



SNAP 304-1

NON-FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS: Categorical and Expanded Categorical Eligibility

Supersedes: SNAP 304-1 (07/25/2022)

Reference: 7 CFR 273.2(j); 7 CFR 273.8(e)

Overview: Federal law provides the basic eligibility rules for SNAP. **There are two basic pathways to gain financial eligibility for SNAP:**

1. Having income and resources below specified levels set out in federal SNAP law (regular eligibility); or,
2. Being “categorically,” or automatically, eligible based on receiving benefits from other specified low-income assistance programs. Traditional Categorical Eligibility (CE) describes households in which all members receive or are authorized to receive CASH assistance funded by TANF, TANF Post Employment, Tribal TANF, or SSI. Expanded categorically eligible (ECE) describes households in which all members receive or are authorized to receive non-cash assistance (in Montana this is the TANF Information and Referral Services brochure).

This policy addresses number 2 above - Categorical Eligibility and Expanded Categorical Eligibility.

CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY AND EXPANDED CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY:

Categorical Eligibility includes both:

1. Traditional categorical eligibility (referred to in Montana as **CE – Categorically Eligible**) describes households in which all members receive or are authorized to receive cash assistance funded by TANF, TANF Post Employment, Tribal TANF, or SSI; and,

2. Broad-based categorical eligibility (referred to in Montana as **ECE – Expanded Categorically Eligible**) describes households in which all members receive or are authorized to receive non-cash assistance. In Montana, this is the TANF Information and Referral Services brochure.

The following describes these in more detail:

Traditional Categorical Eligibility (CE):

Households in which all members are either eligible for or receive cash benefits from TANF, TANF Post Employment, Tribal TANF, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are categorically, or automatically, eligible for SNAP. These households, who have already gone through eligibility determination for those programs, bypass the income and resource tests and are deemed financially eligible. There is no asset/resource test for CE households. They then have their SNAP benefits determined. Categorically eligible households have their SNAP benefit allotment determined under the same rules as other households. A household's SNAP benefit amount is based on the maximum benefit (which varies by household size) and its net countable income after deductions for certain expenses. While the household may be categorically eligible, its net income may be too high to actually receive a SNAP benefit. **The exception is that all eligible households consisting of one or two persons are eligible for at least the minimum monthly benefit. Eligible households with three or more members passing the GMI and NMI tests that are not eligible for a benefit amount are denied or closed.**

Expanded Categorical Eligibility (ECE):

Households in which all members receive or are authorized to receive non-cash assistance have expanded categorical eligibility. In Montana, the non-cash assistance is the TANF Information and Referral Services brochure. All ECE households, including households with an elderly or disabled household member, must pass a gross income test (GMI) of 200% of the federal poverty level but are not required to pass a net income test (NMI). There is no asset/resource test for ECE households except as noted. ECE households have their SNAP benefit allotment determined under the same rules as other households. A household's SNAP benefit amount is based on the maximum benefit (which varies by household size) and its net countable income after deductions for certain expenses. While the household may be ECE, its net income may be too high to actually receive a SNAP benefit. **The exception is that all eligible households consisting of one or two persons are eligible for at least the minimum monthly benefit. Eligible households with three or more members passing the GMI and NMI tests that are not eligible for a benefit amount are denied or closed.**

NOTE: When a household with an elderly (age 60 or older) or disabled individual does not pass the 200% gross income test, eligibility is determined under regular program rules without a gross income test and with a resource limit of \$4,500.

HOUSEHOLDS NOT CATEGORICALLY ELIGIBLE (CE) OR EXPANDED CATEGORICAL ELIGIBLE (ECE):

The following households are not CE or ECE even if they meet the TANF requirements stated above:

1. The entire household is residing in an institution.

NOTE: Residents of public institutions who apply jointly for SSI and SNAP benefits prior to release from the institution are considered categorically eligible once SSI eligibility is determined and the individual is released from the institution.

2. The entire household is disqualified from SNAP.
3. A member is disqualified for any of the following reasons:
 - a. intentional program violation.
 - b. fleeing felon or probation/parole violation.
 - c. convicted of receiving duplicate benefits.
 - d. convicted of trading benefits for weapons, ammunition, explosives, or drugs.
 - e. convicted of buying or selling benefits of \$500 or more.
 - f. convicted after 08/22/96 of a federal or state felony for possession, use or distribution of illegal drugs.

CE AND ECE WITH INELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS:

Households with the following ineligible household members can still be CE or ECE:

1. Ineligible student.
2. Ineligible aliens.
3. Ineligible able-bodied adults without dependents.
4. Ineligible due to failing or opting not to provide a social security number.
5. Ineligible due to work registration disqualification.

TANF DISQUALIFICATION:

When an individual is disqualified from TANF or Tribal TANF for any reason other than ineligible alien, the individual is no longer categorically eligible. Generally, the household is no longer categorically eligible. All SNAP eligibility factors must be reviewed. All individuals who continue to receive a TANF benefit are categorically eligible individuals.

VERIFICATION:

For Categorically Eligible households, all household members' resources, Social Security number, residency, and sponsored alien information are verified by another program and are not required to be verified again. All other eligibility factors must be verified by the SNAP Program and ALL eligibility factors must be verified for ECE households per verification policy.

COMBINED TANF/ SNAP APPLICATION PROCESSING:

If the household is eligible for SNAP without being categorically eligible (CE), process the application with the household as NOT categorically eligible – but as expanded categorical eligibility (ECE) if appropriate. If a household is not entitled to expedited services and is ineligible for SNAP without being categorically eligible, delay processing the application until TANF, Tribal TANF, or SSI eligibility is determined. The delay may not exceed the 30-day processing period.

If TANF, Tribal TANF, or SSI eligibility is not determined within 30 days of original application date, the household is not categorically eligible (CE) but may be ECE. If benefits are denied, the notice of denial must inform the household of the need to request re-evaluation if they are approved for TANF, Tribal TANF or SSI based on the original SNAP application. If the household contacts the OPA or the OPA becomes aware of approval of TANF, Tribal TANF, or SSI within 30

days following the date the denial notice was sent, SNAP benefits are paid from the date TANF, Tribal TANF or SSI benefits are paid, or the date of the original SNAP application whichever is later.

The eligibility staff member must review the original application as well as any pertinent changes that have taken place since the application was filed. **Do NOT require the household to be interviewed again.** However, information must be updated in CHIMES and any changes on the application must be narrated in the case note. **NOTE:** Tribal TANF and SSI do not have combined applications with SNAP. Therefore, the above information applies when notification of Tribal TANF or SSI approval is received.

CATEGORICALLY ELIGIBLE STATUS:

In addition to evaluation at application and recertification, CE and ECE status must be evaluated when any of the following changes occur:

1. TANF, TANF Post Employment, Tribal TANF or SSI benefits are terminated.
2. A household member is disqualified from TANF or Tribal TANF.
3. A new member is added or removed.

Effective Date: October 1, 2024