



Food Stamps and other HHSC Programs and Services for Victims of Hurricane Ike

**Presentation to the House Select Committee on Hurricane Ike Storm
Devastation to the Texas Gulf Coast**

Albert Hawkins, Executive Commissioner

Joanne Molina, Associate Commissioner, Office of Family Services

Aurora LeBrun, Associate Commissioner, Office of Eligibility Services

November 10, 2008

Food Stamp Program -- Hurricane Ike Assistance

Food Stamp Benefits to Qualified Individuals:

- Benefits are 100 percent federally funded.
- Program is federally administered.
 - Changes to eligibility requirements require federal approval.
- HHSC issued emergency Food Stamp benefits under the Hurricane Ike waiver to over 142,000 new households totaling almost \$67.0 million.
 - The average benefit amount issued for emergency food stamps was \$469.00.
- Nearly 222,000 existing Food Stamp households received replacement benefits totaling approximately \$38 million.
- 195,520 households already receiving Food Stamps when Hurricane Ike hit received a supplemental benefit totaling \$30.6 million to account for increased disaster related expenses.

Food Stamp Waiver Overview

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- Waiver negotiations with Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) were an interactive process. The state's request was modified as demand for services evolved.
 - An initial waiver was approved on September 15th.
 - Modifications to the waiver were approved on September 17th and 26th.
 - Texas received approval for modifications to the program for families already receiving Food Stamps in the disaster counties. Approval allowed HHSC to:
 - Provide automatic benefit replacements for individuals who were already receiving food stamp benefits in disaster counties in recognition of the food that was destroyed with the loss of power.
 - Allow an extra ten days for recipients outside of the disaster counties to report power outages and request replacement benefits.
 - Allow the purchase of hot food through the end of October.
 - Extend certification periods for certain households.
 - Apply a disaster related expense deduction resulting in a supplemental benefit for households receiving less than the maximum allotment.

Food Stamp Waiver Overview

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- Texas received approval to modify program requirements for applicants residing in the disaster area:
 - Only verification of identity and residence was required.
 - Applicants self-declared information about income and assets.
 - Applicants under the emergency program could receive six weeks of benefits.
 - If regular verifications were provided applicants were certified for normal six months.
 - Asset limitations were modified to exclude vehicles.
 - The \$5,000 liquid asset restriction still applied.
 - For households meeting income requirements, a deduction for disaster related expenses was applied.
 - This deduction increased benefit amounts for households with benefit levels below the maximum allotment.
 - An abbreviated two-page application was created to collect only the necessary information.

Food Stamp Requirements

Family Size	Monthly Gross Income <i>(Monthly income before taxes and other deductions are taken out.)</i>	Monthly Food Stamp Award
1	\$1,430	\$162
2	\$1,925	\$298
3	\$2,420	\$426
4	\$2,915	\$542

Challenges in Meeting Demand for Services

- Eligibility offices were impacted by the storm and many offices were unable to open immediately.
 - Most of the eligibility offices in the Houston and Beaumont Regions suffered minor damage.
 - Some offices could not open due to the lack of power.
 - Local servers and hardware were damaged in some cases.
 - Four offices with major damage remain closed: 1 in Galveston and 3 in Houston (I-10 East, 1425 E. 40th, and Buffalo Speedway).
 - HHSC set-up temporary offices in various locations to deliver services.
 - Restoration work is ongoing.
- Staff were personally impacted and were dealing with personal challenges
 - Evacuation and relocation to other areas of Texas and Louisiana;
 - Loss of homes and personal property;
 - Destroyed food;
 - Extended loss of power; and
 - School and daycare closures.
- Staff responded to the challenges:
 - Continuing to report to work, including extended hours and weekend assignments;
 - Reporting to other sites where the staff were temporarily displaced;
 - Providing services to individuals and families in-person and over the phone; and
 - Working to conduct office assessments and address building issues in adverse conditions.
- Accommodations were scarce in the affected areas making it difficult to bring in staff from other areas.

Challenges in Meeting Demand for Services

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- Clients faced long wait times at local offices and on the telephone due to high demand. To help address this:
 - Many eligibility offices were open expanded hours and on the weekends.
 - To the extent possible workload was distributed to other areas of the state not affected by the storm.
 - The antiquated system that supports eligibility process does not allow for the electronic distribution of workload.
 - The Food Stamp Program did not meet all needs for food assistance.
 - Clients who did not meet income or asset eligibility requirements for Food Stamps had to rely on Food Banks and other local resources for assistance.
 - HHSC staff provided referrals to other resources, but those resources were limited.
 - Informal communication channels spread inaccurate information regarding eligibility for benefits.
 - Text message was widely distributed indicating all income and assets would be disregarded.
 - Misinformation increased frustration for applicants and increased traffic at offices.
 - To help insure accurate information was reaching families, HHSC:
 - Distributed information regarding eligibility to media outlets;
 - Participated in television and radio interviews;
 - Participated in town hall meetings;
 - Distributed information to local, state, and federal officials; and
 - Posted regular updates on the website and at offices.

Ongoing Impact

- Client and Workload Impact:
 - Timeliness of case processing has been affected because regular caseloads were delayed while processing disaster emergency assistance was prioritized.
 - Many applicants who received emergency Food Stamps for the two month period have a continuing need for services and will reapply.

Case Management Services

- Funding from the Disaster Relief Fund, administered by FEMA, is used to provide long-term case management services to Hurricane Ike victims.
 - HHSC is pursuing this grant funding and will issue a Request for Proposals to seek a sub-grantee(s) to deliver case management services.
 - Implementation of case management pilot is contingent upon receipt of funding from FEMA.
 - Case Management Pilot is 18 months long.
 - An independent evaluation is required.
 - Funds cannot be used for any direct services.
 - FEMA reporting requirements must be met – focus on best practices to assist in formulating an effective federal case management model to be deployed in future disasters.
 - FEMA has defined allowable case management activities to include:
 - Assessing client needs.
 - Developing a plan to achieve recovery.
 - Monitoring progress.
 - Organizing and providing resources.
 - Providing advocacy for clients to achieve pre-Ike conditions
 - Sub-grantee(s) will identify sub-recipients in each of the affected counties to deliver services.
 - Further collaboration with local communities, faith-based organizations, and governmental entities will occur.

APPENDICES

I. Food Stamp Waiver Comparison Charts

II. Additional Services

2-1-1 Texas

Ice and Water

Other Needs Assistance Grants

Food Stamp Waiver Comparison

Texas Disaster Response

	Katrina 8/29/05	Rita 9/24/05	Dolly 7/23/08	Gustav* 9/1/08	Ike* 9/13/08
Population	Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana	9 counties in Region 5, one parish in LA	4 counties in Region 11, 4 zip codes in Hidalgo County	15 counties in Region 5, all evacuees from LA, AL and MS	29 counties in Region 5 and 6
Disaster Food Stamp Benefits Issued	\$91,342,890	\$22,094,021	N/A	\$50,830	\$66,914,842
Households Served	311,989	28,419	N/A	178	142,535
Replacement Food Stamp Benefits Issued	N/A	12,034,942	\$3,906,521	\$110,818	\$37,779,366
Households Served	N/A	241,60	25,148	853	221,919

**Hurricane Gustav and Ike data is not final*

Food Stamp Waiver Comparison

Policies Affecting New Applicants for Disaster-Related Food Stamps

Policy	Katrina 8/29/05	Rita 9/24/05	Dolly 7/23/08	Gustav 9/1/08	Ike 9/13/08
Simplified Disaster Application Form	✓				✓
Disaster-Related Benefit Certification Period	3 months	3 months	N/A Replacements only	September	6 weeks (up to 6 months for TX residents with additional documentation)
Benefit Start Date	First day of application month	September prorated, 10/1 for anything filed in October	N/A Replacements only	Date of application	September 16
Benefit Amount	Certify maximum allotment for household size	Apply regular benefit policy	N/A Replacements only	Apply regular benefit policy	Allowed deduction for disaster related expenses which increased benefits for some households up to the maximum allotment
Expedited if residing in disaster area	✓	✓	N/A Replacements only	✓	✓
Self declaration accepted	All eligibility criteria except identification	All eligibility criteria except identification and residence	N/A Replacements only	All eligibility criteria except identification and residence	All eligibility criteria except identification and residence
Income Policy	Exclude all Income	Apply regular Food Stamp Income criteria	N/A Replacements only	Apply regular Food Stamp Income criteria	Apply regular Food Stamp Income criteria
Resources Policy	Exclude all resources	Exclude vehicles \$5,000 limit for liquid resources	N/A Replacements only	Apply regular Food Stamp resources criteria	Exclude vehicles \$5,000 limit for liquid resources
Allow the purchase of hot foods with Food Stamp Benefits	✓	✓			✓

Food Stamp Waiver Comparison

Disaster-related Policies Affecting Existing Food Stamp Clients

Policy	Katrina 8/29/05	Rita 9/24/05	Dolly 7/23/08	Gustav 9/1/08	Ike 9/13/08
Automatically issue replacements for destroyed food for existing FS recipients in affected area	N/A no Texas Counties	20% of regular allotment replaced	50% of regular allotment replaced	Manually calculated as reported by households, up to maximum allotment	70% of regular allotment replaced
Supplemental Benefit Amount					Issued a supplement to regular benefits after applying a disaster-related income deduction. This increased benefits for households under the maximum benefit allotment.
Extended certification periods of existing food stamp cases	2 month extension for existing cases	6 month extension for certain existing cases			2-6 month extension for certain existing cases
Allow the purchase of hot foods with food stamp benefits	✓	✓			✓

Additional Services

HHSC provides additional services to assist Hurricane Ike Victims:

- Information and referral services through the 2-1-1 network:
 - HHSC contracts with local area information centers (AICs).
 - In the disaster area, the AICs work to provide contact and emergency information to our centralized database.
 - HHSC reroutes calls based on volume to non-disaster areas.
 - HHSC has added capacity to three centers which keep additional phones and have the ability to transfer in trained staff to respond to calls within a matter of hours.
 - From September 9-25, the 2-1-1 Texas system handled 249,081 calls.
 - Typically the system handles an average of 150,000 in a regular month.
 - Prior to the storm's land fall, the top needs reported by callers to 2-1-1 were information related to evacuation transportation, shelter, road conditions, and animal shelters.
 - During the recovery period, callers sought information on Food Stamps, electric bill payment assistance, FEMA disaster assistance tele-Registration, and the Texas Workforce Commission's Disaster Unemployment Assistance program.
 - System capacity was challenged due to the high volume of calls for both Food Stamp eligibility and applications as well as information for where resources were located.
- HHSC provided ice and water to shelters and community points of distribution.
 - Costs to date of ice and water for Hurricane Ike is approximately \$19 million.

Additional Services

- Victims of such disasters are eligible for assistance from the Other Needs Assistance (ONA) provision of the Federal Assistance to Individuals and Household Program (IHP) if they do not have insurance, are underinsured, and do not qualify for low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration.
 - ONA is administered jointly with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA provides housing assistance and HHSC provides grants for other needs.
 - ONA provides assistance with transportation, personal property, medical, dental and funeral expenses based on eligibility criteria (e.g. a vehicle damaged by a flood; the replacement or repair of wheelchairs, eyeglasses, or other medical equipment; appliances, car seats, and other personal property).
- Nearly 340,000 ONA applications were received and reviewed for benefits.
- Approximately 40,000 ONA applications were approved.
- As of October 31, 2008,
 - Other Needs Assistance Grants (all funds) totaled \$60,125,000.
 - Total HHSC Enterprise Costs (all funds) totaled \$163,900,000.