

Federal Government Shutdown FAQs

February 8, 2019

The Department of Health Services (DHS) is committed to minimizing the impact of the federal government shutdown on our program members and will continue updating this document as more information becomes available.

General Questions

1. What programs are impacted by the government shutdown?

Answer: At this time, FoodShare, the WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), are affected by the government shutdown. DHS will be issuing February FoodShare benefits early for many households due to the shutdown. Programs like BadgerCare Plus, Medicaid, SeniorCare, Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program, and Wisconsin Works (W-2) are not affected.

2. Who should members and applicants contact with questions about benefits?

Answer: Members and applicants should contact their [local agency](#) with questions about benefits.

3. Will retailers continue to receive reimbursement for purchases made with QUEST cards?

Answer: Yes. Funds are obligated by the federal government when they are put on QUEST cards so retailers will receive reimbursement for any purchases that are made with QUEST cards. This includes purchases after January 20, 2019 and in February. **Retailers should continue to accept QUEST cards as usual during the government shutdown unless otherwise notified.** No restrictions should be placed on the amount of benefits that a FoodShare member can use at SNAP-authorized retailers.

4. Will QUEST cards stop working after January 31?

Answer: No. QUEST cards continue to work in February. There is a false message on social media telling members they must use their FoodShare benefits immediately. This is not true. FoodShare members will continue to have access to benefits on their cards.

Issuing Benefits

5. Will written notices be sent to current beneficiaries to notify them that their February benefits are being loaded in January?

Answer: Due to the last minute nature of these changes, we are unable to provide formal written notice that February benefits are being loaded to QUEST cards in January. We are working closely with our Income Maintenance (IM) agencies and all other stakeholders and partners to communicate this information with members so that they understand the importance of budgeting their February benefit allotment appropriately. Other means of sharing this information include press releases, call center messaging, emails, social media, and updates on the [DHS FoodShare homepage](#).

6. Will electronic notices be sent to current beneficiaries to notify them that their February benefits are being loaded in January?

Answer: DHS is using a number of electronic messages to notify members of the early issuance. This includes a [mass email message](#) to all households that have email addresses in the CARES benefit system, messaging on the main [ACCESS](#) webpage and [MyACCESS mobile app](#), and updates on the [DHS FoodShare homepage](#).

7. If a member receives an early issuance of February benefits in January, will they receive their regular February benefits in February?

Answer: No, there will not be additional February benefits for those households that receive their February benefits in January. It is important to know that these benefits are not an extra bonus benefit but are meant to last through the end of February. Therefore, members should budget accordingly.

8. With the early distribution of February benefits, what will happen to members who have accrued three time-limited benefit (TLB) months prior to January? Will their FoodShare benefits be distributed in February once it is known if they met the work requirement in January?

Answer: FoodShare members that have accrued three TLB months prior to January will have their cases processed as they normally would have. If the member is anticipated to meet the work requirement in January (as indicated by a FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) worker by the second Saturday of the month, January 12, 2019), the member will receive ongoing FoodShare benefits for February as a part of the January 20 early issuance. If this member ultimately does not meet the work requirement, he or she will be subject to an overpayment.

Similarly, members that are not anticipated to meet the work requirement in January would not receive ongoing February FoodShare benefits as a part of the January 20 early issuance. If the member does meet the January work requirement, he or she will be eligible for February FoodShare benefits after the second Saturday in February (February 16).

9. Will members who did not receive the early issuance of February benefits on January 20 still receive February benefits?

Answer: FNS has indicated that they expect to have sufficient funding to issue February benefits to those households that did not receive their February benefits early. This means that households that apply or complete a recertification or a Six-Month Report form (SMRF) on or after January 19 should expect to receive February benefits on the normal February issuance schedule. Supplements will also be issued under normal processing standards. Replacement benefits will also be issued under normal processing standards.

10. Will members receive March benefits? When will members receive March benefits?

Answer: Federal partners have confirmed that March benefits are available. March benefits will be put on QUEST cards on March 1 to minimize the length of time between the February and March benefit issuance dates. Households that apply in March will receive March benefits in accordance with normal processing and issuance timelines.

Note: Any notices dated between January 19, 2019 and February 4, 2019 will indicate that the household will receive a \$0 March FoodShare benefit due to the federal government shutdown. Households will receive March benefits and will receive new notices indicating the appropriate benefit amount after February 9, 2019.

Eligibility

11. Are furloughed federal employees eligible for FoodShare benefits for January and/or February?

Answer: The federal government has indicated that they would be eligible under [normal eligibility rules](#). It is expected that when federal employees are off furlough, the income would most likely be viewed as a lump sum and would not impact FoodShare eligibility for January and February.

Federal partners have yet to release official guidance. However, it is anticipated that federal employees are subject to all other existing financial and non-financial FoodShare eligibility factors, including verification policy.

Communications

12. Is the information DHS is sharing with FoodShare applicants and members available in languages other than English?

Answer: Yes, FoodShare applicants and members can contact their local agency for language access options or the DHS Civil Rights Coordinator:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/civil-rights/nondiscrimination.htm>

13. Will any messaging be provided to SNAP retailers for customers in the check-out line?

Answer: FNS manages SNAP authorized retailers and has distributed messaging for retailers.

FSET and FoodShare Outreach

14. Are FSET and FoodShare Outreach services available in February and March?

Answer: Yes. The FSET and FoodShare Outreach programs will continue to operate in February and March.

