

**July 15, 2014**

## ***NAP Participants***

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Introduction:** *Introductions. Describe who we are, what we're looking for in the interview. Emphasize that their responses are considered private and that they will only be reported in aggregate.*

*Example:* Thank you for agreeing to speak with us this [morning/afternoon]. I would like your help in understanding how the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) is working in the Northern Mariana Islands. Your answers will help the U.S. Department of Agriculture understand the potential impacts (both positive and negative) of implementing SNAP, the main nutrition assistance program in the U.S., in the CNMI. SNAP, for example, is the nutrition assistance program that Guam currently has. We want to be clear that this interview does not mean that the U.S. or CNMI Government intends to implement SNAP. We are just looking closely at the existing program here in the CNMI to get a sense of how things would need to be changed if a transition to SNAP were to take place. We understand that some of these questions may be personal and we very much appreciate your answers, though you may choose not to answer any particular question. Please note that the way you answer these questions will not affect your nutrition assistance benefits now or in the future. This interview is private and we will not use your name anywhere in our report or share anything you tell us with DCCA or NAP.

#### **Participant Information**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself:
  - How old are you?
  - Were you born outside of the CNMI? If so, how long have you lived here?
  - Do you have children? If so, how many and how old are they?
  - Who lives with you?
  - *[If children do not live with respondent full-time, ask:]* Do you provide any cash support to your children?
  - Tell me about your schooling? What's the highest level you completed?
2. How do you prepare meals? Do you have access to a stove, oven, or burner? What about a refrigerator?

#### **NAP Application Process and Obtaining Coupons**

1. How long have you received NAP benefits?  
[Probe: Number of weeks, months, years]

2. Let's talk about how you applied for your NAP coupons.

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-0524. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

- Did you know where to go to apply?
  - Did you know what you needed to bring with you? What documents did you have to provide?
  - How did you go about getting the documents you needed to apply, such as a birth certificate, social security card, pay stubs, etc.?
  - *[If not addressed, ask:]* If you had to show proof of citizenship *[or legal residency if non-citizen]*, income, savings, and expenses in order to receive benefits, could you do so?
    - Citizenship: birth certificate, Social Security card, etc.
    - Non-citizen: Green Card AND can show they have lived in U.S. (territory) for 5 years, has 40 qualifying work quarters, is blind or disabled, has children under 18 who hold green cards, is elderly, or has a military connection
    - Income: paychecks, tax return, letter from employer, proof of other benefits, etc.
    - Savings: bank statements
    - Expenses: Receipts or other documentation of expenses related to dependent care, medical, shelter (rent/mortgage, utilities)
3. I understand that people who are getting NAP benefits have to renew their benefits in order to keep getting coupons.
- How often do you need to renew (recertify) your NAP benefits?
  - What documents do you need to bring when you want to renew your benefits?
  - How easy or difficult is it to renew your benefits?
4. Now I'd like to talk about how you get your coupons every month.
- *[If not mentioned, ask:]*  
Where do you get them? How easy is it for you to get there?  
How often do you get them?  
How convenient is this time/location/process for you?  
What happens if you are unable to pick up your coupons at the designated date/time/location?
  - *[If Rota or Tinian participant, also ask:]*  
Does the coupon distribution happen on time every month? If not, what contributes to delays? How do you obtain food in the meantime?
5. Could you please share why you applied for NAP benefits?

### **Employment and Other Benefits**

1. Are you currently working?
- *[If yes, ask:]* What is your current job?
  - *[If no, ask:]* When was the last time you had income from a job? Are you looking for work? What are the barriers you've faced in finding work?
2. Does anyone (else) in your household currently work?
- *[If yes, ask:]* What do they do?

- *[If no, ask:]* Is anyone in your household currently looking for work? What are the barriers they have faced in finding work? When was the last time anyone in your household had income from a job?
3. Do you or anyone in your household receive any other benefits from government assistance programs?  
*[Ask specifically about each one and whether the respondent or someone else receives the benefit. If they receive a benefit, ask how much they get:]*
    - WIC?
    - Energy assistance?
    - Disability? SSI?
    - Other cash assistance program?
    - Retirement income? Pension plan? Social Security?
    - Veteran benefits?
    - Others? (*Probe for cash or non-cash benefits, as needed*)
  4. *[If receiving other benefits, ask:]* What other forms of government assistance help you purchase foods?  
*[Probe: WIC, Social Security?]*

### **Computer Access and Literacy**

1. Do you have a computer at home or access to a computer?  
*[If yes, ask:]* Can you connect to the internet with that computer? Where is this computer located? How frequently can you access it?
2. How comfortable are you using a computer and using the internet?

### **Debit/Credit Card Use**

1. Do you currently have any debit or credit cards?  
*[If yes, ask:]* How often do you use your debit card? How often do you use your credit card?  
*[Probe: Daily, weekly, monthly, every six months]*
2. *[If have a credit or debit card, ask:]* Have you ever had a problem using your credit or debit card in CNMI?  
*[Probe: For example, the machine is not working, there is a problem with the phone line, or there is a power outage]*  
*[If respondent has a problem using card, ask:]* How often do you have a problem using your card(s)? *[Probe: weekly, monthly, every six months]*

### **Items Purchased with NAP, Using Coupons and Access of NAP Participants to Retailers**

1. You receive two types of NAP coupons. One type can only be used to purchase local foods, whereas the other can be used to purchase food from anywhere, as well as some nonfood items.
  - How do you know if a product is local or not?
  - What types of items do you buy using your *local* coupons?

2. You can buy things besides food with your coupons such as livestock; seeds; plants; and fishing, farming, and gardening equipment. Do you buy any of these non-food items using your coupons? If so, how often do you buy these things with your coupons?
  - [*If purchases non-food items with coupons, ask:*] What would happen if you could not purchase fishing equipment, farming/gardening supplies, or livestock with your coupons? [*Probe: SNAP only allows purchases of food, seeds, and plants. How would this affect you?*]
3. What has your experience been using your NAP coupons to purchase items? Have you encountered any challenges using them?
4. Now I'd like to talk a bit about your experience locating retailers or stores that accept NAP coupons.
  - Where do you use your coupons? [*Probe for types of retailer: mobile, large grocery store, convenience store, farmers market, fish market, etc.*]
  - How do you find participating retailers? How easy or difficult is it? Why?
5. Do you need to travel far to find a retailer who accepts the coupons? If so, how do you get there?
6. Are there local retailers or stores that do not accept coupons that you wish did? If so, what types of establishments are these? Why do you wish these retailers accepted coupons? What items would you purchase there with your coupons if you could? [*Probe for food vs. non-food items.*]
7. If all of your NAP benefits came in the form of non-local coupons [*show respondent coupon*], would you stop shopping at certain retailers? Why or why not?
  - What (other) impacts would it have on you (and your family) if NAP benefits came only in the form of non-local coupons?
8. In your opinion, what would happen if—instead of using coupons—all of your benefits were put on an electronic benefit card (like a debit card)?

### **When Benefits are Spent**

1. How many times a month do you shop for food?
2. When during the month do you shop for food? [*Probe: anytime you need more food, when paycheck arrives, when benefits arrive?*]

### **Coverage of Benefit**

1. Does the NAP benefit allow you to buy what you need to feed yourself (and your family) nutritious foods? Why or why not? If not, how do you handle this situation? [*Probe: How many days in the past month have you (and your family) not had enough food to eat? Did your children have less to eat?*]
2. How frequently do your NAP benefits run out before the end of the month each year? [*Probe: Every month? 6 months out of the year? 3 months? 1 month?*]

3. How much, on average, do you spend on food in a month using both coupons and cash? How much of this is covered by NAP benefits?  
[Probe: Do NAP benefits cover nearly all your food expenses? 75 percent? Half? Less than half?]
4. What other sources of income help you purchase foods once NAP benefits are used up? [Probe: paycheck, child support?]
5. Are there other places you can turn to for help when your NAP benefits are used up? [Probe: community organizations, food banks/pantries, family, friends, neighbors]

### **Wrap up**

One reason we are talking with people like you is to find out how you might be affected if some changes were made to the NAP program. Let me give you a few examples of some things that could change if the government decides to replace NAP with a program that is similar to what they have in Guam or the continental U.S. That program is called SNAP. For one, instead of getting paper coupons, with SNAP you would get an EBT card, which is like a debit card, and you would use that card to purchase food. Because your benefits would automatically be transferred to the EBT card, you would not have to pick up coupons each month. You might also get more money for food under SNAP, but you would not be able to buy any of the non-food items that you can buy now with your coupons – like livestock or fishing and farming equipment. Also, people who are not U.S. citizens or have not been a legal resident for 5 or more years would not be able to get benefits. Based on these differences, do you think SNAP should be adopted in the CNMI? Why or why not?

1. Is there anything else you think we should know?

**Conclusion:** Thank respondent and conclude interview.