



Senior Legal Hotline

444 North 3rd Street #312 ❖ Sacramento, CA 95811

Telephone: (916) 551-2140 ❖ Toll-free: (800) 222-1753

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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 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 be picking its own name by 2009.
 - **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).
- ▶ **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**, and additional deductions are available 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.
 - **You don't need to “requalify”** as often.
- ▶ **And more changes are coming soon:**
 - **Beginning in 2009 or 2010, there will be no limit for resources** (bank accounts, etc.) for most senior recipients.
 - **Before long, counties will likely be able to accept electronic, on-line applications.**

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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.
 - **Post this flier** or ask us to send copies to your senior center, congregation and wherever else seniors might see it.

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.

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