





The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the foundation of the public food security effort. It provides grocery debit cards to households whose net incomes—after various deductions—are near or below the poverty line. In 2010-11 monthly participation averaged over 1.7 million Pennsylvanians per month—an increase of over 126% in the last 10 years. The program is built on a concept called the Thrifty Food Plan (last updated in 2006), which calculates the thriftiest food budget for a household to maintain a healthy and nutritious diet. The program further assumes that 30% of a household's net income is available to purchase food. Thus, it provides the difference between the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan and 30% of net household income. The value of the average September 2011 benefit amount issued per person in PA was \$126.46 per month (\$4.22 a day).

About 41% of PA food stamp participants are children, and the program contributes significantly to their health. The frequency of iron deficiency, the most common nutritional deficiency in the United States, drops among families that participate, as do deficiencies of calcium, magnesium, Vitamin B12 and zinc. The program makes a significant economic impact in every PA community; each dollar in food stamps results in \$1.79 in local economic activity. During the past federal fiscal year over \$2.3 billion in groceries were purchased with program funds in PA. According to the USDA, \$1 billion in retail purchases generates an additional \$225 million in farm production and \$73.4 million in farm value-added sales.

 <p>Who can provide the service?</p>	<p>The PA Department of Public Welfare (DPW) administers SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program) statewide. Locally, County Assistance Offices handle daily operations, which include eligibility determination and issuance of benefits.</p>
 <p>How is it financed?</p>	<p>The program is funded by the federal government and administered by the PA Department of Public Welfare. The state pays half of the administrative costs.</p>
 <p>Who can receive this service?</p>	<p>Eligibility depends on the income of the household. Households that do not have a member who is 60 years of age or older or who is disabled must have <u>gross</u> incomes below 160% of poverty. Program benefits are based on <u>net</u> income. A variety of deductions are allowed, including a standard deduction based on household size, 20% of earned income, child care costs, some shelter costs, the costs of paying child support, and—for seniors and disabled members—the costs of medical care that exceed \$35 a month.</p> <p>To illustrate the impact of such deductions, here are two examples. A single mother of two, who works 40 hours a week at \$8/hour, has childcare costs of \$50/week, pays \$650/month in rent and pays for heating, would be eligible for about \$460/month in food stamp benefits. An elderly couple who collectively receive \$1500/month in social security benefits, have medical expenses of nearly \$200/month, pay homeowners insurance and property taxes, as well as heating, would be eligible for about \$53/month in benefits.</p> <p>Most one and two-person households with gross incomes below 160% (200% for elderly/disabled households) are eligible for the minimum benefit of \$16/month.</p>
 <p>What is provided?</p>	<p>Each head-of-household receives a debit card, a private I.D. number, and an electronic account. The account is credited monthly with the benefit amount. The debit card can be used to pay for groceries at any store that accepts them.</p>
 <p>Contact</p>	<p>To apply, contact your local county assistance office. The PA Hunger Action Center offers a statewide toll-free line for callers who want to find out if they are eligible for benefits and who are interested in applying for the program over the phone. 1-800-634-2033 (Note: callers from regions of the state where there is an agency with a local-presence will be referred to those agencies.)</p>
 <p>Suggestions for advocacy</p>	<p>If you believe you have been unfairly or inaccurately denied for SNAP benefits, you have the right to appeal. Contact your local legal services agency right away; the number will be in the Blue Pages of the phonebook.</p> <p>SNAP, along with WIC, school meals, summer food, afterschool snacks and meals, and child care food, make up our nation's nutrition safety net and must be protected during the Super Committee's works to produce \$1.5 trillion in entitlement cuts and any and all following efforts to reduce the deficit through cuts to programs for the most vulnerable Americans. SNAP eligibility criteria and benefit levels are also being evaluated as part of the 2012 Farm Bill. Visit www.pahunger.org for related advocacy opportunities.</p>