

Advocacy Update 5.06.2020



NTFB VOICE Advocacy Update

ADVOCATING FOR A HUNGER-FREE, HEALTHY NORTH TEXAS

In Brief:

- SNAP Changes
- TEFAP Changes
- The Fourth Stimulus Package
- What's next?

SNAP Response to CoViD-19 Pandemic

Emergency Allotments to Reach Maximum Benefits

The Texas Health & Human Services Commission was granted approval from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to issue April and May 2020 emergency allotment (EA) supplements to participating Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) households. Households who are approved for SNAP in April 2020 and May 2020 automatically received supplements that will bring the household up to the maximum monthly allotment for the household's size. Typically SNAP benefits can vary from household to household based off of deductions, income and expenses.

Automatic Re-certification Periods

Typically SNAP benefits must be re-certified in regular intervals. However, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approved extending SNAP certification periods for six additional months beginning in March 2020. This policy applies to all SNAP households with re-certifications due in March, April and May 2020.

Households with certification periods ending in:

- March 2020 are automatically extended through September 2020;
- April 2020 are automatically extended through October 2020; and
- May 2020 are automatically extended through November 2020.

SNAP Employment & Training (E&T)

SNAP recipients are not currently required to participate in SNAP E&T as SNAP E&T services were temporarily suspended. All SNAP recipients are considered exempt participants during the pandemic.

Waiving Work Requirements for ABAWDs – Able Bodied Adult Without Dependents

Based on federal law, HR 6201 (Families First Coronavirus Response Act), all states must suspend counting months towards the ABAWD time limit during the pandemic. ABAWDs not working or participating in work activities an average of 20 hours per week are not subject to federal time limits until further notice.

Video-based SNAP Application Assistance

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission approved a request to modify the SNAP Application Assistance contract that allows virtual application assistance through Your Texas Benefits. This allows our Social Services Assistance team to use GoTo meeting video/audio conferencing software to connect with applicants online, assist them in completing and application, and submit that application through Your Texas Benefits. It also helps the team by the ability to look up case information for all clients through Your Texas Benefits without the client being physical present.

Telephonic Signature

This would allow the Social Service Assistance team to accept a signature over the phone to submit a SNAP application. Stay tuned to see if this will move forward!

P-EBT

Pandemic-EBT is a benefit for families with children who are enrolled in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. The benefit is meant to replace the value of meals that the kids are currently not receiving at school. When issued, the benefit will be retroactive to the date when schools closed.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act creates the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program, an important opportunity to provide nutritional resources to families who are losing access to free or reduced-price school meals as school across the country close in response to COVID-19. Texas has not yet accepted a State plan for this program but advocates are working hard to make this happen.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Under a Disaster Declaration it is possible to seek flexibility from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) TEFAP program. The North Texas Food Bank immediately applied for as much flexibility to this program as possible in order to broadly reach many who have been impacted by the CoViD-19 economic crisis.

Typically this program allows households who make below 185% of the Federal Poverty Limit to access USDA foods once a month. This program has an intake process that gathers specific information from households seeking assistance without ever requiring an identification card from those seeking help.

Simplified Intake

TDA has approved the “one-time distribution” option that allows Partner Agencies to use this simplified intake form to distribute TEFAP commodities. It only needs four items: Name, Address, Household Income, and Number of People in the House. It does not require a signature. Basic intake/income information is still necessary but can be gathered verbally and self-declared. Just like typical TEFAP, no identification cards are required

Disaster Household Distribution Program

This program is requested county by county and has a long list of items needed to apply. North Texas Food Bank was excited to receive this program in three of our thirteen counties. This allows NTFB to use USDA food at our mobile distribution sites, it waives all intake information (no forms!), and the USDA will replace the food we distribute through our mobile program. Also, just like typical TEFAP, no identification cards are required.

We advocated and applied for both of these flexibilities in order to simplify our mobile disaster distributions and get more food to more people in a safe manner.

The Fourth Stimulus Package

Phase 1: Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act 2020

Phase 2: The Family First Coronavirus Response Act

Phase 3: The CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act)

The Senate returned from recess on May 4th and the House is set to return soon. They will get to work on the fourth installment (Phase 4) of the CoViD-19 response stimulus package.

The fourth stimulus package will ask to increase SNAP benefits for all recipients by increasing the thrifty food plan by at least 15%, this would raise the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30. It also will ask to provide \$500 million for TEFAP food and \$500 million for TEFAP storage and distribution.

Hanging in there?

I hope all of you out there are hanging in there. It has been hard for this analytical problem solver to just let go and realize there is no way to think out of our current state of affairs.

And other times just when it looks like there's an answer, I'm reminded that sometimes there is no correlation or answer that is the magic fix. If you ever need a nerd-binge check out Spurious Correlations to realize even when the numbers line up, the data doesn't make sense.



Have a great rest of your week!

Questions or Comments?

Charlotte totally would have won the barn spelling bee

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Don't want these updates any longer? Email policy@ntfb.org and I'll remove you quickly but remorsefully...

Apologies if you received this twice, the kinks are stubborn!