

## 3SquaresVT Outreach Talking Points

*The following talking points are designed to assist advocates and service providers speaking with potential participants about applying for 3SquaresVT. There are many reasons why people do not apply. The talking points below speak to some of the most common barriers you may be faced with in speaking to eligible Vermonters. These messages may help you explain the many benefits of the program and why it is worth it to apply. These same messages may be useful if you are writing a local newsletter article or letter to the editor.*

### **Pride, Stigma, & Embarrassment: “Food Stamps are charity”; “Others need it more than me”; “I don’t want people to know I need help”**

- ❖ 3SquaresVT is a vital nutrition program run by the Department of Agriculture that helps people to buy the food they need for good health.
- ❖ 3SquaresVT is an entitlement program, meaning that everyone who is eligible for benefits has the right to receive them. When you get benefits, you are not taking them away from anyone else. There is no limit to the number of Vermonters who can receive benefits.
- ❖ Many Vermonters need extra help to make ends meet. Over 93,000 Vermonters currently use 3SquaresVT every month. Many more are eligible, and they may not even know it.
- ❖ 3SquaresVT benefits now come on a plastic card that looks and works like other debit cards used in grocery stores, so you can pay with privacy.
- ❖ If you are over 65 or receive SSI and have a checking or savings account, you do not have to get a swipe card. Instead, your benefits can come in the form of cash deposited right into your bank account. You can tap into that account the same way you would withdraw cash from it or use a check or debit card to pay other expenses.
- ❖ When you use 3SquaresVT to shop locally or to buy local products, you support jobs and businesses in your community by bringing federal dollars back into Vermont. Every federal dollar of 3SquaresVT spent in Vermont generates \$1.79 worth of economic activity.
- ❖ Everyone agrees that hunger and poor health are unacceptable. Hunger is more widespread in the U.S. than any other industrialized nation. We can all do our part to change that by supporting and participating in the food and nutrition assistance programs run by the USDA.

### **“I’d rather go to the food shelf.”**

- ❖ 3SquaresVT lets you choose the foods you like in a grocery store. You can buy the foods you know your kids will eat.
- ❖ You can go to the food shelf even if you are receiving 3SquaresVT benefits. For example, if you get cereal at the food shelf, then you can use your 3SquaresVT benefits to buy the milk.
- ❖ The food shelf can also help you apply for 3SquaresVT.



*This message is funded in part by the USDA,  
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### “I’m probably not eligible.”

- ❖ Income eligibility guidelines changed in 2009. You can now have more income and still get 3SquaresVT. If you were denied before, it's worth applying again to find out if you qualify now.
- ❖ A change in your household circumstances could help you get 3SquaresVT now, even if you couldn't before. For example, you can apply for 3SquaresVT again if someone in your household turned 60, if you have less income, if you have more bills every month (including medical bills), or if there is a change in the number of people living in your household.
- ❖ If you are 65 or older or have a disability, you may be able to get benefits. If you also have health care costs, you may be able to get even more.
- ❖ You can own a car and a house and still get 3SquaresVT. You can have savings in the bank, too. Most resources and assets will not count if your income is under a certain level.
- ❖ Many people don't know that working parents who get the Vermont Earned Income Tax Credit may be able to get 3SquaresVT no matter their income or resources. Working parents can also deduct child care expenses to get more benefits.
- ❖ If your household situation changed due to a disaster like the spring flooding of 2011 or Tropical Storm Irene, you may be newly eligible for 3SquaresVT. It's worth it to apply and find out.

### “It’s too hard to apply.”

- ❖ You can now apply online, making the process much faster and easier. Go to [www.mybenefits.vt.gov](http://www.mybenefits.vt.gov) to get started.
- ❖ Community Action Agencies, Agencies on Aging, and others across the state will help you with the application form and process. Call 2-1-1 to get connected.
- ❖ The interview process is getting easier, too. You can now have your interview on the phone instead of in the office. Interviews are "on demand" which means you choose the date and time that works for you. Interviewers are on the line to take your call.
- ❖ Most households now only have to reapply once a year. Most seniors and people with disabilities only need to reapply every 2 years.

### Language or Literacy Barrier

- ❖ If you need an interpreter, the 3SquaresVT office will provide one for you. Just call 1-855-247-3092 and stay on the line to be connected to an interpreter.



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