More Help Putting Food on the Table

DHHS has made improvements to SNAP (food assistance) to reduce hunger in Maine

Maine increased the SNAP Standard utility allowance (SUA) The SUA increases the amount of Food Assistance people can get to reflect the impact on household budgets of increased heating and utility costs in the winter. Increasing Maine’s SUA to more realistically reflect heating fuel costs gets more assistance to people who need it to help offset the added cost of staying warm throughout the Maine winter. The new Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) is $782, a substantial increase from $663 last year!

Maine is once again taking advantage of SNAP geographic waivers so people in areas with relatively high unemployment can keep their food assistance after 3 months. As of September 30, 2019, Maine eliminated the 3-month time limit for SNAP in areas with higher unemployment, so people are not penalized by the loss of food if they’re unable to work after 3 months. This will help rural areas where unemployment is higher and year-round jobs are scarcer like many towns in Aroostook, Piscataquis, Washington, Oxford, northern Penobscot and Somerset counties. Most states take advantage of these waivers; Maine used to and now does again. A new federal rule may make some changes in this area – we will share any updates before April 2020 when we will know how Maine will implement any changes.

Maine eliminated the asset test in SNAP for older Mainers and people with disabilities that denied them Food Assistance based on their assets. This change became effective in December of 2019. In 2015, The LePage Administration instituted an asset test for older Mainers, people with disabilities, and others without minor children at home. This punitive policy caused more than 8,000 Mainers to lose Food Assistance simply because they put some dollars aside to protect against unexpected emergencies. Now households in which all members are 60 or older OR have a disability will not be subject to an asset test. A $5,000 asset test does remain for all other households. These are households that do not include a minor child or in which all members are not 60 or over or disabled.

Maine reinstated simplified reporting in SNAP. In May of 2019, Maine returned to a prior policy of simplified reporting for Food Assistance. This means that households are required to report changes only when their total countable income exceeds 130% of the federal poverty level or when work hours for able-bodied adults without dependents fall below 20 hours a week. Prior to this change most changes in circumstances had be reported within ten days. Simplified reporting is less burdensome for people and for the state. This change is being phased in and will apply to all households until April of 2020.