

## **Questions and Answers on “Heat and Eat”**

Recently, New Jersey ended its “Heat and Eat” coordination of SNAP and energy assistance payments, putting 159,000 low-income SNAP households at risk of losing approximately \$90.00 per month in federal SNAP food benefits.

### **1) Who is affected by New Jersey’s Failure to Implement the SNAP Heat and Eat Option**

The elimination of Heat & Eat disproportionately affects New Jerseyans who are elderly and/or have disabilities. Since the Heat & Eat payment was eliminated on July 1<sup>st</sup>, food pantries and other anti-hunger advocates have encountered many elderly and disabled households with substantial SNAP benefit losses. The Congressional Budget Office estimated the SNAP “Heat and Eat” cut to average \$90.00 per household per month. New Jersey social service providers have seen some elderly households’ SNAP food benefits drop from \$135.00 per month to only \$15.00 per month.

### **2) What is the financial impact of New Jersey failing to restore Heat and Eat?**

About 159,000 New Jersey households that participate in Heat and Eat now are at risk of losing \$170 million per year. Those 100 percent federally funded food dollars would generate 1.79 times that in economic activity, or more than \$300 million lost to New Jersey’s economy.

### **3) How does failure to implement the Heat & Eat option impact New Jersey's administration of SNAP benefits?**

The loss of the “Heat and Eat” option further burdens the state's already struggling efforts to administer the SNAP within federal rules and get eligible people vital benefits timely. New Jersey ranks 52nd (out of 53 states and jurisdictions) in processing applications within the required 30 day timeframe and is under threat of the loss of federal administration funds because of that poor performance. One of the primary purposes of the Heat & Eat option is to streamline application processing, by coordinating between the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP or other similar energy assistance. This option allows appropriate SNAP benefits levels to be processed more quickly, and removes duplicated efforts.

### **4) How does the 2014 Farm Bill Revise the Heat and Eat Option?**

For households who have a deemed utility expense based on their receipt of an energy assistance payment (like LIHEAP), the Farm Bill change sets a minimum amount for that energy assistance payment at more than \$20.00 in a 12-month period. SNAP takes into account some basic living expenses when determining the household's SNAP eligibility and benefit amounts. Many states, like New Jersey, use a “mandatory Heating and Cooling Utility Allowance” (HCSUA) to streamline its SNAP application process by deeming an average cost for utilities. The 2014 Farm Bill modified one aspect of this

approach. Before basing a household's SNAP utility allowance on receipt of LIHEAP or other similar energy assistance, such payment received must be more than \$20 within a 12- month period. An investment of \$3.2 million in LIHEAP or other energy assistance payments would be sufficient to provide "Heat and Eat" to the estimated 159,000 New Jersey households at risk.

### **5) Is the Federal Government Allowing States to Opt for Heat and Eat?**

The US Department of Agriculture, which oversees SNAP, and the US Department of Health and Human Services have issued information reaffirming that states can implement the "Heat and Eat" option and be in compliance with federal law.

USDA guidance can be found at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/SNAP-Outreach-QAs-for-Unit.pdf>  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/LIHEAP\\_Implementation\\_Memo.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/LIHEAP_Implementation_Memo.pdf)

HHS responded to the issue:

<http://liheap.ncat.org/pubs/LCIssueBriefs/heateat/HHSreponse.pdf>

### **6) Which states are taking the Heat and Eat option to fight hunger?**

To date, 10 states and the District of Columbia have opted to continue the SNAP "Heat and Eat" simplification for households receiving LIHEAP or other similar energy assistance payments. The ten states are CA, CT, MA, MT, NY, OR, PA, RI, VT, WA.