

## SNAP Cuts = Cuts in Meals for Americans Struggling To Heat and Eat

Both the Senate and House proposals being considered in the Farm Bill conference cut spending on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

With millions of people struggling to pay for food, housing, health, and energy costs in this tough economy, now is the time to strengthen the nation's safety net, not cut it.

The particular cut under consideration would limit states' ability to coordinate the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and SNAP benefits, and, counterintuitively, reduce SNAP benefits for households eligible for but receiving the smallest, least adequate LIHEAP benefits.

**Limiting states' "Heat and Eat" policies will eliminate meals for many children, seniors, and persons living with disabilities.**

### SNAP Policies to Help People Both Heat Their Homes and Eat

Through "Heat and Eat" policies many states coordinate SNAP and the Low-Income Household Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This is in recognition that too many struggling Americans face an impossible choice between paying for food or paying for energy.

LIHEAP is a federally-funded block grant to assist low-income households with the highest energy needs. LIHEAP funding is too low to adequately support the majority of low-income households' utility budgets. In 2010, 8.9 million low-income households received LIHEAP aid--reaching roughly only 20 percent of the needy eligible households. According to a survey conducted by the National Energy Assistance Director's Association, nearly one third of families receiving LIHEAP assistance reported that they went without food during the last five years as a result of high home energy costs. Children's Health Watch, [www.childrenshealthwatch.org](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org), has published a series of studies on the health damage to young children of inadequate LIHEAP or SNAP benefits.

The SNAP "Heat and Eat" option allows states to use LIHEAP and SNAP synergistically in order to maximize support for low-income populations and better target the low-income populations that LIHEAP is required to serve. Currently, the District of Columbia and several states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin) implement "Heat and Eat" policies. These states' LIHEAP agencies provide small cash LIHEAP benefits directly to SNAP households. This targeted LIHEAP benefit helps meet LIHEAP's requirement for outreach, simplifies the SNAP shelter deduction calculation, and, by increasing SNAP benefits to more realistic levels, alleviates some of the untenable "heat or eat" choices that households face.

### Proposed Cut to SNAP "Heat and Eat" Would Cause Real Harm

Experience in Massachusetts and other states demonstrates the positive impacts of the current SNAP "Heat and Eat" rules and the risks that cutbacks would entail.

- "Heat and Eat" has the most positive impact on households with elderly members or members living with a disability. (They are not subject to an arbitrary cap on the amount of their SNAP shelter deduction.)
- Coordinating LIHEAP and SNAP enabled Massachusetts to increase outreach for and access to regular LIHEAP benefits for households which do not know about the energy assistance program. Households that get the SNAP-related benefit often end up applying for and qualifying for standard LIHEAP benefits and weatherization, largely because they have heating (or cooling) costs separate from rent.
- **Bottom line, elimination of "Heat and Eat" means lost meals for elderly and disabled households.** These are low-income persons who cannot survive on the minimum \$15 SNAP benefit per month, which may be the amount they are left with if states lose this option.

For additional background, see FRAC's Smart Choices in Hard Times – Strategies for States, Communities, and Advocates to Reduce Hunger, Stimulate the Economy, and Sustain Recovery, posted at <http://bit.ly/uTloOV> and <http://bit.ly/spAMRV>.