

AGEOPTIONS' BENEFIT ENROLLMENT CENTER BENEFITS CONNECT

What's New in the New Year

As we enter the new year we anticipate change and transition. In this issue, we share new SNAP toolkits and important updates to current programs and resources. We hope these tools help you feel confident and optimistic for the year ahead!

To be added to our newsletter, share a tip and trick, or ask a question, please email Halie at halie.reyes@ageoptions.org

Nominate yourself or someone else for Counselor Spotlight using this [form](#).



SNAP Rules are Changing

The three month time-limit for SNAP work requirements will begin 2/1/26. **We strongly encourage SNAP recipients aged 18-64 to submit an exemption form as soon as possible.** Forms may be mailed, faxed, dropped off in person, or submitted through Manage My Case.

If an exemption is not filed and proof of work hours are not provided, their benefits will expire 5/1/2026 for a 36-month fixed period. Eligibility can be regained if they start a job and work for 30 days or qualify for a waiver. To resume benefits, a new application must be filed.

Clients may complete a self-screener [here](#).

Below you can find toolkits to aid your SNAP outreach and help you answer questions:

- [AgeOptions ADRN Resource Page](#) (under "SNAP Work Requirement Toolkit")
- [Greater Chicago Food Depository](#)
- [Illinois Commission to End Hunger](#)
- [Illinois Legal Aid Online](#)
- [We Got You Illinois](#)
- [IL Department of Human Services](#)

Food Resources

- View a list of [congregate dining sites](#)
- Locate local food pantries through [Chicago Food Bank](#) or [We Got You Illinois](#)



• New Senior Property Tax Relief Expansion

Effective in tax year 2026, Senior Citizens Real Estate Tax Deferral Program has expanded the eligibility and now offers payment plans.

- The maximum household income will increase from \$65,000 to \$75,000 in 2026, then to \$77,000 in 2027, and to \$79,000 in 2028.
- Payment plans may now be offered during the redemption period for county-held tax certificates.

More details [here](#).

• Helphub moves to new website

Helphub has moved to the organization Legal Council for Health Justice. Their website has launched at a new URL. Don't forget to bookmark this link: helphub.legalcouncil.org.

• Non-citizen Eligibility Changes

Beginning **April 1st, 2026**, non-citizen SNAP eligibility will be limited to only lawful permanent residents (subject to 5-year bar), non-citizen US nationals, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and COFA citizens. This removes eligibility from refugees, asylees, T-visa holders, parolees of less than one year, and VAWA self-petitioners.

New applicants will be subject to the new eligibility requirements as of April 1st, 2026. Active cases will no longer be eligible at the time of redetermination.

Resource Hub

- Visit our [ADRN Resource Guide](#) for training materials
- AgeOptions' [SNAP Work Requirement Toolkit](#) (located in the ADRN Resource Guide)
- Browse [DHS' Workers' Action Guide \(WAG\)](#) to research policy questions
- Ask your benefit related questions on [HelpHub](#) to receive a reply from an expert
- Subscribe to [Avisery's email alerts](#) to stay up to date on Medicare and Medicaid news
- Find plentiful professional tools and articles by visiting [NCOA's website](#).
- Email Halie at halie.reyes@ageoptions.org for training and technical assistance.

• Training & Events

If any of these events are in your service area, feel free to forward any materials you'd like us to share or ask to tag along!

February

2/12: Congregate Meal & Benefits Presentation at Al Bawadi Grill in Bridgeview

2/27: Congregate Meal & Benefits Presentation at La Bella Events in Countryside

2/28: Homewood Indoor Farmers Market

March

3/2: ABE 101: Completing a Medicaid Application ([Register here](#))

3/10: Markham Public Library Benefits Presentation

3/19: Chicago Ridge Public Library Benefits Presentation

[Read more detail on our website](#)



COUNSELOR SPOTLIGHT



Andrea Wells
ADRN Specialist
Stickney Township Office of Aging

Q: What do you find most rewarding?

A: Helping seniors learn more about benefits available to them. Especially when helping someone and they really had no idea about a benefit available to them.

Q: What do you wish more people understood about this work or our clients?

A: I wish more people knew more about the various benefits and took more time to learn about them prior to needing them.

Q: What's one tip or piece of advice you would give to new counselors?

A: Be kind to yourself. Ask for help if you need it or don't understand something.

Q: Are there any tools, resources, or strategies you rely on regularly that others might find helpful?

A: The AgeOptions Benefit Chart is a great tool/resource and I use it regularly. The SHIP guide is also very helpful to me.