Maximizing SNAP Benefits with the Medical Expense Deduction

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Presenters

• Erin Kee McGovern, Associate Director, Hunger Initiatives, NCOA

• Deb Lewis, Catawba AAA, South Carolina

• Beth Finch, Feeding the Gulf Coast, Alabama
The Value of SNAP

**Supplemental**

$124

The median SNAP benefit for households with an elderly person in 2016 ($106 for all living alone)

**Nutrition**

19%

Of elderly SNAP households received the minimum benefit in 2016 ($16 per month in 2016)

**Assistance**

22%

Proportion of all SNAP households with at least one person age 60 or older

**Program**

1.2

Average size of a SNAP household with at least one person age 60 or older in 2016
Participation Rates Across the Country
Common reasons seniors don’t participate

- Other people need SNAP more than I do.
- SNAP is only for families with children.
- No stores near me accept SNAP.
- I’ll only get $15 a month.
- It’s too hard to apply for SNAP.
Strategies for Increasing SNAP Participation

• Provide clients with information to empower them to make an informed decision
• Provide comprehensive assistance to clients navigate the complicated application process and maximize their benefit amounts
• Develop community partnerships with organizations fighting senior hunger.
Maximize benefits by claiming deductions

- Standard deduction
- Shelter deduction
- Dependent care deduction
- Medical expense deduction
Medical Expense Deductions

• Increase SNAP benefits by reducing net income.
• Only **14%** of older adults claim the deduction
• 2 Types:
  • Excess Medical Expense Deduction
  • Standard Medical Deduction
Excess Medical Expense Deduction (EMED)

- Federal regulation
- Available in every state
- Requires itemized documentation
- Every senior applying for SNAP can claim this deduction
EMED Requirements

• Elderly and Disabled households
• Clients must still owe on the bill they are presenting (30 days).
• Bills owed and ongoing medical expenses are considered.
• The first $35 worth of medical expenses is not considered.
What can be deducted?

- Medical/dental care
- Hospitalization and nursing home costs
- Costs of health insurance premiums, deductibles, and co-pays (including Medicare)
- Dentures, hearing aids, prosthetics
- Costs associated with owning a service dog
- Eye glasses prescribed by an optometrist or specialist
- Transportation and lodging costs incurred to obtain medical treatment, including mileage (calculated at federal rate = 54.5¢/mile in FY18)
- Attendant, home health aide, homemaker, or child care services
- Over-the-counter and prescription drugs, vitamins, supplies, and equipment
Ongoing vs. One time expenses

- Medical bills are considered on a one time or ongoing basis.
Examples

Ongoing
• Prescriptions
• Transportation
• Monthly insurance premiums
• Part-B Medicare premium

One Time
• Hospital bills
• Doctor bills
• Eyeglasses
• Dental services
• Medical equipment costs
One Time Bills

• One time bills can be pro-rated over the period of eligibility.
  - Example: $1,000 in hospital bills
    - $1,000 bill sent in only February could mean $200 deduction in March.
    - $500 bill sent in February and $500 bill sent in March could mean $200 deductions in March and April.
Best Practices

Step 1
• Have client complete a worksheet documenting all of their medical expenses.

Step 2
• Collect medical bills, document mileage to and from the doctor or hospital, call the pharmacy for a list of all medications taken.

Step 3
• Submit these documents to the SNAP administering agency. In some states you can submit them at any time but some only take bills at renewals.
Standard Medical Expense Deduction

• Policy option that states can apply for to streamline the deduction process
• Not available in every state- check your state’s SNAP Handbook
• Requires only documentation of unreimbursed medical expenses in excess of $35
How does it work?

- Elderly or disabled households can claim medical expenses up to the standard without having to verify all costs
  - At application, household verifies that they have medical expenses in excess of $35 per month.
  - At recertification, the household must declare that it still has medical expense in excess of $35 month.
- If household has and can verify medical expenses in excess of the standard, they can claim actual.
NCOA’s Resources for Seniors and SNAP

NCOA Senior Hunger homepage
www.NCOA.org/SeniorHunger

BenefitsCheckUp® SNAP Homepage
www.benefitscheckup.org/GetSNAP

State senior participation rates
www.NCOA.org/SNAPvisualization