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Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rate Report

December 2019



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
PARTICIPATION RATE REPORT**

DECEMBER 2019

OVERVIEW

Line-item 4400-1001 of Section 2 of Chapter 41 of the Acts of 2019 requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to annually report the status of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) client outreach to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports.

DTA serves one out of every nine people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

BACKGROUND ON SNAP IN MASSACHUSETTS

SNAP is a federally-funded program that provides critical nutritional support to low-income families by helping supplement household food budgets and access nutritious food. DTA administers SNAP on behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). One in nine residents of the Commonwealth participate in the state's SNAP program, including families with children, elders, and persons with disabilities.

As of the beginning of November 2019, DTA's SNAP caseload was comprised of 453,658 households, consisting of 762,648 recipients. Of these recipients, 165,234 recipients were 60 or over; 270,345 were persons with disabilities; and 262,548 were age 18 or under. Of all SNAP households in Massachusetts, 71.7% have gross countable income of less than 100% of the Federal Poverty –that's \$16,910 for a household of two.

Beyond the core responsibilities in administering the SNAP program, DTA works alongside a variety of partners contributing to the larger mission of food security in the Commonwealth.

SNAP OUTREACH STRATEGIES

DTA is dedicated to ensuring SNAP benefits and related services are available to all eligible Massachusetts households. Outreach to potential new and existing SNAP clients is done through a multi-pronged, data informed approach focused on engaging targeted populations

with low SNAP participation rates. The effort brings together DTA staff, inter-secretarial state agencies, community-based organizations, and contracted vendors.

OUTREACH PARTNERS

Enhanced Community Based Outreach Partner System. DTA engaged with the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMass Medical) to administer a performance-based federal reimbursement project to enhance DTA’s provider outreach activities. In federal fiscal year (FFY) 2019, DTA contracted with 80 providers, known as outreach partners. These outreach partners are responsible for client outreach and education as well as assistance with applications and recertifications. As in previous years, preliminary information shows that most Outreach Partners reached their annual application and approval goals. These providers received nearly \$900,000 in payments for SNAP outreach services. For FFY 2019, USDA approved an expansion of the SNAP Outreach Partner Reimbursement Project and reimbursement of up to \$1.78M.

Project Bread. DTA has a long-standing relationship with Project Bread. Project Bread’s Food Source Hotline performs SNAP eligibility screenings and provides application assistance for individuals interested in applying for SNAP benefits. Project Bread also assists families in need with resources to address more immediate food needs. In FY19 Project Bread received additional funds that they used to assist DTA in outreach efforts designed to reduce the SNAP Gap (defined below).

Community-based Trainings. DTA provides SNAP 101 trainings for community-based organizations to educate them on the SNAP program and application process. In addition, DTA provides specialized trainings to best suit the needs of organizations that work with specific populations, such as veterans, college students, elders, and persons with disabilities.

INTERAGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

MassHealth. DTA and MassHealth continue to prioritize efforts to reduce what is commonly known as the “SNAP Gap”. The term refers to Massachusetts residents who receive MassHealth benefits but are not currently receiving SNAP benefits although they’re likely eligible for them. DTA continues to use outreach partners to conduct targeted outreach to potential SNAP Gap clients. Additionally, DTA and MassHealth are actively working on multiple different initiatives designed to reduce the SNAP Gap including the development of a joint application pilot, robust outreach utilizing technology resources including text messaging, and enrolling MassHealth Certified Application Counselors who assist with MassHealth applications as outreach partners.

Department of Veteran Services. In November 2018, DTA announced its intention to focus on expanding access to veterans. Through a strong partnership with DVS and with input from DTA staff members who are military veterans DTA has created several new resources to assist veterans and organizations that serve veterans. These resources include a SNAP Veterans’ Guide for organizations and a [Food Assistance \(SNAP\) for Prior and Active Service Members Brochure](#). Additionally, DTA and DVS jointly hosted five regional trainings for Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) and participated in DVS annual conference. Lastly, DTA has worked on targeted

recruitment to bring on VSOs as outreach partners. To date, three VSOs have become outreach partners and additional VSOs have expressed interest for the future. DTA intends on continuing these outreach efforts in FY20.

Department of Higher Education. DTA, with assistance from the Department of Higher Education, is actively working to bring on colleges and universities as outreach partners and SNAP Employment and Training providers. In a joint effort to address the issue of food insecurity on college campuses, this approach connects higher education institutes with available federal funds to maximize services and supports to food insecure college students. In 2019, DTA was able to expand the number of community college outreach partner and community colleges participating in the SNAP Employment and Training program. To date, two Community Colleges have come on as outreach partners including Bunker Hill Community and Mount Wachusett College. Additionally, there are currently four Community Colleges participating in the SNAP Employment and Training program including Cape Cod Community College, Holyoke Community College, Middlesex Community College, and Quinsigamond Community College.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In FY19 DTA continued strategic discussions with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education around formalizing an outreach strategy targeted at engaging families with children who are not currently receiving SNAP and appear to be eligible. As of November 2019, three public schools are serving as outreach partners. Using information provided through the national school lunch program application process these school are conducting direct outreach to families likely eligible for SNAP by providing education on the program and application assistance. This approach is designed to reach families in the community where they reside and bridge any delta between children eligible for free or reduced priced meals and those who may be SNAP eligible. An added benefit is the increase in federal revenue that is introduced to the school systems and decrease in unpaid school meal debt. DTA and DESE intend on expanding this partnership by conducting robust recruitment of school systems as outreach partners and evaluating further opportunities for collaboration.

Department of Developmental Services and Department of Mental Health. In 2019, the work between DTA and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), in partnership with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the support of EOHHS, has been working towards a strategy to engage vendor-operated group homes that are contracted by DDS. DTA and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) have made strides in their work collaboration over the past few months, including the development and implementation of a data sharing agreement. DTA and DMH, with the assistance of OIG, were able to identify training opportunities for field staff in both agencies to better support shared clients that can be shared within the DDS population as well. The level of detail that was exchanged was modified to allow an opportunity to identify potential program integrity concerns and allow DMH an opportunity to offset their food budgets through the utilization of SNAP benefits.

SNAP PATH TO WORK PROGRAM

Since 2006, DTA has partnered with UMass Medical School to offer meaningful opportunities to SNAP clients who are not receiving economic assistance through the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The goal of the SNAP Path to Work program is to assist under- and unemployed SNAP participants in gaining valuable skills and experience, increase employability, secure employment, and establish a path towards self-sufficiency. Through a network of contracted community partners, participants receive job search assistance, job readiness training, job retention services, certain education opportunities, vocational skills training, work experience, apprenticeships, and supports.

Through this partnership, UMass Medical School is responsible for managing important components of the program, including:

- Recruiting, subcontracting, and monitoring SNAP Path to Work providers
- Assisting providers with federal reimbursement claims
- Designing and producing promotional material
- Maintaining the program's website - snappathtowork.org

In FFY2018, 45 contracted training providers were reimbursed about \$1.5M for employment and training services provided to program participants.

To begin FFY2019, DTA has contracted with 46 SNAP Path to Work providers from across the state to provide services to program participants. USDA has approved provider reimbursements of approximately \$6.6M as part of the FFY19 SNAP Employment and Training State Plan.

In FFY2019, 51 contracted training providers were reimbursed about \$1.8M for employment and training services provided to program participants.

To begin FFY2020, DTA has contracted with 52 SNAP Path to Work providers from across the state and the statewide MassHire Career Center network to provide services to program participants. USDA has approved provider reimbursements of approximately \$6.6M as part of the FFY20 SNAP Employment and Training State Plan.

Finally, in September 2019 DTA was awarded \$1.6M "pledge funds" from USDA designed to serve at-risk Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS). DTA intends to use these funds to further expand our partnership with the Department of Career Services by working with the career centers to provide meaningful employment supports to SNAP participants.

TECHNOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENTS

Online Client Services. In 2018, DTA expanded the DTA Connect platform to include a web-based portal, which affords clients maximum flexibility in accessing information and tools at any time. This expansion included a streamlined eligibility screener, an interactive, user-friendly online SNAP application and a client and provider web portal. In 2019, DTA further expanded

the self-service capabilities of DTA Connect by developing the ability for clients to complete their interim report and recertification online. Traditionally only available in paper form this enhancement broadens the options clients have, to provide the Department with the necessary paper work required to continue receiving benefits. This is beneficial to both DTA and the client as it reduces the administrative burden associated with churn and limits the chances that clients' benefits will be disrupted, ensuring stability in their ability to access nutritious food. Building on the theme of self-service, in 2018 DTA installed self-service kiosks in all 22 Transitional Assistance Offices (TAO) to provide clients with access to DTA Connect. In 2019, DTA expanded access to these self-service kiosks by partnering with organizations in communities where it's been historically challenging to get to a TAO. To date, there are 24 kiosks in the community locations including senior centers, community health centers, WIC offices and others.

Text Messaging Grants. In FY19 DTA was awarded a grant by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) to develop and conduct a text-messaging pilot designed at reducing the cause of churn. This initiative involves a partnership with Brown University to conduct a controlled study designed to evaluate the impact a text message intervention has on reducing churn. In September 2019, DTA was awarded the Process and Technology Improvement grant by USDA, to assist in the development of the text-messaging platform. DTA anticipates going live with this initiative in Winter 2020.