In Florida, there are two types of food assistance programs administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) — the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as “food stamps”) and SUNCAP. These programs are designed to provide low-income Floridians the opportunity to purchase healthy food.

If you are a Floridian struggling to provide food for yourself or your household, read below to find out more about these programs.

How to qualify

If you want to apply for SNAP program benefits, you will need to meet these requirements.

You must:

- Live in the state of Florida;
- Provide proof of citizenship or have a qualified non-citizen status;
- Provide proof of your Social Security number or proof that you have applied for a Social Security number;
- Meet income and financial resource limits;
- Meet work requirements; and
- Cooperate with child support enforcement (if applicable).

Use the Florida Policy Institute SNAP Calculator to check your household eligibility for SNAP, Medical assistance, or cash assistance.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a household for Snap benefits?

A SNAP household is made up of all the people who live together and purchase and prepare food together. Some people are required to be considered as the same household even if they do not purchase and prepare food together. These people

are:

- Spouses living at the same address,
- Children under age 22 living with their parents, and
- Children under age 18 who are under the parental control of the head of household.
- Elderly or disabled adults (and their spouse and children) who are unable to purchase and prepare food on their own may be considered their own household if the income of the other people they live with is less than 165% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

People such as boarders, roomers, and live-in attendants/caretakers are not required to be counted as part of the SNAP household unless they fit in one of the mandatory categories listed above. But you can count them as members of your household if they purchase and prepare food with the rest of the household.

What can you buy with Snap Benefits?

Households can use food assistance benefits to buy:

- Breads and cereals;
- Fruits and vegetables;
- Meats, fish, and poultry;
- Dairy products; and
- Seeds and plants to grow and produce food for the household to eat.

Households cannot use food assistance benefits to buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco;
- Pet food, soaps, paper products, or household supplies;
- Vitamins and other medicines;
- Food that will be eaten in the store; and
- Hot foods.

Stores are not allowed to give cash to individuals who receive food assistance benefits, or in exchange for the return of empty bottles and cans that contained food purchased with food assistance benefits.

What to do if you are denied?

If your application for SNAP is denied, you should receive a written notice stating the reason for denial. If you disagree with the decision, you have ninety (90) days from the date of the notice to ask for a Fair Hearing. A Fair Hearing is the process that allows you to dispute the denial decision if you believe it was decided unfairly. Instructions on how to ask for a Fair Hearing should be included with the notice of denial that DCF sends to you.

Or, you may complete a public assistance fair hearing form on this Florida Department of Children and Families webpage.

It can take several weeks for your Fair Hearing request to be processed. Once it is processed, you will receive a letter telling you the date, time, and location of your Fair Hearing.

What if your benefits are reduced or terminated?

Before your SNAP benefits can be reduced or terminated, you should receive written notice from DCF, stating the reasons why this is happening. If you disagree with the decision, you must ask for a Fair Hearing within ninety (90) days of the date of the notice.

If you ask for a Fair Hearing before your benefits are reduced or stopped, you may ask that your benefits continue pending your appeal. This means that you will still get your full benefits until a final decision is made.

You must request an appeal **within ten (10) days of the notice** to keep getting benefits throughout your appeal process.

If you lose at the Fair Hearing, you may be asked to repay the amount of benefits you received during your appeal process. If you do not ask for aid pending your appeal and you win at your Fair Hearing, you will receive benefits to compensate you for the amount you should have been receiving, up to a year.

If you did not receive written notice but your benefits have stopped or decreased, you have a right to request a Fair Hearing. You should appeal immediately upon learning your benefits have been reduced or cut off.

What are SNAP Overpayments?

There are three different kinds of SNAP overpayments:

- Agency Error: DCF made an error and paid you too much money.
- Inadvertent Household Error: The household made an error that led DCF to pay you too much.
- Intentional Program Violation: DCF believes you or a member of your household lied, committed fraud, or intentionally misled them to gain extra SNAP benefits.

If DCF claims that your household received more food stamps than you should have been given but you believe that you were not overpaid, you have the right to appeal the decision within ninety (90) days.

If you were overpaid benefits, you are still obligated to pay back DCF for the amount of overpayment — even if the overpayment was DCF's error. An accidental overpayment does not benefit your household, because it must always be paid back. If you have noticed an overpayment in your SNAP benefits that you believe to be DCF's error, notify them immediately. It cannot benefit you in the long run.

If you do not appeal or if you agree with the overpayment, DCF can do several things to collect the amount that you owe:

If you are getting SNAP benefits now, DCF will lower your monthly benefits. The amount they will take depends on the type of overpayment you have.

If you are not getting SNAP benefits, DCF will try to get you to agree to a repayment plan. If you do not agree, they can take your federal tax refund. In some situations, they can also take part of other benefits you get, like Social Security.

If DCF alleges that you committed an intentional program violation, you should speak to contact your local legal services provider about potential consequences and remedies.

If you cannot afford to repay the overpayment, you may file for a “compromise.” A compromise is when DCF agrees to eliminate the overpayment altogether, and you can request one at any time. You may get approved for a compromise in certain situations, such as when:

- Your household income is fixed and based on age and/or disability,
- You are in bankruptcy proceedings, or

You can prove that, due to your ongoing expenses, you will not be able to repay the debt within 36 months.

How to apply

You can apply for assistance online on the Access Florida website.

Apply Online

Other things to consider:

Work Requirements

Some people must also meet work requirements to be eligible for SNAP. This will only apply to you if you are an “Able Bodied Adult Without Dependents” (ABAWD). If you are part of this group and are not working or participating in a work program, the SNAP Benefits are limited to no more than 3 months of food assistance in a 3-year period. You are an ABAWD if you:

- Are a healthy adult between 18 and 50 years old;
- Do not have any dependent children; and
- Are not currently pregnant.
- For more information review the SNAP work requirements on the DCF website.

Child Support Enforcement

If you are a parent or relative caregiver of a child with absent parents and you are trying to get food assistance benefits for them, you must cooperate with the state’s

Child Support Enforcement office to establish paternity and obtain child support for the children. If you do not cooperate and do not have a good reason, you will not be able to receive food assistance for your household.

Cooperating with the Child Support Enforcement office means giving as much help as you can. This may include giving information about the absent parent, helping determine who is the father of a child born outside of wedlock, signing legal papers, and testifying in court.

You may have a good reason, known as “good cause,” for not cooperating with child support enforcement if doing so would be against the best interest of you or the child. If you claim good cause for noncooperation, you will have to provide evidence showing why cooperating would be against the best interest of you or the child.

If you are currently paying child support for a child under 18 years old who doesn’t live with you, you may qualify to receive a deduction when determining your own household income when you apply for SNAP benefits.

Transferring Assets

You are not able to give away your assets just to qualify for food assistance, nor can you sell things for much less than they are worth trying to qualify.

Giving away assets or selling them for less than fair market value is considered a “transfer” of assets. If you or any household member transfers assets within 90 days before applying for food assistance for the purpose of qualifying for benefits, you will not be able to receive food assistance benefits for up to one year.

The following transfers do not affect eligibility:

- Assets that would not otherwise affect eligibility (assets that are not counted during the food assistance qualifying process);
- Assets that are sold or traded at, or near, fair market value;
- Assets transferred between members of the same household;
- Assets transferred for reasons other than attempting to qualify for food assistance benefits.

College Students

Most students — ages 18 through 49, enrolled in college or other institutions of higher education at least half time — are not eligible for food assistance benefits, but there are some exceptions. Students may be able to get food assistance benefits if they are:

- Physically or mentally unfit;
- Receiving Temporary Cash Assistance benefits (TANF);
- Participating in a state or federally financed work study program;
- Enrolled in college as a result of participation in a Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program under Title IV of the Social Security Act;
- Working a minimum of 80 hours per month;
- Participating in an on-the-job training program;
- Taking care of a dependent household member under the age of six;
- Taking care of a dependent household member over the age of five but under 12 and do not have adequate child care to enable them to attend school or work a minimum of 80 hours per month, or to take part in a state or federally financed work study program;
- A single parent enrolled full time in college and taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12; or
- Participating or enrolled in specific programs that will assist in obtaining the skills needed for the current job market.

Additional Resources

- Department of Children and Families SNAP Fact Sheet