

Section 5: Step-by-Step Application Process

VIRGINIA SNAP BENEFITS

A Plain-Language Navigation Guide

For Individuals, Families, and Nonprofits Serving Vulnerable Populations | Updated May 2026

What This Guide Covers

Eligibility rules • Income limits • Required documents • Step-by-step application • Work requirements • Military families • Why people lose benefits • Key contacts

Federal Changes in Effect (2025–2026)

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), signed July 4, 2025, expanded ABAWD work requirements (now ages 18–64, effective November 1, 2025), narrowed non-citizen eligibility, and made other national changes to SNAP. This guide reflects rules as of May 2026. Always verify current rules with VDSS at commonhelp.virginia.gov or 1-833-522-5582.

Section 1: What Is SNAP?

SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. In Virginia it is administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) through local departments of social services (LDSS). Benefits are issued monthly through a Virginia EBT Card accepted at authorized grocery stores, farmers markets, and major online retailers including Amazon and Walmart.

Virginia serves approximately 700,000–800,000 SNAP recipients each month across a highly diverse geography — from the dense Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., to rural Southwest Virginia Appalachian communities, to the Hampton Roads military corridor. Virginia's unique political geography (independent cities coexisting with counties) means there are more than 120 local DSS offices administering SNAP statewide.

Virginia SNAP: Key Facts at a Glance

- 200% FPL gross income limit through BBCE — no asset test for most households
- Modified drug felony ban: eligible if complying with sentence terms

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- ABAWD work requirements expanded to age 64 effective November 1, 2025
- Fresh Match: SNAP spending matched on fresh produce at participating Virginia farmers markets
- VaCAP (Virginia Commodity Assistance Program) ends June 1, 2026 — current VaCAP recipients should apply for SNAP
- Military family considerations: BAH counts as income; deployed spouse exemptions available near bases (Norfolk, Quantico, Fort Belvoir)
- CommonHelp (commonhelp.virginia.gov): online portal for SNAP, Medicaid, and other VDSS benefits
- 120+ local DSS offices — Virginia's city/county structure creates more offices than most states

VaCAP Ending June 1, 2026

Virginia's Commodity Assistance Program (VaCAP) — which provided food assistance through food pantries to some low-income Virginians — ends June 1, 2026. Current VaCAP recipients who are not already enrolled in SNAP should apply for SNAP immediately through CommonHelp (commonhelp.virginia.gov) or by calling 1-833-522-5582. VaCAP recipients who meet SNAP income requirements will likely qualify. Apply before June 1 to avoid a gap in food assistance.

Section 2: Eligibility Requirements

2.1 Residency

You must currently reside in Virginia. There is no minimum residency period. You do not need a permanent address — a shelter address, transitional housing, or a signed statement from a non-relative can satisfy the requirement. Your application is handled by the LDSS office in the city or county where you currently reside.

2.2 Citizenship and Immigration Status

The following individuals are generally eligible:

- U.S. citizens (born or naturalized)
- Lawful Permanent Residents (Green Card holders) who have held status for at least 5 years
- Certain refugees, asylees, and Special Immigrant Visa holders

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2025 Change: Non-Citizen Eligibility Narrowed

The OBBBA (July 4, 2025) removed SNAP eligibility for humanitarian parolees, most asylum seekers pending a decision, and several other previously eligible categories. U.S.-born children in mixed-status households may still qualify. Contact your local LDSS office or legal aid if your immigration status is unclear. Virginia's large immigrant communities — particularly in Northern Virginia — should verify current eligibility status.

2.3 Household Composition

Your SNAP household includes everyone who lives together and regularly purchases and prepares food together. Members who buy and prepare food separately may form their own household unit.

2.4 Income Limits

Virginia uses Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. There is no asset test for most households. This makes Virginia one of the more accessible SNAP states in the South — more permissive than neighboring Tennessee (130% FPL, no BBCE). VIEW (Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare — Virginia's TANF program) recipients are categorically eligible.

Exception: Households where all members are age 60+ or have a documented disability have NO gross income limit — only the net income test applies.

Virginia SNAP Income Limits and Maximum Benefits (FY 2026, Oct. 1, 2025 – Sept. 30, 2026)

HHSize	Gross Limit(200% FPL)	Elderly/DisabledGross Limit	Net Limit(100% FPL)	Max MonthlyBenefit
1	\$2,510	No limit*	\$1,255	\$292
2	\$3,398	No limit*	\$1,699	\$536
3	\$4,287	No limit*	\$2,144	\$766
4	\$5,178	No limit*	\$2,589	\$994
5	\$6,067	No limit*	\$3,034	\$1,155
6	\$6,956	No limit*	\$3,478	\$1,386
7	\$7,845	No limit*	\$3,923	\$1,532
8+	+\$889/person	No limit*	+\$445/person	+\$177/person

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* Elderly/disabled households have no gross income limit — only the net income limit applies. Virginia uses BBCE at 200% FPL. Limits update each October 1.

How Net Income Is Calculated

Net income = gross income minus approved deductions. Standard deductions include:

- 20% earned income deduction — automatically applied to all wages and self-employment income
- Standard deduction: \$204/month for households of 1–3; higher for larger households
- Excess shelter deduction: rent/mortgage plus utilities exceeding 50% of net income after other deductions
- Dependent care deduction: childcare or adult care costs paid while working, searching, or in training
- Medical expense deduction: out-of-pocket costs over \$35/month for members 60+ or with a disability
- Child support deduction: legally obligated child support paid to someone outside the household

Virginia Deduction Note

Northern Virginia (Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria, Prince William, Loudoun) has some of the highest housing costs on the East Coast. For households near the 200% FPL ceiling, the excess shelter deduction — triggered when rent and utilities exceed 50% of net income — is often decisive. Always report full shelter costs. Rural Southwest Virginia and Southside communities have lower housing costs but face transportation barriers — document transportation-related work expenses where applicable.

2.5 Asset Limits

For most Virginia BBCE-eligible households, there is NO asset test. Exception: elderly/disabled households whose income exceeds 200% FPL face a \$4,500 asset limit. Primary home and one vehicle are always exempt.

Section 3: Work Requirements

Work requirements are the most common reason people lose SNAP benefits. Virginia expanded ABAWD rules in November 2025 under the OBBBA.

3.1 Standard Work Requirements (All Adults 16–59)

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All able-bodied adults between ages 16 and 59 must meet at least one of the following:

- Be employed (any number of hours)
- Be registered for work with Virginia Employment Commission (VEC)
- Participate in an approved employment or training program
- Not have voluntarily quit a job without good cause or reduced hours below 30/week

3.2 ABAWD Rules — Expanded November 1, 2025

ABAWDs are adults ages 18–64 without dependents who are not disabled and not otherwise exempt. Under the OBBBA effective November 1, 2025, Virginia expanded ABAWD requirements from ages 18–54 to 18–64 — a significant change affecting adults ages 55–64 who were previously exempt.

ABAWDs must complete at least 80 hours per month (20 hours/week): employment, job training, volunteering, or participation in an approved work program.

Without meeting this requirement, ABAWDs can only receive SNAP for 3 months in any 36-month period.



Virginia ABAWD Note

If you are between ages 55 and 64 and were not previously subject to ABAWD requirements, verify your current status with your local LDSS office immediately. Virginia Career Works Centers (formerly VEC One-Stop) offer approved employment and training activities. Some Virginia localities may have ABAWD waivers based on local unemployment conditions — verify with your local LDSS. Veterans and people experiencing homelessness lost their ABAWD exemptions under the OBBBA — if you previously relied on one of these exemptions, contact your LDSS or contact Central Virginia Legal Aid (cvlas.org) for guidance.

3.3 Exemptions from ABAWD Requirements

The following individuals are exempt from ABAWD time limits:

- Physically or mentally unfit for employment (documented by a physician or licensed clinical social worker)
- Pregnant
- Responsible for a dependent child under age 14 living in the same household
- Enrolled at least half-time in a recognized school, training program, or institution of higher education
- Participating in a drug or alcohol treatment or rehabilitation program
- Age 15 or younger, or 65 or older

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- Recently released from an institution (incarceration or psychiatric facility)
- Survivors of domestic violence
- Experiencing homelessness (may qualify under 'unfit for employment' — ask your caseworker)

3.4 How to Document Work or an Exemption

Report work activity or exemption status through CommonHelp (commonhelp.virginia.gov), by phone (1-833-522-5582), or in person at your local LDSS office. Submit documentation before your benefit period runs out — VDSS cannot retroactively restore months lost due to non-compliance.

Section 4: Required Documents

Gather these before applying. Missing documents are the most common cause of delays.

4.1 Always Required

- Proof of Identity: Driver's license, state-issued ID, passport, or birth certificate
- Social Security Number (SSN): For each household member applying
- Proof of Virginia Residency: Utility bill, lease agreement, official mail, or a signed statement from a non-relative

4.2 Income Verification

- Pay stubs from the last 30 days (for employed applicants)
- Military pay stubs and BAH (Basic Allowance for Housing) documentation (for military families)
- Most recent W-2, 1099, or tax return (for self-employment income)
- Award letter or benefit statement for Social Security, SSI, unemployment, or other unearned income
- Documentation of child support received or paid

4.3 Deduction Documentation (Strongly Recommended)

- Rent or mortgage statement
- Utility bills (or claim the Standard Utility Allowance — ask your caseworker which produces a higher deduction)

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- Childcare or dependent care receipts
- Medical bills for members 60+ or with disabilities

Tip: Apply First, Gather Documents Later

Submit your application to lock in your application date — benefits are generally backdated to that date if approved. Your caseworker will specify what additional documents are needed.

Step 1: Check Your Eligibility

Use the SNAP eligibility calculator at snapeligibilitycalculator.com, call 1-833-522-5582, or visit your local LDSS office. Note that Virginia has both independent cities and counties — find your correct LDSS office at dss.virginia.gov/localagency.

Step 2: Apply

Method	Details
CommonHelp Online	commonhelp.virginia.gov — apply for SNAP, Medicaid, and other VDSS benefits in one application. Available 24/7. Recommended.
Phone	Call 1-833-522-5582 or your local LDSS office directly.
In Person	Visit your local LDSS office. Virginia has 120+ offices across all cities and counties. Find yours at dss.virginia.gov/localagency .
By Mail	Download application from dss.virginia.gov ; mail to your local LDSS office.

Step 3: Attend Your Interview

After submitting, your local LDSS will schedule a mandatory interview — typically by phone. Missing the interview is the most common reason applications are denied. Contact your LDSS immediately to reschedule if needed.

Step 4: Receive a Decision

VDSS must process standard applications within 30 days. If approved, you will receive an EBT card by mail. If denied, you have 90 days to appeal.

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Expedited / Emergency Processing (7-Day)

You may qualify if: gross monthly income is under \$150 AND liquid assets under \$100; OR combined monthly income and liquid assets are less than monthly rent plus utilities; OR you are a migrant/seasonal farmworker with liquid assets under \$100.

Section 6: Special Situations

6.1 Experiencing Homelessness

You do not need a permanent address to apply. Your LDSS accepts shelter addresses, transitional housing, or a signed statement from a non-relative. Dial 211 for local shelter and benefits navigation resources across Virginia.

6.2 People With Disabilities or Elderly Members

Households where all members are 60+ or disabled benefit from: no gross income test (only net income limit), uncapped shelter deduction, medical expense deduction, and a \$4,500 asset limit (where applicable).

6.3 Drug Felony Convictions

Virginia has a modified drug felony ban. Individuals with drug felony convictions may receive SNAP if they are in compliance with the terms of their sentence, including any required probation conditions, parole requirements, and substance abuse treatment. Bring documentation of your current compliance status (letter from probation/parole officer, treatment provider) when applying.

6.4 Students

Students enrolled at least half-time must meet at least one exception: work 20+ hours/week, participate in work-study, care for a dependent child under 6, receive TANF (VIEW), or be enrolled in an approved training program.

6.5 Military Families

Virginia's large military population — particularly in Hampton Roads (Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Newport News), Quantico, Fort Belvoir, and Northern Virginia — creates unique SNAP eligibility situations:

- Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) counts as income for SNAP purposes and must be reported

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- Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) also counts as income
- High housing costs near bases (Norfolk, Alexandria, Arlington) may trigger significant shelter deductions
- Deployed service members: the deployed spouse may be exempt from ABAWD work requirements while their spouse is on active deployment. Ask your LDSS caseworker specifically about this exemption and document it with deployment orders
- VA disability compensation counts as income and must be reported

For Military Families Near Virginia Bases

Apply through CommonHelp (commonhelp.virginia.gov) and note military status on your application. VDSS offers guidance tailored to service members. If your household income fluctuates due to deployment or changes in BAH, report changes within 10 days through CommonHelp. Many military families near high-cost bases like Norfolk and Northern Virginia qualify for SNAP even at E-5 or E-6 pay grades after shelter deductions are applied.

6.6 Fresh Match — Virginia Farmers Market Produce Matching

Virginia's Fresh Match program matches SNAP EBT spending dollar-for-dollar on fresh fruits and vegetables at participating Virginia farmers markets — up to \$20 per market visit. This effectively doubles purchasing power for fresh produce. Look for Fresh Match signs at participating markets or contact Virginia Cooperative Extension or your local LDSS for a directory of participating markets.

Section 7: Why People Lose Benefits — and How to Avoid It

Most Common Reasons SNAP Benefits Are Cut Off in Virginia

1. Missing the recertification (renewal) deadline

Certification periods last 6–12 months for most households. Set a calendar reminder 60 days before your certification end date. Monitor your CommonHelp account and keep your mailing address and phone number current with your LDSS.

2. Failing the ABAWD work requirement without claiming an exemption

ABAWDs who do not work 80 hours/month and have not claimed a valid exemption are cut off after 3 months. The November 2025 expansion to ages 55–64 means many Virginians who were previously exempt now face this limit. Verify your status with your local LDSS and document any applicable exemption in writing immediately.

3. Missing the interview or not responding to LDSS notices

Keep your phone number and mailing address current. Check your CommonHelp account regularly. Virginia's 120+ LDSS offices send notices by mail and through the portal — missing either can result in denial or closure.

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4. Failure to report changes in income or household composition

Report changes within 10 days through CommonHelp or by contacting your LDSS. Military families should report BAH changes, deployment orders, and any changes in pay grade promptly.

5. VaCAP recipients who did not apply for SNAP

VaCAP ends June 1, 2026. Former VaCAP recipients who have not applied for SNAP face a gap in food assistance starting that date. Apply at commonhelp.virginia.gov immediately if this applies to you.

Your Right to Appeal

If your LDSS denies your application, reduces your benefits, or closes your case, request a Fair Hearing within 90 days of the notice. If you request within 10 days of a termination notice, your benefits may continue during the review. Contact Central Virginia Legal Aid (cvlas.org, 1-800-649-2227) or Legal Aid Works (legallaidworks.org, 1-800-827-8432) for free legal assistance.

Section 8: Key Contacts and Resources

Resource	Contact / What They Help With
VDSS SNAP Line	1-833-522-5582 dss.virginia.gov/benefit/snap
CommonHelp Portal	commonhelp.virginia.gov — apply, upload documents, manage benefits, renew
LDSS Office Locator	dss.virginia.gov/localagency — find your city or county LDSS office (120+ statewide)
Virginia Career Works (E&T)	virginiacareerworks.com — employment training for ABAWD compliance
VaCAP Transition Info	dss.virginia.gov — information for VaCAP recipients transitioning to SNAP by June 1, 2026
Fresh Match Program	dss.virginia.gov — find participating Virginia farmers markets for EBT produce matching
Feeding America Virginia Food Banks	Dial 211 endhunger.com — find your local food bank across Virginia
Central Virginia Legal Aid	cvlas.org 1-800-649-2227 — free SNAP legal help (central Virginia)
Legal Aid Works (Northern Neck/Rappahannock)	legallaidworks.org 1-800-827-8432 — free SNAP legal help (Northern Neck area)

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Resource	Contact / What They Help With
Blue Ridge Legal Services	brls.org 540-433-1830 — free legal help (Shenandoah Valley and Western Virginia)
Virginia 211	Dial 211 va211.org — food banks, emergency resources, benefits navigation statewide

A Note on Navigating Virginia's System

Virginia's SNAP program has several features that require extra awareness. The 120+ LDSS offices — reflecting Virginia's unique independent city structure — mean you must apply in the correct city or county office. CommonHelp routes applications automatically, but in-person visits require knowing your correct LDSS. The ABAWD age expansion to 64 in November 2025 is the most significant recent change — adults ages 55–64 who were previously exempt need to document work or exemptions immediately. VaCAP's June 1 end date is urgent for current VaCAP recipients. Military families near Virginia's major bases should note that BAH counts as income but high housing costs create significant shelter deductions — many qualifying households underestimate their eligibility because they only see their gross income. Fresh Match at farmers markets is an underutilized resource statewide.

This guide was compiled using information from the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, and publicly available state SNAP resources. It is informational only and does not constitute legal advice. Rules may change — always verify at dss.virginia.gov or commonhelp.virginia.gov or by contacting your local LDSS office.