

Food Bank of Iowa  
Partner Agency Conference  
May 10, 2018

## **Iowa Food Assistance**

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

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\*If you have any questions or need any outreach materials listing income guidelines and the Food Assistance Hotline number, contact me with the information above.

\* DHS phone numbers are at the end of this document.

### Introduction

Hunger is an issue we are all passionate about ending. In 2016, 41 million people struggled with hunger in the United States. One in eight Iowans struggle to access enough food for themselves and their families. That's a lot of people! Hunger hinders many aspects of our lives such as health, growth, education, and work performance. Everyone benefits from a goal of a hunger-free Iowa and United States. The Iowa Food Assistance Program is just one of the ways to help families become hunger-free.

The Iowa Food Assistance Program is how Iowa chooses to present the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to its residents. SNAP is a program under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but the Iowa Department of Human Services is responsible for the distribution of benefits in the state. Approved families receive an EBT card in the mail they can use at retail locations to purchase groceries. The great benefit of SNAP is the flexibility the program affords recipients to purchase the foods they want the most. Clients also have the ability to use their EBT cards at Farmer's Markets, and they have the ability to purchase plants and seeds with their benefits.

Please remember this Supplemental Paper regarding Iowa Food Assistance is meant to serve as an educational, introductory document about the program and how you can assist your clients. This is not a legal document and is not intended to provide any legal advice. If you have questions regarding a specific case or situation, please contact the Department of Human Services regarding your case or contact an attorney.

## Iowa Participation and Benefits

In calendar year 2017, the average monthly benefit per household was \$228.69. It is important to note that a household only consists of the people that prepare and share their meals together. Each recipient received an average of \$108.25. These numbers break down to a per person/per meal amount of \$1.16. The Iowa SNAP participation includes more than 69% of participants in families with children, more than 25% of participants with elderly or disabled family members, and more than 52% of participants in a working family. However, statewide participation is only at 50.6%. That means only half of those eligible for the program have applied and are receiving benefits. Within the Food Bank of Iowa's fifty-five county service area, that participation rate is only 43.2% as of March 2018. Participation rates on a county level can vary drastically county to county.

For monthly DHS reports showing county participation rates click here: [Food Assistance Reports](#). For any information before July 2016 you will need to look at the historical reports. The formatting for Food Assistance Reports changed in July 2016 so any data prior to that date will look different from current reports. If the link above does not work, you may Google "Iowa Food Assistance Reports" to find the information or copy and paste this link: <https://dhs.iowa.gov/reports/food-assistance-reports/f1-report-v2>

## Who Qualifies for Food Assistance?

Current Income Guidelines for Iowa	
Household Size	Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,608
2	\$2,167
3	\$2,724
4	\$3,280
5	\$3,839
6	\$4,396
7	\$4,898
8	\$5,511

These are the current income guidelines for Iowa Food Assistance and are 160% of the Federal Poverty Level. Based on a person's household size (a household being those that purchase food together and share those meals together), the person's gross monthly income can be at the amount listed or below to be eligible for Food Assistance. If a client's income fluctuates month to month, they can still apply for Food Assistance. DHS handles cases with fluctuating income on a regular basis, and they will be able to provide the client with more information for their situation. If someone's income change is seasonal, like a teacher with no income in the summer, then that client can apply for benefits the month before his/her income is going to change. This ensures, if approved for benefits, that they

are ready to receive benefits at the start of the month when their income changes rather than later in the month after going through the application process.

### How Does Someone Apply for Benefits?

#### *Outreach Worker:*

As an outreach worker, I travel to visit pantries, meal sites, and any other locations that serve low-income individuals and families. When I visit these sites, I am able to help clients submit an application at that time. I do not need to see any proof of income or identification to help a client submit an application. I will ask the client to fill out a brief information form asking for Name, Date of Birth, Social Security Number, Address, Employer, Pay per Hour, Hours worked per Week, Pay Frequency, Other Income, Rent/Mortgage, List of Utilities Paid, and Additional Household Members. As soon as I submit an application, it goes straight to DHS.

If you are interested in having me visit your pantry or meal site, please contact me! My information is located at the beginning of this document.

#### *Food Assistance Hotline:*

Clients can submit an application over the phone in 20 minutes or less by calling the Food Assistance Hotline at 1-855-944-3663. An outreach worker will go through the entire application with the client. At the end, the outreach worker will record the client stating his/her name and the date which will be attached to the application and serve as the client's signature. This application is sent immediately to DHS.

If you have a client that is Non-English speaking and you are able to interpret for them, you may call the hotline and help them apply for benefits over the phone.

#### *Paper Application:*

Do not encourage clients to use paper applications. Paper documents are sent to a separate location where they are scanned to be uploaded in the system. It is a much longer process than calling the hotline or submitting an application with an outreach worker. Even if a client goes to a DHS office to fill out or submit a paper application, the document will still have to be sent to another location for scanning and uploading to the system. So, always encourage your clients to call the hotline instead.

### What is the Application Process?

1. Client learns about SNAP income guidelines and their eligibility.
  - Income guidelines can be found on outreach materials containing the hotline number or by going to the Food Bank of Iowa website.
2. Complete an application.
  - This can be done in-person with an outreach worker or over the phone by calling the Hotline at 1-855-944-3663.
3. Submit application.
4. Phone call from DHS.
  - DHS will call the client to set up an interview. It can take up to 25 days for DHS to call.
5. Interview with DHS.
  - Interviews should be over the phone so clients will not have to travel to a DHS office.

6. Gather and submit supporting documents.
  - Some clients may have to submit additional documents. For example, if a client is working, DHS may request copies of pay stubs to verify income.
7. Decision made on case.
8. Receive EBT card in the mail.
9. Complete recertification process 6-24 months later
  - The recertification process consists of a one-page form sent to the client in the mail. The client completes the form and returns the form to DHS.
  - If a client loses this form or forgets to return the form, they can call the Food Assistance Hotline at 1-855-944-3663 and complete a *new* application. The client will have to go through the interview process as they did before, but their application is sent immediately to DHS. This means their information is in DHS's system much faster and they are more likely to get their benefits sooner.
  - Note that Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) can only receive SNAP benefits for a three month period within three years if they do not meet the necessary work requirements. Their recertification period will be at three months rather than six.

### Application Deductions

There are multiple factors taken into account when determining the amount of benefits a client will receive. DHS will take the following deductions as is applicable to each applicant:

- Earned income deduction – 20% of all gross income
  - Applies to all households
- Standard deduction based on household size
  - Applies to all households
- Dependent care deduction when needed for work, training, or education
- Child support deduction – if the applicant is paying child support
- Medical expenses for elderly or disabled members
  - Must be more than \$35 per month and must be paid by the applicant
- Utility deduction
- Shelter deduction

### Work Requirements

All adults, ages 18-59, are required to work part time or agree to accept a job if they are offered one to satisfy work requirements. There are some exceptions for age, if someone is physically or mentally unfit for work, caring for a child under the age of six, pregnant, etc. However, if a client is an Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWDs) between the ages of 18-49, they must meet more stringent work requirements.

An ABAWD can only receive SNAP benefits for three months in a three-year period if they do not meet the more stringent work requirements. ABAWDs are required to work 20 hours per week, participate in qualifying education and training activities at least 80 hours per month, or comply with a workfare program in order to satisfy their work requirements to continue to receive benefits. An

exception to this rule is if a person is homeless, pregnant, etc. It is important for the client to be sure that DHS is informed of their situation so they are not unnecessarily denied benefits.

### Non-Citizen Eligibility

Most non-citizens must be in a qualified alien category *and* meet one additional condition. A qualified alien can be categorized as lawfully admitted for permanent residence (“green card”), battered non-citizens, asylees under the Immigration and Nationality Act, refugees under the INA, trafficking victims, etc. An additional condition can be things such as living in the U.S for five years as a qualified alien, children under 18, blind or disabled individuals receiving benefits or assistance for their condition etc. For example, if a non-citizen has been admitted for permanent residence (received a green card) and has had this status for at least five years, they are eligible to apply for SNAP if they meet the income guidelines. However, some will not have to meet the five-year waiting period such as a child that is under 18 who has been grant permanent resident status. The child is eligible to apply for SNAP even if his/her parents have not been in the U.S. for five years.

It is important to know that children who are citizens of the United States are eligible to apply even if their parent(s) are not for any reason. States may not deny benefits to an entire household just because a non-citizen is ineligible due to his/her immigration status. If a parent wishes to apply for benefits for his/her citizen children, the parent may do so regardless of the status of his/her immigration. State agencies are not required to verify the immigration status of anyone who is applying for SNAP on behalf of others in their household if they do not wish to provide that information to DHS.

Under no circumstances may a state agency:

1. Require any information about the citizenship or immigration status of anyone who is *not applying* for SNAP;
2. Deny SNAP to applying household members because a non-applicant household member has not disclosed his/her citizenship or immigration status or social security number; or
3. Try to establish or verify immigration status through any means other than the procedures outline in the Non-Citizen Guidance Document found by clicking [HERE](#).
  - If the link above does not work, you can Google search “SNAP guidance document on non-citizen eligibility” or copy and paste the following link into your browser: [https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/Non-Citizen\\_Guidance\\_063011.pdf](https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/Non-Citizen_Guidance_063011.pdf)

Also, any non-citizen that is currently a qualified alien is potentially eligible for SNAP benefit regardless if he/she was undocumented previously.

This information can be found in the [Non-Citizen Guidance Document](#) by clicking the link or copying and pasting the above-mentioned link in your browser.

## Common Questions from Clients

How long will it take DHS to contact me?

- It can be up to 25 days for DHS to contact the applicant. However, it usually doesn't take that long. If the client qualifies for Emergency Food Assistance then DHS should get them benefits within seven days.
- Emergency Food Assistance Qualifications:
  - o Gross monthly income is less than \$150 and with resources (such as cash or bank accounts) of \$100 or less;
  - o Rent, mortgage, and utilities are more than the household's gross monthly income and assets;
  - o Migrant or seasonal farm worker and with assets of \$100 or less whose income is stopping or starting.

How much will I get?

- Only DHS can tell determine the client's monthly benefit and inform them of the amount. The minimum for any individual or family is \$15 per month. If any client mentions they are getting less than \$15, they need to call DHS and ask why because they should not be receiving less than \$15. The maximum amount any family can receive varies based on household size.

Will I have to travel for my interview with DHS?

- No. The interviews with DHS should be over the phone.

My income fluctuates month to month. Can I still apply?

- Absolutely! DHS handles cases like this all the time, and they will be able to assist the client with their specific situation.

My benefits stopped and I don't know why. Can you help?

- Most of the time this seems to be because the client failed to fill out and return their recertification form to DHS. Recertification will be required at three, six, twelve, or twenty-four months depending on the client's circumstances when he/she applied for benefits.
- If a client needs to do a recertification, the client can call the Food Assistance Hotline at 1-855-944-3663 to do a *new* application. This will get them into the system much faster than trying to locate their recertification form and returning it to DHS. Following the submission of the new application, the client will have to go through the interview process as before. There is not a way to recertify over the phone or online in lieu of returning the form mailed by DHS. The Hotline, and submitting a new application, is the only additional way a client can recertify with DHS.
- The client can contact their local DHS office if they have any questions regarding the status of their benefits or their application.

I have a paper application at home I will fill out.

- Encourage your clients to call the hotline rather than do a paper application. Paper applications can take longer to get into DHS's system and may delay the client in receiving their benefits.

## DHS Contact Numbers

DHS Status Change Line/ Customer Service: **1-877-347-5678**

- Monday – Friday 7-6 --- Need a new card with change of address
- Any changes to income, address, household size, etc.

Lost/Stolen EBT: **1-800-359-5802**

- Need new card with no change of address
- Check benefits to be added a few days prior to add date

Polk County DHS: **515-286-3555**

- 1900 Carpenter, DSM, 50314; Monday – Friday 8-4:30

Questions about Status of an Application: [Local County Office](#)

- Make sure to check “Income Maintenance” then type your location to find your local office
- If the above link doesn’t work, Google search “Iowa DHS office location”

If you have any questions, need outreach materials with the Food Assistance Hotline number, or would like to schedule a time for me to visit your organization, please contact me!

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