



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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May 10, 2023

The Honorable Steve Huffman
Chair, Senate Health Committee

Re: Substitute HB 33 and SNAP Supplement for Older Adults.

Dear Chair Huffman:

I write on behalf of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging to express our support for the proposal to include in the SFY 2024-2025 state budget supplemental SNAP benefits for older Ohioans so that they receive at least \$50 per month.

Attached is an op-ed that appeared in the Cleveland Plain Dealer that explains that the need for the supplement arose from the ending of the public health emergency (PHE) and termination of SNAP Emergency Benefits.

These emergency benefits were a godsend for older Ohioans during the pandemic; individuals reported improved mental, physical and emotional health due to increased resources to buy food. At a time when 1 in 2 older adults nationally are malnourished or at risk of becoming malnourished, the SNAP Emergency Benefits made a difference.

However, now that the emergency allotments have ended, an estimated 70,000 older Ohioans who receive SNAP will see their benefits reduced; some who had been temporarily receiving \$281/month during the public health emergency are now receiving the minimum allotment of \$23/month. This is a dramatic decline that will surely have an adverse health impact on older Ohioans.

With a SNAP supplemental benefit, Ohio lawmakers have an opportunity to make a legitimate impact on the health and well-being of older Ohioans. For Ohio to be the best state nation in which to age, we need sound public policy and innovative solutions for all of us to thrive as we age. We are all aging, and this is important to us all.

Sincerely,

Beth Kowalczyk
Chief Policy Officer

The Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (o4a), a nonprofit organization, is a statewide network of agencies that provide services for older adults, people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, as well as advocate on their behalf. The Association addresses issues that have an impact on the aging and disability network, provides services to members, serves as a collective voice for Ohio's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs).
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Three years and \$23 dollars later, older Ohioans still need help: Beth Kowalczyk and Hope Lane-Gavin

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- As pandemic-era supports such as continuous Medicaid coverage, food aid emergency allotments and child care co-pay assistance are winding down with the termination of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, lawmakers in Columbus are gearing up to vote on Ohio's biennial state operating budget - determining the best use of \$44 billion dollars. Right now, legislators have an opportunity to make a significant impact in the health and well-being of older Ohioans by applying a lesson learned from the pandemic.

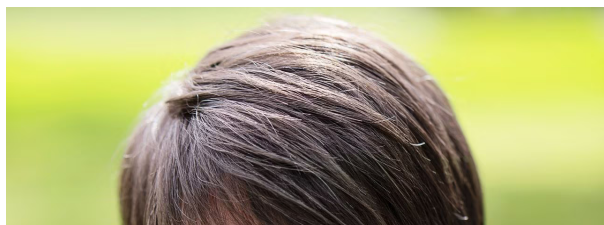
The federal government temporarily expanded its Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, during the pandemic to address rising food insecurity and provide economic stimulus during some of the most uncertain and unprecedented times in American history.

For SNAP households headed by older adults, this expansion was life-changing. Before the pandemic, the minimum SNAP benefits older adults received was \$23 per month. With the emergency benefits, their monthly amount increased to \$281 per month.

During long-form [interviews](#) conducted in summer 2022 by Advocates for Ohio's Future, older Ohioans repeatedly reported improved mental, physical and emotional health due to increased resources to purchase food. Further [research](#) demonstrates that, because they had more resources, fewer older adults skipped meals. We learned that the emergency SNAP benefits promoted health and independence by freeing up resources for other basic needs.

Now, after three years, the federal government has rolled back these benefits to pre-pandemic levels without any guarantees of revisiting SNAP benefit adequacy in the federal farm bill later this year.

Approximately 70,000 older Ohioan households have or will soon return to the minimum benefit of \$23 per month. How they get by each month should concern us all. In addition to traditional methods like couponing and loyalty points to maximize benefits, older Ohioans reported purchasing "mystery" cans, rinsing canned foods of their sodium, and often sacrificing other necessities to ensure their nutritional needs are at least partially met every month.





Beth Kowalczyk is the chief policy officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging and Chief Operating Officer of Direction Home LLC.

States across the country have taken matters into their own hands to assure SNAP benefit adequacy for older adults by exploring ways to supplement the fully funded federal benefit with state dollars. Ohio lawmakers should do the same.

A modest, \$42 million two-year budget proposal is currently before Ohio lawmakers to supplement SNAP benefits for older Ohioans so that they receive at least \$50 per month. This recommendation, modeled after that of Maryland, recognizes what has long been understood by health and human service advocates: Food is medicine. Research continues to show that SNAP reduces food insecurity, [reduces depression](#), increases [prescription adherence](#), and leads to [better nutritional outcomes and lower health care costs](#). Access to SNAP has even been [directly associated](#) with a reduced likelihood of nursing home and hospital admissions.



Hope Lane-Gavin is director of nutrition policy and programs with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks.

While Ohio maintains a strong food bank and pantry network, they aren't nearly as cost-effective as SNAP, which for every meal that a food bank or food pantry provides, SNAP [can provide nine](#). SNAP

also allows participants dignity of choice, which is key to independent living.

Ohio's [2023-2026 State Plan on Aging](#) commits the state to prioritizing principles such as healthy living with the goal of improving the health and well-being of older Ohioans. Allowing SNAP benefits to revert back to inadequate amounts will almost certainly move progress backward when one in two older adults [are already malnourished or at risk of being malnourished](#).

With a SNAP supplemental benefit, Ohio lawmakers have an opportunity to make a legitimate impact in the health and well-being of older Ohioans. For Ohio to be the best state nation in which to age, we need sound public policy and innovative solutions for all of us to thrive as we age. We are all aging, and this is important to us all.

Beth Kowalczyk, a member of Worthington City Council, is the chief policy officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging and Chief Operating Officer of Direction Home LLC. Hope Lane-Gavin is the director of nutrition policy and programs with the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, where she seeks to expand access to entitlement and public assistance programming.

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