

Medicaid and SNAP Data Coordination Case Studies

Prioritizing the Needs of SNAP and Medicaid Clients and State Agencies in Colorado Through Technology Solutions

Aligning technology for public benefit programs — including systems for applications, eligibility, and renewal processes — helps clients, eligibility workers, and administrative agencies by streamlining interactions between clients and government programs. In Colorado, people applying for Health First Colorado (Colorado’s Medicaid Program), administered by the Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF), or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), administered by Colorado’s Department of Human Services (CDHS), can access a single application – called the [Single Purpose Application](#) – via kiosks in agency offices, online, on paper, or by phone. In addition to the joint assistance program application, eligibility workers use a shared eligibility system to evaluate information provided by applicants to either program.

Aligned technology systems at both the state and county level create efficiencies for administrative work and a seamless application experience for clients. Applicants can apply for multiple programs on the joint application without having to repeat their personal information or make multiple trips to agency offices. For example, if a person applies to Medicaid at one time and chooses to apply to SNAP at another time, the demographic information captured in the eligibility system from their prior application can easily be used for their current application. Eligibility workers experience improved processing time because of streamlined demographic data entry, reducing the number of keystrokes required in the shared eligibility system.



Colorado Key Facts

- State population: [5.8 million](#)
- [County-administered SNAP](#)
- SNAP participation: [80%](#)
- SNAP enrollees:
 - [513,617 individuals](#)
 - [219,000 households](#)
- SNAP income limit for a household of four: [\\$4,626/month](#)
- Medicaid enrollees: [1,622,818](#)
- Medicaid income limit for a family of 4 with children 0-18: [\\$3,284/month](#)

MEDICAID AND SNAP DATA COORDINATION CASE STUDIES

This case study series highlights innovative state strategies to improve data coordination between SNAP and Medicaid agencies and increase access for eligible people. The series is a product of *Improving Data-Matching Strategies to Better Coordinate Information Between SNAP and Medicaid Programs*, a national initiative led by Benefits Data Trust in partnership with the Center for Health Care Strategies and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Structures to Support Data Sharing

Colorado's [Single Purpose Application](#) (SPA) allows clients to initiate eligibility evaluation for SNAP, Medicaid, and other benefit programs through multiple channels: online via the [Program Eligibility & Application Kit](#) (PEAK) platform, on a smartphone app called [MyCOBenefits](#), on paper, or by phone with a telephonic signature. Clients can select the programs they want to apply for and can add other benefit applications at any time. A unique feature of PEAK is a tool called [Am I Eligible](#), which applicants can use to learn about benefits, documentation needed to apply, and the application process. Information supplied by clients via the SPA is automatically loaded into a statewide integrated eligibility system called the [Colorado Benefits Management System](#) (CBMS) and available to eligibility workers according to their program-specific needs, determined by their certification and permission profile.

CBMS' ability to store data from multiple programs and filter access for eligibility workers based on job function safeguards clients' private information. Eligibility workers for means-tested programs can access the client's data per the client's wishes to determine joint eligibility, and clients can be assured of the privacy of their information.

Additionally, state agencies in Colorado have established standardized processes for data sharing between agencies and external partners. Interagency and Master Agency Agreements facilitate the process for fulfilling data requests that span multiple programs by establishing the roles and responsibilities of participating parties while creating mechanisms that can expedite approval and fulfillment of requests. These structures support large-scale data coordination, improving efficiency, accountability, and transparency of government programs in Colorado.

Automating Data to Support Eligibility Processes

Colorado SNAP received a [Process and Technology Improvement Grant](#) (PTIG) in FY 2020 from the United States Department of Agriculture that was used to improve periodic report processes for SNAP clients. Periodic report forms are used to update SNAP eligibility information that may have changed since the prior renewal. Colorado SNAP was able to redesign its periodic report form to be compatible with Intelligent Character Recognition (iCR), a program that reads handwriting and uploads it into the CBMS to be reviewed by eligibility staff. When it is time for a client to file a periodic report, the system generates a packet that is prefilled with the most current client information in the eligibility system and sends it to clients via postal mail. Clients write in corrections on the periodic report packet and mail it back to their county. When received, the packet is read through the iCR and data is uploaded into the CBMS electronically. An eligibility worker reviews the changes, resolves any errors, and authorizes eligibility. SNAP administrators credit these automated efforts with reducing wait times for clients by keeping the volume of periodic reports needing intense worker intervention manageable, especially at times of high-volume for other application types, such as initial applications and recertifications.

CDHS continues to look for opportunities to improve client experiences through process and technology improvements. For example, the current [PTIG](#) for FY 2022 will focus on reducing client telephone and call back wait times by creating an Interactive Voice Response system to provide personalized responses to clients.

Improving Responsiveness to Clients' Needs

CDHS has diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts that include a family and community member council, known as the Family Voice Council. Participants are compensated for childcare and transportation costs and receive stipends for their time and expertise to inform approaches to resolving a variety of issues, including technology challenges. Clients who are not engaged with the Family Voice Council are also able to contact CDHS staff to provide feedback. An example of client feedback making an impact at the state

program level was when a blind client reached out to CDHS SNAP leadership with a concern about the compatibility of PEAK with reader programs. CDHS SNAP coordinated with the administrators of the PEAK system, who took steps to make PEAK more accessible for blind community members. Additionally, program leadership from both CDHS and HCPF are engaged in a SPA workgroup that evaluates feedback about the SPA from federal program area partners, county eligibility staff, and client concerns.

Supporting Outreach Through Education

In addition to technological efforts to streamline application and eligibility processes, Colorado SNAP created public education materials to advance awareness of the program. A [SNAP Outreach Toolkit](#) is available for anyone in the community who is interested in learning about SNAP or helping someone to apply.

Spotlight on Arapahoe County

Workflow Management Systems Create Additional Efficiencies

In addition to the combined SNAP and Medicaid application and integrated eligibility systems used statewide, [Arapahoe County](#) created a workflow management system to streamline document management. [HSConnects](#) launched in January 2015, with additional services and functionality added over time. The system images and stores documents submitted by clients to confirm eligibility and makes them available to eligibility workers to process applications and redeterminations. The system is programmed with “what if” scenarios that allow it to organize documents via the workflow process and create a queue of the most important items to prioritize for eligibility staff. This automatic organization reduces the potential issue of multiple case workers engaging on the same case, since it puts the case in one worker’s queue once all documents are in the system.

Similar to the CBMS system, the ability to view information in HSConnects is determined by role-specific permissions, so eligibility workers who are not certified to assist with other programs do not have access to information outside their role. The HSConnects system helps eligibility workers process cases promptly and accurately. Arapahoe County’s human services applications across the board are processed with a timeliness rate of 99 percent completion within seven days, even though the county has experienced a doubling of applications during the pandemic with no commensurate increase in staffing.

The cost savings of creating a workflow management system rather than buying one are substantial. Arapahoe County’s upfront investment was approximately \$135,000 versus a leading quote of \$3.5 million with \$500,000 annual ongoing maintenance support. Additionally, HSConnects is now used by 13 other Colorado counties for a total caseload representing 60 percent of the state’s population. Counties are charged \$22 per user per month, which enables small counties to gain the benefits of the system without an overwhelming upfront cost. Another administrative efficiency is gained when clients move between counties that use HSConnects — their case documentation can be transferred with just a few clicks rather than several phone calls, printouts, faxes, and uploads. Another benefit of HSConnects is that it can be adjusted when the state or federal government makes a change to program regulations. For example, the state took steps to align recertification dates for Medicaid and SNAP during the Public Health Emergency. Arapahoe County was able to make changes to the workflow management process in HSConnects to implement the date changes immediately.

Another benefit of HSConnects is the way it enables effective planning for downtimes, such as holiday closures. Eligibility and enrollment supervisors can generate reports of pending cases that may be due for completion during an office closure. This enables planning for staffing to complete those cases. If overtime is needed on a holiday, staff are asked to volunteer and are compensated at three times the rate of their usual pay. Arapahoe County has not had to mandate overtime in six years, and experiences low turnover of 2-3 percent in enrollment staff annually because of the advantages of transparent and organized workflows.

A gap in the HSConnects system is that it is not yet able to allow automatic application for additional programs if the case worker is not certified in that program. While the information needed for the application to be processed automatically may be present, a certified case worker is still necessary to complete the application. At times, this necessitates an extra step for an applicant to submit their application to multiple programs. To fill this gap, Arapahoe County employs family navigators who work in the Human Services office and receive referrals to assist clients with applications for additional benefit programs.

An additional challenge is ongoing IT support resources housed within Arapahoe County and shared across all county functions are needed to provide ongoing maintenance and updates for the system. If there are multiple competing IT needs at one time, regular updating of HSConnects may be deprioritized as a result.

Preparing for the End of the Public Health Emergency

Arapahoe County currently employs 12 Medicaid-only case workers who were hired in September 2021 to assist with additional caseloads anticipated with the end of the Public Health Emergency (PHE). Since these initially temporary employees are now full-time staff, capacity has been built and maintained over time. Additionally, Arapahoe County has longstanding working relationships with two texting technology companies. They can use HSConnects to identify clients' mobile phones and send out bulk texts with information relevant to multiple types of clients, for example, bulk texts about rule changes concerning re-enrollment due to the PHE. They can also send tailored text messages to specific clients to let them know about upcoming needs for their applications.

Improving Responsiveness to the Needs of Clients

In addition to the multiple functionalities of HSConnects that improve the application and eligibility processes for clients and staff, Arapahoe County makes improvements based on feedback from clients and staff. One example is an effort undertaken to reduce wait times in the county administrative office lobby. Client wait times were averaging four hours, which was frustrating to clients, lobby staff, and case managers. Clients were asked about what an acceptable wait time would be, and how they would expect to be served. Improvements were made to lobby design and workflow systems, including the implementation of HSConnects, which reduced the wait time average to five minutes. One way that HSConnects aids in reducing wait time is that it allows lobby staff to see what is missing in a client case with a simple search, rather than having to check in multiple places. Lobby staff can easily communicate to clients what is missing either in person or on the phone. Clients can send in paperwork via traditional paper or fax, but they can also take a picture of the documentation with their phone and upload it into PEAK or email it to staff, who can easily apply it to their case. These changes have reduced the amount of time that clients wait to get information about their cases and increased the ways they can submit required documentation and have it easily applied to their case. The user-focused improvements have significantly improved customer and staff experience.

Barriers to Sharing and Coordinating Data

CDHS and HCPF leadership are committed to keeping each other informed via regular communication regarding shared data requests, data-related research projects, and managing consent. While there is a high degree of interoperability, it is challenging to keep up with federal and state regulations and new information. The two agencies seek to maintain a reciprocally valuable relationship through mutual respect, ongoing support, and communication. Each recognizes the benefits in terms of client experience and agency efficiencies that come from working together to address barriers and identify solutions.

Looking Ahead

Technological solutions in Colorado eligibility services have enabled remarkable collaboration between counties and state offices over the last 10 years. The innovations of SPA, CBMS, and HSConnects prioritize the protection of client privacy while allowing for efficient data sharing without unnecessary data-sharing agreements. Colorado's county and state administrators have found that taking time for all parties to understand each other's programs, terminology, and needs, while fostering ongoing communication and collaboration, are essential practices for co-designing successful and effective cross-program solutions.