



“It means life gets tougher for those childless adults who face barriers already getting back into work.”

– Ed Bolen, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Return of the ABAWD SNAP Time Limit & Work Requirements

What is an ABAWD?

Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents are adults between the ages of 18 and 49 who have no dependents in the same household, and are not disabled. Since ABAWDs do not qualify for cash benefits, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is among the only federal benefits available to the estimated 1 million unemployed, nondisabled childless adults in America.¹

What is the ABAWD Time Limit/Work Requirement?

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, a nondisabled, childless adult is limited to three full months of SNAP in any three year period, unless the individual:

- is under 18 or older than 49 years of age or
- is working an average of 20 hours per week or
- Participating in an approved employment and training program a minimum of 20 hours per week or
- A combination of the 2nd and 3rd qualifications²

If an individual does not meet these requirements, they are limited to three full months on SNAP benefits in a 36-month time period.³ The effect of this provision can be harsh in states where there are limited or no employment programs and training opportunities – even if they are in the process of searching for a job. With lower unemployment rates in states around the country, waivers are expiring and only a few states will continue to qualify for waivers. It is estimated that in fiscal year 2016, those 1 million ABAWDs will lose their SNAP benefits.

At the time, the authors of the bill presented the provision as one that would push people to look for work, allow states to waive the requirement if there were insufficient jobs, or provide them with a workfare slot if they couldn't find a job.⁴ Yet the cost of operating work programs with enough slots for all ABAWDs at risk is too expensive for most states. At this time, only about five states provide job training or workfare slot to ABAWDs at risk of losing SNAP benefits to the three-month time limit.

Unemployment rates do not take into consideration individuals who are diligently searching for jobs, want to work, and are only finding part-time work to live on. During this economic recovery period, many of the jobs being created are minimum-wage and part time, with some jobs offering less than 20 hours a week. If a struggling person takes on a job for 19 hours a week, they still need help from SNAP, but would be subject to the three-month time limit.

¹ Bolen, Ed. (2015). *Approximately 1 Million Unemployed Childless Adults Will Lose SNAP Benefits in 2016 as State Waivers Expire*. Washington, D.C: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

² State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance

³ Bolen (2015)

⁴ *Ibid*

How will this affect Alaska?

In 2004, Alaska was able to suspend these work requirements with a statewide waiver due to the economic recession and high unemployment rates throughout the nation. However, Alaska is no longer able to provide a waiver for the whole state. Beginning in January 2016, the Municipality of Anchorage will be required to observe the ABAWD time limit and work requirements. The good news is the rest of the state will remain exempt. Alaska officials have requested a waiver covering 28 borough and census areas, along with 155 native villages where unemployment is 20 percent above the national average.⁵

In Anchorage, an estimated 3,414 people in 3,202 households are considered ABAWDs. Of those people, about 85.5% of them have no earned income. ABAWD clients in Anchorage include a wide variety of races, ages, and split almost evenly between male and female⁶. Generally, ABAWD clients:

- have higher rates of unemployment, poverty and food insecurity
- are working without much of a safety net
- describes a majority of the homeless population
- can be non-custodial parents or have adult children
- don't qualify for Medicaid in non-expansion states

Some Anchorage ABAWD clients can retain their SNAP benefits by working more than 20 hours per week, or by being determined medically (either mentally or physically) unable to work by a Division of Public Assistance Eligibility Technician. The new eligibility changes will require revision of computer technology, applications, and programs to streamline processes and paperwork to the time-limit rules. Administrative attention to detail will be critical given the amount of SNAP clients, and to ensure no one who qualifies for exemptions from the three-month inadvertently loses benefits.

How can community service providers help?

For community service providers such as food banks, job training centers, health clinics, and homeless shelters, these changes in Alaska might mean an influx of new clients for services. Without the average ABAWD household's Food Stamp benefit of \$217 per month to purchase basic groceries, people will be turning to food banks, pantries, and kitchens to fill that gap. Organizations must prepare to adequately meet the needs of Alaskan citizens who will be affected by the expiration of the statewide waiver in Anchorage by January 2016.

In the face of limited community resources and the increased work load on DPA, community providers can work with Food Bank of Alaska and DPA that everyone who can qualify for SNAP are enrolled and those who should stay on the program do not inadvertently get kicked off. Community providers can be actively referring those who do still qualify, advocating for those who should remain on the program, and helping clients recertify for SNAP if possible. Volunteer hours with approved sites can count toward the work requirement, if the site qualifies under [Code of Federal Regulations Title 7, 273.24](#). Help ensure your clients are receiving the appropriate SNAP benefits and for more questions, connect with Mari Mukai, SNAP Outreach at Food Bank of Alaska (907)-222-3119.

⁵ Hughes, Zachariah. (August 3, 2015) "3,000 in Anchorage to Lose Food Stamps Under Change to Work Requirement". Anchorage, AK: Alaska Public Radio Network.

⁶ State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance (July 2015).

This whitepaper was published in August 2015. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available on the Alaska Food Coalition website at www.alaskafood.org/materials. For additional information, contact Alaska Food Coalition Manager Sarra Khlifi: afc@foodbankofalaska.org