

Heidi Hedberg
Commissioner

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Department of Health

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Additional Resources to Provide Relief for SNAP Households

February 27, 2023 - ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Department of Health is taking action to provide immediate relief for Alaskans who receive support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). “This is an all hands-on-deck moment,” said Commissioner Heidi Hedberg. “We must work together to get Alaskans the benefits they need.”

Governor Mike Dunleavy said, “These immediate actions, including assistance to the state’s food banks, is to make sure Alaskans can bridge the gap and know what to expect. This support will help stock the pantries of Alaskans while the SNAP recertifications are being processed,” said Dunleavy, outlining the following plan:

1. **SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS:**
 - a. To address immediate needs while longer-term solutions are implemented, the Governor announced \$1.68 million to be distributed through the Fairbanks Community Food Bank, Food Bank of Alaska, Kenai Peninsula Food Bank, and Southeast Alaska Food Bank, to the 150 food pantries across the state. The money will be used to purchase food in bulk to stock food pantries, money cards to be used at local grocery stores for food and support some school box lunch programs while recertifications and new applications are being processed.
 - b. The Division of Public Assistance (DPA) also completed programming to automatically roll SNAP benefits for Alaskans whose benefits were scheduled to be redetermined in February, March, and April 2023. This will provide additional time for staff to work through the backlog.
2. **WITHIN 90 DAYS:**
 - a. Hiring and onboarding additional staff to fill new and vacant positions.
 - b. As an intermediate step, the Division of Public Assistance has a temporary contract to increase staff at the Virtual Contact Center (VCC). The contractor is onboarding and training staff.
 - c. The DPA is implementing contracts for increased IT support.
3. **PERMANENT SOLUTIONS:**
 - a. Governor Dunleavy added \$54 million in the capital budget to migrate the DPA’s legacy system to a modern integrated eligibility enrollment system.
 - b. Programming is underway to transition the SNAP certification period from 6 months to 12 months for all participants with a targeted go live date July 2023.
 - c. The Department plans to launch an online SNAP application by the end of the calendar year.

The division has been coordinating its efforts with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, the federal agency that oversees the SNAP program, to look at long-term solutions to meet the required SNAP processing timeframes. Division Director Deb Etheridge said they are considering all options to reduce processing times. “This is an extraordinary situation, and we are prepared to do whatever it takes,” said Etheridge. “It is important to understand that the improvement process is continually evolving, with the goal of getting benefits to eligible Alaskans.”

The division has filled 71 vacant positions since November 2022. There are 31 new employees in training. It will take several months for the new staff to be fully trained to support the workflow. However, because the newly hired staff is trained first to gather information, this support will allow the more experienced eligibility technicians to focus on final determination. “These changes will give our staff time to catch up,” Etheridge said, noting that the division has overcome similar challenges in the past.

Hedberg expressed gratitude for the community partners who have been active in helping people and families meet their needs locally, especially agencies like the Fairbanks Community Food Bank, the Food Bank of Alaska, the Kenai Peninsula Food Bank, the Southeast Alaska Food Bank and the other food pantries across the state. Alaskans in need can use [Alaska 2-1-1](#) as a way to connect with the range of resources available in the community. “We encourage our community partners to update their information and add any resources they can offer to our neighbors and families today,” said Hedberg.

The Division of Public Assistance Virtual Contact Center is staffed from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and is accessible statewide at 800-478-7778. Callers can select an option to check the status of their case through the automated program information line at any time. News, forms and information are available on the Division of Public Assistance website at <https://health.alaska.gov/dpa/>.

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