



Summer 2022 Advisory Board Statewide Updates

Common Application for MassHealth/SNAP

On July 28, the Administration announced that residents can now easily initiate a SNAP application when applying for or renewing their MassHealth benefits online. These updates will improve the customer experience by streamlining the process to apply for SNAP benefits while residents are already submitting information needed to determine their healthcare eligibility. This initiative is another vital step to integrating and modernizing access to public benefit programs and ensuring there is no wrong door for residents to access assistance. Read our press release in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Expanding Client Access in Celebration of ADA Anniversary

July was Disability Pride Month and marked the 32nd anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law, a landmark civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on a disability. To mark this anniversary and ensure DTA resources are equitable and inclusive, in July the agency rolled out a client-facing Pictorial Communication Board in all local offices to support clients who are Deaf, hard of hearing, nonverbal or have limited verbal or English proficiency. These boards include images and descriptive words in eight languages to help determine the primary reason for a client's visit. Read our news article in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Over 100 New HIP Vendors

Recently, the Administration celebrated Massachusetts Farmers' Market Week and announced over 100 new local Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) farm vendors. The majority of new vendors are small-scale farmers who live in or have close ties to the communities they serve, while others are agricultural vendors with demonstrated capacity to serve high-need communities through innovative delivery models and sales locations embedded into communities with multiple days of availability. Collectively, selected vendors will be able to provide HIP access in more than 25 languages, 76% of towns previously identified as having low HIP access for their SNAP client population will be served by the new vendors, and vendors will serve families in 25 of 26 of the state's Gateway Cities. Read more in our press release in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

EBT Security & Protecting Benefits

DTA has been made aware of a recent increase in skimming and phishing scams that have impacted DTA clients. Skimming is a type of theft where thieves put a device on a store's card-swiping machine to copy card and PIN information. This information is used to make fake EBT cards. These are then used to steal money or SNAP funds from real accounts. Skimming can happen anywhere someone swipes an EBT card. Phishing is where thieves use texts or phone calls to get you to share confidential information about your identity or card information.

The agency has sent out a media advisory in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), created [outreach materials](#) in 11 languages and created dedicated webpages: [Mass.gov/ProtectYourEBT](https://www.mass.gov/ProtectYourEBT) and [Mass.gov/ProtejaSuEBT](https://www.mass.gov/ProtejaSuEBT).

The agency has also taken multiple proactive steps to notify clients of these scams and ways to protect their benefits (change their PIN), including: sending text messages and notices to clients, adding an alert on the agency's mobile app DTA Connect, inserting flyers in regular DTA mailings and providing them in DTA local offices, and updating the message on the DTA Assistance Line (opening and hold messages) to include this information.

Despite DTA's outreach efforts, many DTA clients have still not recently changed their PINs, making them vulnerable to skimming schemes. To protect DTA clients and their benefits from known skimming scams, DTA is requiring cardholders in locations with a high incidence of skimming to set a new PIN to continue to use their EBT card if they have not received a new card or changed their PIN recently. DTA notified cardholders before this occurred and provided special outreach to residents with a need for certain accommodations, older adults, immigrants, and survivors of domestic violence. DTA also alerted stakeholders, including legislators and retailer associations and has collaborated on outreach with sister agencies and community partners. Cardholders can change their PIN through automated steps by calling the number on the back of their card. If anyone has trouble changing their PIN, DTA is available to help.

Celebrating 30 Years of SNAP Nutrition Education with Release for Vendors to Participate

June marked the 30th anniversary of the SNAP Nutrition Education Program (SNAP-Ed). This summer the Administration opened a Request for Responses (RFR) to procure new vendors for the Commonwealth's SNAP-Ed program. This was the first time in 10 years vendors could apply to participate in the grant program, with \$7.4 million of federal funds available. Taking an intentional approach to bring on new SNAP-Ed vendors will further strengthen the Commonwealth's effort to support equitable access to nutritious food, reduce chronic disease, and promote health and well-being. Read more our press release in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Summer P-EBT

Massachusetts received federal approval to extend Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) through August 2022. All eligible infants and children received a total of \$391 in P-EBT benefits in two equal payments of \$195.50 in July and August. This supported over 550,000 kids, bringing approximately \$240 million into the state's local economy. Read more in our press release in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). More information is available at MAp-EBT.org.

Fiscal Year 2023 Budget

Governor Baker signed the Fiscal Year 2023 budget at the end of July. Several DTA and food security related items include: \$12 million for HIP, \$110 million for Universal School Meals for students in K-12 education, 10% increase to TAFDC and EAEDC grant levels starting in October 2022, increases TAFDC fall clothing allowance to \$400 for each eligible child, \$1.5 million increase to DTA's 2-generation grant program to support engaging young parents on their economic goals, \$5.25 million for Secure Jobs to help homeless families increase their economic mobility and a continued commitment to provide child care to SNAP Path to Work participants.

TAFDC Clothing Allowance

DTA will begin issuing a \$400 per child clothing allowance for all eligible TAFDC clients under age 19 starting August 26, 2022. In helping families with the costs of winter clothes ahead of the coming school year, these payments also free up other resource's families can use for other essential and critical expenses. In collaboration with DPH, these notices will also include multilingual information on the COVID-19 vaccine.

SNAP Medical Deduction

The Department has received first in the nation federal approval to allow older adults and clients with disabilities to self-declare medical expenses within the standard medical deduction (SMD) range. This range includes eligible out-of-pocket medical costs greater than \$35, and less than or equal to \$190 per month. This flexibility allows clients to access the deduction without the burden of collecting multiple receipts and documents, while also maximizing the household's SNAP benefits. To receive a medical expense deduction above \$190 clients are still required to submit verifications. DTA is working on changes to DTA Connect to streamline declaring medical expenses in the future.

EBT Card to Culture

Mass Cultural Council and DTA's EBT Card to Culture Program offers free or discounted admissions to DTA clients at many of the Commonwealth's museums and cultural institutions. Throughout 2021, 105 organizations gave 174,148 free or discounted admissions to EBT cardholders to engage in cultural programming across Massachusetts. [Learn more about the program.](#)

SNAP Restaurant Meals Program

The Baker-Polito Administration opened a Notice of Opportunity (NOO) to strategically onboard restaurants and food trucks for the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) pilot. Under federal rules, the RMP allows individuals experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities and older adults (aged 60+) to use their SNAP benefits at select, participating restaurants/food trucks. [The application](#) period for businesses has been extended from August 31, 2022 to September 30, 2022.

Updated Expungement Dates

Per federal requirements, DTA has reduced the SNAP expungement timeline from 365 days to 274 days (nine months). If someone does not use any SNAP benefits for 274 days, benefits that are 274 days old or older will be removed from their EBT card. DTA has updated client notices, the [EBT guide](#) and [outreach brochures](#) in 6 languages to reflect this change.

New SNAP Online Retailers

The Administration recently announced the addition of a local retailer to the Commonwealth's SNAP Online Purchasing Program Geissler's Supermarket ([English](#), [Spanish](#) press release). Instacart has also expanded participating vendors on their platform, including Roche Bros., Sudbury Farms, and Wegmans. For more information on the state's program, visit www.Mass.gov/SNAPOnline.

Federal Public Health Emergency

The federal government extended its public health emergency for 90 days into October. There are several pandemic-related SNAP policies and waivers that are contingent on the federal public health emergency declaration, including waiving the mandatory interview and interim reports. This also ensures the pandemic-related SNAP emergency allotments will continue through December as long as there is both a state and federal public health emergency.