



Food Stamp Use Rises

Q: Are elderly people eligible for food stamps?

A: Yes, and if you are a senior and have not applied for food stamps---Massachusetts is looking for you!

Only a few years ago, Massachusetts ranked last in the nation with 60% of the people eligible for food stamps not on the program. But over the past 5 years, an aggressive outreach plan has turned those numbers around. Today, Massachusetts ranks Number 1 in the percentage of new food stamp users.

In 2001, there were 222,519 state residents using food stamps. Today, there are 445,381 people enrolled. The program has doubled! Across the country, about 25.7 million people use food stamps. In 2006, Massachusetts issued \$408 million in Food Stamp benefits, which also help the economy by increasing grocery store sales.

Some older people may not apply for food stamps because of myths they have:

- **Food stamps are just for young mothers with kids: False.** The program is for people with limited income, regardless of their age. About half the people benefiting from food stamps are children---but only 8% were age 60 or older.
- **Food stamps mean using funny-colored "money." False.** Today, people use a debit card that looks just like any other plastic credit card. The state deposits your monthly food stamps benefits in an electronic benefits transfer account. They send you a card to use at food store checkouts to pay for your food. Whenever you buy food with your card, your receipt will show the amount of money left in your account.
- **Food stamps can only buy limited items. False.** Food stamps can be used to buy almost any food item in any store where you usually shop for food. Massachusetts residents who use food stamps can spend the money they save to help pay their other bills.
- **Food stamps aren't worth much financially: False.** The average food stamp benefit in 2004 was \$1,020 a year. A single person will get less than a family---but even the minimum benefit is worth \$120 a year. Since there is no cost to apply, that frees up \$120 to use for something besides food.
- **Food stamps are hard to apply for: False.** You can apply at food stamp outreach locations throughout the state. To find an office near you, call the toll-free FoodSource Hotline at 1-800-645-8333. Ask them what items you need to bring when applying for food stamps. You will need to bring information about your income and expenses, such as Social Security or SSI payments, rental payments, and medical bills. Remember, hundreds of thousands of people have qualified.

For more information about food stamps in Massachusetts, and how to apply, call 1-866-950-FOOD. If you want to find out if you could be eligible, check out the Internet tool at www.foodstamps-step1.usda.gov.