SNAP Application Processing Timeliness: Effective Practices, Promising Initiatives, and Helpful Resources

States are responsible for meeting federal SNAP requirements for timely processing of applications. In August 2023, FNA invited states to participate in listening sessions focused on understanding states' experiences with processing initial and recertification applications on time. These discussions covered areas for improvement, training and supports, and state-led initiatives. This resource summarizes the valuable information contributed by participating states.

Effective Practices and Innovative Strategies

Policy and process

Task-based model. Many states have moved to a task-based system with a statewide queue for SNAP applications. This distributes work more evenly and efficiently, and opens avenues for further policy innovation.

- *One state uses a task-based model for most applicants while maintaining a case-based system for applicants who are elderly or have a disability, making the process smoother for clients with the greatest need.*

Waivers. Many states are making use of waivers. The on-demand interview waiver for applications and recertifications streamlines the interview process. Recertification interview waivers for people who are elderly or have a disability can also increase processing speed.

Cross-program coordination. Where possible, aligning policies and procedures for multiple benefit programs can create efficiencies.

- *One state has aligned recertification dates for Medicaid and SNAP so that only one client contact is required.*

Technology

Small changes to eligibility systems can support on-time processing.

- **Dashboards for monitoring.** *One state integrated a timeliness dashboard into their system to allow for real-time monitoring of workload and timeliness.*
- **Automatically flagging cases ready for processing.** *Another state flags cases that are ready for processing so they can be addressed quickly and efficiently. This update was developed after the state noticed that working on the oldest cases first slowed processing, as cases were touched multiple times. Now, a subset of eligibility workers prioritize cases that are ready to go, which has improved their overall timeliness rates.*

Communication

Many states mentioned that deliberate communication practices across policy, operations, and quality control units have been essential for improving timeliness.

- **State-to-county communications.** *A state with a county-administered program sends updates related to application and recertification timeliness in letters to the counties, and then meets with each county to review the letter, answer questions, and provide space for feedback.*
- **Frontline worker input.** *Another state stressed the importance of listening to frontline staff. State SNAP leadership holds regular structured conversations with eligibility workers to hear their insights on challenges to processing timeliness and their suggestions for improvement.*

Improving communication with clients to prevent client caused delays is another way to speed processing.

- **Multiple communication avenues.** *States send texts encouraging SNAP applicants to call in for their interview or reminding clients to submit recertification forms.*

Factors impacting application timeliness:

States described a number of competing factors impacting their ability to process SNAP applications faster, including:

- **Staffing.** High staff turnover has meant loss of knowledge; new staff and supervisors need time to learn the intricacies of SNAP.
- **Application volume.** Many states are facing a backlog of cases combined with high application volumes. Online applications enable clients to submit multiple applications more easily while waiting for a determination.
- **Systems and technology.** Data systems, whether older legacy systems or complex integrated systems, may be difficult to update.
- **Client delays.** When clients do not act promptly(calling for an interview, submitting documents),processing time is drawn out.

Cross-state connections

States benefit by connecting with and learning from other states about activities related to improving timeliness.

- Some states visited other states to observe their data systems and office processes and to establish professional relationships.
- Several states also collaborate through relationships with their FNA regional office and professional organizations like the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA).

Promising Initiatives

States highlighted some in-process and future opportunities for changes to promote timeliness.

Hiring and retaining staff

Multiple states have recently ***increased salaries*** to attract new employees and retain their current staff. States are also exploring alternatives for recruitment, with some ***opening positions statewide*** instead of limiting hiring to specific counties.

- *One state conducted a workload assessment to understand where staff were needed, and to redistribute people and work for higher efficiency.*

Training

States are seeing positive results from putting resources into ***strengthening and standardizing training*** and creating ***dedicated training teams***. Many are expanding beyond new-hire training to create ***micro-learning modules*** for veteran staff on targeted topics, and some are using ***quick videos*** for training rather than longer courses.

Staffing and policy changes

One county-administered state described ***organizing counties into four "Human Service Zones."*** Workers can process cases for any client in their zone, thereby more evenly distributing the workload. This is intended to increase application timeliness, but staff are still in a ramp-up phase, and the system is being refined.

One state is working to ***align renewal dates for other benefit programs*** with SNAP and Medicaid recertification dates.

Helpful resources

Resources states find valuable in addressing timeliness include:

- **The SNAP Application Processing Timeliness website.** This landing page contains links to guidance and policy memos, annual application processing timeliness rates, and other resources.
- **FNA training, technical assistance, and policy guidance.** We provide training and technical assistance to states and shares materials from other states. Some FNA regional offices hold regular calls with their states.
- **Waivers and policy options.** We can assist states in understanding available options and flexibilities on procedures, such as asset tests, income verification, and interview protocols, that may help address timeliness.
- **Workload Management Matrix.** The SNAP workload management matrix is an overview of options states have for managing increased workloads.
- **Peer support.** We can facilitate cross-state conversations and meetings to share strategies and resources, and support peer learning.

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