

Connecting Your Patients with Food Resources

A Guide for MassHealth Providers During the COVID-19 Emergency

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of individuals and families across Massachusetts face food insecurity, many for the first time. This guide will help you identify patients who need food assistance and connect them to resources in the community. Here, you'll find information about food assistance resources that can provide your patients with immediate access to food, as well as other resources that may provide recurring financial support for the purchase of food.

How to Screen Your Patients for Food Insecurity

The best way to learn if your patients are facing food insecurity is by asking the validated Hunger Vital Signs questions.

1. "Within the past 30 days, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more." Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household?
2. "Within the past 30 days, the food we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more." Was that often true, sometimes true or never true for you or your household?

If your patient answers "often true" or "sometimes true" to one or both questions, or simply asks for help, it's best to ask a few more questions so that you can connect them to the right resources.

1. Are you pregnant or breastfeeding? Are you currently enrolled in WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)?
2. Are there any kids in your household? If yes, what are their ages?
3. Are you currently enrolled in SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)?

Resources

Once you have answers to the above questions, you'll be in the best position to help connect patients to the appropriate resources below.

All MassHealth members who are not currently enrolled in SNAP or WIC should be encouraged to apply immediately, as they are likely eligible. School meals and food pantries can play an important role in filling an immediate need while applications are being processed.

At a Glance: Resources for Food Insecure Individuals & Families

	SNAP	WIC	School Meals	P-EBT	Meals on Wheels	Food Pantries and Meal Programs
Pregnant & Breastfeeding Women	X	X				X
Youth younger than age 5	X	X	X			X
School age youth (5-18)	X		X	X		X
Seniors (60+)	X				X	X
All ages	X					X

Please keep in mind, MassHealth members may fit into more than one category and be eligible for more resources.

SUPPORT FOR ALL AGES

SNAP — Your patients may be eligible for SNAP, which provides a monthly benefit to buy nutritious foods. To get SNAP, your patients must meet income guidelines and be a U.S. citizen or legal noncitizen (restrictions apply).

Your patients can check their eligibility and apply at [DTAConnect.com](https://www.mass.gov/dtaconnect). They can also fill out and mail or fax a paper application, which can be found at www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-snap-benefits-food-stamps.

Patients can view their case status, check the balance of their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card — a card used to pay for groceries — and to upload and submit documents and more on [DTAConnect.com](https://www.mass.gov/dtaconnect) and on the DTA Connect mobile app.

If they are having trouble applying for or keeping their SNAP benefits, DTA's SNAP outreach partners can help. Find a list of partners at www.mass.gov/doc/snap-outreach-partners/download.

They can also call the Project Bread Food Source Hotline at **(800) 645-8333** for additional help.

SUPPORT FOR ALL AGES

FOOD PANTRIES AND MEAL PROGRAMS — A food pantry is a distribution center where people can receive free groceries. There are hundreds of food pantries in the Commonwealth, and anyone is eligible to access food at pantries regardless of age or immigration status. A meal program is where a person can receive a prepared meal for free or at a deeply discounted rate.

The food banks in eastern, central, and western MA have pantry and meal program locators on their websites — all that is needed is a zip code. Links to all three are on **Healthy Food in a SNAP** (mahealthyfoodsinasnap.org/healthy-foods/food-pantries). Or your patients can call the FoodSource Hotline at **(800) 645-8333**. Some food pantries and meal programs are reserved for residents of certain towns/cities — specific details may be found at the links/hotline provided.

SUPPORT FOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN

WIC — WIC is a health and nutrition program that provides healthy food, personalized nutrition and health education, breastfeeding support, immunization screening, referrals, and other free services to qualified Massachusetts families.

WIC's goal is to help pregnant and postpartum women and kids younger than age 5 stay healthy. Each local WIC program has a variety of nutrition and lactation staff, many of whom hold advanced degrees and/or are registered dietitians, licensed dietitians/nutritionists, certified lactation counselors (CLC), and International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC).

Who is WIC for?

- Pregnant women
- Breastfeeding women, up to 1 year postpartum
- Non-breastfeeding women, up to 6 months postpartum
- Infants and children younger than age 5

Important WIC eligibility facts:

- Families with a household income at or below 185% of the **Federal Poverty Level** (FPL) are WIC eligible.
- Individuals currently enrolled in certain MassHealth coverage types (including MassHealth standard), or receiving TAFDC, or SNAP are automatically income-eligible for WIC.
- Foster parents can enroll their children younger than age 5 regardless of their household income.
- Pregnant women can enroll as soon as they learn they are pregnant; they do not have to wait for their first visit with their provider to apply.

Learn more about the program and direct families to apply online at www.mass.gov/wic, or call **(617) 721-6601** or **(800) WIC-1007**. During the COVID-19 emergency, all WIC appointments can be done by phone.

SCHOOL MEALS — There are now more than 1,300 sites across the Commonwealth where free meals for youth (ages 0-18) can be picked up Monday through Friday. To find a location please visit www.meals4kids.org/summer or have your patients call their local school district.

PANDEMIC-EBT (P-EBT) — All Massachusetts families with school-aged children approved for free or reduced price school meals will receive P-EBT. The P-EBT benefit is \$28.50 per week, per child. Households may receive P-EBT and continue to participate in school meal programs.

Households receiving DTA benefits will receive the additional benefit automatically on their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card — a card used to pay for groceries. Households not receiving DTA benefits, but with children eligible to receive free or reduced price meals if not for school closures, will receive a P-EBT card for each eligible school-aged child.

For more information about P-EBT eligibility and how to receive this benefit, please visit www.map-ebt.org/ or call the Project Bread Hotline at **(800) 645-8333**.

SUPPORT FOR SENIORS

MEALS ON WHEELS — Meals on Wheels can provide home delivered meals for individuals with certain needs who are ages 60+, and their spouses. This program is run by the senior nutrition agencies throughout Massachusetts.

To **find a program, call (800) 243-4636**. Agency staff will assess eligibility for home deliveries.

For additional information, please visit <https://www.mass.gov/nutrition-program-for-seniors>.

Helpful Phone Numbers and Websites	Project Bread Foodsource Hotline	Information source for additional food resources	(800) 645-8333 www.projectbread.org
	Statewide Resource Information Hotline	Information source for both food and non-food resources, such as utilities	211 www.mass211.org
	MassOptions	Services resource for elders and individuals with disabilities	(800) 243-4636 www.massoptions.org