

Best Practices for Partnering With Health Professionals to Protect SNAP Benefits for People Unable to Work

SCOPE | State, County, Local

PROGRAM | Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

PRACTICE | Partnering with health professionals, advocates, application assistance providers, and others can help individuals who are struggling against hunger to continue to receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when they might otherwise be improperly subjected to three-month time limits as so-called “Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents” (ABAWD).

Health care professionals can identify patients who are exempt from ABAWD time limits because they are

- pregnant;
- participating in a drug or alcohol treatment program;
- physically or mentally unfit for work; or
- receiving a disability-based benefit from a government or private source, including the receipt of Veterans Affairs disability compensation, regardless of the percentage rating.

Tip for Health Care Professionals Working With Veterans:

Pursuant to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s guidance: “State agencies do not have the discretion to set such a threshold, and must accept receipt of veterans disability compensation, regardless of the individual’s disability percentage rating for the purpose of exemption from the ABAWD time limit.” For more information, see the agency’s memo (May 20, 2016) regarding [ABAWD Time Limit Exemption for Veterans Disability Benefit Recipients](#).¹

By sharing information about ABAWD rules and sample forms to document why a patient would be exempt from ABAWD time limits, advocates can work with health care professionals to

- document why patients meet one of the exemptions from the ABAWD rules;
- ensure that patients struggling with food insecurity can continue receiving needed benefits to purchase food; and
- connect patients to SNAP, and reap the health benefits of participating in the program.

WHY | Unemployed or underemployed adults without dependents and without other exemptions (such as disability) often face time limits after three months of SNAP benefits. Screening individuals for health-related exemptions can preserve SNAP benefits for these eligible, low-income patients, and promote food security and better health outcomes. For more about SNAP and health, see FRAC’s [Hunger and Health: The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being](#).²

BACKGROUND | ABAWDs are people ages 18 through 49 who do not have dependents, are fit for work, are not working at least 20 hours per week, and are not otherwise exempt from the SNAP three-month time limit.

In some areas of the country with insufficient jobs, states have federal waivers of the time limits for area residents. In all states, a number of discretionary exemptions may be

available. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has details on [ABAWD rules and exemptions](#).³

KEY STEPS | Advocates should follow the recommended actions below to help health care professionals understand the ABAWD rules and how they can assist eligible, low-income patients maintain SNAP benefits.

- **Review the relevant state SNAP policy manual for guidance on its ABAWD rules, particularly those pertaining to what constitutes unfitness for work.** Pursuant to 7 CFR § 273.7(b)(1)(ii)⁴, a person who is physically or mentally unfit for employment is exempt from SNAP ABAWD work requirements, but it is generally up to the state agency to “define physical and mental fitness; establish procedures for verifying; and verify claimed physical or mental unfitness when necessary.”
- **Work with the state agency to develop a standard “Medical Report” form that health professionals can complete for ABAWD purposes.** Advocates should check with the state SNAP agency to see if the agency has a form in place, and, if so, confirm whether the form complies with the available ABAWD exemptions. Make sure that the state is not using its disability certification form for ABAWD screening determinations. The ABAWD standard for “physically or mentally unfit for work” is less stringent than to be certified as disabled.
- **Ensure that the state’s “Medical Report” allows for the appropriate range of qualified health care professionals to certify patients as exempt from ABAWD work requirements.** Health care professionals can include physicians, physician’s assistants, designated representatives of the physician’s office, osteopaths, licensed or certified psychologists, drug and alcohol abuse counselors, certified mental health counselors, licensed independent clinical social workers, licensed certified social workers, and certified midwives.
- **Offer health care providers resources to screen for ABAWD exemptions to help streamline the time-limit waiver.** Reach out to health networks that serve the at-risk population, such as the Department of Veteran’s Affairs, community health clinics, and family practitioners. Work with state partners to develop a standard, easy-to-complete, state-approved “Medical Record” form, with instructions on how to submit the form to the local SNAP office. Let health professionals know that by screening

patients for ABAWD exemptions, they are safeguarding nutrition benefits for eligible people and serving the community.

- **Make sure that the USDA guidance on veterans disability is followed.** Advocates should ensure that the state agency is properly implementing the [policy](#) that exempts all veterans with a disability rating (regardless of the level of disability) from the ABAWD time limits. It is important also to ensure that health care providers and organizations that help veterans are aware of this exemption.

SPOTLIGHT

[Hunger Solutions New York](#) has developed an online portal that is replete with helpful resources to educate clients and community groups on the complex ABAWD rules.

MORE RESOURCES

- Federal: [7 CFR § 273.7\(b\)](#) Exemptions from work requirements⁵;
- FRAC’s webpage about [SNAP](#);
- FRAC’s infographic [7 Actions to Protect SNAP Benefits for Jobless People](#);
- [SNAP ABAWD Time-Limit Checklist](#)⁶ — Provided by Hunger Solutions New York, this is a customizable template for you to fill out to help determine if SNAP time-limit rules apply to an individual;
- [ABAWD Sample Medical Statement](#)⁷ — Provided by Hunger Solutions New York, this is a customizable template for health care providers to fill out to help low-income adults keep their SNAP benefits; and
- USDA’s [ABAWD webpage](#).

For technical assistance, contact:

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For more on ending hunger, read FRAC’s [A Plan of Action to End Hunger in America](#).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2016). *ABAWD Time Limit Exemption for Veterans Disability Benefit Recipients*. Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/ABAWD-Time-Limit-Exemption-for-Veterans-Disability-Benefit.pdf>. Accessed on February 14, 2019.
- ² Food Research & Action Center. (2017). *The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being*. Available at: <http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>. Accessed on February 17, 2019.
- ³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2017). *Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD)*(webpage). Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawds>. Accessed on January 3, 2019.
- ⁴ United States Government. (2016). 7 CFR 273.7 - *Work provisions*. Available at: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/7/273.7>. Accessed on February 14, 2017.
- ⁵ See 7 CFR § 273.7(b) at: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/7/273.7>.
- ⁶ Hunger Solutions New York. (2017). *SNAP ABAWD Time-Limit Checklist*. Available at: frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Customizable-SNAP-ABAWD-Time-Limit-Checklist.docx. Accessed on May 14, 2019.
- ⁷ Hunger Solutions New York. (2017). *ABAWD Sample Medical Statement*. Available at: frac.org/wp-content/uploads/Customizable-SNAP-ABAWD-Sample-Medical-Statement.docx. Accessed on May 14, 2019.