

# Pennsylvania 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 • 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), narrowed non-citizen eligibility, and made other national changes to SNAP. This guide reflects rules as of May 2026. Always verify current rules with PA DHS at [dhs.pa.gov](https://dhs.pa.gov) or [compass.state.pa.us](https://compass.state.pa.us).

## Section 1: What Is SNAP?

SNAP stands for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. In Pennsylvania it is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS). Benefits are issued monthly through the Pennsylvania ACCESS Card accepted at authorized grocery stores, farmers markets, and major online retailers including Amazon and Walmart.

Pennsylvania uses 200% FPL through BBCE with no asset test and has a modified drug felony ban. SNAP is administered through County Assistance Offices (CAOs) statewide, and the COMPASS portal integrates SNAP with Medicaid and other DHS programs in one application. Pennsylvania offers 5-day expedited processing — faster than the federal 7-day standard. Benefits are issued on the Pennsylvania ACCESS Card. Some Pennsylvania counties have ABAWD waivers; verify with your county CAO.

### Pennsylvania SNAP: Key Facts at a Glance

- 200% FPL gross income limit through BBCE — no asset test for most households
- 5-day expedited processing for qualifying households — faster than the federal 7-day standard

- COMPASS portal integrates SNAP, Medicaid (Medical Assistance), and other DHS benefits in one application
- Modified drug felony ban: eligible if complying with sentence terms
- County Assistance Offices (CAOs) in all 67 counties
- EBT card is the 'Pennsylvania ACCESS Card'

## Section 2: Eligibility Requirements

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### 2.1 Residency

You must currently reside in Pennsylvania. 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 this requirement.

### 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

#### **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 PA DHS office or legal aid if your immigration status is unclear.

### 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

Pennsylvania uses Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE) at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. There is no asset test for most households. COMPASS allows Pennsylvania residents to apply for SNAP, Medical Assistance (Medicaid), and other DHS programs simultaneously.

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

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

<b>HHSize</b>	<b>Gross Limit</b>	<b>Elderly/DisabledGross Limit</b>	<b>Net Limit(100% FPL)</b>	<b>Max MonthlyBenefit</b>
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

\* Elderly/disabled households have no gross income limit — only the net income limit applies. Pennsylvania 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

#### **Pennsylvania Deduction Note**

Pennsylvania's diverse geography creates significant variation in housing costs — from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh urban cores (high rents) to rural central Pennsylvania (lower housing costs but significant transportation costs). Philadelphia-area households should

document full shelter costs given high rents. Rural households may deduct transportation costs for work or training. SEPTA and Port Authority transit fares used for employment commutes may be deductible as work-related expenses.

## 2.5 Asset Limits

For most Pennsylvania 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

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Work requirements are the most common reason people lose SNAP benefits.

### 3.1 Standard Work Requirements (All Adults 16–59)

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 PA CareerLink Centers
- 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

ABAWDs are adults ages 18–64 without dependents who are not disabled and not otherwise exempt. Pennsylvania enforces ABAWD rules in most counties, though county-level waivers may apply in some areas.

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.



#### **Pennsylvania ABAWD Note**

Some Pennsylvania counties have active ABAWD waivers based on local unemployment conditions. Contact your county CAO to confirm current waiver status. PA CareerLink Centers offer employment and training programs that satisfy ABAWD requirements statewide. Note:

some parts of Pennsylvania do not have ABAWD requirements — call 1-800-692-7462 to find out about your specific county.

### 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
- 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 COMPASS ([compass.state.pa.us](https://compass.state.pa.us)), by phone, or in person at your PA DHS office. Submit documentation before your benefit period runs out.

## Section 4: Required Documents

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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 Pennsylvania 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)
- 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)
- 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.

## Section 5: Step-by-Step Application Process

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### Step 1: Check Your Eligibility

Use the SNAP eligibility calculator at [snapeligibilitycalculator.com](https://snapeligibilitycalculator.com), call 1-800-692-7462, or visit your local PA DHS office.

### Step 2: Apply

Method	Details
COMPASS Online	<a href="https://compass.state.pa.us">compass.state.pa.us</a> — apply for SNAP, Medicaid, and other DHS benefits in one application. Available 24/7. Recommended.
Phone	Call 1-800-692-7462 or your county CAO.
In Person	Visit your county CAO. All 67 Pennsylvania counties have a County Assistance Office.
By Mail	Download Form PA 600 from <a href="https://dhs.pa.gov">dhs.pa.gov</a> ; mail to your county CAO.

### Step 3: Attend Your Interview

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

## Step 4: Receive a Decision

PA DHS 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.

## Expedited / Emergency Processing

Pennsylvania offers 5-day expedited processing — faster than the federal 7-day standard. You qualify if: gross monthly income is under \$150 AND liquid assets are under \$100; OR your combined monthly income and liquid assets are less than your monthly shelter costs (rent plus utilities); OR you are a migrant or seasonal farmworker with liquid assets under \$100.

## Section 6: Special Situations

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### 6.1 Experiencing Homelessness

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

### 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 higher asset limits (where applicable).

### 6.3 Drug Felony Convictions

Pennsylvania 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 probation, parole, or substance abuse treatment requirements. Bring documentation of your current compliance status (letter from probation officer, parole agent, or 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, or be enrolled in an approved training program.

## 6.5 COMPASS — Apply for Multiple Benefits at Once

Pennsylvania's COMPASS portal ([compass.state.pa.us](https://compass.state.pa.us)) allows residents to apply for SNAP, Medical Assistance (Medicaid), CHIP, LIHEAP, and other DHS programs in a single integrated application. This is a significant time-saver for households that may qualify for multiple programs simultaneously. You can also use COMPASS to upload documents, track your application status, report changes, and renew benefits online. If you are helping a client apply, COMPASS also supports authorized representative applications.

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

### Most Common Reasons SNAP Benefits Are Cut Off

#### 1. Missing the recertification (renewal) deadline

Certification periods last 6–12 months. Set a calendar reminder 60 days before your certification end date and monitor your online account regularly.

#### 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. Check county/local waiver status and document any exemption in writing at every recertification.

#### 3. Missing the interview or not responding to agency notices

Keep your phone number and mailing address current. Check your online account regularly for notices.

#### 4. Failure to report changes in income or household composition

Report changes within 10 days. Failure to report can result in overpayments and case closure.

## Your Right to Appeal

If PA DHS denies or reduces your benefits, 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 Community Legal Services of Philadelphia ([clsphila.org](https://clsphila.org), 215-981-3700) or your local legal aid organization for free legal assistance.

## Section 8: Key Contacts and Resources

Resource	Contact / What They Help With
PA DHS SNAP Line	1-800-692-7462   <a href="https://dhs.pa.gov">dhs.pa.gov</a>
COMPASS Portal	<a href="https://compass.state.pa.us">compass.state.pa.us</a> — apply for SNAP, Medicaid, and other benefits
County CAO Locator	<a href="https://dhs.pa.gov/county-offices">dhs.pa.gov/county-offices</a> — find your County Assistance Office

Resource	Contact / What They Help With
PA CareerLink (E&T)	pacareerlink.pa.gov — employment training for ABAWD compliance
Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger	hungercoalition.org   215-430-0556 — SNAP outreach in Philadelphia
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank	pittsburghfoodbank.org   412-460-3663 — Pittsburgh area food resources
Pennsylvania 211	Dial 211   pa211.org — food banks, emergency resources, benefits navigation
Community Legal Services (Philadelphia)	clsphila.org   215-981-3700 — free legal help with SNAP appeals

### A Note on Navigating Pennsylvania's System

Pennsylvania's 200% BBCE, no asset test, COMPASS multi-benefit integration, and 5-day expedited processing make it a very accessible SNAP state. The modified drug felony ban (sentence compliance required) is the key restriction. For advocates: COMPASS is the most efficient application tool — use it to simultaneously screen for SNAP, Medicaid, and LIHEAP. Help clients document transportation costs in rural areas and full shelter costs in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Verify county ABAWD waiver status before advising clients they face work requirements.

*This guide was compiled using information from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), 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 [dhs.pa.gov](https://dhs.pa.gov) or [compass.state.pa.us](https://compass.state.pa.us) or by contacting your local office.*