The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of numerous blueberries. The berries are a deep, rich blue color with some lighter, almost white, highlights on their surfaces, suggesting a natural, slightly textured appearance. They are scattered across the frame, filling the entire space.

mRelief

Impact Report: MD SUN Bucks to SNAP Cross Enrollment Campaign

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Executive Summary

Campaign Snapshot

- 170,700 Maryland households with children reached through targeted SMS outreach to SUN Bucks families
- 28,401 households began eligibility screening (17% engagement)
- 2,700+ families newly enrolled in SNAP as a result of the campaign, strengthening food access for children and households statewide
- \$5.5 million in estimated federal food assistance unlocked to support Maryland families and advance efforts to reduce childhood hunger
- Demonstrated opportunity to scale cross-enrollment strategies across nutrition and family support programs

In September 2025, mRelief partnered with the Maryland Department of Human Services (MD DHS) to pilot an SMS campaign connecting SUN Bucks recipients (also known as Summer EBT) to SNAP. This pilot demonstrates the potential for cross-enrollment strategies to unlock millions of dollars in federal nutrition assistance for Maryland families while supporting the state's broader goal of reducing childhood hunger.

MD DHS observed that a large proportion of Maryland residents enrolled in SUN Bucks were not enrolled in SNAP, despite a significant overlap in eligibility criteria. By leveraging mRelief's mobile-first outreach infrastructure and eligibility screener, this pilot sought to identify these households and connect them quickly to SNAP enrollment pathways through Maryland's existing application systems.

During the campaign, **mRelief texted over 194,400 unique phone numbers** from households enrolled in SUN Bucks but not SNAP, **resulting in over 170,700 successful deliveries**. Clients were encouraged to complete mRelief's eligibility screener, and if they were found to be Likely Eligible, were prompted to apply for SNAP via the state portal. 28,401 households (17%) began eligibility screening, 55% completed the screener, and 42% were identified as Likely Eligible for SNAP.

As a result of this outreach effort, more than **2,700 households newly enrolled in SNAP** after receiving campaign messages, **unlocking an estimated \$5.5 million in federal food assistance** for Maryland families with children.

mRelief is a nonprofit dedicated to transforming access to social services for the inherent dignity of all. For more than ten years, mRelief has developed technology and outreach tools that help individuals move from awareness of public benefits to successful enrollment. Our work focuses on identifying where eligible households face barriers in the benefits process and designing mobile-first solutions that help families overcome those barriers.

This pilot also demonstrated the value of pairing outreach infrastructure with experimentation and data analysis. Through bilingual message testing, engagement analysis, and mobile-first screening tools, the campaign generated insights that can inform how Maryland continues to strengthen participation across nutrition programs.

Key recommendations for future collaboration include strengthening partnerships across state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic supporters to support ambitious cross-enrollment initiatives like this one; integrating mRelief's eligibility screener more directly into the SUN Bucks enrollment experience to create a more durable cross-enrollment pathway; and continuing to expand language access to better reach diverse communities across Maryland.

This pilot also highlights opportunities to expand cross-enrollment strategies across additional programs and partners that serve families with children. Programs such as the Maryland Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) may offer opportunities to connect households already interacting with state benefit systems to additional support. There may also be opportunities to collaborate with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), particularly through Community Schools and other school-based food access initiatives where families are already engaging with programs like SUN Bucks.

This work was supported in part by funders such as Share Our Strength and Maryland No Kid Hungry, and additional philanthropic funders have expressed interest in supporting expanded efforts that connect children and families to nutrition benefits. Future phases of this work may also explore emerging tools such as AI-supported outreach testing and document assistance tools designed to help families more easily complete benefits applications.

We are proud of the impact this partnership had on Maryland residents in 2025 and look forward to continuing to build on this work to strengthen cross-enrollment across nutrition programs and beyond.

Key Programmatic Challenges and Preliminary Insights

The core challenge this partnership sought to address is a gap in enrollment between SUN Bucks and SNAP among Maryland residents. In 2024, just 51.23% of Maryland SUN Bucks recipients were enrolled in SNAP, despite significant overlap in eligibility criteria.

In early discussions, MD DHS suggested that gaps may be associated with hard-to-reach populations, such as immigrants, who may experience language barriers or social isolation.

mRelief performed a county-level analysis showing that gaps in cross enrollment varied significantly across counties, with a notable negative correlation between the percentage of individuals below the poverty line and the gap in cross-enrollment, meaning enrollment gaps were generally higher in counties with lower poverty rates. This pattern suggests that counties with higher poverty rates may already have stronger outreach infrastructure connecting residents to SNAP, while counties with lower poverty rates may have fewer outreach systems in place to connect eligible households to benefits. Another potential factor is increased social isolation and stigma associated with accessing benefits in communities where fewer households participate in assistance programs.

Our preliminary analysis also showed that enrollment gaps were higher in counties with higher proportions of foreign-born individuals and individuals born in Puerto Rico, U.S. Island areas, or born abroad to American parents (henceforth referred to as immigrants for simplicity's sake). To ensure program accessibility to these populations, we sought access to language preference data, but it was ultimately not available from the state.

TAKEAWAY

mRelief identified two hard-to-reach populations that presented strategic opportunities to close the SUN Bucks-to-SNAP enrollment gap: individuals living in counties with lower levels of poverty and immigrants. While a mobile-centric approach positioned us to reach low-income clients regardless of geography, a key challenge emerged around the best approach for reaching immigrant populations due to the lack of language preference data.

Methods and Approach

With hard-to-reach populations in mind, mRelief crafted a broadly-accessible, mobile-friendly outreach campaign focused on increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and language access.

Using enrollment data provided by DHS, we launched an SMS campaign targeting individuals who were enrolled in SUN Bucks but not SNAP in Maryland. The SMS campaign educated clients about their potential eligibility due to their SUN Bucks enrollment and encouraged them to complete our mobile-friendly eligibility screener, available via web and SMS. Clients who screened Likely Eligible were encouraged to apply for SNAP benefits and directed to the state's application portal.

mRelief's approach to this campaign was informed by over 10 years of accumulated expertise in developing and implementing mobile-friendly solutions for increasing SNAP enrollment. We incorporated field-tested solutions where appropriate, while running small-scale tests to validate our approach to addressing the lack of access to language preference data.

Because mRelief's tools are designed to integrate with state systems and outreach programs, this campaign also served as an opportunity to test how mobile-first technology can support state agencies in scaling cross-enrollment efforts efficiently.

Role of the mRelief Eligibility Screener

A key component of this campaign was mRelief's eligibility screener, which served as the primary engagement tool connecting SUN Bucks recipients to SNAP enrollment pathways. While many states, including Maryland, offer eligibility screeners, mRelief's screener is designed as part of a broader end-to-end enrollment support system that guides individuals from initial outreach through application completion.

The screener is intentionally built to be mobile-first and text-friendly, recognizing that many low-income households primarily access the internet through smartphones. Clients who receive a text message from mRelief are able to immediately access the screener through their phone, complete it in under 3 minutes, and receive clear next-step guidance directing them to the appropriate SNAP application portal for their state.

Beyond determining likely eligibility, the screener also functions as an engagement and follow-through tool. Over more than ten years of use, mRelief has studied how individuals move

through the benefits application journey and where they most frequently drop off. These insights have informed the development of built-in interventions that help encourage application completion, including automated follow-up text messages that remind and support clients as they move from screening to applying.

Because the screener is embedded within mRelief's broader outreach and communication infrastructure, it allows us to track engagement throughout the client journey, from the initial outreach message to screener completion and, when possible, confirmed program enrollment. This data helps identify where barriers occur and allows us to continuously refine outreach strategies and improve conversion to application.

The screener is also designed to support accessibility and language inclusion. It is currently available in English and Spanish and can be configured to support additional languages depending on partner needs. This flexibility allows the tool to adapt to the needs of diverse populations while maintaining a consistent and easy-to-use experience for clients accessing benefits through their mobile devices.

In the context of this campaign, using the mRelief screener allowed us to provide a seamless pathway for SUN Bucks recipients to quickly assess their potential SNAP eligibility and receive immediate guidance on how to apply through Maryland's application system. This streamlined pathway, combined with automated outreach and follow-up helped reduce friction in the enrollment process and contributed to the strong engagement and conversion rates observed during the campaign.

Reaching non-English speakers

mRelief prioritizes language accessibility in its outreach and tools. Our eligibility screener is available in English and Spanish and can be configured to support additional languages based on needs. In past partnerships, including work in Florida, our tools have also been deployed in Haitian Creole.

In most programs, mRelief is able to target non-English speaking populations through localized outreach efforts that direct clients to the screener in their preferred language. For this campaign, however, DHS did not have language preference data available for SUN Bucks recipients. As a result, we were unable to identify Spanish-speaking households in advance.

Because of this limitation, we conducted small-scale message tests to determine the most effective way to reach Spanish-speaking clients through SMS outreach.

Experiment 1: English copy with option to switch to Spanish

Using sample data supplied by Maryland, we texted a universe of 1,400 clients with copy in English that provided an option to switch to Spanish. This is the default approach mRelief uses for our localized end-to-end solutions. The sample size was large enough to provide realistic expectations of performance without impacting overall program outcomes.

 **Note:** The sample file provided by MD DHS for this test included SUN Bucks recipients only and we were unable to exclude people already enrolled in SNAP. Subsequent test universes excluded SNAP recipients, resulting in more effective targeting and higher screener competition rates.

Hello 🙌 This is mRelief, partnering with Maryland DHS to help more people sign up for SNAP (food stamps). As a SUN Bucks recipient, you likely qualify for SNAP. This could provide extra food support — \$180 per person each month on average. See if you qualify in less than 3 minutes with a few quick questions. Reply SUNBUCKS or visit apply.mrelief.com/sunbucks,

Para continuar en Español, responde — Español.

If you no longer want these updates, reply — Stop.

Results:

Using this approach, 1.6% of clients completed a screener in English but none completed a screener in Spanish. When integrated into our typical client experience, this approach yields a Spanish engagement rate of 38%, but this experiment made it clear that a different strategy was required if we wanted to reach Spanish-speaking clients with this campaign.

TAKEAWAY

This test demonstrated that simply providing an option to switch to Spanish was ineffective for engaging Spanish-speaking clients in this specific context. Unlike in mRelief's client funnel, where the vast majority of clients start the screener in the language of their preference, a different approach would be needed for this campaign.

Experiment 2: Fully bilingual text messages

Our next experiment evaluated the efficacy of sending fully bilingual texts in both English and Spanish. We targeted a universe of 500 clients in Montgomery County (the county with the highest Latino population) and Templeville, MD (a very small town spanning Caroline & Queen Anne's Counties with a population that is 60% Latino). Unlike the previous experiment, we were able to exclude clients already enrolled in SNAP after receiving enrollment data from MD DHS.

English Text Message

Hello {@client.first_name} 🙌 This is mRelief, partnering with Maryland DHS to help more people sign up for SNAP (food stamps). As a SUN Bucks recipient, you likely qualify for SNAP. This could provide extra food support — \$180 per person each month on average. See if you qualify in less than 3 minutes with a few quick questions. Reply SUNBUCKS or visit apply.mrelief.com/sunbucks If you don't want these updates, reply Stop.

Spanish Text Message

Hola {@client.first_name} 🙌 Somos mRelief y nos unimos con el Departamento de Servicios Humanos de Maryland (DHS) para ayudar a más personas a inscribirse en el programa SNAP (cupones para alimentos). Como beneficiario de SUN Bucks, probablemente califiques para el programa SNAP. Esto podría brindarte apoyo alimentario adicional — \$180 por persona cada mes en promedio. Vea si calificas en menos de 3 minutos con unas preguntas rápidas. Responde CUPONES o visita apply.mrelief.com/cupones Si no quieres estas mensajes, responde Stop.

Results

Using this approach, 6.9% of clients completed a screener overall, with 68% screening in English and 32% screening in Spanish. We were pleased to see that by texting all clients in both languages, we were able to achieve high levels of engagement among Spanish speakers, without noticing a negative impact on engagement among English speakers. In fact, the fully bilingual campaign showed a slightly lower opt-out rate than the English-only campaign. Overall outcomes were also improved by being able to exclude clients already enrolled in SNAP in the target universe.

TAKEAWAY

By sending fully bilingual texts in both English and Spanish, we were able to secure strong participation from Spanish-speaking clients despite lacking language preference data, without negatively impacting overall campaign performance. The availability of complete program data, including people enrolled in SNAP, also improved targeting and outcomes.

Additional Message Testing

Once we validated our strategy for securing engagement from Spanish-speakers, we conducted more extensive message testing to inform our full launch. We tested a total of 13 message variations, including different combinations of the following elements: creating a sense of urgency, highlighting average benefits received, including a hand wave or apple emoji, and ending the sentence before the hyperlink with an exclamation point (!) versus a colon (:). All variations were sent as fully translated bilingual texts with variations for clients with and without first name data available.

Here are two examples of messages we tested:

Example 1:

Don't miss out, [FirstName]! SUN Bucks families may qualify for more grocery support through SNAP — about \$180 per person monthly 🍏 Find out in 2 minutes! apply.mrelief.com/sunbucks From mRelief & Maryland DHS. If you don't want these messages, reply Stop.

¡No te lo pierdas, [FirstName]! Las familias que participan en SUN Bucks podrían recibir más apoyo para alimentos a través de SNAP — aproximadamente \$180 por persona al mes 🍏 ¡Descúbrelo en 2 minutos! apply.mrelief.com/cupones De mRelief y el Departamento de Servicios Humanos de Maryland. Si no quieres estas mensajes, responde Stop.

Example 2:

Hi 🙌, you may qualify for more grocery support through SNAP. Find out in 2 minutes: apply.mrelief.com/sunbucks From mRelief & Maryland DHS. Reply STOP to opt out.

Hola 🙌, podrías recibir más ayuda para alimentos a través de SNAP. Descúbrelo en 2 minutos: apply.mrelief.com/cupones De mRelief y el Departamento de Servicios Humanos de Maryland. Si no quieres estas mensajes, responde Stop.

Results

The weakest performing messages saw 3.8% of clients go on to complete a screener, compared to 8.3% for the strongest performing messages.

TAKEAWAY

We tested 13 different messaging variations and saw a range in completed screener performance of 4.5%, demonstrating the benefit of rigorous message testing. We were able to identify messaging that performed stronger than our previous tests and optimize messaging for clients with and without first name data available.

Final Messaging for Full Launch

Based on the results of our message testing, we decided to use the following text messages for our full launch, using different versions for clients where first name was available versus not based on performance:

Clients with first name available

Hello {@client.first_name} 🙌 This is mRelief, partnering with Maryland DHS to help more people sign up for SNAP (food stamps). As a SUN Bucks recipient, you likely qualify for SNAP. This could provide extra food support — \$180 per person each month on average.

See if you qualify in less than 3 minutes with a few quick questions. Reply SUNBUCKS or visit apply.mrelief.com/sunbucks If you don't want these updates, reply Stop.

Hola {@client.first_name} 🙌 Somos mRelief y nos unimos con el Departamento de Servicios Humanos de Maryland (DHS) para ayudar a más personas a inscribirse en el programa SNAP (cupones para alimentos). Como beneficiario de SUN Bucks, probablemente califiques para el programa SNAP. Esto podría brindarte apoyo alimentario adicional — \$180 por persona cada mes en promedio.

Vea si calificas en menos de 3 minutos con unas preguntas rápidas. Responde CUPONES o visita apply.mrelief.com/cupones Si no quieres estas mensajes, responde Stop.

Clients without first name available

Don't miss out! SUN Bucks families may qualify for more grocery support through SNAP — about \$180 per person monthly 🍏 Find out in 2 minutes! apply.mrelief.com/sunbucks From mRelief & Maryland DHS. If you don't want these messages, reply Stop.

¡No te lo pierdas! Las familias que participan en SUN Bucks podrían recibir más apoyo para alimentos a través de SNAP — aproximadamente \$180 por persona al mes 🍏 ¡Descúbrelo en 2 minutos! apply.mrelief.com/cupones De mRelief y el Departamento de Servicios Humanos de Maryland. Si no quieres estas mensajes, responde Stop.

Our full campaign was launched between September 9 and September 17, 2025.

TAKEAWAY

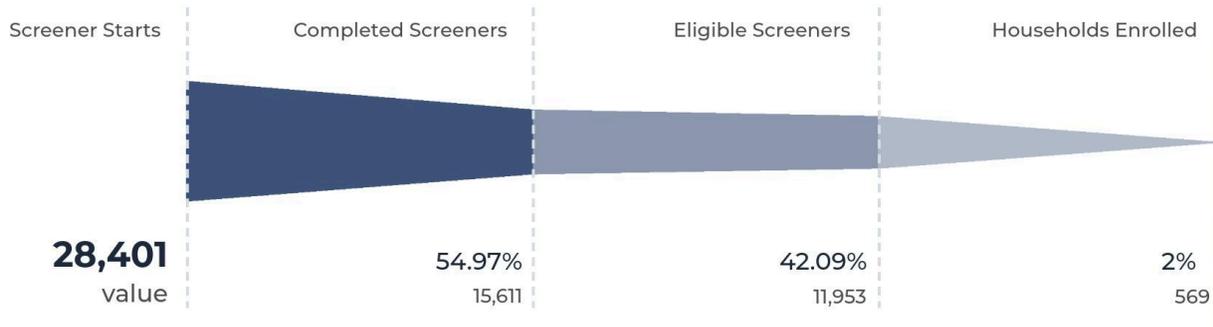
Informed by rigorous testing, mRelief identified two top-performing messaging variations to send to clients with and without first name data available, respectively, and launched our full campaign.

Results and Observations

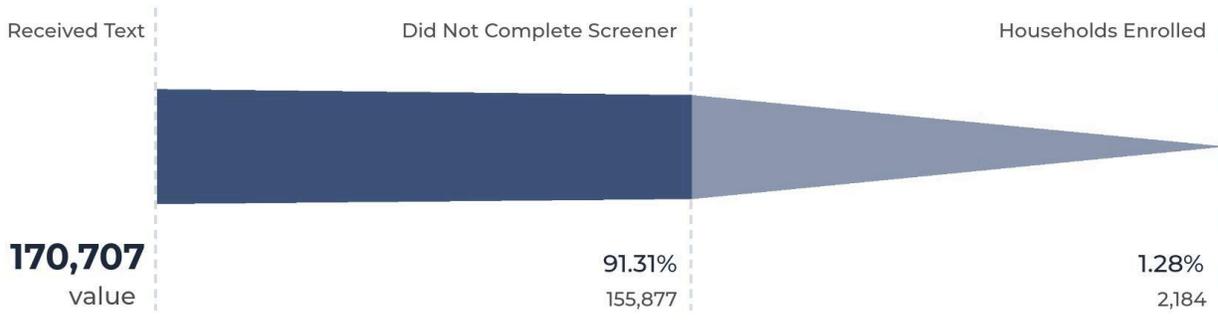
For this campaign, mRelief texted a universe of 194,402 unique phone numbers representing households enrolled in SUN Bucks but not SNAP, resulting in 170,707 successful deliveries.

28,401 households (17%) started eligibility screeners, with 55% of those going on to complete a screener, and 42% found Likely Eligible for SNAP. A large volume of clients also enrolled in SNAP after receiving our text messages without completing the eligibility screener, suggesting that the content of the messages alone played a role in motivating clients to apply. **Over 2,700 households enrolled in SNAP** as part of this pilot, unlocking an estimated \$5.5 million in federal food assistance for Maryland families.

Client Funnel - With Screeners



Client Funnel - Without Screeners



Impact Measurement and Validation

Through our analysis of MD's enrollment data, we estimate that 2,753 households went on to be enrolled after receiving a text message through the campaign. Our traditional methodologies for estimating households enrolled support this figure as well. Based on national survey data of eligible screeners, we expect to see a conversion rate of about 22.76% to 24.80% (assuming a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 1.02%). For the campaign, this would equate to somewhere between 2,721 and 2,964 households enrolled. The 2,753 estimate falls right within this range, showing alignment across two independent methodologies. While neither methodology will deliver 100% certainty due to unknown variables, this alignment gives us more confidence in offering 2,753 as our best estimate of households enrolled. (See [Recommendations](#) for improved impact measurement.)

Screener Outcomes

The eligibility screener completion rate of 55% represents stronger engagement compared to mRelief's prior outreach in Maryland. In the 365 days before the campaign, mRelief's screener completion rate was 45% nationally and 52% in Maryland, demonstrating the impact of the partnership. Overall we were able to help 15 times as many people screen Likely Eligible for SNAP in Maryland and 17 times as many people screen Likely Eligible for WIC compared to monthly screener averages before the campaign. (See [WIC Eligibility](#) below for more information.)

Out of clients who completed a screener, 75% were Likely Eligible, 15% were already receiving SNAP benefits, 7% were Maybe Eligible, and just 4% were Ineligible, according to results from mRelief's eligibility screener.

The top reason for ineligibility was income, followed by student status.

Completed Screeners by Eligibility Status



Ineligible Screeners by Reasons



Referral Screeners

One unexpected result of this campaign we were pleased to notice is that a significant amount of completed screeners appear to be referral-driven. In total, 781 completed screeners came from phone numbers that were outside of our outreach universe. All of these screeners used campaign-specific referral links, meaning the referral links were likely shared with them by a friend or family member who received our texts.

Referrals are a positive indicator of program buy-in and client satisfaction, so we were pleased to note this high occurrence, especially given that they were organic and unprompted.

WIC Eligibility

In 2025, mRelief integrated WIC into our SNAP-focused eligibility screener, and as a result, 2,795 clients in this campaign learned they were Likely Eligible for WIC. These households received information about how to apply for WIC through their local WIC agency. mRelief integrated WIC into our eligibility screener because we identified an opportunity to increase food security for families with children. Households that are eligible for SNAP are categorically eligible for WIC based on income. Additionally, individuals who are ineligible for SNAP on the basis of immigration status alone may still qualify for WIC, presenting an opportunity to increase food security for immigrant families that do not qualify for SNAP.

Demographic and Geographic Insights

Race and Ethnicity

Maryland Alliance for the Poor's 2018 report, Maryland Poverty Profiles, shows that Black and Latino Marylanders are more likely to live in poverty, along with women and children.

Through the campaign, we were able to reach more families, younger parents, women, and people identifying as Black or African American compared to mRelief's prior outreach.

The tables below show the race and ethnicity breakdown of clients who enrolled in SNAP as a result of the campaign (as reported by the state of Maryland) compared to 2024 Census Data.

The campaign was especially successful at reaching Black households, who experience higher levels of poverty in Maryland compared to other races, accounting for 55% of households enrolled in SNAP. Black households typically represent about 20% of clients reached by mRelief, demonstrating that the campaign was especially effective at reaching this population.

While Spanish-speakers were over-represented in completed screeners at 26%, Latino households were slightly underrepresented in SNAP enrollment compared to the general population. Latinos only represented 8% of households enrolled and non-citizens represented 4% of households enrolled. This is notable considering Latinos experience higher levels of poverty in Maryland compared to non-Latinos. The discrepancy between overrepresentation in completed screeners and underrepresentation in enrollment suggests there are more opportunities to continue closing the enrollment gap for Latinos and immigrants.

mRelief has also noticed that the percentage of SNAP applications from Latino households across our products has decreased over the past few months, indicating that the underrepresentation in enrollment could be part of a national trend, likely due to HRI eligibility changes that went into effect November 1, 2025. Current eligibility rules under HRI exclude many immigrants from participating in SNAP who were previously eligible. Lawful permanent residents, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and citizens of COFA nations are still eligible, however, prompting a need for additional research to ensure that eligible Latino and immigrant populations participate in SNAP (see [Recommendations](#)).

Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, who also experience higher rates of poverty, were represented in the campaign at levels similar to their representation in the state population.

Race and Ethnicity		
	Maryland Census Data (2024)	mRelief Outreach
White	56.7%	22.5%
White, non-Hispanic or Latino	46.4%	-
Black or African American	31.6%	55.4%
Asian	7.3%	1.3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.2%
Hispanic or Latinx	13.3%	8.1%
Two or more races	3.4%	-
Unknown	-	11.8%
American Indian and Alaskan Native	0.9%	0.5%

Completed Screeners by Language



- English 74%
- Spanish 26%

Citizenship Status



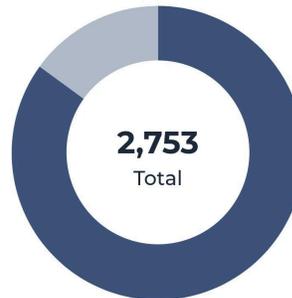
- Non-Citizen 4%
- Citizen 96%

Gender and Household Composition

Women accounted for 86% of applicants who successfully enrolled, in line with state and national trends showing that women are more likely to live in poverty and more likely to apply for SNAP benefits. However, this trend was more pronounced than mRelief's national average of 65%.

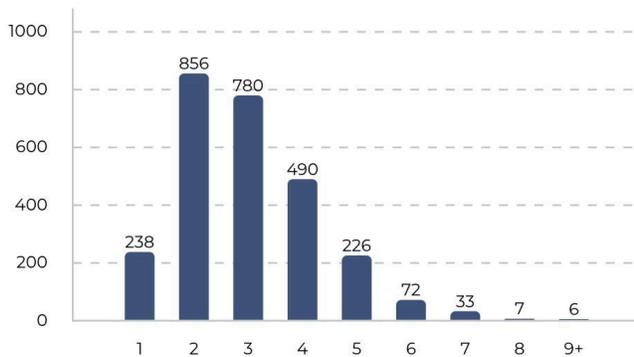
Gender

- Female 86%
- Male 14%

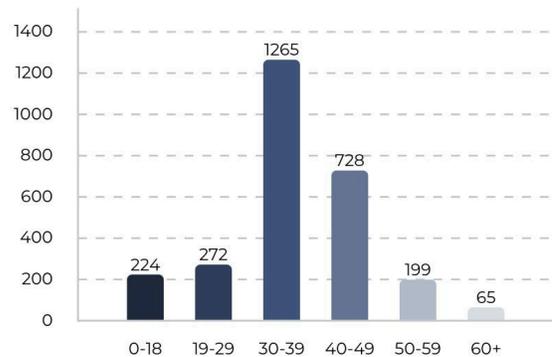


We saw larger household sizes, compared to mRelief's national average of two, and more applicants in their 30s and 40s, compared to older adults and seniors typically being overrepresented in mRelief's data. Both of these findings are consistent with the target population for the campaign being families with school-aged children.

Household Size



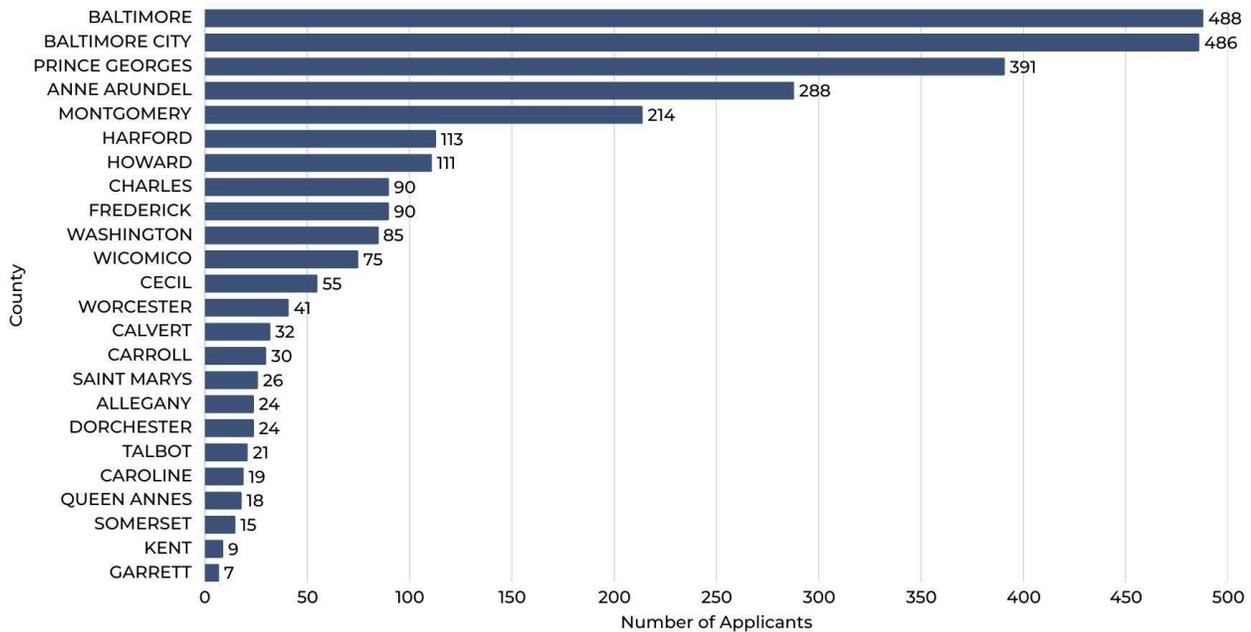
Age



Geography

Five counties accounted for 71% of Likely Eligible screeners, representing counties with larger populations overall. The campaign reached all 24 counties in Maryland and 64% of zip codes.

We also saw a strong impact in counties with the highest gaps in enrollment. Worcester County, for example, had the highest gap in cross-enrollment by percent, with 92% of SUN Bucks recipients not enrolled in SNAP, according to county-level data supplied by MD DHS. Our campaign successfully enrolled 41 households in SNAP, increasing enrollment among SUN Bucks recipients in Worcester County by 20%, up from 202 households in 2024.



Operational Insights

Data Processing

Unanticipated data processing requirements impacted both project scope and delivery timelines. The enrollment data provided by MD DHS included all SUN Bucks and SNAP participants, which required additional processing to identify and exclude clients already enrolled in SNAP from outreach efforts. The structure of the data also required matching across multiple files and conducting de-duplication, which added time to the data preparation process.

After cleaning and de-duplication, the final dataset included 194,400 unique phone numbers, compared to the initial estimate of approximately 230,000 contacts.

Project Timeline

Planned Timeline	
Date	Activity
August 11	Maryland DHS shares required data to support campaign setup and validation
August 13	mRelief conducts a test run of the text campaign to validate accuracy and readiness
August 22	Maryland DHS shares remainder datasets of 230,000+ contacts
September 9	Full text campaign launch
October 8	Maryland DHS shares first round of SNAP enrollment status data (30 days post-launch)
October 22	mRelief analyzes and provides initial campaign performance summary and early outcomes
November 7	Maryland DHS provides second round of SNAP enrollment status data
November 17	mRelief delivers comprehensive program analysis, including outcomes, impact, and recommendations

Actual Timeline	
Date	Activity
August 11	MD DHS delivers SUN Bucks-only test file
August 13	mRelief conducts initial message testing
August 27	MD DHS delivers SUN Bucks and SNAP Enrollment data for targeting
September 4-9	mRelief conducts additional message testing
September 9-17	Full campaign launch
October 23-28	MD DHS delivers updated SNAP enrollment data for analysis
November 12	mRelief delivers expedited enrollment results by request
November 24	mRelief delivers dashboard showing enrollment results only
December 23 – January 2	mRelief holiday closure
January 9	Payment received from MD DHS
January 16	mRelief delivers Updated Dashboard with a publicly shareable link
January 30	mRelief delivers of Final Report and Updated Dashboard with a publicly shareable link, including demographic data

The final campaign timeline departed from the original plan, but all project deliverables were completed well before the final date specified in the contract (March 31, 2026). Delays in data delivery, additional data processing requirements, evolving coordination around payment processing timelines, potential communication gaps about payment methods, as well as holiday office closures impacted campaign execution and delivery dates.

Recommendations for a follow-up campaign

mRelief is inspired by everything we learned from this partnership and its impact, but more than that, we are excited about the opportunities to continue closing the gap between SUN Bucks and SNAP enrollment into the future.

This pilot campaign demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted SMS outreach and also revealed opportunities to build more durable cross-enrollment infrastructure that allows Maryland to connect families to nutrition benefits more systematically over time. The following recommendations outline how Maryland can build on the success of this campaign to strengthen long-term participation in SNAP and other benefit programs.

Partnerships

The success of this campaign reflects the power of coordinated partnerships across state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic supporters working toward a shared goal: ensuring that families with children can access the nutrition resources they qualify for. Increasing participation in programs like SNAP and SUN Bucks requires not only effective outreach tools, but also collaboration across organizations that serve families at different points along their food access journey.

This pilot campaign was implemented through close collaboration between mRelief and the Maryland Department of Human Services and was further supported through philanthropic investments from the **Share Our Strength Foundation** and **Maryland No Kid Hungry**. Their support helped make it possible to launch a campaign of this scale.

Beyond supporting this pilot effort, Share Our Strength and Maryland No Kid Hungry have expressed strong interest in continuing to partner on future cross-enrollment efforts that connect children and families to SNAP and other nutrition programs. Their work across Maryland focuses on ensuring children and families can access the food resources they need, making them a natural partner in efforts that improve participation in programs like SUN Bucks and SNAP.

Looking ahead, there are meaningful opportunities to expand this work through a multi-pronged partnership approach that brings together state agencies, community organizations, and philanthropic partners. For example, the **Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)** has expressed interest in expanding food access initiatives through its Community Schools network and through the development of a broader food access network.

Aligning SUN Bucks and SNAP outreach efforts with these initiatives presents a promising opportunity to support families more effectively. Schools, community-based organizations, and local food access partners often serve as trusted entry points for families navigating nutrition programs. Integrating tools such as the mRelief eligibility screener, along with school-based outreach strategies, could help families more easily understand their eligibility and access available benefits.

This pilot demonstrated that when state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic partners collaborate around shared goals, it is possible to reach families at scale and unlock substantial resources for communities. By continuing to strengthen these partnerships and aligning efforts across agencies such as DHS and MSDE, Maryland can build on the success of this campaign to further close the gap between SUN Bucks and SNAP participation and ensure that families with children have consistent support throughout their nutrition access journey.

Integrate eligibility screener directly into the SUN Bucks enrollment experience and incorporate multiple touchpoints

This pilot campaign demonstrated that text outreach combined with mRelief’s eligibility screener was incredibly effective at reaching households who are enrolled in SUN Bucks but not SNAP, especially populations experiencing higher levels of poverty and food insecurity—including Black families, Spanish-speaking families, women, and families with multiple children.

Unlike mRelief’s standard programs, where clients initiate engagement in response to ongoing digital ad and referral campaigns, this campaign centered on sending a one-time text message to clients with no prior introduction. While the press release MD DHS issued about our partnership was helpful for allowing clients to verify our partnership if they had concerns about our legitimacy, industry best practices show that engagement and retention are higher when engagement is initiated by a client, introduced directly by a trusted source, and tied to an activity where a client is already actively engaged.

To paint a more concrete picture of what this approach could look like, MD DHS could integrate mRelief’s eligibility screener directly into SUN Bucks materials, via a QR code or referral link, so that when a client is in the process of learning about SUN Bucks, they are prompted to check their eligibility for SNAP at the same time. The timing of this initial introduction is crucial. Embedding eligibility tools directly into existing program experiences such as SUN Bucks creates a more seamless pathway for families to access benefits and allows states to operationalize cross-enrollment

as a standard part of program delivery rather than a one-time outreach campaign. Reaching families during or shortly after SUN Bucks enrollment significantly increases the likelihood that households will apply for SNAP while they are already engaged with a nutrition assistance program.

Following this initial introduction of the eligibility screener, we could text families shortly after they enroll in SUN Bucks and use automated follow-up messages to encourage them to apply for SNAP, instead of receiving a single text message as with this pilot campaign. Building in additional touch points will strengthen outcomes by cultivating interest in SNAP over time and presenting multiple opportunities for families to apply.

An ideal implementation of this approach would use automated text flows that allow clients to receive texts in response to their actions or enrollment events. This would eliminate the need for labor-intensive data processing and provide a more client-centric approach, compared to a one-time high-volume SMS campaign.

Develop more robust solutions for reaching immigrants and expanding language access

Despite this campaign's outstanding success in engaging Spanish-speaking populations, we feel that there are additional opportunities to continue closing the SUN Bucks-to-SNAP enrollment gap among immigrant households and households where English may not be a primary language. Latino households were slightly underrepresented among enrollees and non-citizens made up a very small proportion of enrollees (5%), despite nearly half of immigrants living in Maryland being non-citizens. These figures suggest additional strategies need to be developed to continue closing the enrollment gap among Latinos, who are at increased risk for living in poverty in Maryland, and immigrants who are still eligible for SNAP under new eligibility rules. There are also many immigrant populations in Maryland we likely did not reach with this campaign, such as families of African, Haitian or Asian origin, due to the limitations of bilingual English/Spanish outreach.

Reaching immigrants without language preference data

In the absence of language preference data, the above recommendation to integrate SNAP outreach directly into the SUN Bucks enrollment experience would make developing multi-lingual solutions more feasible. For example, digital or printed outreach materials could be developed in additional

languages and strategically deployed in schools to reach specific populations, rather than casting a wide net as we did with this campaign.

Identifying opportunities to collect language preference data near or during the enrollment process would also expand opportunities for SMS outreach. mRelief can work with MD DHS to audit the client journey and share recommendations on the best opportunities to collect language preference data.

Finally, additional research into unique barriers faced by various immigrant and non-English speaking populations will help develop more strategic solutions for increasing cross-enrollment.

Additional recommendations

Improving impact measurement

Data quality, planning, and coordination will play an important role in improving mRelief's ability to measure programmatic impact as accurately as possible in future collaborations. Some recommendations we have for strengthening reporting include:

- Sharing definitions of data fields before data is received
- Collaborating to define how impact will be measured in advance of project kick-off
- Identifying a technical point of contact at MD DHS who is available to answer questions about data throughout the project
- Getting access to recertification data and understanding how churn is represented in enrollment data
 - In the absence of this data, we were unable to evaluate the extent to which our campaign may have impacted recertification rates or re-enrolled clients who may have churned out of SNAP

Promote cross-enrollment in additional benefit programs

This campaign demonstrated that cross-enrollment strategies where populations are targeted based on current program enrollment are highly effective. We recommend taking this further by integrating additional benefits programs into cross-enrollment strategies.

For our next cross-enrollment campaign, we recommend selecting an additional benefit program based on:

- High crossover in eligibility requirements
- Ease of access to enrollment data based on program administration
- Compatibility with SMS outreach

Based on these criteria, **Medicaid** and **Emergency Assistance for Families with Children** seem like promising options for integrating an additional benefit.

Develop referral-based outreach strategies

Building on the success of the organic referrals we saw in this campaign, we recommend building referral-based outreach strategies into regular outreach programs. For example, after a client completes a specific user journey, such as successfully applying for SNAP benefits, they could receive an automated text message that encourages them to share mRelief's eligibility screener with friends and family who may also need food assistance.

Referral strategies can help individuals overcome stigma by coming from a trusted source with a personal connection. They can also be an effective way of reaching populations that may be more isolated, by allowing individuals to refer to people within their networks. This "snowball recruitment" approach can be incredibly effective for accessing hard-to-reach populations where trust is key to engagement.

Pursue a recertification pilot to keep people enrolled in SNAP

The impact of cross-enrollment efforts can be strengthened through the development of a recertification pilot. Exploring opportunities to strengthen recertification would help to ensure that gains from cross-enrollment efforts are preserved by increasing retention in SNAP participation and reducing costs associated with "churn," defined by the USDA as a household exiting SNAP and then re-entering the program within 4 months. Churn contributes to increased administrative costs by requiring agencies to process additional applications and lost benefits for participants. A 2014 [USDA study](#) estimated that states spend approximately \$80 to certify each household that churns and that the rate of churn ranged from 17 to 28 percent across 6 states. In Maryland, the rate of churn was 21% and foregone benefits due to churn were estimated at \$14.8 million. The study also found that

churners tended to be younger, non-White, and be more likely to have children, showing strong overlap with the populations that stand to benefit most from SUN Bucks cross-enrollment efforts.

A recertification pilot would help MD DHS better understand factors associated with churn and inform best practices for keeping clients enrolled. mRelief could work with MD DHS to text clients when they are due for renewal and support them to overcome barriers to completing recertification,

Prepare for the unexpected with brief, scheduled touchpoints

During this partnership, project scope and timeline shifted with unexpected developments. This is a very normal part of collaborative partnerships, especially when embarking on a brand new effort. We have learned from experience that proactive, informal check-ins are very helpful for adapting to the unexpected. Scheduled touchpoints allow key stakeholders to communicate effectively and efficiently about emerging developments and adapt collaboratively. Regular meetings do not need to be long to be effective. Brief, 15-minute standup meetings every other week or even once a month can allow parties to communicate important information, ensure everyone is on the same page, and update timelines and agreements in response to emerging needs.

Acknowledgements

In September 2025, mRelief worked together with MD DHS to encourage 170,700 households enrolled in SUN Bucks to cross-enroll in SNAP via an SMS campaign. **As a result of this text campaign, over 2,700 households enrolled in SNAP, unlocking \$5.5 million dollars in estimated benefits.**

We look forward to continuing our partnership with MD DHS to unlock additional benefits for Marylanders – whether that be through another SUN Bucks-to-SNAP text campaign, a WIC cross-enrollment campaign, integrating our eligibility screener and automated SMS flows directly into the SUN Bucks application experience, or expanding language access for non-English speaking families in Maryland.

mRelief is deeply grateful to MD DHS for entrusting us with the mission of increasing cross-enrollment in SNAP among Maryland SUN Bucks recipients. The partnership provided a valuable opportunity for us to apply our field-tested solutions and expertise, make an impact at a larger scale than normally possible, and innovate to address unique challenges presented by this campaign. Together, we made a powerful impact and we are eager to explore opportunities to build on our shared success and learnings. The insights generated through this partnership can also inform similar cross-enrollment strategies in other states seeking to strengthen participation in nutrition programs and better connect families to the benefits they are eligible to receive.

Please contact us with any questions about this report or to explore future opportunities for collaboration at porschia@mrelief.com and brittany@mrelief.com.