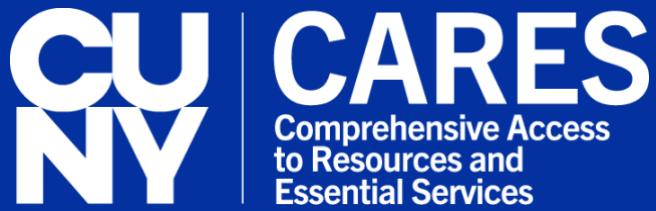


Policy Brief : How SNAP and Medicaid cuts harm CUNY students



CUNY CARES connects students at Bronx Community, Hostos Community, and Lehman Colleges to services and public benefits that meet their needs for food, housing, health care, and mental health services. It is sponsored by the CUNY Office of Transformation, the 3 Bronx campuses, and the CUNY Schools of Medicine and Public Health. This is the first of several CUNY CARES briefs on current policy challenges to meeting the needs of CUNY students.

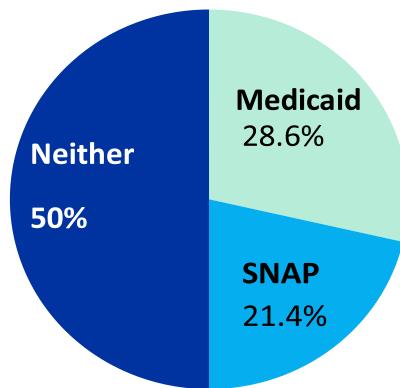
Overview

New federal budget and policy changes threaten to reduce CUNY students' access to food security, health care, and mental health services. Impending cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid, along with new work and eligibility requirements, will significantly burden CUNY's 240,000 students and their families. The current suspension of SNAP payments due to the government shutdown adds further uncertainty.

SNAP and Medicaid are vital to the CUNY community: an estimated 50% of CUNY's 210,000 matriculated students (105,000 individuals) were covered by Medicaid, SNAP, or both in 2024. These programs provide hundreds of millions of dollars of public support into CUNY households annually, and their reduction jeopardizes students' ability to complete their education.

CUNY CARES student surveys show that in 2024, 50% of CUNY student received either SNAP, Medicaid, or both (14% have both). This shows the major role these two programs play in protecting CUNY students from unmet needs for health care and hunger and food insecurity.

Percent of CUNY Students Enrolled in Medicaid and SNAP, 2024



As one student in the Bronx explained, "Let me tell you something deeply from my heart. I'm really concerned about the political issues. If they cut the benefit for SNAP—these are lifesaving for especially single moms enrolled in college. Not being able to get that benefit is going to be a huge negative change in our decision to be focused on our goal of finishing college." Another student said, "Since I started school, it has been very difficult for me to buy lunch and breakfast when I get

to school. I only use the cafeteria when I have to study or do homework, not to buy food, because food at school is expensive. Sometimes I use the MetroCard money (that CUNY provides) to buy milk for my kids because I don't receive enough from SNAP."

Food Insecurity & SNAP Program Cuts

CUNY students already face high levels of food insecurity. A Fall 2024 CUNY-wide survey found that 34% of our students -- an estimated 71,500 learners-- experienced food insecurity as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, a rate more than double the overall city rate of 14.6%. Despite this high need, only 21.8% of CUNY students receive SNAP benefits.

Major Cuts and Economic Impact: Federal SNAP cuts, driven by President Trump's 2025 budget, impose a \$230 billion national spending reduction, resulting in an estimated \$7.8 billion direct SNAP loss for New York State and an approximate \$12 billion total economic loss. These cuts are implemented primarily through:

1. Benefits Cost Sharing: Shifting SNAP costs from the federal to the state government.
2. Administrative Cost Sharing: Raising New York's share of administrative expenses from 50% to 75%.
3. Eligibility Restrictions: Expanding work requirements that immediately affect 281,000 adults in the state.

These cuts are separate from the suspension of SNAP payments starting in November 2025 due to the government shutdown, another threat to the food security of CUNY students and their families.

New SNAP Barriers for Students

- Work Requirements: For many years, most college students have had to work 80 hours a month in order to receive SNAP. In coming months new work requirements will further complicate SNAP enrollment for the many New Yorkers. This changes are expected to cause 300,000 New York households to lose all or some SNAP benefits.
- Benefit Reduction: New rules will effectively reverse the 2021 increase in SNAP benefits achieved under the Thrifty Food Plan revision.
- Asset Test: The reimposition of the assets test will require households to spend down their assets before becoming eligible, with a general federal limit of \$3,000 in assets to get SNAP.

These new standards and administrative rules are expected to deter eligible students and their families from applying for SNAP and increase wrongful denials and benefit terminations, compounding an already challenging process.

A community college student who is a full-time parent: "It took almost two months for HRA to approve my SNAP case, to verify that I was not working. It was hard because they asked for a lot of documents for no reason. Just the wait time is a struggle. In the meanwhile, I'm using my credit cards. you know? And who's gonna pay those? So that's where I'm at."

Medicaid Program Cuts

Medicaid is the largest health insurer of CUNY students, with 41% of degree students (an estimated 86,100 individuals) having Medicaid in 2024. However, in the same year, 17.2% (about 36,000 students) reported they were unable to get medical care they needed. The impending cuts will worsen this access crisis for primary care, mental health, and sexual/reproductive health services, all key contributors to academic success.



A CUNY CARES navigator gives a student on the Bronx Community campus information on campus services.

Federal legislation is expected to decrease Medicaid funding by \$911 billion over the next decade and is estimated to strip coverage from approximately 1.5 million New Yorkers. Already, the expiration of continuous eligibility waivers has already led to mass disenrollments across New York, with nearly 1 million people losing coverage in the last year. Crucially, the vast majority (70% of those who lost coverage) were disenrolled due to procedural issues (like incorrect paperwork or missed deadlines), not confirmed ineligibility, making it harder for CUNY students to maintain coverage even when eligible. At CUNY, the 2024 student survey found that new reenrollment requirements that followed the pandemic Medicaid expansion contributed to interruption of Medicaid coverage for 10% of CUNY students enrolled in Medicaid.

New work requirements for Medicaid taking effect in early 2027 will impose strict paperwork, more frequent eligibility checks, and a mandatory 80 hours of work per month as a condition of eligibility for many recipients. This provision is expected to cause over 1 million New Yorkers to lose Medicaid coverage, disproportionately affecting young adults and college students. Research shows these work requirements often fail to increase employment but succeed in increasing administrative removal of eligible people and increasing program costs.

For CUNY students, loss of health insurance that provides assured access to primary care, emergency care, mental health services, sexual and reproductive health care, and care for asthma and other common chronic conditions --all services that contribute to good health and academic success--will force more students to incur medical debt or go without needed care. Even before the latest Medicaid cuts, CUNY students experienced problems getting needed care. In the 2024 CUNY survey, more than 36,000 CUNY degree students said they had gone without needed medical care in the last year. Between 2023 and 2024, Medicaid ended reenrollment rules in effect during the pandemic, contributing to 10% of CUNY students with Medicaid losing their coverage.

Other changes in the federal budget will decrease subsidies for health insurance purchased under the Affordable Care Act and increase deductibles and co-payments for most insured households. Almost 40% of CUNY students are covered by these types of health insurance. This cascade of increases in health care costs will also harm New York City's health care system decreasing their revenues as more people need care they can no longer afford.

What CUNY Can do

To mitigate the harmful consequences of these enacted and impending cuts, CUNY CARES proposes that the CUNY community can take six actions:

1	Benefits Enrollment: Ensure existing campus resource centers, food pantries, and programs like CUNY CARES have the necessary resources to function effectively and enroll students in benefits with a focus on SNAP and Medicaid.
2	Communications Campaigns: Launch robust, student-centered campaigns to educate students and families about policy changes, how to enroll successfully, and how to appeal wrongful terminations and provide the information they need to enroll successfully and correct agency errors. These campaigns should assure students that despite the cuts, SNAP and Medicaid continue as sources of support for students and their families and that CUNY will continue to support its students in gaining these and other benefits.
3	Form alliances with the city's networks of low cost and sliding scale providers and with groups expert in enrolling New Yorkers in benefits such as the Community Service Society, NYC Health & Hospitals, United Way and Hunger Free America to ensure access to care and public benefits to all students.
4	Robust Research Studies: Support faculty researchers to conduct studies that counteract policy myths. For example, studies that show work requirements do not increase employment or save money, but do terminate eligible clients, can inform more effective and humane policymaking.
5	Student Advocacy: Integrate advocacy and social justice education into coursework and support students in educating elected officials about the critical role of public benefits in academic success. Faculty can integrate advocacy and similar civic engagement activities into classroom and experiential learning activities.
6	Groundbreaking CUNY Public Benefits Safety Net: Create a pioneering program to hire and train 1,000 CUNY students as navigators to assist city residents across campuses and communities to enroll in SNAP and Medicaid and file appeals for wrongful termination or extended delays, thus showing how CUNY serves New York.

In the long run, CUNY can assist its students to overcome the obstacles to academic success imposed by new public policies and budgets by moving to make comprehensive student-centered services such as CUNY CARES available for all its students on all campuses. CUNY CARES will continue to provide evidence to inform this opportunity to fulfill CUNY's historic mission of ensuring equitable access to higher education.

For more information, e-mail Cares@cuny.edu or visit [CUNY CARES](#).



Some New Yorkers -- and CUNY students -- responded to the cuts in Medicaid and health care by protesting. This March 2025 demonstration was sponsored by the New York State Nurses Association and other health care worker unions.

This Policy Brief was prepared by Nicholas Freudenberg, Priscilla Bustamante, and the CUNY CARES staff. Its views and recommendations are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the City University of New York.

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