



### **City's Successful Food Stamp Program Continues to Help New Yorkers**

In New York City, the Food Stamp Program has expanded to meet rising demand: as of September, 2011, over 1.8 million NYC residents are enrolled in the program, which has increased by 124 percent since Mayor Bloomberg first took office. Despite the increased caseload, HRA's Food Stamp Program has maintained a high rate of accuracy and worked diligently to prevent fraud and waste. HRA has worked with other city, state and federal agencies to improve services, improve the program's focus on nutrition and help food stamp recipients find employment.

"The fact that our program has responded to the increased need for Food Stamp benefits caused by the 2009-10 recession by significantly increasing enrollment without adding staff is an achievement that deserves recognition," said Commissioner Doar in testimony given to the NY City Council's General Welfare Committee. "There is no question that the \$280 million in benefits that the program distributes each month has been an important ingredient in New York City's weathering of the recent recession."

HRA's [award winning](#) Food Stamp Program has managed to maintain a high payment accuracy rating while the program has grown significantly. For the first half of the 2011 fiscal year, the City's cumulative food stamp payment error rate was only 4.32 percent. One of the ways HRA has managed to maintain a high accuracy rating is by finger imaging clients when they apply for food stamps. Finger imaging has helped the Agency avoid payment errors and eliminate duplicate cases, which has saved approximately \$5.3 million in 2010 alone at a cost of only \$183,000. In that same year, 2,000 duplicate cases were detected and eliminated thanks to finger imaging.

The Food Stamp Program's high rate of growth shows that the finger imaging requirement does not deter people from participating in the program. The process is primarily about efficiently keeping track of Food Stamps cases and avoiding duplication, not about criminalizing food stamp recipients. If finger imaging were eliminated, HRA would not be able to maintain a high accuracy rating without hiring more staff. Higher operating costs, and potential penalties from the Federal government if the Agency's accuracy rating suffers, mean less money would be available for benefits when they are sorely needed.

Food stamps are a work support intended to help low-income New Yorkers provide nutritious food for their families. Most food stamps recipients do not receive cash assistance, which means they are employed or actively seeking employment. In September, 2011, the Non Cash Assistance Food Stamp caseload increased by 3,416 persons, whereas the Cash Assistance caseload only increased by only 550 persons, and remains at its lowest levels since the 1960s despite the difficult economy.

Due to difficult economic conditions, more and more New Yorkers now depend on food stamps to help feed their families. HRA is committed to serving these customers to the best of its ability, and to helping New Yorkers make the transition to self sufficiency as the economy recovers.