

Census: 1 in 5 children on food stamps

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

Sixteen million children were on food stamps as of last year, the highest number since the nation's economy tumbled in 2008.

Numbers released by the Census Bureau Wednesday as part of its annual look at children and families show that one in five children were on food stamp assistance in 2014. The survey was taken last spring.

The number of people receiving food stamps — now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP — spiked through the recession and has stayed at a higher level since. In the 2007 Census survey, 9 million children received SNAP assistance.

Participation and spending appear to be going down, though. The Congressional Budget Office said this week that the government spent \$76 billion on SNAP last year, down 8 percent from the year before. That was the first time spending went down since the beginning of the recession.

Around 46.5 million people received food stamps last year, according to the Agriculture Department, which oversees the aid, up from around 26 million in 2007. Participation is expected to decrease over the next 10 years, though higher food costs could keep spending up.

Half of the children receiving food stamps in the Census survey — 8 million — were living only with their mothers. Around 5 million children receiving food stamps lived with married parents.

The spike in food stamp spending has caught the attention of Congress, and House Republicans tried to cut the program by around \$4 billion a year in 2013. In an eventual compromise, Congress agreed to cuts of around \$800 million a year, policy that was signed into law by President Barack Obama early last year as part of a larger farm bill. Since then, many states have found ways to get around the cuts.

The SNAP program will still be under scrutiny in the new Republican Congress. The new chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Texas Rep. Mike Conaway, and the new chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Kansas Sen. Pat Roberts, are both expected to take a look at food stamp spending in the coming year.

Billy Shore, the founder and CEO of Share Our Strength, a national anti-hunger group, said childhood hunger doesn't get enough attention. His group is pushing Congress to leave the food stamp program untouched and to find new ways to end childhood poverty.

"These kids are the most vulnerable and the least responsible for the situation in which they find themselves," he said.