

Heidi Hedberg
Commissioner

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Department of Health

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SNAP application processing times steadily improving

September 15, 2023 / ANCHORAGE –The Alaska Department of Health, Division of Public Assistance (DPA) has cleared the backlog of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications and recertifications submitted prior to June 2023.

“Our diligent staff deserves a moment to pause and reflect on achieving this milestone,” said Commissioner Heidi Hedberg. “While we still have miles to run in this marathon, I can’t overstate how proud I am of their efforts to implement new strategies and continue to find ways to improve the services we provide to Alaskans who need this support to feed themselves and their families.”

First identified in the fall of 2022, the SNAP backlog had left more than 14,000 Alaskans waiting for an eligibility determination for the program longer than the federal deadline of 30 days. Unfortunately, this delay put a strain on individuals and families as well as on community organizations across the state, prompting the state to respond with [additional resources to provide relief](#).

“The longer an application waits for processing, the longer it takes to complete, based on changes that naturally occur,” explained Deb Etheridge, DPA Director. “Now that these priority determinations are completed, our staff can address new applications and recertifications received since June, which we expect to move through much more quickly.”

Clearing the backlog has been Etheridge’s main mission since her appointment as Director of DPA in January. With support from Governor Mike Dunleavy, the Legislature and the division’s dedicated staff, the division continues to focus on shoring up staffing, increasing training and improving technology. DPA has also “rebooted” its business process, creating a more efficient “one and done” model, Etheridge said.

DPA’s progress is a testament to cooperation among many stakeholders, including coordination with the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service, the federal agency that oversees the SNAP program – as well as the Food Bank of Alaska and other partners, who combined efforts to help distribute [\\$1.7 million in aid](#) throughout Alaska. “Without all of that effort and your tremendous support, we wouldn’t be out of the backlog,” she said. She further expressed heartfelt gratitude to the employees at DPA, saying “It has been a full-court press with all of our eligibility staff to get this work done.”

Above all, to those affected, Etheridge says this: “We’re continuing to develop strategies to permanently resolve this situation. I sincerely appreciate everyone’s patience these past few months as we have continued to improve our overall effectiveness.”

DPA Director Deb Etheridge addresses the SNAP backlog in this [video press release](#) from DOH.



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