

Medicaid and SNAP Data Coordination Case Studies

South Dakota's Medicaid and SNAP Eligibility Workforce: Streamlining Data Coordination to Facilitate Enrollment

Cross-agency collaboration can benefit both clients and agencies by simplifying enrollment and administrative processes. Public benefit programs with similar eligibility requirements can coordinate outreach to community members and streamline enrollment processes across multiple programs. In South Dakota, the administrative offices of Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are housed within the Division of Economic Assistance (EA) at the Department of Social Services. The mission of EA is to promote well-being and self-sufficiency through assessment and referral to medical, nutritional, and financial supports. EA uses a combined, single application for all three programs, and conducts outreach to individuals who are enrolled in one of the programs and eligible but not enrolled in others. The key to this coordination is the EA eligibility workforce, which is composed of case workers who are trained in eligibility and enrollment for all three programs, and who participate in cross-agency policy and practice committees to improve program services.



South Dakota 2022 Key Facts

- State population: 895,376
- State-administered SNAP
- SNAP participation: 78%
- SNAP enrollees:
 - 71,078 persons
 - 33,912 households
- SNAP income limit for a household of four: \$3,007/month
- Medicaid enrollees: 140,791
- Medicaid income limit for a household of four: \$4,834/month

MEDICAID AND SNAP DATA COORDINATION CASE STUDIES

The 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 that Support Coordination

In South Dakota, EA eligibility staff process combined applications for Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. While separate administrators oversee each of the programs, a unified Division Director and Quality Control Unit provide ongoing support to all three programs. No data-sharing agreements or memoranda of understanding are needed to share client data between Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF case workers, since all share the same application, mainframe system, and data. South Dakotans applying for Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF must sign a statement of understanding on the combined application stating that they understand their information will be given to three programs. Applicants indicate which programs they are applying to for each of their household members. EA offers paper and online applications.

Eligibility staff receive robust training on eligibility requirements and processes for each program. A training specialist welcomes all new eligibility staff with an initial week of standardized training. After the onboarding week, new staff attend training specific to each program for Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. After training on these programs, new staff spend time with lead staff, who have additional training responsibilities, and supervisors at the home office to learn case work. Each case processed by new eligibility workers is reviewed for the first four-to-six months to ensure staff are assisting clients through the application and renewal processes accurately. Following initial onboarding, all eligibility workers receive monthly training on new policy and procedures, as well as periodic refresher courses. Supervisors perform random audits for individual training purposes, and staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the ideas they have for ongoing training. Leadership responds to staff needs and incorporates staff ideas to improve trainings.

Processes to Support Coordination

The streamlined process for application review and renewal helps clients access services for which they qualify. Eligibility staff review applications, noting whether members of the household may be eligible for multiple programs. Staff know that clients may be unaware of the different programs, so they treat the application review as an opportunity to identify and promote eligibility for Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, as well as other programs like Childcare Assistance and Energy and Weatherization Assistance. If a client is applying for one program and staff note that they may be eligible for multiple programs, staff reach out to assess the client's interest in receiving additional support from other programs. Eligibility staff also frequently refer families to other community supports, such as food pantries, legal services, Long-Term Services and Supports (Dakota at Home), transportation, rent assistance, and housing assistance.

Currently, Medicaid eligibility determination is done manually by eligibility workers. South Dakota is in the process of building a new enrollment and eligibility system, which will support processing of eligibility for Medicaid in January 2024, with plans to add eligibility determination for SNAP, TANF, Childcare Assistance and Energy and Weatherization Assistance soon. When the new system is in place, the Division of Economic Assistance will continue training eligibility workers in Medicaid, SNAP and TANF to provide critical support, outreach, and resources to clients.

For children who are on SNAP, South Dakota Medicaid uses a facilitated enrollment process, referred to as express lane eligibility. With consent from their parent or guardian, children on SNAP are assessed for Medicaid eligibility. Outside of this process, case workers may need to verify whether the child meets Medicaid citizenship criteria.

Eligibility staff use two key resources to identify services for applicants: community resource guides that list local organizations providing help with food, finances, and other community supports, and the expanded South Dakota [211 helpline](#), which provides connections to additional resources, such as transportation support, mental health resources, and help with buying diapers. EA's goal is to equip

eligibility staff to provide a “no wrong door” experience, where South Dakotans in need of assistance can approach any part of the system and be referred to appropriate services.

Supporting the Renewal Process

In addition to the application process, eligibility workers provide supports for renewal and/or recertification of Medicaid and SNAP benefits. For those who qualify, South Dakota Medicaid uses the administrative review process known as [ex parte](#), wherein an eligibility worker uses reliable data available to process renewal of coverage without an individual having to complete an application or provide documentation. If an ex parte renewal is not possible, eligibility staff prepopulate online renewal forms to minimize customer burden.

Whenever possible, eligibility workers make efforts to align renewal and recertification timelines for SNAP and Medicaid. There is a single renewal form, which eligibility workers use to align Medicaid renewal timelines with SNAP. This process is currently completed manually; however, the new eligibility system scheduled to launch in January 2024 will automate this process to determine continuing eligibility, taking the burden off staff and clients.

Additional Coordination in the Application Process

Outside of Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF, additional coordination processes exist to increase services provided to eligible South Dakotans. For example, Medicaid has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Health (DOH) for sharing data with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, which is overseen by DOH. Each month Medicaid provides WIC with a list of individuals who have been approved for pregnancy medical programs so WIC can reach out to them to assess the potential of engaging them in WIC services. South Dakota Medicaid is working with DOH toward sharing additional information for children to enhance WIC outreach. TANF has an additional practice to share a list of enrolled children aged 0-5 with the Department of Education (DOE) to conduct outreach for the Head Start program. Additionally, DOE frequently makes referrals to TANF and Medicaid.

South Dakota is also using social media campaigns and partnerships with stakeholders to increase benefit participation through a focus on increasing enrollment in the [Medicare Savings Program](#), a historically [underutilized](#) benefit. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has [encouraged](#) state efforts to increase enrollment. As a result, South Dakota Medicaid has initiated training for outreach staff, navigator groups, and non-state benefit coordinators to encourage screening for eligibility and referral to the Social Security Administration when appropriate.

Increasing Collaboration Through Feedback Processes and Strategic Planning

The Division of Economic Assistance fields several committees of eligibility staff, lead staff, and supervisory staff from each region. A Medical Advisory Committee, SNAP Advisory Committee, and TANF Eligibility and Workforce Services Committee all meet monthly to discuss policies and procedures in development, explore training needs, and engage in joint problem solving. Eligibility workers who are trained in all three programs may join one or more committees.

To assess client experience, the Quality Control Unit conducts surveys and outreach to clients enrolled in Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. The survey includes questions about how client information was handled and if it was used for eligibility as directed by the client. Additionally, Medicaid sends out surveys to enrollees to evaluate experience. Feedback from enrollees and staff committees is reviewed in biweekly management meetings and shared with eligibility staff via monthly reports. Monthly reports also spotlight a customer story as a reminder to staff about why their work matters.

Innovation Through Partnerships

One innovative SNAP pilot initiative currently underway in South Dakota is a partnership with local technical colleges. This pilot identified 25 individuals registered with the SNAP employment and training program who could use help paying for tuition, books, transportation, laptops, and other necessities to complete their education at Southeast Technical College. SNAP is evaluating the pilot effort's success in supporting graduates in getting employed and will consider expanding the program based on initial pilot results.

Barriers to Sharing and Coordinating Data

A primary frustration that South Dakota's eligibility workers experience regarding data sharing is the inability to use client income information from the Federal Data Services Hub for verifying SNAP and TANF eligibility. Workers must look to several other sources of information to find income from wages, income from cash assistance, Social Security income, unemployment insurance and child support. Frequently there is also a need to request documentation from applicants, which can cause delays in verifying eligibility.

Looking Ahead

Collaboration, data sharing, and referral for other services is an ongoing practice within the South Dakota Department of Social Services. Leaders from South Dakota's Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF offices recognize how valuable their collaboration, data sharing, shared quality standards, and eligibility worker processes are to getting critical services to those who qualify. States that house these programs in different divisions can consider designing mechanisms and interfaces for sharing data and facilitating client enrollment. Programs with similar income guidelines often have clients who qualify for more than one program without realizing it. Data sharing and coordination between programs saves the time and effort of both case workers and clients in ensuring that clients receive the services for which they are eligible.