

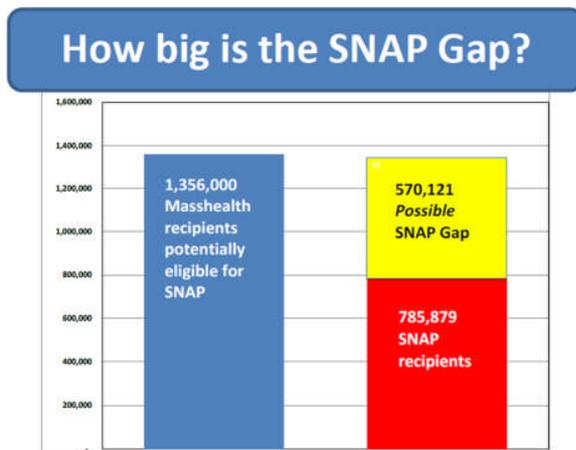
February 9, 2016

**RE: Massachusetts “SNAP Gap” - FY2017 Budget
Recommendation for a Common Application Portal**

Dear Representative:

We are writing to share with you information about federal nutrition dollars available to your low-income constituents and to urge your support to **close the SNAP Gap in Massachusetts** during the FY2017 budget deliberations. The Commonwealth has done a tremendous job ensuring that the majority of residents have health coverage, including our lowest income residents. But we have left important 100% federal funded nutrition benefits on the table!

The SNAP Gap is the difference between the number of people receiving MassHealth who are likely SNAP eligible and the number of people actually receiving SNAP. In Massachusetts, the size of this gap is about **570,000 people**. For many years the state has administered these programs separately. This means the application process and collection of documents is *duplicated* for both Masshealth and SNAP. This creates more work for the state and for clients. Many states have already implemented a single eligibility system. Significant federal dollars are available for systems improvements. It's time to close the SNAP Gap in Massachusetts!



For zipcode and city/town information comparing the MassHealth and SNAP recipient population in your local district, see attached data broken down by Senate District.

Recommendation for FY2017 House Ways and Means Budget:

- Urge House Ways and Means to include funding for EOHHS and DTA to implement systems changes that move MA toward an “integrated eligibility system.”
- Urge House Ways and Means to include Outside Section language directing EOHHS to create a “common application portal,” allowing MassHealth applicants and recipients to apply at the same time for SNAP and other key benefits. (Sample language on reverse).

It’s time for Massachusetts to **close the SNAP Gap** and bring 100% federal nutrition dollars to our neediest low income residents.

Sincerely,

Patricia Baker, SNAP Coalition Chair Pbaker@mlri.org

Proposed Outside Section Language:

Section X: Chapter 118E of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding after Section 77 the following section:-

Section 78. At the time of initial application for, or renewal of, MassHealth coverage or any other single state application or renewal process described in section 7A of chapter 118E, the department shall provide the MassHealth applicant or recipient with the opportunity to complete a common application for MassHealth and for programs administered by the department of transitional assistance, including the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Program for Emergency Aid to Elders, Disabled and Children pursuant to chapter 117A and the Program for Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children pursuant to chapter 118. A MassHealth applicant or recipient who elects to apply for these benefits shall have his or her eligibility information and verifications used to initiate a simultaneous common application and that information shall be transmitted to the department of transitional assistance to initiate the application for benefits. The common application for benefits must be accepted with the voluntary consent of the MassHealth applicant or recipient and shall have no bearing on the MassHealth eligibility of the applicant or recipient. The department of transitional assistance shall promptly inform said applicant of the eligibility requirements and any additional verifications or obligations of the program or programs elected by the applicant.

More information on closing the SNAP Gap!

- The proposed outside section would establish a common application portal to allow low income person the option to file an application at the same time for MassHealth, federal SNAP and other needs-based programs. Both DTA and MassHealth could then use the same client eligibility information and verifications to determine eligibility for most households.
- Many states have integrated eligibility and more are working on relinking these programs.¹ The Affordable Care Act authorized a federal 90% match for design and development of integrated systems—with 75% match for ongoing operations and management.² A more efficient and integrated eligibility determination system will enable Massachusetts to close the SNAP gap and bring benefits determination processes into the 21st century.
- Receipt of SNAP for low wage working families enables Massachusetts school age children to be “directly certified” for free school meals under the National School Lunch Program. An increase in “direct certification” enables school districts with large numbers of low-income families to qualify for universal free school meals under the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Direct certification is also newly proposed metric for determining “economically disadvantaged children” for distribution of Chapter 70 funding.³

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation Report, Modern Era Medicaid, January 2105 <http://kff.org/health-reform/report/modern-era-medicaid-findings-from-a-50-state-survey-of-eligibility-enrollment-renewal-and-cost-sharing-policies-in-medicaid-and-chip-as-of-january-2015/>

² 45 CFR Part 433 (Issued 12/4/2015), Tri-Agency Letter: Additional Guidance to States on the OMB Circular A-87 Cost Allocation Exception (July 20, 2015) accessed at: <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/>

³ DESE Information Data Services Collection Announcement, Redefining Low Income - A New Metric for K-12 Education Data (July 16, 2015) <http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/ed.html>