September 28, 2012

Subject: NC FAST Implementation Strategy Suggestions

Dear County Director of Social Services:

We have learned a great deal in the last four months as counties implement NC FAST. The feedback from counties is welcomed, and is being incorporated whenever possible. It is imperative that we receive constructive input from county staff regarding successful implementation strategies. In turn, we will share these recommendations across all 100 counties, to alleviate some of the challenges experienced by the counties that have already begun using NC FAST.

The suggestions, as provided by counties currently using NC FAST, are described in the following paragraphs:

Leverage County Champions and Super Users to be Subject Matter Experts for NC FAST. This should begin with the completion of the NC FAST web-based training modules, classroom training, and all associated training on FAST Help. County Champions and Super Users are expected to be knowledgeable of the system prior to soft launch. As a result of the dedication needed to learn NC FAST, these employees may need to be freed of some of their responsibilities in order to focus on getting up to speed on the system. County staff will be dependent on the County Champions and Super Users for support, so their commitment and adherence to the training plan is crucial to each county.

Promote the use of available project and county resources to staff. This includes FAST Help, job aids, co-workers, Onsite Support Staff (OSS), supervisor(s), and the Help Desk to resolve any challenges encountered with NC FAST. Once information is obtained, staff members should share their knowledge among the team to ensure consistent application for all cases. Staff should never guess what the correct procedure may be in NC FAST, since this can negatively impact a customer's benefit(s).

Encourage county staff to stay current with project guidance to avoid problems with cases. As defects are fixed, certain workarounds and job aid steps may become obsolete. County staff should reference the end-user postcards to confirm whether a workaround is still relevant or is no longer needed. If a workaround is removed from a postcard, it is no longer required. Staff members who continue to use workarounds that are outdated will create new issues for their cases. In addition, always ensure the most current version of a resource (i.e., postcard, job aid) is being used when processing applications, particularly if these are printed and provided to staff as a desk reference.

Consider a shift in headcount during the implementation process. The initial training and ramp-up time during NC FAST can be arduous. Counties that have separate intake and ongoing/recertification units should seriously consider shifting ongoing/recertification team members to intake during the initial transition period. Counties may also want to consider cross-training Medicaid and/or Work First Caseworkers to assist with the intake of FNS applications, if needed. In some instances, counties are adding

additional staff in the form of temporary workers. Temporary staff can be used to help with basic clerical duties, such as handling Standard and/or Fast Convert cases, and can provide other assistance as needed during the transition.

Set expectations appropriately for how NC FAST may impact workers. Caseworkers should understand that the application process will take longer in NC FAST due to the volume of customer information gathered and entered into the system. Counties should also consider the learning curve of their employees as they begin using NC FAST. This does take time and practice. The payoff with NC FAST will occur during the recertification process, since much of the information needed will already be stored in the system. Also, a majority of the information gathered during Project 1: Global Case Management and Food and Nutrition Services will be applicable to Medicaid and Work First customers, creating time-saving measures down the road.

Promote the benefit of NC FAST to customers. Before the implementation of NC FAST, it is recommended that counties promote the arrival of NC FAST to customers. This can be done in the form of brochures, newspaper articles, lobby/office posters, and even word of mouth. Customers who are aware of the change are more likely to be accepting of the transition.

Be as prepared as possible for the NC FAST implementation. Counties are strongly encouraged to enter as much information as possible into FSIS prior to soft launch. Once counties soft launch NC FAST, all new applications and reapplications should be entered into NC FAST rather than being keyed in FSIS. Remember that for every application entered in NC FAST during soft launch, one less application will need to be converted from FSIS at hard launch. In addition, it is imperative that counties meet the minimum PC requirements, as defined on the NC FAST website. This will ensure that counties are ready for a successful launch of NC FAST on the first day.

DHHS and NC FAST Management are committed to helping with the successful implementation of NC FAST to all 100 counties. Your continued support and participation in this important initiative is essential for program success. We thank you for your ideas as we continue to adapt and improve the implementation process based on your valuable feedback. As always, do not hesitate to contact me or any of the NC FAST staff if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Anthony Vellucci

cc: Beth Melcher, NC DHHS, Deputy Secretary for Health Services
        Maria F. Spaulding, NC DHHS, Deputy Secretary for Long-Term Care and Family Services
        Dan Stewart, NC DHHS, Assistant Secretary for Finance and Business Operations
        Laketha Miller, NC DHHS Controller
        Michael Watson, NC DHHS Division of Medical Assistance, Director
        Deborah Cassidy, NC DHHS Division of Child Development and Early Education, Director
        Dennis Streets, NC DHHS Division of Aging and Adult Services, Director
        Sherry Bradsher, NC DHHS Division of Social Services, Director
        Karen Tomczak, NC DHHS, Chief Information Officer

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