

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

2001 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, NC 27699-2001
Tel 919-855-4800 • Fax 919-715-4645

Beverly Eaves Perdue, Governor

Albert A. Delia, Acting Secretary

November 14, 2012

RE: Aligned Certification Periods for Medicaid and
Food and Nutrition Services

Dear County Director of Social Services:

**Attention: Food and Nutrition Services Managers and Supervisors
Medicaid Managers and Supervisors**

The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance to counties regarding the alignment of certification periods in Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) and Family and Children's Medicaid (F&C MA).

As part of the *Work Support Strategies* initiative the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services piloted a program to align certification periods and better leverage information for customers who are applying for or recertifying their FNS and F&C MA benefits. This pilot was an effort to decrease churning (the likelihood of customers experiencing a lapse in benefits for reasons other than eligibility), decrease the administrative duplication, and support the efforts of customers to hold steady employment by reducing complicated enrollment processes. It was intended to make more efficient contact with customers, allowing them to tell their story once and receive all the services they need.

The Aligned Certification Periods pilot was implemented from February – April 2012 in Lenoir and Orange Counties with considerable success. At the conclusion of the 3-month period, 51% of the customers whose certification periods were not already aligned were aligned as a result of this initiative. It was also determined that, if the pilot had run for 9 months, this number would have increased to 97% alignment. The quantitative and qualitative feedback collected indicates that a permanent aligned certification period policy would benefit a large number of customers across the state.

Attached is a summary of the Aligned Certification Period Pilot Study. The full report may be found on the North Carolina Work Support Strategies website at www.ncwss.com.

Based on the pilot data, NC-DHHS has found this to be the most family-centered approach. It is expected that counties will begin the process of aligning certification periods across multiple programs. There is no current FNS policy directing case workers to align certification periods with any other program. However, there is no policy prohibiting alignment as long as the certification period is not shortened. In Medicaid, existing policy directs case workers to align the certification periods for:

- Medicaid parents and their children for whom they have financial responsibility, and
- Medicaid siblings, including half- and step-siblings, living with their financially responsible parent(s).

Based on the pilot, this could be implemented without policy change in Medicaid and FNS.

The alignment of certification periods has shown much positive potential, including:

- Preparing to help offset challenges related to NC FAST implementation. Counties have experienced longer wait times and heavier lobby traffic through the implementation of P1 with NC FAST. Certification period alignment could be a preparation step to help counteract these challenges with NC FAST P2/6 implementation next year.
- Since NC FAST will screen for all programs, this is a front-end streamlining effort prior to NC FAST implementation across all programs.
- Allowing families to tell their story once and receive needed benefits from multiple programs, as well as viewing the family as one unit, maintaining evidence at an integrated case level.
- Allowing for cross-program training opportunities that will become essential with the further implementation of NC FAST.

It is strongly recommended that counties first align all certification periods in Medicaid, as much as allowable by policy, prior to aligning with FNS certification periods. This will benefit families with multiple Medicaid programs within one family by alleviating unnecessary multiple certification periods. By first aligning all possible Medicaid programs, the effort to align with FNS certification periods will be streamlined.

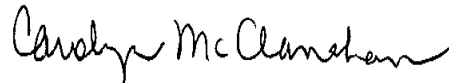
NC-DHHS is working diligently through WSS and NC FAST to provide multiple opportunities for counties to streamline access to benefits and strengthen families. Counties are heavily encouraged to embrace this opportunity to simplify multi-program processes through aligned certification periods and also to look for other simplification opportunities in the future.

If you have any questions or need technical assistance, please contact a FNS Program Consultant at (919) 527-6300 or a Medicaid Program Representative.

Sincerely,
DHHS Economic Services Policy Governance Board



Dean Simpson
Division of Social Services



Carolyn McClanahan
Division of Medical Assistance

EFS-FNSEP-30-2012 (DSS)



Chris Urso
Division of Aging and Adult
Services



Ron Byrd
Division of Child Development and
Early Education

AFS-17-2012 (DAAS)