



INCREASING ACCESS TO FOOD STAMPS/EBT BENEFITS

The objective of this administrative work is to address vague and misleading language on SNAP Benefit eligibility on Washington State application platforms by creating a step-by-step guide with simplified language on all eligibility requirements, state and federal. Currently, young people between the ages of 18 and 22 living with a guardian are unable to qualify for SNAP benefits if the guardian is already receiving benefits, clarified in the federal definition of a "household." However, state application sites omit this definition and circumstance, leading to confusion during the application process. By creating a simplified guide for the state application portal, we can ensure that all eligibility criteria, state or federal, are visible and consistent with all regulations for this program in Washington State.

ISSUE & BACKGROUND

KEY ISSUE

Young people in Washington State are facing barriers while applying for SNAP benefits, where eligibility requirements are unclear and inconsistent across state and federal websites, making the process of applying for food stamps difficult to navigate and inaccessible for many young people.

CONTEXT

While state requirements for food stamps are visible on the state's website, it is vaguely written and does not reference the federal definition of "household," which is a key component on whether young people between the ages of 18 and 22 living with a guardian are able to qualify for SNAP.

The US Dept. of Agriculture oversees SNAP benefits, but applications are submitted through the states. While DSHS and Washington Connections manages the information for in-state application in Washington State, it only explicitly covers the state requirements for SNAP and does not reference the restrictions around the federal definition of a "household," which states that everyone living in the household under the age of 22 counts as 1 household, even if some family members purchase their own food.

IMPACT

Due to this lack of valuable information on multi-person households, young people across the state between ages 18 and 22 are left unable to qualify for SNAP benefits after navigating the convoluted application process if they happen to live with a guardian on SNAP benefits that chooses not to cover their dependent's food costs.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

- **Legislative/Regulatory Action:** The Mockingbird Society is working closely with DSHS to develop a simplified, step-by-step guide for SNAP benefits, food assistance, and related services within WA State, where state and federal requirements are visible and clear, to make the process more accessible for all.
- **Resolution:** This course of action addresses vague and misleading language around SNAP benefit requirements by the state and federal governments and simplifies the application process to be more accessible to young people, amongst others, that need these services.
- **Legislative Pathway:** This policy priority focuses on adding to and adjusting existing language, no direct legislative action is required.





BENEFITS & OUTCOMES

Positive Outcomes:

- Reduces confusion around eligibility, particularly in multi-person households
- Creates consistency between state and federal websites on eligibility requirements

Who Benefits:

Everyone that needs to apply for SNAP benefits in WA State, especially young people between 18 and 22.

Social, Economic, or Public Health Benefits:

Streamlining the application process will allow more people to successfully navigate this welfare system and access services that they otherwise may not have been able to reach.

Measurable Results:

Currently, trackable reports such as SNAPshots and the SNAP-Ed Needs Assessment occur at least on a yearly basis and can give an insight on how many people are accessing this service in WA State as well as where the system is lacking sufficient supports to operate effectively.

TAKE ACTION

With rising costs of living, young people more than ever need all the support they can get. It is imperative that eligibility requirements are clear and visible to the public because welfare is only effective if the people that need these services can successfully navigate them. TMS will work with DSHS to create a simplified guide with step-by-step instructions to navigate the SNAP program to clear up misleading language on eligibility.

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