Supporting Survivors' Access to SNAP

A Guide for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocates

Economic Security for Survivors
of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Working Group

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I. Introduction

Who We Are

The Economic Security for Survivors Working Group includes local, state, and national organizations that advocate for survivors[1] of domestic violence and sexual assault[2] and share a commitment to advancing public policies and programs that support their economic security. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, Domestic Violence and Paid Leave Advocate Lydia Waligorski, and Futures Without Violence co-lead the working group. A list of the working group members appears at the end of this document.

Purpose

This document provides guidance to individuals and programs serving survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault so they can help maximize access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. New eligibility requirements are being implemented in 2025 and 2026 following enactment of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). OBBBA expanded the work requirements for SNAP and included a provision denying eligibility to certain adults who previously qualified unless they demonstrate that they meet a work requirement or qualify for an exemption. Importantly, states have some flexibility in implementing these changes to SNAP.

This document provides an introduction to SNAP and then describes the changes that result from recently passed federal legislation. However, it is critical that advocates also reach out to their state Department of Health and Human Services for state-specific information.[3] This document also provides suggestions to help survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault continue to receive these supports or access them. Several key recommendations can be found below.

Key Recommendations

- Those working with survivors should check their understanding of the SNAP program before providing guidance because recently passed federal legislation has significantly changed the program.

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[1] We use the term survivor throughout this document to refer to individuals who have experienced or are experiencing forms of domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

[2] The Workgroup members encourage broad definitions of each of these terms and inclusion of survivors of all forms of gender-based violence in public benefits programs that go beyond the scope of these guidelines including survivors and victims of trafficking, stalking, child abuse, and gun violence.

[3] SNAP is administered on a state level and states have some discretion regarding income requirements, exemptions and other requirements. There are resources available online that discuss the eligibility requirements for SNAP in each state in more detail. These details are beyond the scope of this document.

- States have significant discretion regarding how they implement the SNAP program, so it is important that those assisting survivors review information from the state enforcement agency for SNAP and, if possible, develop relationships with staff. Some states have adopted policies intended specifically to help survivors access SNAP, others have policies that are particularly helpful for survivors even if they are not specifically named.
- It remains essential to center the safety and confidentiality of survivors, and to take significant care when assisting immigrant survivors in accessing SNAP benefits.

Background

A primary obstacle to safety for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault is economic insecurity.[4] A 2018 survey of survivors of intimate partner violence found that nearly three in four respondents (74%) remained in abusive relationships due to financial insecurity.[5] This precarity was often driven by partners' abusive behaviors and a lack of secure employment or access to quality job opportunities.[6] A 2025 survey found that housing is the number one unmet need of survivors of sexual assault, followed by cash assistance, basic needs (such as food and clothing), and mental health care.[7] Many survivors are focused on immediate, fundamental needs such as physical safety and access to safe, stable housing. The accumulation of unmet needs makes it difficult to find work or access social services.[8]

Many survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault rely on SNAP and other public benefits to meet their basic needs. Nearly 80% of staff in programs serving survivors reported that most domestic violence victims rely on SNAP to help address their basic needs and to establish safety and security.[9] This same 2018 survey found that 55% of program staff reported that most sexual assault victims need SNAP to establish safety and stability.[10] Survivors with disabilities, transgender survivors, immigrant survivors, survivors of color and LGBTQ+ survivors face

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[4] See Breiding MJ, Basile KC, Klevens J, Smith SG. *Economic Insecurity and Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Victimization*. Am J Prev Med. 2017 Oct;53(4):457-464. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2017.03.021. Epub 2017 May 10. PMID: 28501239; PMCID: PMC6426442 available at https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6426442/pdf/nihms-1016342.pdf.

[5] Cynthia Hess, Alona Del Rosario, Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security, (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018)("Hess and Del Rosario").

[6] Hess and Del Rosario at 34.

[7] See https://endsexualviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026-RCC-Survey-Infographic-2.25.26.pdf

[8] *See Intersecting Barriers: Challenges to Economic Empowerment for Domestic Violence Survivors*, Women Employed at 5 (2022) https://womenemployed.org/resources/intersecting-barriers/.

[9] Shaina Goodman, *The Difference Between Surviving and Not Surviving: Public Benefits Programs and sexual assault Victims' Economic Security*, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and the Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law (2018) available at https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-01/TheDifferenceBetweenSurvivingandNotSurviving_Jan2018.pdf

[10] Id.

greater needs for SNAP.[11] A critical component of survivor advocacy is helping survivors access public benefits, including SNAP, particularly as eligibility requirements for these programs change.

In order to best support survivors accessing the state and federal food and health benefits to which they are eligible and qualified, it is critical that program staff understand how SNAP requirements have recently changed. Furthermore, as these changes are implemented, there will be opportunities to encourage state agencies to use their discretion in structuring programs to make SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid[12] benefits accessible to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Importantly, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is another state-run program that survivors may access for additional economic assistance that is beyond the scope of this document.[13] Some states offer cash assistance programs to certain low-income individuals including survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.[14] A handful of states provide state-funded food assistance to immigrants who are excluded from federal SNAP benefits.

II. What is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), frequently referenced as food stamps, is a U.S. federal and state-funded program administered by each state. States provide monthly food benefits through SNAP to certain individuals and families who are low-income to help them buy groceries. Federal law sets the core eligibility rules for SNAP, and states administer the program and have some discretion in determining who qualifies for benefits. As a result, eligibility varies from state to state, and it is important to learn about the way SNAP is administered in the state in which the individual who is seeking SNAP resides. Approved recipients receive an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, which is loaded each month with funds that may be spent at authorized grocery stores, farmers' markets and food co-ops to buy fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, breads and cereals, non-alcoholic beverages, and seeds and plants to grow food.

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[11] Id.; see DuMonthier, A., & Dusenbery, M., Intersections of domestic violence and economic security (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2016) available at https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/B362-Domestic-Violence-and-Economic-Security.pdf

[12] Please see Futures Without Violence resources available there for additional information about Medicaid changes: https://futureswithoutviolence.org/initiative/survivors-health-access-project/

[13] For more information about TANF please see https://acf.gov/ofa/programs-services/tanf and https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/tanf-and-domestic-violence-cash-assistance-matters-to-survivors.

[14] Economic Security of Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Working Gorup, Guidelines for Developing Cash Assistance Programs for Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, available at https://futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/FUTURES-Economic-Security-Working-Group-Cash-Assistance-Guidelines-Final-1.pdf

PRACTICE TIPS

- To apply for SNAP benefits or to obtain the most up-to-date information about SNAP, contact the local SNAP office in the state where the survivor lives. In general, a survivor applies for benefits online, but it is possible in some states to apply in person, by mail, or by phone.
- Individuals have a right to apply for benefits with just their name, address and signature.
- SNAP benefits begin the date the individual applies for them, so it is beneficial for a survivor to apply as soon as possible.
- The state agency must verify identity, but if the survivor does not have an ID, the agency must provide other options which could include a written statement from staff at a domestic violence shelter or rape crisis center. If a survivor does not have an address where they can reliably get mail, the agency can send notices to a local organization like a shelter or to a P.O. Box.
- It may be helpful for a survivor to disclose that they are experiencing and/or fleeing domestic violence or sexual assault when they apply for SNAP benefits as long as their confidentiality, privacy, and safety are protected. However, they are not required to disclose this information to access SNAP.
- Any household, including individuals fleeing from domestic violence or sexual assault, may qualify for expedited SNAP benefits within 7 days of applying if the household has less than $150 in gross monthly income and $100 or less in cash.[15]
- If possible, we recommend assisting a survivor with their applications by helping them collect this information in advance and building a relationship with staff at the local state Department of Health and Human Services office that administers SNAP.

A. Income Requirements for SNAP

To be eligible for SNAP benefits, a household's gross monthly income must generally be at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG). (From October 2026 through September 30, 2027, this limit is $1,729 per month for a household of one. SNAP benefits are updated every year on October 1.)[16] Many states use broader income guidelines up to 200% of the FPG, recognizing that many low-income individuals who need food have an income of more than 130% of the FPG. These higher limits vary by state. Certain expenses may be deducted, which can lower income calculations for purposes of SNAP.[17]

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[15] See 7 CFR § 273.2(i)(1)(i)(describing the standard federal threshold for 7-day expedited SNAP processing mandating emergency processing for any household with less than $150 in gross monthly income and no more than $100 in liquid resources); 7 CFR § 273.2(i)(1)(ii) (households whose combined gross income and liquid resources are less than their monthly rent or mortgage and utilities); see also 7 CFR § 273.11(g) (residents of shelters for battered women and children may be certified as separate households, with eligibility and benefits based solely on their own income and resources).

[16] The federal government guidelines may be found here: https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines.

[17] See A Quick Guide to SNAP Eligibility and Benefits, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 6, 2026 a available at https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits.

Practice Tip: When helping a survivor, it is important to check the website of the local state Department of Health and Human Services in the state in which the survivor lives for the most accurate and up to date information about income requirements to qualify for benefits and benefit amounts.

B. Work Requirements to Receive SNAP Benefits

If a survivor is aged 16-59 and able to work, they generally must meet these basic rules to receive and continue to receive SNAP benefits, unless they are otherwise exempted:

- Register for work and accept a suitable job offer if one is presented;
- Participate in SNAP Employment and Training or workfare if the state agency assigns them;
- Do not voluntarily quit a job or cut their work hours below 30 hours a week without a good reason.[18]

A survivor who quits a job or refuses a suitable job offer without good cause may be disqualified from receiving SNAP benefits for a period of time.

C. Exemptions from SNAP Work Requirements and the ABAWD Time Limit

SNAP has two separate sets of work rules. The general work requirements described above apply to most people aged 16–59. A stricter time limit applies to able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs), who are aged 18–64 without a disability and without a child under the age of 14 in their household (see Section E). A survivor who is exempt from the general work requirements is also exempt from the ABAWD time limit.

Under current federal rules, a survivor may be exempt from work requirements to receive SNAP if they:

- Are unable to work because of a physical or mental limitation;
- Are pregnant;
- Have someone under the age of 14 in their SNAP household;
- Are American Indian or Alaska Native;
- Are already working at least 30 hours a week or earning wages at least equivalent to the federal minimum wage for 30 hours;
- Meet work requirements of another program such as TANF or unemployment compensation;

[18] Good cause refers to circumstances that are beyond the individual's control or situations where the job becomes unsuitable or unsafe.

- Take care of a child under the age of 6 or an incapacitated person;
- Participate in an alcohol or drug treatment program; or
- Are enrolled at least half-time in school or a training program.

Under current federal rules, a survivor who is an ABAWD may also be exempt from the ABAWD time limit if they:

- Are unable to work because of a physical or mental limitation;
- Are pregnant;
- Have someone under the age of 14 in their SNAP household; or
- Are American Indian or Alaska Native.

NOTE: OBBBA removed the ABAWD exemptions that had applied to veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and former foster youth aged 24 and under. These survivors must now meet the ABAWD work requirement unless another exemption applies.[19]

PRACTICE TIPS

- It is important to check if the survivor seeking SNAP lives in a rural county or other area where the state has a waiver of the ABAWD time limit. Under OBBBA, these waivers are generally limited to areas with unemployment above 10%. Some states, including Oregon, have taken steps to protect SNAP access for ABAWDs living in rural counties that lack local SNAP employment and training programs.[20]
- Consider investigating whether the state in which the survivor resides has a policy that helps survivors meet or be exempted from SNAP work requirements. Unlike TANF, SNAP has no federal Family Violence Option, but states can treat survivors as "obviously unfit" for work (see below), use limited discretionary exemptions, or apply good cause. Advocates can also ask whether a state that has adopted the Family Violence Option for TANF will take a similar approach for SNAP.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the SNAP program, has guidance that allows states to exempt someone because of a physical or mental condition if they are experiencing chronic homelessness that is impacting their ability to work.

How a Physical or Mental Limitation is Defined

An individual may establish that they are unable to work because of a physical or mental limitation by (1) receipt of any disability payments—federal, state or private,

[19] USDA Food and Nutrition Service, OBBBA ABAWD Exemptions Implementation: https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/obbb-abawd-exemptions-implementation.
[20] See, e.g., https://apps.oregon.gov/oregon-newsroom/OR/ODHS/Posts/Post/oregon-takes-steps-to-protect-snap-access-in-rural-communities-starting-feb-1.

(2) being "obviously unfit" as determined by the state agency, or (3) written documentation from a medical professional.[21]

Some states have described surviving domestic violence or fleeing a dangerous situation as causing mental trauma (or physical harm) that can qualify someone as "obviously unfit" for work, and these states can accept the statement of the individual as proof. Other states may not have an explicit policy, but individuals can describe the circumstances making them unfit for work and the eligibility worker can make the determination.

For example, North Carolina has determined that survivors of recent acts of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or stalking that have impacted their physical or mental health and are interfering with their ability to maintain work may be considered physically or mentally unfit for employment for purposes of the ABAWD exemption, based on the eligibility worker's discretion.[22]

D. Accessing SNAP for Survivors with Dependent Children

Many survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault have custody of children. If a survivor has a child under the age of 14 in their SNAP household, they are exempt from the ABAWD time limit. They must still meet the general work requirements unless the child is under the age of 6 or if another exemption applies.

E. Accessing SNAP for Survivors Without Dependent Children

SNAP defines able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) as adults aged 18 to 64 without a disability or who do not have children under the age of 14 in the home. Generally, ABAWDs are limited to three months of SNAP benefits every three years if they are not working, volunteering, or in an approved work training program at least 20 hours a week. See Section IV for a description of ways to resume SNAP benefits.

III. Meeting the 20 Hours/Week SNAP Work Requirement

In general, a survivor can meet the 20 hours per week (80 hours per month)[23] work requirement in a variety of ways determined by the state agency administering SNAP including:

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[21] 7 C.F.R. 273.24(c)(2).

[22] North Carolina Food and Nutrition Services Certification Manual Section 260.01(F)(2)(d): https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/FNS-260-Able-Bodied-Adults-without-Dependents-ABAWD-11.26.2025-1.pdf.

[23] See https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/work-requirements for the hours per month requirement (80 hours per month, which equals 20 hours per week averaged monthly).

- Paid employment;
- Qualifying unpaid/volunteer work;
- Qualifying employment and training;
- Combinations of work and approved activities; and
- Participation in workfare[24] for the total number of hours assigned each month.

For the most accurate information, it's important to go to each state's SNAP website.[25]

IV. What Happens if a Survivor Cannot Meet the SNAP Work Requirements and Does Not Qualify for an Exemption

If a domestic violence and/or sexual assault survivor is unable to meet the work requirements as an ABAWD and does not qualify for an exemption, their SNAP benefits are limited to three months within a three-year period.[26] After those three months, food assistance from SNAP stops completely.

Before terminating someone from SNAP benefits for failure to meet the work requirement, the state must screen the individual to determine whether an exemption applies, so this provides an opportunity to let the agency know about new physical or mental conditions that make the individual unable to work 20 hours a week (or makes them eligible for another exemption).

In addition, the agency must determine whether the individual had "good cause" for not meeting the work requirement in one or more months. Good cause means temporary circumstances beyond the individual's control, such as a family emergency, lack of transportation or lack of childcare.

An individual may regain eligibility by:

- Completing 80 hours of work, volunteering or training within a 30-day period; or
- Reporting a change that makes them exempt, such as a new medical limitation, pregnancy, or caregiving for a dependent child under the age of 14.

V. Considerations for Access to SNAP by Certain Immigrants

Enacted in July 2025, OBBBA has significantly narrowed SNAP eligibility for several groups of lawfully present immigrants who could qualify for SNAP under prior law. Refugees, asylees, people granted withholding of removal or deportation, certain trafficking survivors, and certain

[24] Workfare refers to government programs under which welfare recipients are required to take public-service jobs or to participate in employment training.
[25] https://www.fna.usda.gov/snap/state-directory
[26] https://www.fna.usda.gov/snap/work-requirements

immigrant survivors who had qualified under the Violence Against Women Act provisions are no longer eligible for SNAP benefits.

Eligibility for SNAP benefits based on immigration status is now generally limited to lawful permanent residents (LPRs), subject to applicable waiting periods and exceptions; Cuban or Haitian entrants; and individuals lawfully residing in the United States under the Compact of Free Association. U visa holders, individuals with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and undocumented immigrants were not eligible for federal SNAP before OBBBA and remain ineligible.

Five-year waiting period for Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs). LPR adults must still satisfy a five-year waiting period before receiving SNAP.[27] There are exemptions from this waiting period requirement for LPRs under age 18, those who have 40 qualifying work quarters, those who were admitted as Amerasian immigrants, certain Hmong or Laotian tribal members, people who receive disability-related benefits because they are blind or disabled, people who have certain military connections and other statutory categories. Importantly, certain people who were refugees or asylees are exempt from the waiting period after becoming LPRs.[28] Because these rules can depend on a person's immigration history, circumstances, and pending litigation tied to OBBBA, advocates should confirm status-specific eligibility with the state SNAP agency or qualified immigration experts.

Mixed-status households. One household member's immigration status does not determine whether other household members can receive SNAP. Eligible children or other eligible household members are not automatically disqualified if a parent is not eligible because of immigration status. Eligible U.S. citizens and eligible immigrants may receive SNAP even when another person in the household is not eligible or does not want to apply.[29]

Generally, a noncitizen household member who is not applying for SNAP does not have to provide a Social Security number or immigration-status information for themselves. However, their income and resources may still be considered when the agency determines the household's eligibility and benefit amount, and states use different methods for counting that income, including prorating it.

PRACTICE TIPS

- Consider accompanying immigrant survivors to meetings or helping them when they complete online forms to apply for SNAP benefits.

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[27] FNS-USDA handbook: https://snapqcs.fns.usda.gov/Welcome/Doc/FNS310Handbook.pdf

[28] PRWORA - 8 U.S. Code § 1613. Also, *State of New York v. Rollins* held that H.R. 1 did not alter PRWORA's five-year waiting-period exceptions for " humanitarian immigrant groups" - https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/oregon/ordce/6:2025cv02186/190652/107/

[29] USDA handbook: https://snapqcs.fns.usda.gov/Welcome/Doc/FNS310Handbook.pdf; consistent with 7 CFR § 273.11 - Action on households with special circumstances; and 7 CFR § 273.2.

- Immigration status can be complicated, particularly for survivors who have multiple forms of immigration relief or family members with different statuses. Screen each household member's eligibility separately.
- Advocates should not make their own immigration-status determination. Help the survivor identify which household members are seeking SNAP, protect access to benefits for eligible household members, and refer immigration-specific questions to a qualified immigration attorney or DOJ-accredited representative.

VII. Suggestions for Advocates Working with Survivors

To minimize confusion or loss of benefits by survivors during this time when new SNAP requirements are being implemented, staff of programs serving survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault may:

- Partner with the agency implementing SNAP and those that oversee work programs for public benefits recipients (if distinct), and other organizations with SNAP expertise, to strengthen navigation and referral processes.[30]
- Investigate whether the state already has a waiver from work requirements for survivors receiving SNAP. See if the state has taken the Family Violence Option to exempt survivors from TANF work requirements and if the state intends to replicate this for SNAP.
- Provide training on SNAP access to domestic violence and sexual assault victim-serving agencies as state implementation evolves.
- Help survivors understand new work and documentation requirements.
- Support survivors in maintaining SNAP benefits when possible.

When helping a survivor apply for SNAP benefits, it may be helpful to collect the following information before beginning the application process:

- Whether the survivor has children;
- Whether the survivor is pregnant;
- Whether they have a disability or health limitations affecting their ability to work;
- Whether they are homeless or living in a temporary shelter;
- What their age is;
- Whether they are employed or in a work training program;
- Whether they recently left the abuser; and
- Whether they are living in a safe home.

[30] https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-directory

Survivor-Centered "Know Your Rights"

A survivor can apply for SNAP even if they are fleeing an abusive household.

A survivor may want to ask about separate-household rules if they have left an abuser.

A survivor can request a safe way to receive notices and communicate with the agency.

If benefits are denied, reduced, or stopped, a survivor can ask about appeal/hearing rights.

Gathering this information in advance can help advocates identify possible exemptions, anticipate documentation needs, and help survivors keep the food assistance they need to stay safe and stable. Taking these steps up front can also make the application process less stressful for survivors, reduce the risk of losing benefits, and keep economic security at the center of safety planning. And with SNAP rules and state implementation still evolving, advocates should stay connected with local SNAP partners so survivors can continue benefiting from the vital food assistance that SNAP provides.

Economic Security for Survivors Working Group Members

Activating Change
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Center for Survivor Agency and Justice
Futures Without Violence, Co-Lead
Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Legal Momentum
Legal Voice
Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Network to End Domestic Violence
Paid Leave Advocate Lydia Waligorski, Co-Lead
Survivor & Family Advocate, Krista Del Gallo
The National Domestic Violence Hotline, Co-Lead
The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence
Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh