

How to talk about SNAP:

Messaging/information for households reluctant to apply



In January 2021, DTA confirmed that over 714,000 MassHealth recipients with income under 150% of the federal poverty level are likely eligible but not getting SNAP.¹ Nearly 60% received or applied for SNAP in the past.² Here's ways you can encourage households who are reluctant to apply for SNAP.

First, start by asking if household received SNAP benefits in the past:

- If they did, that can shape the conversation because:
 - many SNAP rules have changed during COVID-19
 - currently all eligible households get the maximum SNAP benefit
 - applying is much simpler during COVID-19

Second, if household says they do not want to do a SNAP application – follow these talking points:

1. Not enough time/not interested:

- It takes just a few minutes for me to get the information for your SNAP application. After we file the application, DTA will let you know if they need more information. It is a simple process!
- During COVID, the monthly SNAP benefit amounts are higher! If you qualify, you will get the maximum SNAP amount for your household. For example, see →
- If you got benefits before, DTA has changed a lot:
 - It's easier to apply and stay on, and most households do not need to have a phone interview with DTA.
 - There is an easy mobile app called DTA Connect - to learn about your application and share information with DTA!
- You are helping your community if you get SNAP! Local grocery and corner stores benefit from SNAP, too. Plus, it is very important that you are healthy. SNAP can help you put food on the table.

Sample Household Size	Monthly SNAP (with supplement)
1	\$234
2	\$430
3	\$616
4	\$782
5	\$929

2. SNAP benefits are too low:

- During COVID, the monthly SNAP benefit amounts are higher! If you qualify, you will get the maximum SNAP amount for your household during the COVID-19 emergency. For example, see chart ↑.
- Getting SNAP can connect you to other types of help – like pandemic EBT benefits for some children, utility discounts, and more.
- You can also use your SNAP at farmers markets to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, and get additional benefits through the Healthy Incentive Program- at least \$40/mo to add to your SNAP.

3. Immigration concerns:

- Most immigrants with green cards - and many with work authorization - are eligible for SNAP. Everyone has a right to file a SNAP application and have DTA review their application.

- Even if you are not eligible, you may be eligible for SNAP for eligible household members, like your US citizen children. And SNAP benefits that you get for your kids are NOT considered in the immigration “public charge” test. *If public charge is raised specifically* - Would you like a list of Legal Services offices who can talk with you more about this?
- DTA does not report anyone to immigration officials.³ You are safe applying for SNAP.
- You don’t have to give DTA an SSN or the immigrant status information for an immigrant family member not applying for SNAP. But, any income they have may still count.

4. Other concerns/talking points – myth busting - Use these responses if these concerns surface:

SNAP Myth	Response
<i>“SNAP is hard to use.”</i>	SNAP benefits are like grocery store gift cards to buy food. The SNAP EBT card is just like a debit card where you put in a PIN. And you can use SNAP for online purchasing with an EBT card thru Amazon, Walmart or ALDI
<i>“My income is too high because of my Unemployment.”</i>	If you get Unemployment, the \$300/week boost in unemployment due to COVID-19 does NOT count as income for SNAP. Many workers who get unemployment are eligible!
<i>“I don’t want to tell DTA about my roommates or other people I live with”</i>	You only need to apply with people you buy and prepare most of your monthly food with. And you need to apply with certain family members like your spouse or your children who live with you, including children under age 22. We can talk more about this.
<i>“Someone else needs them”:</i>	Everyone who is eligible for SNAP can get it. This is a federal government-guaranteed program and you are not taking benefits away from someone else.
<i>“I don’t need a handout/I don’t want anyone else’s money.”</i>	SNAP isn’t a handout, it’s a hand. And everyone needs a hand from time to time, especially with the impact of COVID-19 on our community. [for workers/older adults etc] You’ve paid into this program through your taxes. It’s your money, you’ve earned this benefit.

Produced by the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, February 2020. And special thanks to our friends at Hunger Free VT for additional messaging suggestions.

¹ According to the January 2021 DTA data, of the 714K likely SNAP eligible MassHealth recipients, almost 213,000 are children under 19, about 95,000 are 60 or older and the rest are either parents with children or childless adults.

² Common reasons that households were denied/cut-off and did not reapply that are NOT relevant during the pandemic: a) application was denied because of the required interview, even though DTA had all needed proofs b) cut off because of work rules not currently in effect, c) got the “minimum” \$16/month and decided it was not worth it.

³ The only situation where DTA would report status information is where an immigrant is under an order of deportation, affirmatively applies for SNAP for themselves and shows DTA a final order of deportation as proof. This rarely if ever happens.