

2026 SNAP Changes: Information for Agencies Serving Vulnerable Populations

Federal changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) affect work requirements, exemptions, utility and shelter deductions, eligibility for certain noncitizens, and related reporting and verification processes. These changes may require additional documentation or follow-up for some households.

Understanding these updates can help homeless services agencies and partner agencies serving vulnerable populations identify potential exemptions and deductions, support required documentation, and reduce avoidable interruptions in food assistance.

Key SNAP Changes Affecting Vulnerable Populations

Expanded ABAWD Work Requirements

Federal law expanded the age range for adults who may be subject to the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) time limit and narrowed several categorical exemptions. In West Virginia, many adults ages 18 through 64 who do not qualify for an exemption may need to document at least 80 hours per month of work or another qualifying activity to continue receiving SNAP beyond the applicable time limit.

Homelessness, veteran status, and former foster care status no longer provide automatic federal ABAWD exemptions. Agencies should screen for other exemptions before assuming an individual must begin work activities.

Exemptions and Documentation

Depending on individual circumstances, an exemption may apply because of a physical or mental inability to work, pregnancy, receipt of certain disability benefits, caregiving responsibilities, participation in treatment or rehabilitation, school enrollment, unemployment benefit requirements, or another qualifying circumstance.

For service providers, an important first step is identifying whether an exemption may apply and helping the individual obtain or submit acceptable verification when required.

Utility and Shelter Deductions

Federal SNAP changes also affect how certain energy assistance and shelter expenses are treated when calculating benefits. Receipt of qualifying energy assistance no longer automatically establishes the same heating and cooling utility allowance for every household. Households without an elderly or disabled member may need to show that they actually incur heating or cooling costs to receive the applicable allowance.

This may be particularly important when an individual moves from homelessness into housing, changes utility responsibility, or has shelter expenses that need to be reflected in the SNAP calculation.

Eligibility for Certain Noncitizens

Federal law changed SNAP eligibility rules for some immigrants and other noncitizens who are lawfully present in the United States. Eligibility depends on the individual's specific immigration category and other SNAP requirements. Agencies should avoid making independent immigration eligibility determinations and instead assist individuals with notices, requested documentation, and referrals to qualified legal or benefits assistance when eligibility is unclear.

Populations Most Likely to Face Barriers

People Experiencing Homelessness or Housing Instability

People without stable housing may have difficulty receiving notices, maintaining current contact information, accessing phones or internet, storing documents, or verifying work and other qualifying activities. Because homelessness alone is no longer an automatic ABAWD exemption, careful screening for health-related or other exemptions is especially important.

People With Disabilities or Significant Health Conditions

A physical or mental condition that limits the ability to work may support an ABAWD exemption even when the individual is not already receiving SSI or SSDI. Some individuals may need assistance obtaining medical or other acceptable verification and responding to requests within required timeframes.

People With Transportation or Rural Access Barriers

Lack of transportation is not itself an ABAWD exemption. In rural areas, individuals may have difficulty accessing employment, training, volunteer activities, medical providers, DoHS offices, or other services needed to meet or document requirements.

Families and Caregivers

Household composition and caregiving circumstances can affect whether an adult is subject to ABAWD requirements. The dependent-related exception generally applies when the SNAP household includes a child under age 14. Adults caring for an ill or disabled person may also qualify for an exemption depending on the circumstances and required verification.

Administrative & Procedural Impact

Some individuals may experience a reduction or interruption in SNAP because of procedural issues rather than failure to meet an eligibility requirement. Potential barriers include missed notices, difficulty completing verification, changes in work hours, loss of an exemption, unstable contact information, limited technology access, or changes in housing and utility responsibility.

West Virginia also requires certain changes to be reported. For individuals subject to ABAWD rules, this can include losing an exemption or having work hours fall below the required level. Timely reporting and documentation can be important to maintaining accurate eligibility.

Recommendations for Homeless Service Providers

Homeless service providers and partner agencies can help reduce administrative and access barriers by:

- Screening for exemptions before focusing on work or training requirements, including disability, medical or behavioral health conditions, pregnancy, caregiving, treatment, school, unemployment, and other qualifying circumstances.
- Helping individuals maintain current contact information with DoHS and identifying a reliable way to receive notices when mail, phone, or internet access is unstable.
- Reviewing SNAP notices with individuals, identifying deadlines, and assisting with requested verification or change reporting.
- Helping gather and retain employment records, medical documentation, volunteer or training verification, household information, rent records, and utility documentation when needed.
- Connecting individuals who need qualifying hours with employment services, volunteer opportunities, education or training programs, or other allowable activities.
- Reviewing SNAP when an individual moves into housing or experiences a change in rent, utilities, household composition, employment, health, treatment, or caregiving responsibilities.
- Providing access to phones, internet, computers, printing, scanning, transportation, and appointment support when needed to complete SNAP-related tasks.
- Connecting individuals with DoHS or qualified legal assistance when benefits are denied, reduced, or terminated and additional case-specific guidance is needed.

Considerations for West Virginia

As agencies assist individuals with the 2026 SNAP changes, practical areas to monitor include:

- How exemption status is identified and what documentation DoHS requires in individual cases.
- How people without stable addresses, phones, internet, transportation, or document storage can receive notices and complete required follow-up.
- How employment, training, volunteer, or other qualifying hours should be documented when participation changes from month to month.
- Whether rent, utility responsibility, and heating or cooling costs are accurately reflected when individuals move into housing or their housing circumstances change.
- What referral pathways are available for legal assistance, eligibility support, and other benefits navigation services?

Key Takeaway

For vulnerable populations, the practical impact of the 2026 SNAP changes extends beyond meeting a work requirement. Identifying exemptions, maintaining current contact information, documenting qualifying activities, responding to notices, and accurately reporting housing, utility, employment, and household changes can all affect whether an individual maintains SNAP eligibility and receives the correct benefit amount.

Contact Information

West Virginia Bureau for Family Assistance

For SNAP applications, eligibility questions, case information, and local assistance, visit the [West Virginia Bureau for Family Assistance SNAP website](#).

Legal Aid of West Virginia

For legal assistance with SNAP denials, terminations, exemptions, or fair hearings, visit the [Legal Aid of West Virginia website](#).

Sources: [USDA Food and Nutrition Service: SNAP Work Requirements](#) and [SNAP Provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025](#); [West Virginia Bureau for Family Assistance: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#); and [Legal Aid of West Virginia: SNAP Benefits ABAWD Changes](#).

These resources provide additional information on recent SNAP changes, including work requirements, ABAWD time limits and exemptions, eligibility and reporting requirements, and other changes affecting SNAP administration.