

Issue Alert
13-10-01

Program Area: Food Assistance Program (FAP)

Issue Summary: Monthly food assistance (FAP) benefits MAY increase slightly in October but WILL decrease beginning with November.

Persons Affected: All food assistance recipients.

Date: October 1, 2013

For More Information:

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BACKGROUND

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA also commonly known as the Stimulus) was passed and monthly food assistance benefits increased. The ARRA was passed to help the nation's economy by increasing funding for many programs. The food assistance part of ARRA, commonly known as the "SNAP ARRA boost" ends on October 31st. As a result, food assistance benefits for **all** groups will decrease beginning with November benefits. See What's Happening, below, for details.

The names of food assistance programs at the federal and state level can be confusing: The federal government refers to food assistance as "SNAP" (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and Michigan calls its Food Assistance Program "FAP".

Before the November decrease, some FAP groups received a small increase in benefits from cost of living adjustments (COLA's) that started on October 1st. These COLA's increase some standard deductions used to budget food assistance benefit and will increase benefits for **some** groups. Those groups got notice from the Department of Human Services (DHS) in mid-September that their benefits would increase on October 1st, but they did not get notice that their benefits would decrease in November because of the end of the SNAP ARRA boost. DHS will not send notices of the November decreases out until mid-October.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Some FAP groups will get small increases to benefits in October due to cost of living adjustments (COLA's) for some deductions used in FAP budgeting. In mid-September, the Department of Human Services (DHS) sent Notice of Case Action (NOCA) telling each group about the increase in its benefit. However, this notice did not mention that benefits will decrease beginning in November because the SNAP ARRA boost is ending.

All FAP groups' benefits will decrease in November when the benefit increase passed in the ARRA or Stimulus package in 2009 comes to an end. (See Background, above, for an explanation of the SNAP ARRA boost.) The Department of Human Services (DHS) will not notify FAP groups of this decrease until Notices of Case Action (NOCA) are sent out beginning in mid-October. The FAP groups will have very little notice of the decrease which can make a big difference for some groups whose benefits don't stretch far enough to prevent food insecurity as it is.

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	REDUCTION IN MONTHLY FAP BENEFIT – starting November 2013
1 person*	-\$11
2 persons*	-\$20
3 persons	-\$29
4 persons	-\$36
5 persons	-\$43
6 persons	-\$52
<i>*1 or 2 person households currently receiving the minimum benefit of \$16 will receive \$15 – a reduction of \$1</i>	

This decrease makes it very important that FAP groups are receiving all allowable deductions. Unless the FAP group is receiving the maximum FAP monthly benefit, recipients and their advocates should ask questions and make sure they understand all deductions that might be allowed. Examples of deductions that sometimes are not budgeted correctly and prevent FAP groups from receiving all of the benefits they are entitled to are: dependent care (for care of a child or disabled adult), up-to-date shelter costs, and medical expenses for people who are senior (age 60+), disabled or disabled veterans. These medical expenses include insurance premiums, over-the-counter medications and health care supplies, transportation to medical treatment. Call the CCJ Food Helpline at 1-800-481-4989 to get information and help.

WHAT SHOULD ADVOCATES DO?

1. Help clients to understand that some might receive FAP benefit increases in October but all will see a benefits decrease in November.

2. Help clients get the most possible benefits by reporting all allowable costs to DHS.
3. Contact CCJ's Food Helpline at (800)481-4989 for help understanding FAP budgeting and allowable expenses.
4. If you believe your client's FAP benefits are not correct, help them request and present information at administrative hearings if and when appropriate.

WHAT SHOULD CLIENTS DO?

1. Be informed and plan for lower benefits beginning in November (see chart above).
2. Call CCJ's Food Helpline at (800)481-4989 to talk to an advocate about all allowable deductions for FAP food assistance budgeting.
3. Inform your caseworker of any allowable deductions you have.
4. If appropriate, request and present information at an administrative hearing if you disagree with your benefit amount.

FINDING HELP

Most legal aid and legal services offices handle these types of cases, and they do not charge a fee. You can locate the "free" legal services or legal aid office that serves your county on the Michigan Legal Aid Web Site <http://www.michiganlegalhelp.org/> or look in the yellow pages under "attorneys" or call the toll-free lawyer referral number, (800) 968-0738.