



## Senior Legal Hotline

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### SENIOR LEGAL FACT SHEET

# Grocery bills skyrocket – but many seniors can qualify for extra help

- ▶ **Did you know there's a federal program to help ensure that all Americans can afford basic, nutritious food – and to encourage farmers to grow more of it?**
- ▶ **The program is changing dramatically – becoming easier than ever to use – and hundreds of thousands of California seniors are missing out.**
- ▶ **Here are some more important facts:**
  - **What used to be called “food stamps” will soon have a new name.** Nationally, the federal government is now calling it “SNAP” – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. California will either adopt “SNAP” or choose its own name soon.
  - **It's not just a name change. “Stamps” no longer have anything to do with it.** Already, if you qualify, you'll receive a plastic card that's swiped just like an ATM card, accepted at virtually any market these days. Each month, your account is automatically replenished with added value. No extra time at the checkout counter, and no one else knows the difference.
  - **The program is not just for “welfare” recipients.** You can own your home and a car. Other exceptions to resource limits also apply, and more are coming (see below).
  - **Due to the financial stimulus package approved by Congress and signed by President Obama, effective April 1, 2009, the SNAP allotment amounts have increased considerably.**
- ▶ **It's even easier to qualify if you are over 60 or disabled:**
  - **You may have up to \$3,000** in cash or bank accounts. (For others, the limit is \$2,000.)
  - **There is no limit on your “gross” income** – the amount you receive every month before deductions are calculated.
  - **Additional deductions may apply** for health care costs and housing costs, making it more likely that your “net” income will be under the limit and the benefit amount higher.
  - **It's also easier to apply:**
    - + You can have someone else do it on your behalf;
    - + You may not need to appear for an in-person interview;
    - + You can receive an application by mail, and mail it in.

*Please turn the page*

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► **More changes may be coming:**

- Before long, counties will likely be able to accept electronic, on-line applications.
- Limits on resources (bank accounts, etc.) may be raised or eliminated for some recipients.

***Here are two important things to know:***



- *If you receive SSI, you cannot also receive this food assistance. But if the SSI amount you receive is low and most of your income is from Social Security or any other source, you may benefit more from the food assistance program instead. Call the hotline, and we can help you make the comparison.*
- *If you are part of a household with others who are not seniors or disabled, special rules and calculations apply. Call Senior Legal Hotline to find out if you're eligible.*

► **California Senior Legal Hotline wants to make sure every senior knows about this benefit – and if eligible, receives it. We're ready to help, and you can too.**

- **If you think you might be eligible**, call. We can answer questions and make a rough calculation to find out whether you are and the approximate amount of the benefit.
- **We can print out an application** for you to submit if it appears you are eligible.
- **We'll help submit** on-line applications when they become available.
- **If you have trouble communicating with your county office** or need to appeal a denial of benefits, we or one of our local legal aid partners may be able to help.
- **Even if you're sure you're not eligible**, please pass this on to a friend, neighbor or relative who might be.
- **Ask us for more copies of this flier – or of our color poster on SNAP**; or ask us to send them to your senior center, congregation and wherever else seniors might see them.
- **For on-line information**, including self-help pre-screening tools, visit the California Association of Food Banks web site, <http://www.myfoodstamps.org>

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**If you are over 60 in California, you can get free advice by phone from the Senior Legal Hotline regarding your questions about this or any other legal issue. Call (916) 551-2140 in Sacramento or (800) 222-1753 toll-free in California, Mon.-Fri. 9 to 12 and 1 to 4, and until 7 p.m. on Thursdays. Or submit your question by e-mail from our web site, [www.seniorlegalhotline.org](http://www.seniorlegalhotline.org).**

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