

## Hunger Free Vermont | Vermont Foodbank 3SquaresVT Talking Points

### Talking Points:

*For organizations that work with Older Adults (60+)*

### About this document

The following is a list of talking points developed by Hunger Free Vermont and the Vermont Foodbank that your organization is free to use when speaking with adults 60+ about 3SquaresVT. Your organization is an ally in our goal to address food insecurity across Vermont, and we wanted to provide you with accurate and helpful information that you can share in conversation with community members or in any communication channels you use.

Our goals with these talking points is for those who may be eligible for 3SquaresVT to not only become aware of the assistance available to them to help buy groceries but also to remove barriers and reduce the stigma surrounding these benefits. We also would like Vermont residents over 60 to become aware of aspects of the program that make it easier for them to receive benefits.

Feel free to adapt these talking points to fit your organization's style of communication with your community members. We ask that rather than sharing this document with your community that you either incorporate this messaging into your own communications or share the provided one-page summary PDF that covers much of the same information.

For questions related to this information please contact Phil Morin, [pmorin@hungerfreevt.org](mailto:pmorin@hungerfreevt.org), 802-266-0665.

### What is 3SquaresVT?

3SquaresVT is Vermont's name for the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is a program of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). It gives eligible people funds to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets.

### Who is it for?

Many in Vermont have a hard time affording all of the groceries they and their families need. Since the pandemic, 1 out of every 3 Vermont residents has experienced hardships buying groceries. 3SquaresVT provides assistance for those who need an extra hand to be able to have enough nourishing food on their plates.



If any of the following apply to you, consider applying for 3SquaresVT:

- You worry about having enough food
- You're on a fixed income while caring for young children in your household
- You skip meals or eat less than you need to for your overall health
- You rely on a food shelf to get meals
- You sacrifice food quality in favor of affordability
- You reduce your grocery budget in order to pay for your rent, mortgage, utilities, or other expenses

### **How It Works**

3SquaresVT helps you stretch your grocery budget with choice and convenience. Each month, money is loaded onto a Vermont EBT card, similar to a debit card, that can be used to purchase groceries where you normally shop, including many grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets. The amount you receive per month is based on household size, income, and expenses – giving you some extra spending money to ensure you have plenty of food for you and your family.

- NEW - You can now use your EBT card to purchase eligible grocery items online from retailers such as Amazon, Walmart (Bennington only), Aldi, and certain Hannafords
- Stretching your dollars further – Every \$1 you spend with your 3SquaresVT at participating farmers markets counts as \$3 with Crop Cash

### **Special Rules for Vermont Residents 60+**

There are special rules that make getting 3SquaresVT benefits easier for older Vermont residents and people living with disabilities. These rules apply to you if you are 60+ or receive disability benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income, Veteran's Disability, Social Security disability or blindness payments, or Railroad Retirement disability payments.

- You can get 3SquaresVT benefits without going to the 3SquaresVT office. Most 3SquaresVT interviews are now done over the phone.
- You do not have to reapply for 3SquaresVT benefits as often as other people. If everyone in your 3SquaresVT household is 60 or older or has a disability, and does not have earned income, you will be able to get 3SquaresVT benefits for up to 3 years before you will be asked to fill out another application.
- You can get help with your 3SquaresVT application at your local Area Agency on Aging if you are 60 or older or Community Action Agency if you are a person with a disability and under 60.
- Your 3SquaresVT benefits can be deposited into a bank account. If everyone in your 3SquaresVT household is 65 or older or is entitled to SSI/AABD, you do not have to use



the 3SquaresVT card. Instead, you can get 3SquaresVT benefits in the form of cash deposited right into your bank account. You can use cash or a check to buy food. If you do not have a bank account, you can get 3SquaresVT benefits in the form of cash on the 3SquaresVT card.

- You can get more 3SquaresVT benefits if you have monthly medical expenses. You may be able to get more 3SquaresVT benefits each month if you have medical costs not covered by insurance. These costs will be deducted from your income and can help you get more 3SquaresVT benefits. Medical costs are things like: over-the-counter medications; insurance premiums; medical supplies; dentures; prescriptions; and a home health aid (nurse).

Visit <https://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/3SquaresVT> for more detail regarding your eligibility status

### **A Ripple Effect of Good**

*Note to our partners: To help reduce the stigma, we want all Vermont residents, including those who are eligible for 3SquaresVT, to see the greater impact of 3SquaresVT on our community*

Every time you buy your groceries using 3SquaresVT benefits, you support your health, the health of your family, and strengthen your community and Vermont's economy. Money spent on groceries with 3SquaresVT goes to local Vermont retailers who sell food and local Vermont farmers who provide food. An estimated \$10 million in Federal tax dollars comes to Vermont each month through 3SquaresVT, but if more people who are eligible apply and use these benefits, more money goes into our economy, and could create more jobs in our communities.

### **An Easier Way to Apply and Receive Benefits – 3SquaresVT in a SNAP**

Adults 60+ and those getting disability benefits may be eligible for 3SquaresVT in a SNAP, a simpler, shorter application process. Within a single application, you can apply for 3SquaresVT and Fuel Assistance benefits. Once enrolled, your benefits remain for three years without any annual review process.

Get benefits your way. Choose whether you want to receive your benefits as a Vermont EBT card or as cash deposited into your bank account.

### **Addressing Barriers**

*Note to our partners: When speaking with your constituents about 3SquaresVT, they may express objections to participating in the program. Here are some responses you can use to address frequent concerns.*



“Someone else in my community needs this more than me”

Anyone who is eligible to receive 3SquaresVT benefits receives them. You will not be taking benefits away from anyone else if you apply, and you will only be taking benefits away from yourself if you don't apply. There is no limit to the number of people who can receive 3SquaresVT. It is not “first come, first served.”

“I don't need a handout.”

3SquaresVT isn't a handout, it's a hand. And everyone needs a hand from time to time, especially with the impact of COVID-19 on our community.

“I don't want anyone else's money.”

You've paid into this program through your taxes, just like Social Security. It's your money, you've earned this benefit.

“I've never applied for assistance. / It seems complicated.”

A dedicated person will work with you to determine if you are eligible and help you complete your application.

### **Next Steps**

If you're interested in learning more about the program and finding out how to apply, visit Vermont Food Help at [vermontfoodhelp.com](https://vermontfoodhelp.com).

