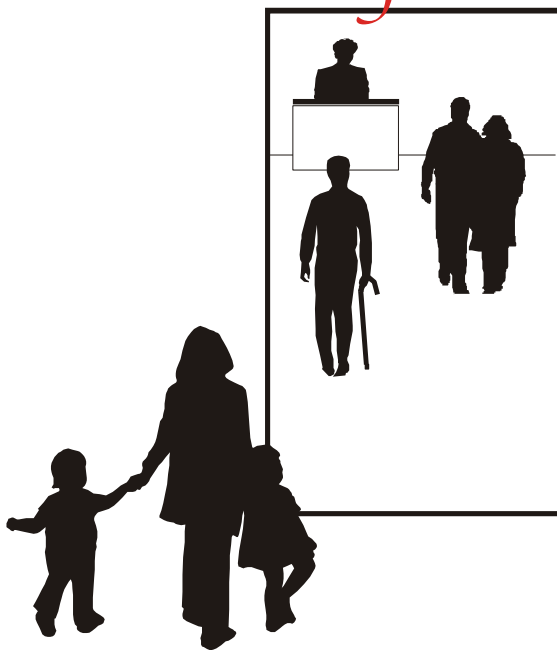


## *Excellent Service for All*



*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

**Delaware**  
**District of Columbia**  
**Maryland**  
**New Jersey**  
**Pennsylvania**  
**Virginia**  
**Virgin Islands**  
**West Virginia**

USDA, Food and Nutrition Service  
Mid-Atlantic Region  
Christopher J. Martin, Administrator

# Excellent Service for All



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The Food Stamp Program is reaching about 60 percent of individuals who are eligible for program benefits. While participation is on the upswing, it is still significantly below 1994 levels, when more than 74 percent of eligible people were participating in the program. Many people do not fully understand that they may be eligible. This is due to ongoing misunderstandings about the program, as well as changes in eligibility criteria during the past several years.

To ensure that everyone has access to a healthy, nutritious diet, the Food Stamp Program, along with its cooperating partners - state and local agencies - have implemented methods to improve the public's access to the Food Stamp Program. *Excellent Service for All* presents the access and outreach "best practices" of the eight states within the FNS, Mid-Atlantic Region.

We will continue to provide good ideas through *Excellent Service for All*. Its success will depend, in part, however, on your participation. We are very interested in your success stories, however big or small - someone else may consider your idea a "keeper." Please let us know of your best practices by contacting:

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Mid-Atlantic Region  
Food Stamp Program  
300 Corporate Boulevard  
Robbinsville, NJ 08691

Attn: Marian Wig, Senior Program Specialist  
(609) 259-5059 (voice)  
(609)259-5062 (fax)  
marian.wig@fns.usda.gov

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# Excellent Service for All



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## Delaware

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### No Waiting at Service Centers

Prompt service is a goal in all service centers of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). In fact, applicants can expect to be helped within 5 to 10 minutes of their scheduled appointment times, say DHSS staff.

A rotation system keeps the wait time to a minimum. Each week, a unit of case workers take turns within their own locations to perform intake functions for multiple assistance programs. They know well in advance when they are scheduled for intake and when they can perform recertification and interim change functions for the applicants who become part of their assigned caseloads. As such, there is enough staff available to see applicants – barring a flu epidemic – and applicants do not have to wait for help from one particular case worker, say DHSS staff.

*☐ For more information, contact: Barbara Hanson, Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, (302) 577-4899, bhanson@state.de.us.*

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### No Wrong Door in Delaware

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) provides service in the same manner as private industry, like a bank, for example, that has many branches where customers can transact business.

Through its Service Integration Project, one interview captures extensive client information and enables a single case worker to guide a client through an array of available services. For example, each of the service centers in Delaware accepts applications and conducts interviews for food stamps and other assistance programs, and in turn, forwards the applications to the service center closest to the applicants' residence .

This is a friendly and efficient way to assist applicants, no matter what “door” they enter, say DHSS staff.

*☐ For more information, contact: Barbara Hanson, Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, (302) 577-4899, bhanson@state.de.us.*

# Excellent Service for All

*Best practices for increasing access  
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**District of Columbia**



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## Eligibility Video Tape for Service Centers

If you need help, take the first step, apply for food stamps. And here's how.

That's the message broadcasted in the service centers of the District of Columbia Department of Human Services through its new eligibility video.

*Applying for Food Stamps* follows four food stamp recipients through the application process with the narrator, Paul Berry, who is a former news anchor for ABC-TV, explaining:

- Who can get food stamps
- How to apply
- Expedited service
- Why the DHS asks particular questions
- Household concept
- Purchasing and preparing meals together
- Types of verification that must be provided
- How benefits are issued and redeemed
- How to remain eligible

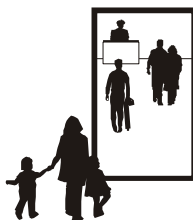
The 10-minute tape ends with a recap of the information, which certainly should help to get the important points across to viewers.

☐ For more information, contact: Sharon Cooper-DeLoatch, District of Columbia Department of Human Services, (202) 698-3900, [sharon.cooper-delatch@dc.gov](mailto:sharon.cooper-delatch@dc.gov).

# Excellent Service for All

*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

**Maryland**



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## **Self-screening for Food Stamp Benefits**

At a shopping mall, Maryland residents can find out whether they are potentially eligible for the Food Stamp Program.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) is reaching the public through a web-based, interactive kiosk. The “computer in a box” debuted at the Mondawmin Mall in Baltimore City this past November, and another is slated soon for the Salisbury Mall.

Inquirers, who remain anonymous, input their gross income and resource amounts, rent, utility and shelter costs and the number and ages of the people in their households. To ensure users understand that they are not applying for benefits, a message, “This is only a test,” appears on the screen. No matter what determination is reached, the computer returns an advisement to contact a local department of social services.

The system also includes information on the USDA Women, Infants and Children program, the USDA Food Guide Pyramid, meal planning, food safety, handling and preparation tips and the locations of soup kitchens and food pantries.

The freestanding unit, which is about the size of a typical ATM machine, was fitted with panels to ensure privacy. The design and height of the kiosk meets the specifications for accessibility by wheelchair-bound people. Access is by touch. An earphone jack and software called JAWS, or Job Access With Sound, enable people with visual impairments to access the kiosk.

DHR staff say, the latest data indicates that the rate of use averaged 47.5 times a day, November 25 through December 31, 2002.

Implementation of the kiosk basically involved forming a committee of food stamp and information technology staff, soliciting bids, selecting a vendor, coordinating with an electrician at the site and maintaining the system.

*☐ For more information, contact: Deborah McWilliams, Maryland Department of Human Resources, (410) 767-7080, [dmcwilli@dhr.state.md.us](mailto:dmcwilli@dhr.state.md.us).*

# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

## Maryland

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### Eligibility Video Tape for Advocates and Local Agencies

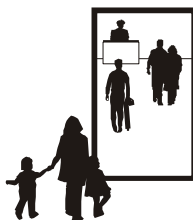
You can do wonders with food stamps. You don't have to spend them all at one time. That's the good part, exclaims a food stamp recipient whose nine great-grandchildren reside with her. Another recipient says he is comfortable using the EBT card because it looks like a credit card, and, therefore, no one knows he is using food stamp benefits at the grocery store.

Their testimonies to the benefits of the Food Stamp Program are included on a video tape, *Helping Ends Meet With Food Stamps*. The 8-minute production for the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) provides an overview of basic program eligibility - who may qualify (unemployed, TANF clients, disabled, elderly), how to apply, how to access benefits, the types of eligible food items and the requirements of households to advise of changes in circumstances (simplified reporting). There also is a segment on making good food choices and budgeting for and preparing nutritious meals. A toll-free number is displayed so viewers can obtain additional information on the Food Stamp Program.

The video tape was produced by Maryland Public Television during 2002 as part of the DHR access and outreach campaign, *Hard Working Families*, that targets "new" (working poor) clients. It was filmed in a grocery store, the homes of recipients and at a local agency. More than 100 copies have been distributed to advocates and groups that serve potential clients. It also is shown in the reception areas of the DHR local agencies. DHR plans to provide the video and FNS outreach brochures to various cultural organizations and service agencies.

☐ For more information, contact: Erlene Wilson, Maryland Department of Human Resources, (410) 767-8951, [ewilson@dlr.state.md.us](mailto:ewilson@dlr.state.md.us).

# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

## **Pennsylvania**

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### **Self-Screening and Online Application for Social Service Programs**

Pennsylvanians can self-screen for potential eligibility and apply for food stamp benefits any time during the day or night, from home, a library, health care clinic, community center or any other location where the Internet can be accessed.

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) is one of two agencies leading the Nation with its online self-screening and application service. COMPASS - or Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Application for Social Services - is a single access point for a wide variety of programs including food stamps, cash assistance, energy assistance, health care benefits and home- and community-based services.

From implementation in April 2002 through February 2003, approximately 24,000 people pre-screened for eligibility; 20,000 were potentially eligible for programs. DPW received 7,185 requests for the Food Stamp Program, half as many for cash assistance and 10,500 for Medicaid.

COMPASS is available in English and Spanish, while 10 other languages are used to tell non-English-speaking Pennsylvanians about the application and where they can obtain assistance to complete it. Additionally, the online application reduces barriers for persons with visual, hearing, physical or cognitive disabilities.

Encryption and a private user identification/password protects the information during transmission and confidentiality when the application is received, which becomes the date of application.

The development of COMPASS involved a collaborative effort between DPW and other state agencies, the private sector and local communities. A variety of stakeholders helped to test its effectiveness and user-friendliness.

Pennsylvania community representatives say, convenience, comfort, speed and simplification best describe the online application, which can be reached through the website, [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).

☐ For more information, contact: Mary Brugger, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, (717) 787-6524, [mbrugger@state.pa.us](mailto:mbrugger@state.pa.us); or Ed Zogby, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, (717) 787-4081, [ezogby@state.pa.us](mailto:ezogby@state.pa.us).

# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

## Pennsylvania

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### Liaison Between Social Services and Faith-Based Groups

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) recently assigned a staff member of its Income Maintenance Administration to be the single point of contact for all its faith-based activities. Gilbert Gomez, Liaison to the Faith Community, responds to inquiries on how faith-based organizations can collaborate with government entities in the provision of social services, and provides information to them on navigating through capacity-building resources.

DPW has been reaching out to faith-based and community groups for years, say DPW officials. It has made special outreach efforts to inform faith-based and community organizations about programs and services such as the Food Stamp Program, Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicaid and Statewide Adoption Network program. DPW currently contracts with faith-based groups to encourage TANF clients in designated counties to engage in opportunities for self-sufficiency. Through the DPW Community Connections Initiative, faith-based and community organizations are working in partnership in these efforts.

*☐ For more information, contact: Gilbert Gomez, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, (717) 787-0262, [ggomez@state.pa.us](mailto:ggomez@state.pa.us).*

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### State Outreach Grants to Community Organizations

The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) provided 19 community organizations close to \$1 million this past year to conduct outreach initiatives in 33 counties. For the most part, these are pre-screening and intake projects that target non-English-speaking populations, elderly and former TANF clients. The activities take place in the homes of applicants, at food banks, Head Start centers, churches, Women, Infants and Children sites, senior centers and the like.

Summary of the basic services provided by the projects:

- Philadelphia Corporation for Aging – bilingual outreach coordinator pre-screens and assists in completing food stamp applications of low-income, Spanish-speaking congregation at local Catholic church; and advises Catholic clergy of food stamp eligibility.
- Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger – pre-screens and accepts food stamp applications at food cupboards; and conducts media campaign.
- Montgomery County Community Action Development – full-time worker pre-screens; and assists in completing food stamp applications.
- Community Services Council of Chester County – pre-screens and assists in completing food stamp applications of housing applicants.
- Community Action of Delaware County – pre-screens and assists in completing food stamp applications in ABAWD-exempt localities.



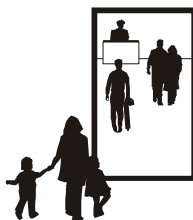
- Community Check-Up of South Harrisburg – pre-screens health-care services applicants; arranges appointments; and makes home visits to complete food stamp applications.
- Indiana County Community Action Program – outreach worker accepts food stamp applications one evening each week at senior and Head Start centers.
- Keystone Community Action Program – Makes home visits to complete food stamp applications; takes completed applications to appropriate local agency; makes food stamp information and brochures available to area businesses that employ low-income people; and trains staff from Area Aging, Salvation Army, Women, Infants and Children program, state health centers and child care sites to identify potential participants.
- Fayette County Community Action Agency – enrollment specialist provides food stamp applications through home-delivery programs such as Meals on Wheels and at senior centers; and assists in completing food stamp applications.
- Mercer County Community Action Agency – pre-screens former TANF clients and special needs groups such as homeless with serious mental illnesses; makes home visits to complete food stamp applications; and partners with faith-based organizations and the Women, Infants and Children program.
- Armstrong County Community Action Agency – two service coordinators assist in completing food stamp applications; and present food stamp information at senior centers.
- Hunger Services Network – pre-screens former TANF clients and the elderly at food banks one evening each week and in the morning each Saturday.
- Union/Snyder Office of Human Resources – bilingual outreach team assists in completing food stamp applications at shelters, Head Start and day care and aging centers, food banks, super cupboards, housing authorities and at Family Literacy Council.
- Trehab Center – two outreach workers pre-screen and assist in completing food stamp applications at three food banks during flexible hours, to accommodate working people; and make home visits to complete food stamp applications of the elderly.
- Central Pennsylvania Community Action Incorporated – assists in completing food stamp applications of former TANF clients and Russian-speaking population who visit senior centers and six food pantries.
- Hispanic American Organization of Lehigh County – bilingual staff pre-screen and assist in completing food stamp applications of former TANF clients and the elderly who live in high-rise buildings; and work with area churches.
- Family Health Council of Pennsylvania – two outreach workers pre-screen and assist in completing food stamp applications at Women, Infants and Children program sites, senior centers and food banks.
- Commission of Economic Opportunity of Luzerne County – trains staff of food banks, crisis and Head Start centers to pre-screen and assist in completing food stamp applications of former TANF clients, non-English-speaking and elderly populations at senior centers; and makes home visits to pre-screen and assist in completing food stamp applications of homebound seniors.
- Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank – outreach worker pre-screens and assists in completing food stamp applications at food banks; and organizes pre-screening events.

Grants up to \$50,000 funded the 19 projects. Approximately 14,000 people were reached through group presentations, seminars, individual meetings and media campaigns. More than 4,000 individuals were pre-screened for potential food stamp eligibility. The 12-month grants were renewed April 1, 2003, say DPW staff.

*For more information, contact: Nancy Poindexter, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, (717) 772-7906, [npoindester@state.pa.us](mailto:npoindester@state.pa.us).*

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# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
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**Pennsylvania**

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## **Outreach Packet to Recipients of Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid in Allegheny County**

“With the rising cost of food, we wondered if you could use a little help at the grocery store. Every little bit surely helps, and we may just be the help you need.”

This was the opening line of the letter that the Allegheny County Assistance Office (ACAO) targeted to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid recipients who were not receiving food stamps. The letter, part of a special outreach effort by the Pennsylvania county, explained that the addressee may be eligible for food stamps and could apply by completing the application attached to the letter and including verification of income and living expenses, if possible. It also included the telephone number for assistance in completing the application. An enclosed pamphlet reinforced the content of the letter.

Allegheny County sent the outreach packet to 11,064 clients in nine of its 10 districts from March through December 2002. In return, it received 1,363 applications, of which 989 were authorized for food stamp benefits and 175 were pended. Applications arrive daily, however, so these “real time” statistics may continue to increase.

Even if we only see an additional 1,000 or so SSI recipients receive an average of \$71.30 in food stamp benefits per month, the effort was worth it, say ACAO staff.

Approximately 15 percent of the applications were sent to elderly individuals. As the word gets out, the myth - the average benefit is only \$10 - may be dispelled and even more people will apply.

FNS provided funding to print the aforementioned pamphlet as a poster. The ACAO had identified strategic locations for display, such as doctors’ offices, seniors’ facilities and grocery stores.

*☐ For more information, contact: Vince Corvino, Allegheny County Assistance Office, (412) 565-7795, vcorvino@state.pa.us.*

# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
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## Virginia

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### One-Stop Centers in Norfolk

A center on aging, a center for substance abuse and mental health services, and oddly enough, the utilities department, are an “extension” of the Norfolk Department of Human Services (DHS). As such, the partners share their office space at these locations where their clientele and others can apply for food stamps.

The “one-stop” concept promotes fast, efficient and convenient service. And it generates less anxiety for folks who are not comfortable with the idea of applying for assistance at a “welfare office,” say DHS staff.

Here is a summary of the DHS initiatives at the three centers:

#### Center on Aging

##### DHS Service:

Two eligibility supervisors and 16 eligibility workers help people daily to apply for and continue their participation in the Food Stamp Program, Medicaid and long-term nursing. The staff, aboard at the center since September 2002, also conduct home visits, which they say have increased in number recently. They access the state automated eligibility system and maintain the case files at the center. Business hours are 7 a.m. through 6 p.m. daily. The extended hours enable caregivers and other providers to access the center without taking time off from their jobs. During the first six months in operation, this “offsite food stamp office” processed 37 food stamp applications and maintained approximately 1,681 ongoing food stamp cases.

*[ ] For more information, contact: Lynn Brodnax, Norfolk Department of Human Services, (757) 664-6109, [lynn.brodnax@norfolk.gov](mailto:lynn.brodnax@norfolk.gov).*

#### Community Services Board

##### DHS Service:

Six eligibility workers accept food stamp applications for initial certification and recertification at this center. Besides maintaining approximately 1,200 food stamp cases at this center for substance abuse and mental health services, the workers also provide food stamp information at community functions.

*[ ] For more information, contact: Lynn Brodnax, Norfolk Department of Human Services, (757) 664-6109, [lynn.brodnax@norfolk.gov](mailto:lynn.brodnax@norfolk.gov).*

#### Norfolk Department of Utilities

##### DHS Service:

An eligibility worker helps people to complete applications for food stamps and other assistance programs at the Norfolk Department of Utilities. Many of the food stamp applicants initially had gone to the unusual “offsite food stamp office” to seek assistance regarding their water bills.

*[ ] For more information, contact: Lynn Brodnax, Norfolk Department of Human Services, (757) 664-6109, [lynn.brodnax@norfolk.gov](mailto:lynn.brodnax@norfolk.gov).*

# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

**Virginia**

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## Self- and Pre-Screening for Social Services

Answering 13 relatively simple questions and providing a zip code, return a projection of whether Virginians are potentially eligible for food stamps, cash assistance, children's health insurance, medical assistance, energy assistance and child care.

The online self-screening tool that is available through the website of the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) also advises potential applicants of the minimum information that will have to be verified for each program, a disclaimer that completing the questionnaire provides only a preliminary screening - not actual eligibility - a statement that "may not be eligible" does not mean DSS cannot help, and the address and phone number of the DSS local agency nearest to the user's zip code.

Prior to its availability this past November, DSS announced the eligibility instrument to some 150 partner community agencies. One such organization, Information and Referral, refers callers to the screening tool or accesses the website for those who cannot, and provides DSS a quarterly report on the number of referrals and assistance it provided. A counter on the DSS website also tracks the number of times and the time of day the screener was accessed.

Self-screening tools in any locality help to lessen some of the anxiety experienced by people for whom seeking assistance is new. They also educate the public about eligibility for food stamps and other programs, encourage application for benefits and save time for those who may suspect they do not meet the income criteria.

For more information, contact: Angela Beachy, Virginia Department of Social Services, (804) 692-2376, [acb900@email1.dss.state.va.us](mailto:acb900@email1.dss.state.va.us).

# Excellent Service for All



*Best practices for increasing access  
to the Food Stamp Program*

## West Virginia

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### Service at Outstations

For West Virginians in remote areas of the state, the drive to the food stamp office used to be treacherous, expensive, extensive - 1 to 1-1/2 hours. The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) bridged the gap to these residents, however, by expanding services the past several years beyond its "real" office in Oak Hill, Fayette County.

A handful of DHHR staff manage four "outstations" during scheduled time periods, which are advertised in the communities they serve. They are available at a town hall, a former elementary school and senior centers, each in different counties.

Using laptop computers and the "box" - it's just that - a box of paper applications and supplies - DHHR case workers process initial applications and reapplications for food stamps and emergency and medical assistance. They suppress the computer-generated notice, which they say has not been a problem, and send a letter to outstationed clients who are due for recertification.

DHHR says the benefits of the outstations include:

- The food stamp caseload increased steadily after initiation of the outstations.
- The rate for keeping appointments is greater at the outstations than the main office.
- The "welfare office" stigma has been reduced, particularly among the elderly.
- The outstations were very beneficial when the southern half of West Virginia was hit by disastrous floods.
- The outstations save time for the local agency and clients.
- The cost to the local agency is a half-tank of gas.
- They did not have a problem obtaining the sites.
- Case workers enjoy the break from the normal routine at the central location and pride themselves on being a full-service, friendly and helpful provider.
- Clients appreciate the service. In fact, one of the first customers - a 79-year-old gentleman - walked to the outstation; ordinarily he would have paid \$25 for private transportation. He was so pleased, he hugged the case worker.

☐ For more information, contact: Skip Jennings, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, (304) 465-9613, [skipjennings@wvdhhr.org](mailto:skipjennings@wvdhhr.org).