

SNAP (Food Stamp) Reductions for Some Households Starting April 1, 2011

Questions and Answers

Can the Department of Social Services do anything to keep SNAP benefits from going down?

No. This is a change required by the federal government.

Why are SNAP benefits going down for some households?

SNAP is a federal program run by the Department of Social Services. Federal rules consider several things in determining a household's SNAP benefits. One of these is a standard amount that is allowed for heating and utility costs. The standard amount for heating and utility costs is going from \$720 a month to \$662 a month as of April 1st. A lower standard amount for heat and utilities means that we have to count more of a household's income. Counting more income means a lower SNAP benefit for many households.

Will SNAP benefits go down for all SNAP households?

No. Even though we have to use the lower heat and utility amount for all SNAP households, not everyone's SNAP benefits will go down. About 1 out of every 4 SNAP households will see a reduction of their SNAP benefits starting April 1st.

If most SNAP households receive a standard amount for heat and utilities, why aren't everyone's SNAP benefits going down?

The calculation for SNAP benefits is set by federal regulations and is very complicated. A household's income, the amount of rent, the number of people in the household, child support obligations and the amount of out-of-pocket medical and child care expenses are used to compute the amount of benefits. Because these things can vary from household to household, some households will not see their benefits reduced even though we are using the lower standard amount for heat and utilities for everyone.

How much are SNAP benefits going down?

It depends on the household's income, the amount of rent, the number of people in the household and the amount of out-of-pocket medical and child care expenses. SNAP benefits will go down by \$10 - \$18 per month in most cases, but some may be less while others may be more.

Why is this happening?

SNAP is a federal program run by the Department of Social Services. Because SNAP is a federal program, we have to use federal rules. The federal rules require states to revise the standard amount for heat and utilities from time to time. The last time we revised this standard was based on energy prices in July of 2008, when they were at their highest. The heating and utility standard of \$720 a month that we have been using is based on these high energy costs.

Energy prices are high now and are going up, so why is this happening now?

States were supposed to revise the standard for heat and utility costs based on prices in July 2009. Energy costs dropped significantly from July 2008 to July 2009, so the standard amount for heat and utilities would have also dropped significantly. This would have meant large SNAP benefit reductions. To keep this from happening, the federal government allowed states to postpone the revision of the heat and utility cost standard until April 2011. Since energy prices are higher now than they were in July 2009, the SNAP benefit reductions are not as large as they would have been. Despite the higher energy prices we are currently seeing, energy prices are still lower than they were in July 2008, so we still must reduce the standard for heat and utilities.

Will SNAP benefits go back up if energy costs keep rising?

Probably. We plan to revise the standard for heat and utilities again this October. If energy prices increase to where they were in July 2008 (or more), we will increase the standard for heat and utilities and many households will see an increase in their SNAP benefits.

Can SNAP recipients request a hearing if they don't agree?

If recipients disagree with this decision, they may request a hearing within 90 days of this notice. Information on how to request a hearing is contained in the notice they are receiving to advise them of the reduction in SNAP benefits. A hearing decision,

however, cannot change the federal requirement to reduce the heating and fuel deduction.

Will SNAP benefits stay the same if they request a hearing?

Recipients may continue to receive their current level of SNAP benefits pending the outcome of the hearing only if they request a hearing within 10 days of being notified of the change in their benefits and if the reason for the request is that they believe we have made a mistake in computing the amount of their benefit or in applying federal law to their case. If the hearing upholds the department's decision to reduce the benefits, the recipient must repay the benefits they were not entitled to receive.

How do recipients know if their SNAP benefits are correct?

There is an online SNAP calculator that can be used to see if their benefit is correct. The online calculator is available at www.ctfoodstamps.org

What if recipients need more information?

Recipients can contact United Way's 2-1-1 number for more information. In addition, they can contact our SNAP community partners:

End Hunger CT!

Hartford (860) 527-0856

Willimantic (860) 208-4219

Connecticut Association for Human Services (860) 951-2212

Hispanic Health Council (860) 560-2101

Local Community Action Agencies www.cafca.org

CT DSS

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