



*Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance*

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**Online Guide Transmittal 2021-71
September 21, 2021**

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff
From: Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management
Re: SNAP: Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) and Standard Utility Allowances Change

Overview

At the beginning of each Federal fiscal year, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) adjusts SNAP income standards, deduction amounts, and maximum benefit levels to reflect changes in the cost of living. This is known as the “SNAP COLA.”

The Department also recalculates the Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs) every year, per federal rules, and includes the recalculated SUAs in the SNAP COLA. This combined calculation minimizes the frequency of benefit changes communicated to the client and the number of associated notices that a separate recalculation would generate.

The SNAP COLA will be processed over the weekend of September 17, 2021. These adjustments will impact October SNAP benefits.

In addition, this Online Guide update advises staff **that the temporary 15% increase in the minimum and maximum SNAP allotments will expire on September 30, 2021.**

Purpose

The purpose of this Online Guide Transmittal is to advise staff of:

- COLA-related changes;
 - clients impacted by the COLA;
 - client communications about the COLA; and
 - related updates to the Online Guide.
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COLA-related Changes

Based on significant changes to the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan, the 2021 COLA is expected to increase SNAP benefit levels by an average of **25%** above the regular (pre-adjusted) benefit amounts. This includes increases in the:

- maximum benefit level for all household sizes;
- minimum benefit level for eligible one- and two-person households;
- standard deduction;
- maximum shelter deduction;
- gross income threshold;
- net income threshold;
- homeless shelter deduction; and
- SUA amounts.

The income reporting threshold for Simplified Reporting households at IR and Change Reporting households during case maintenance has changed from \$100 to \$125.

Note: The applicable pages in the Online Guide have been updated to reflect this numerical change but are not individually noted in this Transmittal.

Communication

The Department will automatically send a notice to households whose SNAP benefits change as a result of the COLA. The notice schedule will be staggered based on last digit of the grantee's SSN. The first set of notices will be mailed on September 20, 2021.

For clients whose benefits **increase** as a result of the COLA, the Department plans to send the following text message on September 23: "Monthly SNAP amounts are increasing in October. Check DTA Connect or your mail for the Notice of SNAP Annual Benefit Adjustment. Learn more: [Mass.gov/dta/covid-19](https://www.mass.gov/dta/covid-19)."

The text message will be sent in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Simplified Chinese and Vietnamese based on the client's language on file. Households with Heightened Level of Security or who have affirmatively opted out of text messaging will not be sent one. Text messages are sent regardless of the phone type on file.

**End of the
Temporary 15%
SNAP Increase**

The temporary 15% increase in the minimum and maximum SNAP allotments per OLG 2021-4 will expire on September 30, 2021, the Federal Fiscal Year. However, the large COLA-related increases will likely offset any benefit decreases that would have otherwise been caused by the expiration of the temporary 15% increase.

Eligible clients will receive their final 15% supplement in October, issued retroactively for September, along with the COLA-adjusted regular SNAP benefit amount. In November and each month thereafter, clients will receive the COLA-adjusted regular amount but not the 15% related benefit. As such, clients should experience a net increase of 10% (i.e., the 25% increase due to the COLA minus the expired temporary 15% increase).

Until further notice, eligible clients will continue receiving Emergency Allotments. These allotments will reflect the new, COLA-adjusted maximum benefit levels. Moreover, the Emergency Allotment will still be a minimum of \$95 if the difference between the client's new maximum allotment and their regular benefit level is less than or equal to \$95.

**Revised Online
Guide Pages**

Topic: Cross Programs
Page: Helpful Charts and Figures

Topic: Scheduled Mailings/Projects
Book: SNAP COLA
Page: SNAP Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)

Topic: COVID-19
Page: Standardized Procedures for SNAP Emergency Allotments

**Obsoleted
Online Guide
Pages**

Topic: COVID-19
Page: Temporary 15% SNAP Increase

Questions

If you have any policy or procedural questions, after conferring with the appropriate TAO personnel, please have your Systems Information Specialists or TAO management email them to DTA.Procedural Issues.

Systems issues should be directed to the Systems Support Help Desk.
