

1. What is a Standard Utility Allowance (SUA)?

Food Stamp benefit levels are determined by taking a household's gross income and reducing it by certain expenses. When expenses go up, the Food Stamp benefit also increases. One expense is for household utility (heat, electric, telephone, cooling). Rather than ask a client to verify each utility charge for every month, a standard utility allowance (SUA), or standard for deduction is used instead. The SUA amount is subtracted from gross income for each month to determine the benefits. There are 4 standards:

Heat and utility Standard - \$578

Utilities – no heat - \$261

Electric Only - \$152

Telephone only - \$28

Food Stamp applicants must verify which utilities they are responsible for paying. The verification (receipt, document or letter stating payment) determines what SUA allowance is subtracted from their gross income. Some households qualify for the heat and utility standard if they receive Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assistance.

2. What does LIHEAP have to do with Food Stamp benefits?

The Food Stamp program and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP, or Fuel assistance) have long tried to coordinate services to make it easier for clients to access both benefits. One policy that accomplished this was to give anyone receiving LIHEAP the highest SUA standard, for Heat.

3. What changed with the Heating standard?

Those applying for Food Stamps should continue to bring in verification of a heating utility bill. The Agricultural Act of 2014 changed the law that relates Food Stamps to LIHEAP. In the past, no verification was needed and because most people on Food Stamps were applying for LIHEAP, the maximum deduction was allowed. Under the new law an individual must have received a credit for a LIHEAP benefit of more than \$20 within the past twelve months to qualify for the maximum heat and utility standard.

4. How can I verify utility expenses?

The department will accept any reasonable verification that you are responsible for a utility cost. That could be a lease, a bill, a receipt, or a landlord statement.

5. How can I verify that I have received LIHEAP within the past 12 months?

If you did not save your LIHEAP approval letter the Community Action Agency where you applied can provide you with a form verifying your receipt of benefits.

6. What if I did receive LIHEAP benefits, but I have moved to a different address now?

If you received a LIHEAP benefit in the past twelve months you are eligible for the highest SUA even if you have since moved.