



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Human Services Shares Latest Public-Assistance Enrollment Data, Urges Congressional Delegation to Codify Flexibility for States, Support for Food Assistance Programs

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Teresa Miller reminded Pennsylvanians that safety-net programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid are available to individuals and families who are struggling to afford food or access health care.

While program enrollments have increased since the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in Pennsylvania in March, there has been an increase, but an overwhelming surge of applications to date. However, DHS is still anticipating a prolonged need, and urged Pennsylvania's Congressional Delegation to consider what states need to properly respond to this need in their next relief package.

"Millions of people across this country have lost their jobs, or experienced a cutback in their hours, as a direct result of COVID-19's unprecedented assault on our way of life. While we are all in this together, and we will overcome this, many are still struggling under our own individual circumstances that none of us predicted six months ago," Secretary Miller said. "SNAP and Medicaid are here for anyone who needs extra help affording food or accessing health care. These are basic needs that we all have, and any one of us could find ourselves in need of some help one day."

Enrollment statewide for Medicaid has increased by more than 178,000 people since February, for a total enrollment of more than 3 million people in July -- a 6.3 percent increase.

Pennsylvanians who have lost health coverage or are currently uninsured and need coverage for themselves or their children may qualify for coverage through Medicaid and CHIP. Medicaid and CHIP provide coverage for routine and emergency health services, tests and screenings, and prescriptions, and COVID-19 testing and treatment are covered by both Medicaid and CHIP. Medicaid and CHIP enroll individuals throughout the year and do not have a limited or special enrollment time, so people needing health coverage can apply for these programs at any time. There are income limits for Medicaid, but all children qualify for coverage through CHIP.

Enrollment for SNAP statewide has increased by about 101,500 people since February, for a total enrollment of about 1.9 million in July -- a 5.8 percent increase.

SNAP currently helps more than 1.9 million Pennsylvanians, including children, people with disabilities, older adults, and working adults expand purchasing power to ensure their household has enough food to avoid going hungry. Inadequate food and chronic nutrient deficiencies have profound effects on a person's life and health, including increased risks for chronic diseases, higher chances of hospitalization, poorer overall health, and increased health care costs. Children who have enough to eat go on to have higher graduation rates, increased adult earnings, and improved health outcomes in their adult life. Older adults who are enrolled in SNAP are healthier, hospitalized less and are less likely to go to a nursing home. As the nation faces the COVID-19 pandemic, access to essential needs like food is more important than ever to help keep people healthy and mitigate co-occurring health risks.

Applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid can be submitted online at www.compass.state.pa.us. Applications are processed within six days on average for SNAP and 11 days on average for Medicaid. Once a benefit is approved, it can be immediately accessed. Pennsylvanians who need immediate help feeding themselves or their family can also find more information about food assistance resources for people around Pennsylvania impacted by COVID-19 and the accompanying economic insecurity [here](#).

Secretary Miller also detailed a [letter](#) recently sent by DHS to Pennsylvania's Congressional Delegation. The letter details the stabilizing impact of direct assistance provided from the federal government to families in Pennsylvania and around the country. Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy projects [in a brief released earlier this summer](#) that the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) will rise just .2 percent this year to 12.7 percent because of economic impact payments and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC). Had broadly-targeted aid not been included in early COVID-19 relief efforts, the brief estimates that the SPM could have reached 16.3 percent due to historic unemployment rates not seen since the Great Depression.

"As members of the United States Congress, each of you has the power to continue relief that will protect hard-working Pennsylvanians affected by this time of crisis. We must be sure that individuals and families in Pennsylvania and around the country do not default on mortgage, auto, and student loan payments; face eviction from rental properties; rely on credit card debt and predatory loans to cover costs, or go without essential needs like food, health care, utilities, or shelter just to make ends meet," wrote Secretary Miller. "We must avoid a prolonged economic downturn and a crisis like the Great Depression and 2008 financial crisis. Those crises upended peoples' lives and livelihoods and caused grave, long-term damage to the people we all serve. We can prevent this, and each of you can be a part of protecting your constituents from similar turmoil."

In the letter, Secretary Miller urges Pennsylvania's Congressional Delegation to support:

- **Extending emergency SNAP allotments** permitted under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) to all SNAP recipients rather than just households making less than the monthly maximum as permitted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This approach excludes 40 percent of SNAP recipients, many of whom are the lowest income SNAP recipients;
- **Increasing the maximum monthly SNAP benefit**, as included in the Heroes Act passed in May, by at least 15 percent and the minimum benefit to at least \$30 for the duration of the economic crisis so the 1.8 million Pennsylvanians who rely on SNAP have enough funds to feed themselves and their families and support local food retailers, grocers, and agricultural producers;
- **Extending the Pandemic Economic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program for the full 2020-21 school year** so Pennsylvania can continue to provide assistance to families of children who would normally receive free or reduced-priced meals if their school was open for in-person instruction. This benefit has been a resource for families who would not otherwise have children at home, and because P-EBT funds carry the same stipulations as SNAP benefits, they carry the same economic boost to food retailers across our commonwealth. This program must be extended and clarified in order to account for the varying educational plans for the 2020-2021 school year.
- **Creating certainty for states administering assistance programs by preserving waivers** that help states maintain access to critical assistance programs, mitigate risk of spreading virus during required interviews with benefit recipients, and ease workflow and processing times as states anticipate increasing assistance applications without an FPUC is extension. The USDA has indicated an interest in returning to normal operations, despite COVID-19 remaining an ongoing, serious threat. Secretary Miller also encouraged tying this flexibility to state and federal disaster declarations to give states better predictability and ease a transition back to normal workflow; and,
- **Resuming FPUC payments and extending additional stimulus funds to Pennsylvanians affected by this crisis.**

Read the full letter [here](#).

For more information on public assistance programs available in Pennsylvania, visit www.dhs.pa.gov.