



## Virginia SNAP Emergency Allotment Toolkit

### Background

In late January of 2020, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a Public Health Emergency (PHE) as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. This declaration gave states the option to provide Emergency Allotment (EA) issuances to all participating SNAP households and raise their monthly benefit amount to the maximum allotment based on household size rather than income limits.

In March of 2020, SNAP state agencies were given the option to issue emergency allotments on a month-to-month basis if the state met certain criteria such as a state-level emergency declaration. Later in April 2021, the USDA provided guidance that gave states the option to issue an additional month of EA to phase out the end of their state emergency declaration and prepare households for the change.

Although the national Public Health Emergency has not ended, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 passed by Congress in December, concludes the authorization to issue EA nationwide. This means that in March of 2023, all SNAP households will return to pre-pandemic benefit amounts and not receive the additional supplemental benefits.

In Virginia, there are approximately 900,000 households receiving SNAP benefits as of 2022. We expect to see a large influx of neighbors looking for food and nutrition assistance. As a response, the Federation would like to provide resources that may be helpful in preparing your food bank and community partners for the loss in benefits.

### Emergency Allotment Communications (per the Virginia Department of Social Services)

- The last issuance of EA benefits in Virginia will be automatically added onto SNAP participants Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards on February 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Beginning March 2023, the distribution of benefits will continue as normal and SNAP households will receive benefits on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, or 7<sup>th</sup> day of the month.
- The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) and their respective local county offices will be sending notices to active SNAP households and authorized representatives.
  - [FAQ's](#) are posted on the VDSS website and allow for translations into various languages.
- Participating SNAP households will see a minimum reduction of **\$95** to their monthly benefit amount.
  - SNAP recipients received the [maximum allowable benefit](#) for their household size or a blanket increase of \$95, whichever was a larger increase.
  - Although the exact benefit amount for each household will vary due to household size and income, households with little to no net income will experience the smallest cut in benefits while households with larger net incomes will receive larger cuts.
- Even with the end of EA, SNAP application procedures will still follow usual program regulations, meaning normal program eligibility standards remain.
  - SNAP eligibility requirements in Virginia are based on financial (income and asset tests) and non-financial criteria such as immigration status.
  - Households with emergency needs may still qualify for the Expedited Service and receive SNAP benefits within 7 days, if eligible.



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- Virginians currently participating in SNAP can update their information and report changes through the following avenues:
  - Online through CommonHelp. Go to <https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access/> and log in to your account and provide applicable documentation and update changes to your case.
  - Fill out a [Change Report](#) and submit the form to a local department of social/human services at <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/index.cgi>
  - For more information, you may contact the VDSS temporary information line at 1-855-635-4370, Monday through Friday from 7AM to 6PM starting January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### Tips to Maximizing Benefits

- Even with the decrease in benefit amounts, SNAP households can still provide information to maximize their total benefit amount.
- SNAP benefits are determined by the net income of a household after applicable deductions are made. It is important for SNAP participants or those interested in applying to know that updating changes to their case will ensure that they receive the maximum allotments they are eligible for. Deductions are applied once documentation is provided and verified by a caseworker.
- You may be eligible for more SNAP benefits if:
  - The number of people in your household has increased
  - Your income has decreased
  - Your housing, childcare (including child support expenses), and medical costs have increased
- Take advantage of [deductions](#):
  - Households can deduct dependent care costs if it is necessary for a household to pay for dependent care expenses to continue, accept or seek employment requirements.
    - Court ordered child support payments may also be deducted
  - If a household includes elderly or disabled members, medical expenses exceeding **\$35** will be deducted
    - The medical standard deduction is **\$200**
    - Allowable expenses include medical and dental care, over-the-counter medication, medical supplies, dentures, hearing aids, or other costs that have been approved by a licensed health professional
  - Shelter costs may be deducted after all other applicable deductions have been determined
    - Expenses that are part of the cost of a shelter include rent, mortgage, homeowners insurance, utility costs and other applicable expenses
    - If the monthly shelter cost exceeds **50%** of the households adjusted net income, then they may receive a deduction of up to **\$624** per month
- Another useful tool to determine eligibility and receive an estimate on benefit amounts for a household is by using the [SNAP Calculator](#) provided by Virginia Poverty Law Center.

### Additional Tips

- Emphasize [Virginia Fresh Match](#) (VFM) programs
  - VFM offers nutrition incentives to households by doubling the value of SNAP benefits spent at participating farmers markets and food stores.



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- Virginians can use their SNAP EBT card at participating farmers markets to get more fruits and vegetables.
  - Go to <https://vfm.leapforlocalfood.org/how-it-works/> to find a participating location near you.
- Dial 2-1-1 or text CONNECT to 247211 to receive additional assistance to find local resources
  - Virginian callers - select option 9 to connect to a Community Resource Specialist
  - Select option 8 to connect to a Spanish speaking Community Resource Specialist
- Promote your food bank's agency locator so individuals in need can access a pantry near them. Pantry locators for all seven food banks can be found at [Find Assistance \(vafoodbanks.org\)](https://vafoodbanks.org)