

Food Stamps Time Limit and Work Requirements for ABAWDs

The food stamp (Basic Food/SNAP) time limits for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) go back into effect January 1, 2016 in Washington. This is a federal law that was suspended for many years. Individuals considered “ABAWDs” may only receive food stamps for a total of three (3) full months within a 36-month period—unless the person meets an “exemption” or complies with certain work requirements.

Who is an ABAWD?

An ABAWD is an able-bodied adult age 18 to 49 who is not disabled, pregnant, or living in a household with minor children. Persons under age 18 or age 50 or older are not subject to this rule.

Who is exempt from the time limit?

The 3-month food stamps limit does not apply if the ABAWD meets any of the following:

- Working 30 hours or more per week, including self-employment or in-kind work
- Receiving a disability-based benefit (SSI, SSDI, ABD, Worker Comp, etc.)
- Certified as physically or mentally “unfit” for employment by a health professional
- Has been homeless and cannot find work because of this
- Receiving—or has applied for— unemployment benefits
- Participating in a drug or alcohol treatment program
- Is a student enrolled at least 1/2 time in a high school or college (special rules may apply)
- Lives in a Basic Food/SNAP household with any child under 18—does not need to be child of the ABAWD
- Is pregnant—at any stage of pregnancy
- Is providing care for a disabled person or a frail elder who is incapacitated **OR**
- Lives in any county other than King, Snohomish, or parts of Pierce Counties. In Pierce County, anyone who lives in Tacoma or Lakewood is exempt. All other cities in Pierce County are not exempt.

What if my client is homeless or appears unable to work?

- DSHS will consider exempting individuals who are “chronically homeless” and are unemployed or under-employed. Have your client contact DSHS at 1-877-501-2233 if he or she is homeless.
- If your client appears to have a physical or mental impairment that prevents him or her from working full-time—even if not homeless—he or she can ask for an ABAWD “exemption” any time. Have your client call DSHS immediately at 1-877-501-2233. Remember, an ABAWD does not need to receive a disability benefit or meet the SSI disability standards to qualify as “exempt” and be eligible for Basic Food benefits. The client should also contact his or her doctor to get a statement indicating that he or she cannot work.

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How can an ABAWD meet the work requirements?

● If not exempt, there are several ways an ABAWD might be able to meet the Basic Food work requirements including:

1. Working for pay at least 80 hours/month - roughly 20 hours/week
2. Participating in an eligible work training program for at least 20 hours/week **OR**
3. Volunteering with a public or private non-profit organization for 16 hours per week, or a lower number of hours if determined by DSHS.

What is “volunteering” and how many hours are required?

- Volunteer work is unpaid work at a non-profit organization. An ABAWD may qualify for food stamps if performing enough hours of volunteer work each month to qualify. Note that federal SNAP law does not require state agencies (DSHS) to find local community service placements.
- DSHS has pledged informally to find a spot for every ABAWD so no one loses benefits.
- The number of volunteer hours required is based on the ABAWD’s monthly food stamps divided by the state minimum wage.
- The community organization needs to sign the ABAWD WorkFare Activity Report Form for the client every month.

How does my organization become a WorkFare organization?

● Email DSHS at SWBFETPolicy@dshs.wa.gov to get the process started. The Basic Food program manager or her staff will contact you as soon as possible.

How does someone sign up for BFET, RISE, or another state-approved employment or training program?

- You can visit the following Web site: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/employment-and-training-programs>
- You can also call DSHS at 1-877-501-2233 to get additional information. You can also email DSHS at jobhelp@dshs.wa.gov, or visit your local CSO office. You can find your local CSO office at <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-find-an-office>.



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What if my client had a good reason for missing work?

- An ABAWD can claim “good cause” for not meeting the work or volunteer hours if he or she was sick, transportation broke down, or there was bad weather that shut down the workplace. As long as the ABAWD has a job or volunteer slot but missed work hours for reasons “beyond his or her control,” DSHS should accept this as “good cause” and not terminate the food stamps benefits.

Are there appeal rights?

- YES! Every food stamps applicant or recipient has the right to ask for an administrative hearing to challenge any DSHS decision he or she disagrees with. This includes if DSHS denies or terminates food stamps benefits for alleged failure to meet an ABAWD exemption, a work, or volunteer requirement. Contact a local Legal Services Office if food stamps benefits are incorrectly terminated or denied. Clients can find legal help by calling 2-1-1 in King County or calling CLEAR statewide at 1-888-201-1014.
- If an ABAWD requests an administrative hearing, the client's three-month clock stops ticking and benefits will continue until there is a hearing decision. If a client continues to receive benefits while a hearing is pending, and the hearing decision goes against the client, the client might be at risk for an overpayment. This means he or she might have pay to back some of the benefits money he or she received while the hearing was pending.

What else should I know?

- Call 1-877-501-2233 to speak with a DSHS Basic Food ABAWD specialist. They can answer questions about the exemptions, work requirements and send copies of the ABAWD forms. More information is available at: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawd>
- After receiving the initial three (3) months of food stamps benefits, an ABAWD may qualify for a second 3-month period of food stamps. The ABAWD must meet certain criteria, such as having worked 80 hours for one month or moving from a waived area, for this one-time extra 3 months of food stamps benefits.

Washington State Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limit & Requirements



Counties that have ABAWD Time Limits and Requirements for benefits.

Counties (and two cities) that do not have the ABAWD requirements.