



**Office of Temporary  
and Disability Assistance**

# **Public Benefits in New York**

**OTDA Programs, Reforms, and More**

**Acting Commissioner Barbara Guinn**

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# Administration of Public Benefits in NYS

- The NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) is responsible for the oversight of a range of public benefits programs in New York State. These programs include: Public Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Home Energy Assistance Program, and the State Supplement Program
- To administer public benefits, OTDA works in partnership with New York's 58 social services districts, which are comprised of each county and the City of New York
- Applicants for PA, HEAP and SNAP are received and processed by the local DSS
  - Benefit applications are available online and by paper
  - NYC also has mobile application for accessing benefits
  - NYS is developing a more modern digital statewide system to enable New Yorkers across the state (NYC and ROS) to more simply manage their benefits

# Public Benefits Overseen by OTDA

- OTDA oversees a range of social services programs designed to provide economic security for low- and no-income New Yorkers and others, including:
  - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Public Assistance (PA)
  - Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
  - State Supplement Program (SSP)
  - Medical eligibility determinations for federal Supplemental Security Income
  - Emergency housing/shelter and certain housing stability services
  - Child Support Services
  - Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (supportive housing)
  - And more

# What is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?

- SNAP provides eligible households with monthly benefits for purchasing food
  - Benefits are issued on an Electronic Benefit Card
  - Grocery stores, online purchases, farmers markets, and other retailers (16,700+ in NYS)
  - Average household benefit: \$233/month, can be used to purchase most food items
- Governed by federal rules – with state options – NYS seeks to apply flexibilities when available to simplify SNAP access and to maximize program benefits.
  - NYS an early participant in Online Purchasing Pilot
  - Elderly Simplified Application Project launched in 2021
  - Restaurant Meals Program launching later this year
  - Boost access to healthy foods with SNAP incentive coupons
  - Robust SNAP Outreach and Education

# SNAP: Eligibility and Application

- **SNAP Eligibility**
  - Income must be below a % of Federal Poverty Level (130%, 150%, 200% FPL)
  - Most households are not subject to a resource test (e.g., vehicle, bank account)
  - Limited earned income deductions (20%)
  - Citizen or Qualified non-citizenship required
  - Limited job search or other work requirements
- **SNAP Application Process**
  - May be submitted online, by mail/fax or at a district office
  - Documentation can be uploaded online, mailed or dropped off
  - Interview is required with telephone options
  - Auto-enrollment by State for joint SSI applicants

# SNAP: Facts and Figures

- **2.9 million people** in NYS received SNAP benefits in May 2023 (14% of NY residents)
  - 60% of SNAP recipients reside in NYC and 40% in ROS
  - The statewide SNAP caseload in May 2023 was 2% higher than it was a year ago and 10% higher than January 2019
- New Yorkers receive SNAP for a range of months, with many receiving SNAP for multiple years:
  - Among children who started to receive SNAP during 2018, the median duration of SNAP receipt was 19 months.
  - Among children who started to receive SNAP during 2020, the median duration of SNAP receipt was 24 months – and 36% were still receiving SNAP in June 2023
- Many households that receive SNAP also receive PA and/or SSI:
  - In NYC, 24% of SNAP cases also receive PA; ROS 8% of SNAP cases also receive PA
  - In both NYC and ROS, about 21% of SNAP cases are also SSI cases.

# SNAP: Facts and Figures

- **SNAP Monthly Benefit Levels**
  - Adjusted annually to reflect food costs
  - Household Maximum Monthly Benefits (through September 30, 2023)
    - HH of 1 = \$281
    - HH of 2 = \$516
    - HH of 3 = \$740
    - HH of 4 = \$939

# SNAP: Outreach

- **NYS SNAP Education**
  - Helps households receiving SNAP shop for and eat healthy on a budget
  - Meal planning; food demos; video, website and social media content; recipe development; shopping tips; and more
  - OTDA contracts with 40+ organizations across the state. Community-based outreach at sites like health centers, food pantries, housing communities, employment offices, libraries, churches, among others.
- **NYS SNAP Outreach**
  - 20 contract providers serve potentially eligible households – assist with completing and submitting SNAP application; recertifications
  - Community based outreach and education on benefits of SNAP



# What is Public Assistance (PA)?

- Public Assistance provides support in the form of a monthly benefit to low- and no-income New Yorkers to help **households pay for their basic needs** such as rent, utilities, and clothing. The PA grant is comprised of a basic allowance, home energy allowances, a shelter/housing allowance, and other allowances. Some allowances, such as the pregnancy allowances are only provided based on case-specific circumstances.
- PA provides payment to cover **emergency housing** (shelter) for individuals experiencing homelessness
- The PA program also provides assistance to meet **emergency needs** such as payment of rent arrears to prevent an eviction, payments to prevent a utility shut-off.
- PA is governed by Federal and State law and regulations. Federal rules and funding support households with children. NYS is one of the few states in the nation with a program (Safety Net Assistance) designed to help single individuals and childless couples.

# PA: Eligibility and Application

- **PA Eligibility**

- Applicants' income and other circumstances are considered
- Must be **very low income at application**.
  - Income test is compared to the county “Standard of need” or maximum grant allowance that varies by household size and somewhat by county to account for differences in the PA housing costs benefit
  - For example, at application a NYC household of 3 must have earnings below \$9,468/year to potentially be PA eligible. Once in receipt of benefits, additional earning disregards apply that permit households at higher income to retain benefits. Currently, 62% of earnings may be disregarded so that a family of 3 in NYC may earn up to \$29,640 and retain PA benefits
- All households are subject to a **resource test**: Applicants may have up to \$2,500 in assets/resources (or up to \$3,000 if elderly or disabled). Recipients can have up to \$10,000 in assets/resources
- Citizen or Qualified non-citizenship required

# PA: Eligibility and Application

- **PA Application Process**
  - Applications may be submitted online, by mail/fax or at a district office
  - Documentation can be uploaded online, mailed or dropped off
  - Interview is required, in most instances can be by phone or other digital means (varies by district)
  - Applicants and recipients must also comply with certain program requirements such as completing drug/alcohol screening followed by an assessment and potential requirement to comply with treatment; child support agreements,
  - Applicants and recipients who are determined to be able to work may be required to meet certain job search or work requirements as a condition of eligibility

# PA: Facts and Figures

- 579,000 people received PA in May 2023 (3% of New Yorkers), with about 80% in NYC and 20% in ROS
  - The PA caseload in May 2023 was 11% higher than it was a year ago and 24% higher than it was in January 2019
- About 60% of PA recipients are in families (adults and children). 40% are adults without children.
  - The proportion of the PA caseload that is adults without children has grown recently.
- PA is often received for a year or more:
  - Among children who started to receive PA during 2020, the median duration of PA receipt was 19 months – and 28% were still receiving TA in June 2023
  - Among children who started to receive PA during 2018, the median duration of PA receipt was 12 months
- Almost all PA cases also receive SNAP benefits

# PA: Facts and Figures

- **PA Monthly Benefit Levels**

- PA benefits include 3 components: a basic benefit intended to meet non-housing or utility costs; utility allowances; and a housing (shelter) component.
- PA benefits have no statutory or regulatory requirement to adjust annually based on cost-of-living: The last benefit increase was in 2012 associated with the ‘basic’ benefit and the ‘housing/shelter’ component was last adjusted in 2003
- Household Maximum PA Monthly Benefits
  - HH of 1 = \$398.00
  - HH of 2 = \$574.00
  - HH of 3 = \$789.00
  - HH of 4 = \$951.00

# SNAP and PA: Work and Education Requirements

- Federal laws and certain State policies require some SNAP and PA recipients to meet certain work activity and/or educational program requirements, such as number of hours participating each week, unless exempted for specific reasons such as a disabling condition or advanced age.
  - 52% of TA recipients without children and 17% of PA recipients with children are currently exempt from work and education requirements
  - 28% of non-exempt PA recipients with children are currently either working part-time or participating in at least some work and education requirements
- The SNAP program has strict work requirements for single adults that do not reside with children. States may seek waivers of these requirements during times of high unemployment. NYS is currently eligible for a statewide waiver of these requirements.

# SNAP and PA: Demographics

- Majority of SNAP and PA cases with children include only one adult – and the vast majority of them are women:
  - 67% of SNAP cases with children had one adult on the case, 91% of whom were women
  - 77% of PA cases with children had one adult on the case, 95% of whom were women
  - 33% of SNAP cases and 23% of PA cases include two or more adults
- The majority of SNAP and PA recipients report having no earned income – underscoring that most recipients of these programs are among New York’s poorest residents, really struggling with poverty, including finding and/or maintaining employment
  - 87% of PA cases in June 2023 reported no income
  - 80% of SNAP cases not also receiving PA reported no income
- Among households with earned income, earnings for the most part are extremely low
  - Among families who started to receive PA in the spring of 2016, 60% had at least some reported earnings in the previous two years, but only 6% had earnings at or above the federal poverty line in those two years

# SNAP and PA Demographics

- As expected, race/ethnic groups with a greater % of individuals and families living in poverty make up a larger % of the SNAP caseload and an even greater proportion of the PA caseload, relative to their prevalence in the NYS population

## Among SNAP and PA Recipients in June 2023, Distribution by Combination of Race/Ethnicity Categories

Reported Race/Ethnicity Combinations	SNAP Recipients	PA Recipients
Asian Alone	8%	5%
Black or African American Alone	25%	38%
White Alone	30%	15%
Hispanic or Latino with any other race(s)	33%	37%
Other Non-Hispanic Race Combinations*	3%	4%
Missing	1%	0%
All Recipients	100%	100%

*\*For example, a recipient who selected both a Black and a White flag would be in this category*



# What is the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)?

- HEAP Regular benefits are grants to help residents pay their energy costs
  - Larger benefits are paid to households with very low income and households which include a member under age 6, over age 60, or disabled
  - Income guidelines are set at the higher of 60% of NYS median income or 150% of FPL
  - Households received on average \$485/year in HEAP bill assistance in the last program year
  - On average, HEAP benefits reduced a household's annual energy costs by 21%
- In addition to the Regular benefit
  - Emergency benefits range from \$400 to \$900
  - Heating Equipment Repair and Replacement up to \$4,000/repair, \$8,000/replace
  - Clean and Tune up to \$500 once per year
  - Cooling up to \$800 (\$1,000 for an existing wall sleeve unit) once every five years
  - HEAP funds weatherization grants

# HEAP: Facts and Figures

- A family of 4 can earn up to \$65,829/year and be eligible for benefits
  - Regular benefits range from \$400 to \$976 depending on home heating source
  - \$45 or \$50 benefits available for eligible renters with heat included
- During the last HEAP funding year, 1.5 million (20%) of NY households received a HEAP funded benefit (59% living NYC and 41% living in ROS).
  - 5% higher than it was the previous year (Oct 20-Sept 21) and 8% higher than it was in the pre-pandemic year (Oct 18-Sept 19)
  - More than 500,000 included an individual 60 or over, or a child under age 6
- NYS is the largest grantee recipient of LIHEAP funding (annual grant >\$350 million)
- To increase outreach, NYS HEAP partners with the NYS Office for the Aging (OFA), NYS Department of Health (DOH), NYS Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), and the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA)

# What is Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

- SSI is a federal program that provides monthly payments to individuals 65 or older or with a disabling condition and with limited income
  - Governed by Federal rules, NYS OTDA determines medical eligibility
  - NYS developed State Supplement Program (SSP) to strengthen SSI
- Must be aged (age 65 or older), blind, or have a qualifying disability, and meet specific income requirements
  - Individual must have less than \$934 a month in unearned income to receive SSI
  - A couple can get SSI if they have unearned income of less than \$1391 a month
  - Other factors (i.e. housing situation, composition), may affect amount received
  - Resource limit applied of \$2,000 for an individual and \$3,000 for a couple
- Can apply online or call to set up an appointment with federal Social Security office

# What is the New York State Supplement Program (SSP)?

- State-funded supplement that provides additional income to SSI recipients in New York
  - \$23-87 for individuals living in the community, \$200-600 for those living in congregate care
  - Unlike SSI, which is governed by Federal rules, SSP is a State program
- Eligibility for SSP is based on SSI eligibility as determined by SSA – there is no separate NYS application
  - For New Yorkers who meet SSI medical standards and SSI/SSP income standards

# SSI and SSP: Facts and Figures

- 612,000 people (3% of New Yorkers, May 2023) received SSI/SSP, 59% in NYC and 41% in ROS
  - The number of recipients of SSI was 2.6% lower than it was a year ago and 10% lower than it was in January 2019
- About 12% of SSI recipients are children and 88% are adults
- 90% of SSI recipients also receive SNAP
  - No SSI recipients also receive PA since the SSI benefit is higher, but some SSI recipients live with children or other adults who receive PA
- Maximum monthly SSI/SSP payment for 2023 is: \$1,001 for one person, \$1,475 for a couple
  - Average SSI/SSP benefit in May 2023 was \$670 per month (as income reduces the benefit)

# What housing help does OTDA provide?

- **Shelter Services**
  - OTDA oversees provision of shelter services administered by social services districts throughout the state for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness
    - Responsible for issuing Operating Certificates for shelters
    - Responsible for annual inspection of shelters for adults and families with children
    - Districts are responsible for inspection of hotels/motels and submission of reports to OTDA
  - Social services districts have a legal obligation to provide temporary housing/shelter to households that are eligible for public assistance
  - Social services districts are responsible for provide Code Blue shelter during times of cold weather to all in need, regardless of PA eligibility

# What housing help does OTDA provide?

- **Housing Benefits**

- Public Assistance monthly grants
- Shelter supplement programs
- Locally developed supplements for PA households such as FHEPS in NYC
- State-funded Rental Supplement Program, which can provide rental assistance in amounts up to 85% Fair Market Rent for households with income under 50% of Area Median Income (AMI)
- About 12,000 households currently receive a shelter supplement
  - Max supplement in NYC for a family of 3 is \$2,051 (average NYC supplement is \$968)
  - Max supplement in ROS district for a family of 3 is \$779 (average ROS supplement is \$421)

- **Homelessness Prevention**

- Rent Arrears Payments
- Solutions to End Homelessness – contracts for prevention, rapid rehousing and other services
- Oversees various programs that help low-income New Yorkers afford housing

# What housing help does OTDA provide?

- **Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP)**
  - Helps develop emergency shelters, transitional facilities, and permanent housing, including supportive housing with services on-site, through capital funding
    - Provides funds (\$128 M annually) to qualified non-profit housing developers and service providers, oversees development process, construction, and rent-up, and monitors ongoing operations
    - 402 active projects with over 558 sites (17,855 beds)
- **Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative**
  - Support operating (rents) and services costs for supportive housing overseen by NYS



# Using Data to Improve Services

- OTDA is using modernized data analysis to better understand needs among New Yorkers, existing service delivery, and how to strengthen programs and close gaps
  - Collecting, compiling, and considering data in new ways
  - Strategic analyses that center equity, help identify areas for improvement
- Similar to U.S. Census Bureau, OTDA is looking at Program Access Indicators to understand how many New Yorkers are receiving a benefit, such as SNAP or PA, compared to how many are eligible – and working to address underutilization/under-enrollment to ensure all New Yorkers receive the benefits for which they are eligible
  - Take-up rates by race/ethnicity, geography, etc
  - Acknowledge gaps among different communities, highs/lows

# Estimating Program Access - SNAP

The Census uses survey data to estimate the number of people eligible for the benefit and compares that to the number receiving the benefit. For example, the Census Bureau estimated a NYS SNAP access rate of 64% in 2019, with room for improvement for all and particularly for Asian and White New Yorkers:

Census Bureau 2019 NYS Estimated SNAP Access Rate by Race and Ethnicity

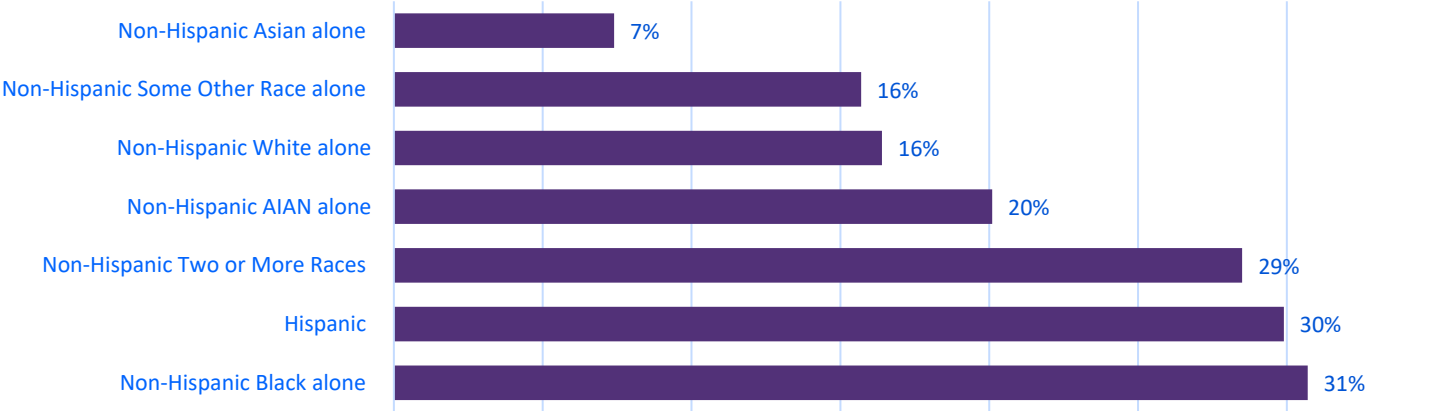


*Note: USDA's 2019 SNAP access rates, which utilize a different methodology, indicate NYS has a rate of 89% and the national average is 82%. Census-based SNAP access rates are lower because the Census Bureau uses survey response data and estimates a larger number of people who are potentially eligible.*

# Estimating Program Access - TANF

The Census Bureau estimated a NYS TANF access rate of 25% in 2019 for children below the federal poverty line. State benefit levels dictate that households have income below 50% FPL at application. Census data demonstrates the following:

Census Bureau 2019 NYS Estimated TANF Access Rate by Race and Ethnicity



*Note: The access rate for PA benefits in NYS is higher than 25%. NYS TANF eligibility requires households to have income below 50% of the FPL at application and NYS provides benefits to children not eligible for TANF through the Safety Net Program. OTDA currently estimates the PA PAI at 67% for children below 50% of the FPL. Children below the poverty line are also served by the SSI program.*

# Recent Reforms

- **Objective is to streamline program requirements to expand program access**
- Recent PA reforms include:
  - Expansion of eligibility for non-citizens
  - Exemption of healthcare worker and childcare worker bonuses from income
  - One-time 6-month disregard for earned income for New Yorkers who get jobs
  - Eligibility adjustments to permit more households with income to be eligible
  - Increase in the amount of earned income that can be disregarded to help those with earnings receive more PA and/or have benefits reduced due to earnings more gradually
- Recent HEAP reforms include:
  - Reducing the number of households that must be interviewed
  - Permitting telephone interviews
  - Exempting additional household income

# Challenges and Opportunities

- **OTDA is focused on areas for reform and improvement**
  - Public Assistance benefits have not been adjusted since 2012
  - Public Assistance and HEAP do not have any built-in cost of living adjustments
  - Program access measures indicate new strategies are needed for program outreach
  - Additional policy changes could reduce ‘benefit cliffs’
- OTDA is continually working to make public benefits easier to access for New Yorkers who need them – goal is to always strengthen services and improve service delivery. Upcoming planned reforms include:
  - Establishing a permanent Summer EBT program for launch in 2024
  - Extending certifications periods for Public Assistance
  - Integrated Eligibility System - a technology solution to simplify online application processes and support cross-program enrollments

# CPRAC: Effects of Recent Reforms

- Urban Institute is analyzing recent and potential public benefits reforms to estimate the effects of these changes on child poverty in New York
- Enacted policies that Urban is modeling include our recent changes to help recipients retain more of their benefits, with the goal of encouraging economic mobility and self-sufficiency (and ameliorate benefit cliff effect), including:
  - Elimination of the gross income and poverty level eligibility tests for PA
  - Increase in the amount of earned income that can be disregarded for purposes of eligibility a change in the way these disregards are applied
  - One-time 6-month disregard for earned income for New Yorkers who get jobs

# CPRAC: Effects of Potential Reforms

- Potential policies that Urban is modeling include:
  - Increase the basic allowance portion of the Public Assistance grant
  - Increase the shelter allowance portion of the Public Assistance grant
  - Ensure overall PA Standard of Need is at least 50% of poverty for all households
  - Increase SSI State Supplement
  - Provide food benefit to households not currently eligible for SNAP
  - Other

# Conclusion

- Questions? Comments?