

Please Support the Best Outcomes for Everyone Who Lives in Vermont by Appropriating \$5.75 million in FY2027 for Benefit Assisters for SNAP & Medicaid

Benefit Assisters for SNAP and Medicaid

As the effects of federal changes to SNAP and Medicaid roll out across the nation, it is critical for Vermont to ensure that *all eligible people* are able to stay enrolled or be enrolled in these important benefit programs. Having Benefit Assisters ready and able to help people at their regular local service provider will greatly improve our efficiency, as people will not need to be referred to multiple providers.

Having Benefit Assisters at a person's regular local service provider will also improve the chances that everyone who is eligible for these programs will get the benefits they provide. Benefit Assisters will also be able to help people get ALL the benefits they are eligible for, although the focus of this funding will be for SNAP and Medicaid.

In Vermont, we know that our public-private partnership for providing State services and supports can really work for people when they most need help. This proposal reflects that partnership and commitment to the best outcomes for everyone who lives in Vermont.

- Service Providers who receive this State funding for Benefit Assisters will commit to designated staff member(s) getting certified by the Vermont Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA) as a Benefit Assister, which is the training for Medicaid enrollment and eligibility.
- Service Providers who receive this State funding for Benefit Assisters will also commit to designated staff member(s) getting trained by Hunger Free Vermont (HFVT) for SNAP eligibility and enrollment.
 - This request also includes the additional match funding needed for organizations that are already designated as SNAP Outreach Organizations, some of which will not be doing Medicaid Assistance.
- Both DVHA and HFVT provide ongoing support for Benefit Assisters, including Communities of Practice, online resources, and training and technical assistance as needed.



Having Benefit Assisters all across the state in multiple service provider organizations will mean that people who need assistance will be able to go to their regular local service provider to get the help they need from a trusted person. This is especially important for marginalized or vulnerable populations who may not feel comfortable going elsewhere or who face barriers in accessing programs they are not already involved with. Frequently, it is not only the individual who suffers when they miss out on or lose benefits, but that person's entire family. This puts children and other vulnerable people within the family at risk.

This Collective Statewide Effort Will:

- **Utilize Vermont's community service provider network efficiently and effectively.**
- **Provide support to people who need it, in places they are already going, by people they already trust.**
- **Ensure that people are getting the federal food and healthcare benefits they are eligible for.**
- **Use a relatively small investment to maximize federal funding coming to Vermont.**
- **Help to keep our SNAP error rates low.**

How the Funding Will Work

It is important that each Community Service Provider and other Supporting Organization receives funding in their usual way, so that we are not creating additional administrative burden, and the funding can be used efficiently and effectively. Many of the organizations participating in this request have niche training to serve a specific population. By allocating funds directly to these organizations, we will save the state from dedicating time and money to train staff who may not know how to work with certain populations or demographics.

All of the local service providers included in this request will commit to the following:

- A common group of data points that will be collected and reported on.
 - Designated SNAP Outreach Partners will continue doing their Quarterly Reports as usual.
- Either dedicated staff that are only doing the Benefit Assister job, or multiple staff certified/trained in Medicaid/SNAP who will assist people as part of their regular interactions (home visitors, for instance).
- An organization-wide commitment to ensuring that all eligible people are asked regularly about their benefits and offered help to ensure they enroll or stay enrolled.

Other Included Supporting Organizations

Some of the organizations included in the request will be providing additional and critical support to this statewide effort. These organizations include VT 211, Hunger Free Vermont, the Vermont Language Justice Project, for example. Some of the funding in the request will be used to support these critical supports for the service provider organizations and the people they serve. These organizations will also commit to reporting on their activities, which could include the following:

- Maintaining a statewide database of service provider organizations that have Benefit Assistants and providing Resource Navigation services for people who call for help
- Providing materials and videos in multiple languages
- Providing training and technical assistance

What We Will Collectively Report On

- The number of staff who are certified Benefit Assistants through DVHA and trained in SNAP through Hunger Free Vermont at each organization.
- The number of eligible people who received assistance (un-duplicated) each quarter.
 - The number of people who needed repeat assistance for reporting, etc, in the year.
 - The number of new applications & enrollments in each program in the year.
 - The number of people who were referred to other service providers or enrolled in other benefit programs.
- Outreach efforts to inform people that Benefit Assistance is available. This reporting will be qualitative to explain how the outreach is being done.
- VT 211 can report on the number of referrals they make to organizations for Benefit Assistance.

