



HEALTH

ALASKA IN BRIEF

State lags in heating assistance payments to Alaskans with low incomes, catches up on food stamps

BY: **CLAIRE STREMPLE** - MARCH 5, 2024 12:41 PM



 Bulk food purchased with the \$1.68 million Gov. Mike Dunleavy put towards supporting food banks is staged for delivery in Food Bank of Alaska's Anchorage warehouse on April 21, 2023. (Photo by Claire Stremple/Alaska Beacon)

The Alaska Division of Public Assistance said Tuesday it has caught up on food stamp applications. That means no Alaskan is waiting an unlawful time for food aid for the first time since 2022. But there are people waiting for other benefits programs, including heating assistance.

The state Division of Public Assistance worked to eliminate its most recent backlog of more than 12,000 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program applications in about four months, after struggling to stay current on applications for more than a year.

Division Director Deb Etheridge, who took on her role at the height of the backlog in 2023, said her dedicated backlog staff will now direct their attention to processing food stamp applications much faster – and catching up on slowdowns for other programs.

“Let’s keep those [food stamps] current and get those other ones brought up to date,” she said. “But this in no way amounts to the lift that we had with the SNAP program.”

The state’s Heating Assistance Program is designed to offset costs for Alaskans with low incomes. Nearly 2,000 applicants have been waiting more than a month for their application to be processed. Last year, the division processed about 6,000 total applications.

In the last benefit cycle, roughly 4,800 Alaska households benefited from the program, which is available only to those whose income is 150% of federal poverty guidelines and who have at least \$200 in heating bills annually. The state pays the benefit directly to the household’s vendor, as a credit.

Etheridge said this year, the application process was slowed down because of the effort to get food stamps back on track. She said the Division of Public Assistance may bring in seasonal employees next winter to help with the uptick in applications at that time and prevent slowdowns.



GET THE
MORNING
HEADLINES.

SUBSCRIBE



REPUBLICH

Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our website. AP and Getty images may not be republished. Please see our [republishing guidelines](#) for use of any other photos and graphics.



CLAIRE STREMPLE  

Claire Stremple is a reporter based in Juneau, Alaska. She got her start in public radio, first at KHNS in Haines and then on the health and environment beat at KTOO in Juneau. Her focus for the Beacon is education and criminal and social justice.

Alaska Beacon is part of [States Newsroom](#), the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

MORE FROM AUTHOR

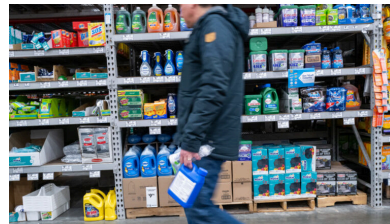
RELATED NEWS



Reproductive health care in the Southeast hinges on Florida...

BY SOFIA RESNICK

October 23, 2024



More states ban PFAS, or 'forever chemicals,' in more

BY SHALINA CHATLANI

October 22, 2024

INDEPENDENT AND ILLUMINATING JOURNALISM

DEMOCRACY TOOLKIT





The Alaska Beacon is an independent, nonpartisan news organization focused on connecting Alaskans to their state government. Our journalists fairly and fearlessly report on the people and interests that determine state policy.

We're part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

[DEIJ Policy](#) | [Ethics Policy](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)



Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our website. (See full republishing guidelines.)



© Alaska Beacon, 2024

v1.56.1

STATES NEWSROOM

FAIR. FEARLESS. FREE.