On June 30, 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the FY 2022 payment error rate (PER) for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the first national error rate calculated since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This payment error rate captures a time when the ability of SNAP to agilely adapt to meet the health and well-being of families and support the economic resiliency of our nation was pivotal—and state and local agencies overwhelmingly stepped up to the challenge. The FY 2022 national PER of 11.54 percent reflects a 4.18 percentage point increase from the last time it was calculated in FY 2019. While these numbers are unsurprising given the adversity of the past several years, state and local SNAP agencies are committed to continuing the work to create resilient, quality services that prioritize accountability and excellence in the program.

The PER reflects a calculation of the accuracy of the benefit amount determination by a SNAP agency. A payment error creates an overpayment or underpayment and can be the result of either an error by the agency or by a SNAP participant. Due to the majority of states operating SNAP Emergency Allotments in FY 2022—whereby all households received the maximum benefit amount for their household size—the actual monetary impact of errors on benefit issuance amounts was significantly muted. It is also important to note that the PER is not a calculation of fraud. The overwhelming majority of errors are unintentional, and in recent years, many of the errors have stemmed from the large increase in first-time SNAP recipients and general client confusion relating to the significant number of changes in SNAP application and reporting rules during the pandemic.

The increased PER reported by USDA reflects the unprecedented challenges state and local SNAP agencies have faced in recent years. The disruptive forces of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in rapid changes in major federal policy to SNAP that agencies implemented while simultaneously adapting to a new virtual environment and prioritizing safe and efficient access to food. As this wholesale rewiring was underway, the cumulative effect of these changes amid broader macroeconomic forces placed extensive strain on the shrinking human services workforce and led to the increased national error rate. However, SNAP agencies demonstrated their resilience throughout the pandemic and the program stands out as a true success in rising to meet the needs of millions of Americans facing hunger.

As we now exit the public health emergency, SNAP agencies are left with the difficult work ahead to unwind temporary policy changes during the pandemic and confront the structural challenges that will remain. States experiencing high payment error rates have been proactively working on
Corrective Action Plans that will set them on the path to improvement. It will take time to see these investments reflected in our quality control measures of success. As states work through their plans, the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) and its members will remain steadfast in keeping focus on the key building blocks of operational excellence in SNAP including a strong and thriving workforce; agile tools and technology; and sound, simple, and mission-centered policy and process.

For additional questions and inquiries, please contact Jessica Garon, Director of Communications.