

Overview

As part of the *Work Support Strategies* initiative, North Carolina is seeking to align certification periods among customers who are already enrolled in FNS and Medicaid. It is common for multiple certification periods to exist within one family, often with different recertification schedules. This initiative is 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. This alignment is intended to make more efficient contact with customers, allowing them to tell their story once and receive all the services they need.

In 2010, 67.7% of North Carolina SNAP customers were also receiving Medicaid.

There is flexibility within federal and state policy and opportunities to leverage customer data across programs, allowing for a one-time alignment of FNS and Medicaid certification periods through a single interview. Under this recommended guidance, when a customer applies for or recertifies their FNS benefits, the caseworker should leverage information the customer provides to make every effort to align the certification periods of any FNS and any Family and Children's Medicaid programs that the customer is applying for or currently receiving: Medicaid for Infants and Children (MIC), Medicaid for Pregnant Women (MPW), Medicaid for Families with Dependent Children (MAF), and/or NC Health Choice (NCHC). The Medicaid or FNS, and should only contact the customer in the event of missing or incorrect information. It is important to note that failure to recertify one program will not result in automatic termination of the other.

Pilot Results

From a pilot program that ran in two counties (Lenoir and Orange) from February – May 2012, North Carolina looked to determine whether alignment would be effective in practice and test various processes for operationalizing it. From that pilot we found that:

- Counties need to create their own process to implement the policy based on their unique organizational structure, staff functions, and agency environment. Lenoir and Orange Counties had very different business processes for implementing.
- Of the 1,066 customers from both pilot counties, 85% did not have aligned FNS and F&C MA certification periods prior to being enrolled, and 51% were aligned as a result of this policy.
- 51% of cases could be aligned through the pilot. The remaining 49% of cases could not be aligned for one of a variety of reasons. The most common reason was because the customer's next certification period was more than 6 months in the future.
- If the policy was extended for the initial cohort still receiving FNS and Medicaid, 97% would have aligned certification periods within 9 months as a result of this policy

Implementation Considerations

As each county sets forth to implement the alignment of certification periods between FNS and Family Medicaid, there are four items that they must consider.

- *Communicating the updated eligibility information between programs* –To ensure consistent communication between programs, counties may want to utilize the DSS-8194. In addition, FNS and Medicaid IMCs will want to have inquiry access into both EIS and FSIS/NCFASST to utilize updated eligibility information.
- *Redesigning business process*– Minor business process change will be required in counties to facilitate case workers' efforts to align certification periods. This will include a way for FNS and Medicaid case workers to communicate regarding newly updated eligibility information, to flag certification periods that are more than six months out for alignment at the next recertification, and to collect and share information, verifications, and supporting documents.
- *Training Staff* – County staff will need adequate training to fully understand the policy change and what it means for their customers, as well as what information to look for in EIS, FSIS, and/or NCFASST. They will also need to know how to utilize the new business processes to achieve the policy's goal of reducing administrative workload and likelihood of customer churning.
- *Communicating with customers* – A plan should be developed communicate this change effectively to customers. This should include consistent messaging from case workers to customers on what this policy changes means and an explanation of how this policy change will affect their future recertification processes.