

## **Food Stamp Pilot for Seniors**

Only about 30 percent of eligible seniors are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program (FSP). This is because many are reluctant to visit county offices long associated with "welfare" and because at least some seniors have difficulty managing the paperwork and office-visits required by the FSP.

The PA Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) are addressing this problem through an initiative called the Combined Application Project. Starting in early 2006, the two offices will automatically enroll Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients in the FSP. Recipients will enroll in food stamps through the social security office, receive their EBT debit cards in the mail and receive their pinning instructions by telephone – all without ever visiting the county assistance office.

To achieve this, some of the precise targeting of the FSP will be lost. Seniors who are part of the pilot will be grouped into four benefit levels depending on income level, household composition and shelter costs; individuals within each level will receive a standard amount. The lowest of the four benefit levels is expected to be at least \$20 and the highest at least \$90.

Similar pilots are currently operating on at least a county level in six other states and have produced increases of 20–35 percent increases in FSP enrollment among seniors. DPW will operate the PA pilot statewide. It has requested help from community based organizations in publicizing this new initiative.