

Frequently Asked Questions About the Food Stamp Homeless Shelter Deduction

What is the food stamp homeless shelter deduction?

In calculating how much a household gets in food stamps, the welfare office deducts certain amounts from the household's income. The food stamp homeless shelter deduction is a \$143 per month deduction from income that should be given to anyone who is homeless and who incurs any shelter costs in a month. The deduction lowers the household's countable income, so the household qualifies for more food stamps.

What is the problem that needs fixing?

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW, or the welfare office) has not been deducting the \$143 homeless shelter deduction from the income of homeless people. Instead, its computers have been programmed to plug the \$143 deduction into the calculation for a separate "excess shelter deduction" that does not benefit most homeless people.

How much of a difference has this error made in homeless households' food stamp grants?

Most homeless people on SSI have been receiving \$10 per month when they should have been receiving about \$45 per month. Some homeless people on General Assistance have been receiving \$142 per month when they should have received \$162 per month (the maximum for a household of one person). A homeless family of three whose only income is \$403 in cash assistance should get \$41 more per month in food stamps with this change.

What is DPW doing to fix the problem?

DPW has issued instructions to its caseworkers, called Operations Memorandum 08-04-01, telling caseworkers what codes to enter into their computers to give homeless people the proper homeless shelter deduction. This "workaround" is necessary while DPW is reprogramming its computers to give the homeless shelter deduction properly. But even when the computers are reprogrammed, caseworkers will have to enter into the computer that the household is homeless and incurs shelter costs. It will always be a good idea to remind caseworkers that a homeless person should get the homeless shelter deduction.

How can shelters make sure shelter residents get the correct food stamp homeless shelter deduction?

Shelters can help by giving their residents letters to take to the welfare office showing that the resident qualifies for the homeless shelter deduction. The letter should say that the household is homeless and that it incurs some shelter costs (such as shelter fees). The letter should also request that the DPW caseworker follow the workaround instructions in DPW Operations Memorandum 08-04-01.

Where can I find DPW's Operations Memorandum with the instructions for caseworkers?

The Operations Memorandum is available online at <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/manuals/bop/ops/OPS080401.pdf>

Will homeless people get the back food stamps they would have received had DPW's computers been programmed correctly before?

DPW is obligated to pay back food stamps that it should have issued, but has not yet said how it will do so.

Our homeless shelter feeds its residents 3 meals a day. Can our residents also get food stamps?

Yes. The food stamp law specifically says that residents of homeless shelters can get food stamps, even if the shelter provides meals.

Why should homeless people in shelters get food stamps if they getting their meals for free?

Some homeless people need special foods that are not provided by shelters. And food stamps can be saved on the Access card for use after a household leaves a shelter. As long as the card is used once every 90 days, the food stamps will stay on the card.

Do only homeless shelter residents get the homeless shelter deduction?

No. Anyone who is homeless under the food stamp program's rules, who incurs some shelter costs in a month, should get the shelter deduction for homeless people. People doubled up with friends or family for less than 90 days qualify. A resident of transitional housing may also qualify if the resident meets the definition of a "homeless individual."

What is the food stamp program's definition of a "homeless individual"?

Under the food stamp program's rules, a homeless individual is "an individual who lacks a fixed and regular nighttime residence or an individual whose primary nighttime residence is:

- a supervised shelter that provides temporary accommodations such as a welfare hotel or congregate shelter;
- a halfway house or similar institution that provides temporary accommodations for individuals intended to be institutionalized;
- a temporary accommodation in the residence of another person for 90 days or less; or
- a place not designed for, or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations such as a hallway, a bus station, a lobby, a car, an abandoned building or any similar place."

For more information, call Louise Hayes at Community Legal Services, (215) 227-2400 x2421, or email her at LHayes@clsphila.org.

