

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | Aug. 21, 2020

ND SNAP clients can purchase groceries online; Agency announces new grant to assist food retailers with online setup costs

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services announced a new SNAP Access Enhancement Grant program today to increase access to food assistance by ensuring North Dakota grocery stores and other qualifying food retailers are equipped to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card payments for food purchases.

The grant funding, which was approved by the legislature’s Budget Section late last week and by the North Dakota Emergency Commission Aug. 3, comes after the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved North Dakota’s request to allow online food purchases by SNAP households. North Dakota joined USDA’s online purchasing program Aug. 12, 2020.

The SNAP EBT online food purchasing program started as a federal pilot project involving a few states and two approved national food retailers: Walmart and Amazon. The pandemic has accelerated the nationwide rollout, and North Dakota is among the most recent states to provide another purchasing option for SNAP clients who can already buy food from USDA-approved food retailers who use store-based or mobile point-of-sale devices.

Michele Gee, the DHS Director for Economic Assistance, said the department has been working closely with USDA and the North Dakota Grocer’s Association to increase access to safe and convenient online purchasing options.

“We want to prevent hunger by supporting a safer option to in-store shopping for individuals at higher risk of coronavirus complications who are limiting their outings and exposure to others in the community who may be asymptomatic,” she said.

The SNAP Access Enhancement Grants are for any approved SNAP retailer who could benefit from help with the cost of the equipment and systems needed to accept and correctly process SNAP/EBT card purchases, whether online, in store and when groceries are delivered. They can also be used to help retailers get set up as an approved SNAP retailer, as a precursor to approval for the online purchasing program.

The grants will reimburse applicants for the cost of eligible expenses incurred, up to \$25,000. The application form and details about eligible expenses, documentation requirements and the reimbursement process are online at <https://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/snap-access-grant.html>.

SNAP benefits can only be used to pay for food. They cannot be used to purchase non-food items or to pay for delivery fees or other associated charges. One of the primary requirements of the systems and equipment that need to be used for online purchasing is that they are able to ensure that non-food items cannot be purchased with a SNAP EBT card.

North Dakota approved \$750,000 in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding to support the grocery retailer grant program. A portion of the funding will be prioritized to help smaller grocery retailers to help ensure broad access across North Dakota.

Information about the SNAP Access Enhancement Grant and other resources and information for service providers and individuals and families can be found in the coronavirus section of the department's website at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/index.html.

Background on the federal USDA SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot is online at www.fns.usda.gov/snap/online-purchasing-pilot.

SNAP typically assists about 23,000 low-income North Dakota households with their nutritional needs by providing \$68 million in federal SNAP benefits annually. On average, the monthly SNAP benefit per household is about \$350 in North Dakota.

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