to answer every call that came through, except for short periods on two days."

CONCLUSIONS

SUCCESSES. In 2025, SEBT continued to bridge the summer hunger gap for thousands of families. The program had strong operational stability, with two-thirds of participating states maintaining or expanding their reach compared to the previous year. On average, 99% of kids were enrolled via streamlined certification, which relied on successful data matching from programs such as SNAP, TANF, and others. States communicated with families at key points in the operational period, particularly at the time of certification and when benefits were about to expire. They also made progress in improving the technologies used to facilitate SEBT programming, such as standalone web applications and eligibility screeners.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED. Increasing redemption remains a key challenge. While average redemption rates were 78% in 2025, this still potentially leaves millions of allocated benefit dollars unused by families who need them. Families face challenges in redeeming their benefits, including not receiving their SEBT card, confusion about when and how to use the benefits and benefit expiration. This highlights gaps in communication and messaging between state agencies and participating families. Similarly, while certain technologies were widely implemented by respondent states in 2025, there are still key technology gaps that could ease program administration for everyone and make sure that benefits are used by those who need them most.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AGENCIES

- **CONTINUE TO REFINE AND ENHANCE TECHNOLOGY OFFERINGS, PARTICULARLY WEB-BASED ADDRESS UPDATES AND SELF-SERVICE PORTALS.** State agencies hypothesized that inaccurate mailing addresses were the top reason families do not redeem their benefits. States should prioritize building web-based change of address tools and self-service portals to let families update their contact details, upload documentation, and track their benefits in real time, easing administrative burden for both agencies and families.

- **CLEARER GUIDANCE ON WHEN AND HOW TO USE BENEFITS.** Challenges with card setup and confusion about expiration dates were frequently cited reasons for unused benefits. Setting up and redeeming benefits may be confusing due to how SEBT is administered. And while most states communicated with participants close to expiration, due to the short timeframe for SEBT redemption, more frequent communication throughout the operational period could improve overall redemption.

- **LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT STAFF AND FAMILIES.** Many states already rely on multiple partners to communicate with families. Promising practices such as outreach to eligible families and improving collaboration between state agencies and local offices to provide responsive customer service may improve workflows for staff while also addressing the questions, concerns, and needs of families.

- **INCORPORATE FAMILY-LEVEL FEEDBACK ON REDEMPTION BARRIERS.** Redemption insights in this report come from agencies, not families, meaning agencies can only hypothesize why benefits go unused. Gathering direct input (e.g., through short post-summer surveys, portal prompts, or partner organizations) could help agencies better understand barriers and target outreach where it is most needed.

- **REDUCE REDUNDANT APPLICATIONS THROUGH UP-FRONT ELIGIBILITY SCREENING.** Application approval rates were low and highly variable (median 36.2%), and the top reason for denial was that the child was already streamlined certified, suggesting many families apply unnecessarily. Encouraging families to check their certification status before applying, and integrating screeners into the application pathway, may help reduce redundant applications and ease burden for families and agencies alike.

- **STRENGTHEN DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES WHO NEED TO APPLY.** One-third of responding states reported no communication with families who needed to apply, and the most common channel for this group was social media. Because these families must take action to enroll, establishing at least one reliable, direct touchpoint (e.g., a letter, email, or SMS/text) could help ensure they understand how and when to apply.