

# SNAP Time Limit for ABAWDs: What Community Groups Should Know



The federal SNAP (food stamp) time limits for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) go back into effect January 1, 2016 in Pennsylvania. This is a federal law that was suspended for many years. Individuals considered “ABAWDs” may only receive SNAP benefits for a total of 3 full months within a 36 month period—unless the person meets an “exemption” or complies with certain work requirements.

## ***Who is an ABAWD?***

An ABAWD is an able-bodied adult between 18 and 49 years old who is not disabled, pregnant, or living in a household with minor children. Persons under age 18 or age 50 or older are not subject to this rule.

## ***Who is exempt from the time limit?***

The 3 month SNAP limit **does not apply** if the ABAWD meets any of the following:

- Working 20 hours or more per week, including self-employment or in-kind work;
- Receiving a disability-based benefit (SSI, social security disability, VA pension, Worker Comp) ;
- Certified as physically or mentally “unfit” for employment by a health professional;  
*DHS has a special SNAP Time Limit Medical Exemption Form, form number PA 1921, that can be signed by a wide range of health care providers. Including any whose services are paid by Medicaid.*
- Is homeless;
- Receiving—or has applied for— Unemployment Compensation (UC);
- Participating in a drug or alcohol treatment program or a mental health treatment program;
- Is a student enrolled at least 1/2 time in an education program;
- Lives in a household with any child under 18—does not need to be child of the ABAWD;
- Is pregnant—at any stage of pregnancy;
- Is providing care for a disabled person or a frail elder ;
- **Lives in any of the following counties:** Bedford, Cambria, Cameron, Carbon, Clearfield, Clinton, Delaware, Fayette, Forest, Fulton, Huntingdon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Mifflin, Monroe, Northumberland, **Philadelphia**, Pike, Potter, Schuylkill, Somerset, Sullivan, Tioga, Wyoming; **OR**
- **Lives in any of the following cities:** Allentown, Berwick Borough (Columbia County), Bethlehem, Easton, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon, McKeesport, New Castle, Reading, Williamsport, York.

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## ***How can an ABAWD meet the work requirements?***

If not exempt, there are three ways an ABAWD may be able to meet the SNAP work requirements:

1. Working for pay at least 80 hours/month - roughly 20 hours/week;
2. Participating in an eligible job training program for at least 20 hours/week; **OR**
3. Volunteering through community service a few hours a week to “work for benefits.”

## ***What is “community service” and how many hours are required?***

- Community service is unpaid or volunteer work at a non-profit or religious organization or government site. An ABAWD may qualify for SNAP if volunteering enough hours each month to qualify.
- The number of volunteer hours required is based on the ABAWD’s monthly SNAP benefit divided by the state minimum wage — \$7.25 per hour. For example, an ABAWD receiving \$194 in SNAP per month must volunteer 26 hours/month – or 6 1/2 hours/week.
- DHS can provide “special allowances” to pay for ABAWDs’ transportation to a community service site.
- The community organization needs to sign the Community Service Agency Agreement (form PA 1694).

## ***What if my client had a good reason for missing work?***

- An ABAWD can claim “good cause” for not meeting the work or community service hours if he or she has a job or community service slot but missed work hours for reasons beyond his or her control.

## ***What else should I know?***

- Pennsylvania is delaying implementation of the time limit until March 1, 2016, so no one will be cut off until June 1, 2016. It is still best for ABAWDs to be found exempt as soon as possible.
- An ABAWD who was cut off may always reapply and get SNAP back by showing that he or she is exempt, lives in a waived area, or is meeting the work requirement.
- After receiving the initial 3 months worth of SNAP benefits, an ABAWD whose SNAP was cut off because he or she was not exempt or meeting the work requirement may qualify for a second 3-month period of SNAP. The ABAWD must meet certain criteria, such as having worked 80 hours for one month.
- The 36 month time clock, during which ABAWDs can only get 3 months of benefits unless they are exempt or working or volunteering, started 1/1/15. All ABAWDs will requalify on 1/1/18.
- More information and forms are available at [www.clsphila.org](http://www.clsphila.org).

## ***Are there appeal rights?***

- YES! Every SNAP applicant or recipient has the right to ask for a fair hearing if DHS denies or cuts off SNAP benefits for alleged failure to meet an ABAWD exemption, or a work or volunteer requirement. If you appeal a cutoff within about 13 days from the date of the notice, the SNAP benefits should continue while you wait for a hearing. Legal Services programs can help. To find the local office, go to [www.palegalaid.net](http://www.palegalaid.net).