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Information for Vermonters on SNAP Benefits During the Government Shutdown

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Information on SNAP Benefits During the Government Shutdown

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Problem Identification & AHEC Focus Areas

- During the 2025 federal government shutdown, SNAP (3SquaresVT) benefits were at risk of disruption, creating confusion and anxiety among low-income Vermonters who rely on these funds for groceries.

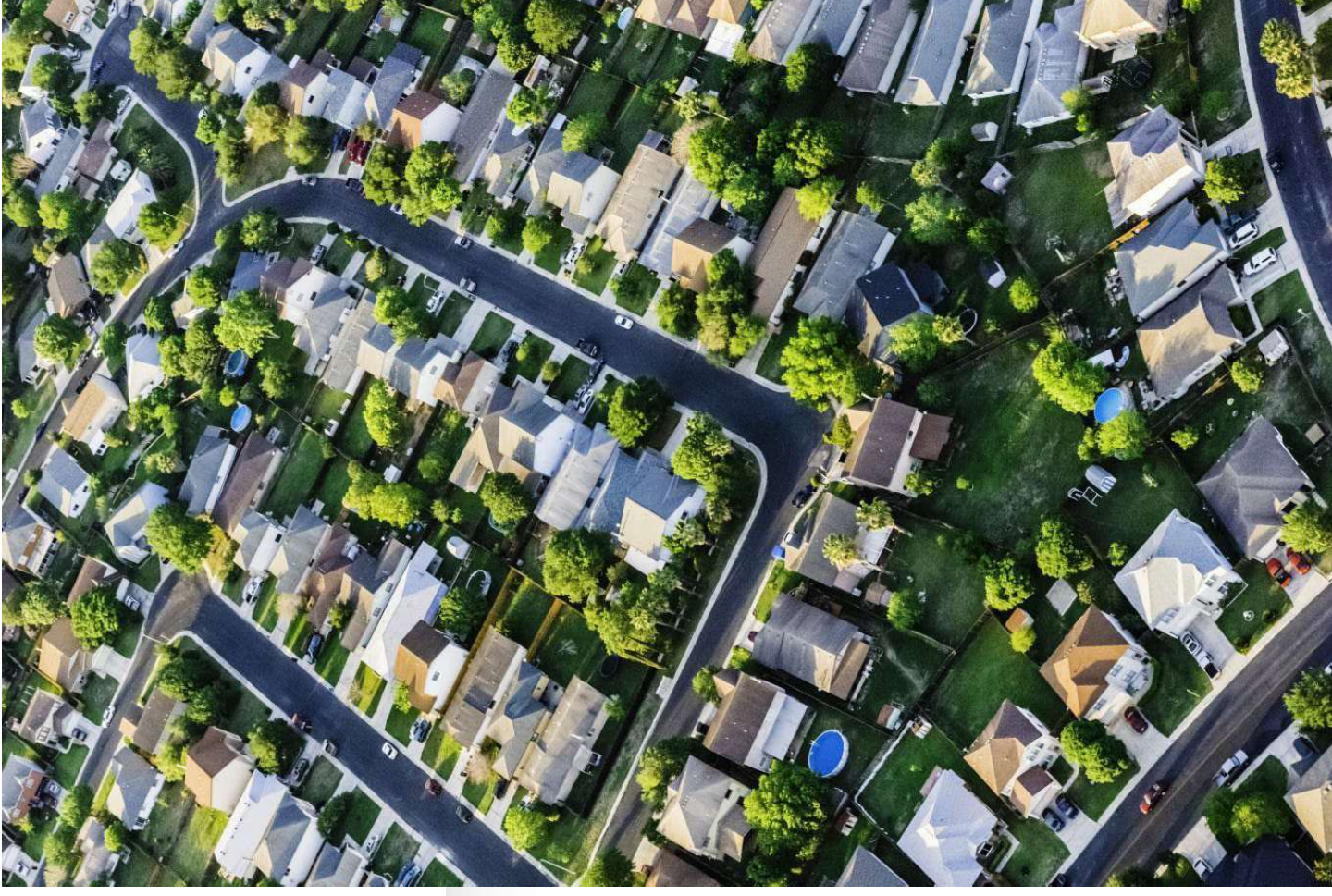
- Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital serves rural Windham County, where patients often depend on both SNAP and local food shelves such as the Neighbor's Pantry in Londonderry. The Neighbor's Pantry distributes food to anyone who needs assistance on the 3rd Friday of each month, 1–4 p.m., operated by the Second Congregational Church in Londonderry (Windham County). I have volunteered for this organization since middle school.

- The government shutdown created many questions surrounding EBT card function, how long state contingency funding would last, or where to get updated information quickly.

- Project goal: Create a clear, informative handout as a communication strategy to explain how the shutdown and Vermont's emergency response could affect SNAP benefits and local food resources. This was distributed in the clinic and via social media (Neighbor's Pantry Facebook page).

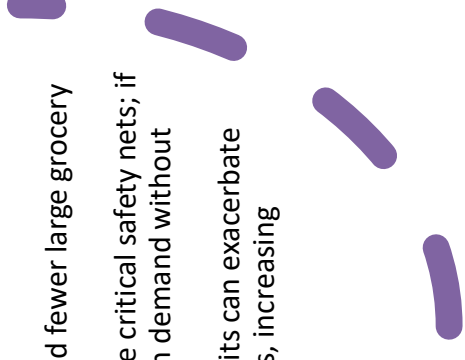
- AHEC Focus Areas addressed:

- Social Determinants of Health (food insecurity, poverty)
- Connecting Communities & Supporting Health Professionals (FOHC, clinic staff, food shelves)
- Virtual Learning & Telehealth (directing patients to phone, web, and social media resources)
- Interprofessional Education/Practice (coordination between clinic, state agencies, legislators, and food shelves)
- Medical Practice Transformation (embedding real-time policy changes into clinic workflows).



Public Health Cost & Local Impact

- State-level burden:
 - In FY 2022, 67,743 people in 39,619 households received SNAP in Vermont, with an average monthly benefit of \$161 per person.
 - On average, \$10.88 million in SNAP benefits were issued each month in Vermont, supporting ~642 SNAP-authorized food retailers statewide.
- Food insecurity in Vermont:
 - About 8% of Vermont households were food insecure between 2020–2022.
 - Recent data from Hunger Free Vermont and partners suggest that as many as 2 in 5 VermonTERS have experienced some level of food insecurity during overlapping crises (COVID-19, inflation, and now a federal shutdown).
- Shutdown-specific costs:
 - Vermont’s Emergency Board approved \$6 million in state funds to cover benefits for ~65,000 low-income residents for the first two weeks of November 2025, plus \$250,000 to the Vermont Foodbank to support food shelves.
 - Even a short lapse in federal support risks increased demand on food shelves and community resources, transportation challenges for rural residents, and worsening chronic disease management due to poor nutrition.
- Windham County & Grace Cottage context:
 - Rural geography, limited public transportation, and fewer large grocery stores magnify the impact of any disruption in SNAP.
 - Neighbor’s Pantry and other local food shelves are critical safety nets; if SNAP is interrupted, these food shelves face surges in demand without guaranteed surge funding.
 - For Grace Cottage patients, loss or delay of benefits can exacerbate diabetes, hypertension, and mental health conditions, increasing downstream health care utilization and costs.





Community Perspectives & Interviews

VT State Representative Kathleen James (Bennington County)

Noted that “Vermont legislators anticipated this possibility and set aside contingency funds in the state budget.” The VT Emergency Board later authorized \$6 million in state funds plus \$250,000 for the Vermont Foodbank.

Highlighted that “money is not the problem, the cards are the problem” – the key barrier is technical (loading benefits onto EBT cards) rather than lack of state willingness to support residents.

Guidance from Rep. James on what to tell patients:

- Call Economic Services for up-to-date information about benefits and card status.
- Stay in close contact with case workers or local offices.
- Follow credible news sources and official state channels for rapid updates.
- Understand that Vermont may not be reimbursed by the federal government, so public messaging must balance transparency with reassurance.

Senior Staff at a Vermont Food Shelf (anonymous):

- “This last distribution on November 7th was 55 households at distribution with 7 backpack bags being sent home for a total of 62 households. This number of household represents 130 individuals.”
- “The hardest part of my job is trying to find sources of food. We get a truck once a month from the Vermont Foodbank. We get some donations from individuals and a few businesses but that is not always consistent. The rest of our food is sourced at Aldi’s, Walmart, Dollar Tree, Black River Produce, as well as other grocery stores as items go on sale.”
- “When the government shutdown I felt overwhelmed with the uncertainty of what was going to happen. How do we adequately serve the people that need our help with our limited resources? How long is this going to last? The stress is continuing because we are still not sure what will happen with the new limitations to the SNAP program and how that will affect our community.”

Intervention & Methodology

- **Intervention: SNAP Information Handout for Grace Cottage & Neighbor's Pantry**
 - Time sensitive (finished by November 1 due to fast pace of government changes), one-page resource sheet, designed for both print and digital use.
 - Plain-language explanation of what SNAP is, how the shutdown and state emergency funding may affect benefit timing/amounts, and who to call for help.
 - Includes key phone numbers and websites: Economic Services, Vermont Foodbank food shelf locator, Grace Cottage contact information, and local food shelves such as Neighbor's Pantry.
- **Methodology for development:**
 - Reviewed current state guidance (VT Emergency Board decision, DCF/Economic Services updates) and media coverage summarizing the \$6M state funding decision.
 - Incorporated insights from interview with Rep. Kathleen James and a local Food Shelf Director to ensure messaging aligned with state plans and did not over-promise federal reimbursement
- **Implementation plan:**
 - Print copies for distribution at Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital
 - Provided digital copies to Neighbor's Pantry for distribution via Facebook

Intervention

SNAP BENEFITS UPDATE FOR VERMONT RESIDENTS

Good News for Vermonters!

Vermont will temporarily fund Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits—3SquaresVT—during the federal funding uncertainty. This keeps food assistance flowing so households can keep buying groceries.

What's Happening

- The Agency of Human Services (AHS) will provide state-funded SNAP if a federal shutdown delays payments.
- Benefits will continue through the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system.
- For older adults (65+) and people with disabilities, deposits to bank accounts will continue.

Timing & Duration

- On October 29, 2025, Vermont approved emergency funding to keep 3SquaresVT running during the federal shutdown. This state-funded plan will cover benefits for the first 15 days of November, ensuring that Vermonters do not experience an interruption.
- Benefits will load on EBT cards by November 7, 2025, and provide support through November 15, 2025. The state's emergency board will reconvene on November 13, 2025, to decide whether to extend the funding period.
- Benefits will still follow the usual schedule, and no additional paperwork or reapplication is needed.

What This Means for You

- Use your EBT card as usual at grocery stores and farmers markets.
- No interruption to monthly benefits is expected.
- Check your balance in the MyBenefits app or call EBT Customer Service (1-800-914-8605).
- If you experience any issues or delays, contact the Department for Children and Families (DCF).

Key Contacts & Resources

Organization	Phone / Website	Purpose
DCF Economic Services Division	1-800-479-6151 dcf.vermont.gov	Questions about eligibility or benefits
EBT Customer Service	1-800-914-8605	Check your balance or report card issues
3SquaresVT Helpline	1-855-855-6181	Help applying or managing benefits
Vermont Foodbank	vfoodbank.org	Find food shelves and local pantries
Agency of Human Services	humanservices.vermont.gov	Official statewide updates

Need extra support? Contact the Vermont Foodbank or your local food shelf so every Vermonter has access to healthy food.

Prepared by the Vermont Agency of Human Services • October 2025

Results & Reflection

Goal:

- Reduces confusion and anxiety among SNAP recipients by clearly explaining what is known, what is uncertain, and what concrete steps they can take.
- Supports Grace Cottage clinicians and staff and local food shelves by providing up-to-date information.
- Strengthens connections between clinic, state agencies, and local food shelves by explicitly listing shared resources.



Shortcomings:

- Lack of information from patients on if they understand: (1) when benefits will be loaded; (2) who to call if their card doesn't work; (3) where to get food in an emergency.
- Tracking outcomes: number of handouts given out at Grace Cottage and Neighbor's Pantry or number of views of information on Facebook
- Re-assessing the information after changes made by government officials



Reflection:

- The policy environment changed rapidly (federal court rulings, state emergency actions), requiring frequent content updates I was unable to accommodate.
- Limited local, real-time data specific to Windham County made it difficult to quantify the exact impact at the county level.
- There is a risk of information overload for patients already facing multiple stressors (housing, heating, transportation), underscoring the importance of simple visuals and concrete action steps.

Future Directions

- **For the host clinic (Grace Cottage):**
 - Integrate the SNAP/food access handout into standard social determinants of health patient interviews for those who are food insecure (e.g., positive food insecurity screens automatically trigger provision of the handout)
- **For the next student at Grace Cottage:**
 - Expand interviews to include Neighbor's Pantry volunteers, Grace Cottage social workers, and patients receiving SNAP to better understand barriers and refine messaging.
 - Add multilingual versions (e.g., Spanish, French) or low-literacy visual formats, depending on community needs
- **For the broader system:**
 - Continue state-wide contingency planning for future inevitable government shutdowns.
 - Consider system-wide fail points – like EBT cards that the federal government turned off and hindered the state government's ability to distribute contingency funding.

References & Key Sources

- USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Vermont SNAP State Fact Sheet, FY 2022. (Participants, average monthly benefits, food insecurity rates).
- Seven Days VT. "Vermont Will Pick Up the Tab for Food Stamps During the Shutdown" (Oct 29, 2025) – details on \$6M in state funds and \$250,000 to the Vermont Foodbank.
- MyNBC5. "How many Vermonters get SNAP benefits? See county-by-county breakdown" (Oct 30, 2025) – context on 65,000 Vermonters relying on SNAP and the emergency board decision.
- Vermont Department of Health. Nutrition & Food Access Resources – statewide food access, Vermont Foodbank locator, and healthy eating resources.
- Neighbor's Pantry (Londonderry, VT) listings via FoodPantries.org/FreeFood.org – hours and role as a key Windham County food shelf.
- Hunger Free Vermont / local reporting summarized in The Commons – description of rising food insecurity, with estimates of up to 2 in 5 Vermonters experiencing some level of food insecurity during recent crises.
- Communications and newsletter from VT State Representative Kathleen James – explanation of state contingency planning, card deactivation concerns, and guidance for constituents on SNAP during the shutdown.