

In November 2010, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) implemented a federal policy option from the U.S. Department of Agriculture called “broad-based categorical eligibility” in its Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This policy has helped Minnesota streamline its SNAP program and increase access to benefits.

What is broad-based categorical eligibility?

Broad-based categorical eligibility is a federal policy through which households may become “categorically” eligible for SNAP if they also qualify for a non-cash Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefit.¹ When Minnesotans apply for SNAP, they receive a brochure about domestic violence resources which is produced with TANF funds. Like all SNAP households, categorically eligible households must still submit an application, meet the program’s income eligibility criteria, participate in an interview, and document their financial circumstances (including any future changes).

Minnesota uses broad-based categorical eligibility to:

- **Raise the maximum gross income limit in SNAP** from 130% of the federal poverty guideline (\$27,024 per year for a family of three) to 165% of the federal poverty guideline (\$34,296 per year for a family of three);²
- **Waive the SNAP asset limits;** and
- **Streamline the SNAP enrollment process for counties and tribes.**

Benefits of raising the gross income limit:

Minnesota chose to raise the gross income threshold to 165% of the federal poverty guideline under broad-based categorical eligibility. This threshold was chosen because households with gross incomes slightly above 130% of the federal poverty guideline often struggle to afford basic food needs in addition to housing, medical, and/or child care costs. Minnesota’s threshold helps low-income households manage an increasingly expensive cost of living while retaining food benefits.

The increased gross income limit reaches a targeted group of households otherwise at risk of hunger. **If broad-based categorical eligibility were eliminated, approximately 35,500 Minnesotans between 130% and 165% of the federal poverty guideline would lose their SNAP benefits in any given month.** They include:

- **18,000 children**
- **8,800 parents**
- **3,200 seniors** (over age 60)
- **2,600 adults** (under age 60, without children)
- **2,900 disabled adults**

¹ You do not need to be enrolled in TANF to receive a non-cash benefit.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, [SNAP Eligibility](#), 2018.

Benefits of waiving the SNAP asset limit:

Without broad-based categorical eligibility, the federal SNAP asset limit is \$2,250 for households without a senior or disabled member and \$3,500 for households with a senior or disabled member. Because broad-based categorical eligibility allows the state to waive these limits and applicants are no longer asked about their assets, Minnesota cannot estimate how many additional people would lose their benefits if the limits were reinstated. However, this flexibility primarily helps seniors, low-wage working parents, and people with disabilities.

- Seniors would be disproportionately impacted by asset tests because they are more likely to have low incomes but some savings. Broad-based categorical eligibility allows them to retain their assets in order to live independently. Only 28% of low-income seniors received SNAP benefits before the state adopted the policy. Today, almost 60% of low-income seniors receive them.
- Without an asset limit, recently unemployed low-wage workers do not have to deplete their savings in order to receive SNAP benefits. This is similar to unemployment insurance which does not subject workers to an asset test.

Streamlining the enrollment process:

Frontline workers in counties and tribal nations report that asset verification is one of the most time-consuming administrative tasks. By eliminating the need for asset verification, broad-based categorical eligibility improves program efficiency in the following ways:

- Eases financial verification demands and case-processing time;
- Reduces wait times at county human services offices; and
- Mitigates the risk of errors in eligibility determinations.

Without broad-based categorical eligibility:

- Families of three who earn \$27,024 to \$34,296 per year would no longer qualify for SNAP benefits.
- Families with assets above the federal asset limits would lose SNAP benefits.
- Counties and tribes administering SNAP would face greater administrative burden.
- Minnesota would have to update SNAP eligibility rules, modify computer systems, retrain staff, and revise applications and program manuals at a cost to counties, tribes, and the State.
- Seniors may no longer be able to use a one-page application for SNAP which has been a key tool to increase their participation in the program.
- Local food shelves would be under increased pressure to assist Minnesotans who were cut from SNAP but still need food assistance.