



Special Statement: SNAP Administrative Relief

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), on behalf of state and local human services agencies throughout the country, urges USDA to approve the flexibilities needed for SNAP agencies to meet the nutritional needs of our nation's children and families. As demand for food assistance remains at unprecedented levels, a confluence of factors driven by the pandemic threaten to stretch SNAP agencies beyond their capacity. Guided by our shared commitment to prioritize the health and well-being of the people and communities affected by the pandemic, USDA should continue partnering with states to provide SNAP administrative flexibilities for the remainder of 2020. Decisions must be guided by the facts on the ground and the operational realities that states face.

In the early months of the pandemic, SNAP was an essential tool to boost the economy and keep children and families fed. State and local human services agencies rose to the challenge to help more than six million newly displaced workers and impacted families apply for SNAP. This unprecedented increase necessitated a Herculean effort from state and local human services agencies to process the flood of new SNAP applications while simultaneously adapting systems and business processes to the remote functions necessary to face our new normal. The administrative relief provided by USDA during these months was fundamental to helping states get benefits to those who need them most.

Today, SNAP enrollment rates remain at extraordinary levels, and as we look ahead to the volume of work states must process for the remainder of the year, it is clear that the challenges faced by states are anything but normal. These problems stem from both the early impacts of the pandemic as well as lingering effects on SNAP agencies.

- In the first three months of the pandemic, SNAP enrollment grew three times faster than any previous recorded period. This flood of applications are due for eligibility reviews in the fall.

SPECIFIC ASKS

- USDA should work with states to simplify recertification procedures and/or extend timelines so states can keep up with the unprecedented volume of cases due this fall
- Congress should extend legislatively authorized SNAP flexibilities beyond the public health emergency

- At the same time, eligibility reviews that were temporarily delayed from March through May are due to be processed in the fall, effectively doubling the number of case reviews states must handle.
- State and local agencies remain at reduced capacity while many staff work remotely to follow public health precautions. Furthermore, state budget shortfalls have resulted in hiring freezes and furloughs in human services agencies throughout the country and led to local office closures in particularly hard hit areas.
- In addition to these challenges, agencies face the possibility of even greater caseload spikes in the coming months as Pandemic Unemployment Compensation ends and the potential need for extended Pandemic EBT in the upcoming school year further drains agency resources.

State and local agencies recognize the importance of providing timely and accurate SNAP benefits in this period of crisis. Without the adjustments needed to manage caseloads within resource constraints, states are at risk to fall behind in delivering benefits to children and families and see backslides in program integrity.

The challenges states face are solvable with the support of our federal partners. As a collective voice for our nation's human services systems, we urge USDA to provide states the option to simplify recertification procedures and/or extend certification periods to allow them to keep up with the unprecedented volume of cases due in the upcoming months. This guidance should be clear and timely to afford states the space needed to prepare staff, clients, and systems for needed adjustments. Furthermore, we urge Congress to extend SNAP flexibilities granted in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act beyond the public health emergency so states have the tools needed to plan ahead to keep all children and families fed.

As our country faces the recovery ahead, taking these critical actions demonstrates our federal partners' commitment to equipping state and local human services agencies with the tools needed to provide effective and accountable SNAP services that support the health and well-being of all people along the way.

KEY POINTS

- As demand for food assistance remains at unprecedented levels, a confluence of factors driven by the pandemic threaten to stretch SNAP agencies beyond their capacity
- In the early months of the pandemic, SNAP was an essential tool to boost the economy and keep children and families fed
- The administrative relief provided by USDA during these months was fundamental to helping states get benefits to those who need them most
- With SNAP enrollment rates still at extraordinary levels today, states are at risk to fall behind in delivering essential benefits to children and families and see backslides in program integrity
- These challenges are solvable with the support of our federal partners