

SNAP Questions & Suggested Answers

Why are Questions and Answers (Q&As) important? Q&As are anticipated questions and suggested answers that program administrators and outreach spokespeople can study to help get ready for media interviews or other public speaking. You might receive these questions from the media, the public, or others.

Here are some examples of Q&As about SNAP outreach:

Why are you encouraging people to enroll in SNAP?

RESPONSE

SNAP is a nutrition assistance program that helps low-income people put healthy food on the table. SNAP supplements the food budgets of low-income people who are having a tough time paying for food for themselves or their families. Children have important nutritional needs and they make up about half of those currently receiving SNAP benefits. We want everyone who is eligible to have the opportunity to apply for benefits so that they can have access to healthier diets. Our outreach efforts are specially targeted to people who are least likely to understand that they may be eligible: elderly persons, immigrants, and working poor.

Why are you encouraging the use of SNAP benefits when application numbers are increasing already?

RESPONSE

Yes, enrollment numbers are increasing. However, there are still many people who need help. Currently, in an average month, more than 13 million eligible households are NOT receiving SNAP benefits. This is usually because they do not think they qualify, or think there are people in greater need of the benefits. We want to reach out to those people, encourage them to get prescreened, and, if appropriate, apply for SNAP benefits so they can get help with their grocery bills. SNAP benefits are not only good for low-income people; they also help the local economy.

Are the financial benefits worth the effort to enroll?

RESPONSE

SNAP benefits are not intended to be the only means of paying the grocery bill, but they do help low-income people purchase healthier food items, such as fruits and vegetables. Monthly benefits vary based on income and household size. On average, an eligible person receives around \$101 per month (fiscal year 2008 data). This additional support will help low-income households purchase nutritious foods for a healthy diet.

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Can people purchase whatever they want with their SNAP benefits?

RESPONSE

SNAP benefits are intended to supplement a household's grocery budgets and help them purchase healthier foods. Households can use SNAP benefits to purchase a wide range of food items. Participants are encouraged to use their SNAP benefits wisely to maximize their nutrition impact and economic value. To that end, they are encouraged to buy nutrient-dense foods such as whole-grain bread and cereals; fruits and vegetables; low fat meats, fish, and poultry and milk products. Other items that can be purchased with SNAP benefits are seeds and plants that produce food. Nonfood items cannot be bought with SNAP benefits.

I have heard that enrolling in SNAP is difficult. What does it involve?

RESPONSE

USDA and State and local agencies that administer SNAP are working to improve the application process by simplifying forms, offering extended office hours, and, in some instances, allowing online applications. Anyone can check to see if they might qualify for benefits through an online prescreening process at www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/.

Anyone interested in finding out more about how to apply should call 1-800-221-5689 for information. [Localize this information if your State or community has a toll-free number.]

How long does it take to start receiving benefits?

RESPONSE

If you are in special need because of very low income, you may receive benefits within 7 days, if eligible. However, for others, it may take up to 30 days to receive benefits. At the time of application, an eligibility worker will give applicants this type of information.

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What measures are taken to prevent SNAP fraud?

RESPONSE

USDA is committed to integrity in all of its nutrition assistance programs. USDA has taken several steps to make it easier to identify and punish those who misuse SNAP benefits. Retailers who violate program rules, recipients who try to obtain their benefits based on false information, or recipients who sell their benefits can be removed from the program, fined, and even jailed. Also, with the introduction of the electronic benefit card (EBT), which works much like a debit card at a grocery store, the USDA is better able to track and deter fraud.

Doesn't the EBT card make it easier for people to abuse the system?

RESPONSE

No. The EBT card makes it more difficult for people to commit SNAP fraud. EBT eliminates paper food stamps and creates an electronic record for each transaction, making fraud easier to detect. Not only does the EBT card cut down on SNAP abuse, but it also reduces the stigma some people associate with receiving SNAP benefits.

Why are you advertising a free benefit for poor people?

RESPONSE

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a nutrition program that helps low-income people have better diets, and better eating can mean better health. There are many people who are eligible for SNAP benefits but are not participating in the program. SNAP is a win-win for local retailers and local communities. Each \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community. Average SNAP benefits are about \$101 a month per person (fiscal year 2008 data), translating to money spent in local grocery stores. Everyone wins when eligible people take advantage of benefits to which they are entitled.