

**Pilot Program to Increase Access to Public Benefits
For Older Dual Eligible Seniors**

Session Law 2017-57, Section 11.C.8.(b)



Report to the

**Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on
Health and Human Services**

and

Office of the Governor

By

**North Carolina Department of
Health and Human Services**

August 24, 2022

Background

Session Law 2016-94, states that the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services Division, shall establish an evidence-based pilot program to increase access to public benefits for seniors 65 and older who are dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid to (i) improve the health and independence of seniors and (ii) reduce health care costs. The Division shall partner with a non-profit firm for the purpose of engaging in a data-driven campaign to help seniors aged 65 and older enrolled who are dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid meet their basic social needs. The not-for-profit firm shall have demonstrated experience in assisting with these types of services and the partnership shall accomplish each of the following:

- (1) Identify through data sharing, dual eligible seniors aged 65 and older who qualify For Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP) but not currently enrolled.
- (2) Conduct an outreach program towards those seniors for the purpose of enrolling them into SNAP.
- (3) Provide comprehensive application assistance through outreach specialists to complete public benefits application processes.
- (4) Evaluate project effectiveness and explore how data can be utilized to achieve optimal outcomes.
- (5) Make recommendations regarding policy options available to the State to streamline access to benefits.

The law states the Division of Social Services shall report to the Office of the Governor and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services on its progress in the pilot program by February 1 following each year the pilot program is in place. The report shall, at a minimum, include the following:

- (1) Number of seniors age 65 and older who are dual Eligible but are not enrolled in SNAP.
- (2) Number of those identified that would be included in the sample population.
- (3) Methods of outreach toward those seniors in the sample population
- (4) Number of to date enrollments in SNAP as a direct result of outreach during the pilot program.
- (5) Participation rate to date in SNAP of those seniors in the sample population.
- (6) Any other findings the Division deems relevant.

Benefits Data Trust (BDT) was awarded the Pilot Project for Dual-Eligibles Not Receiving SNAP/FNS project on March 7, 2017. To ensure provisions in the law as well as NC Department of Health and Human Services privacy and security policies were met, the project launched in December 2017 and was extended to June 30, 2019. During the 2020 legislative session, Session Law 2020-97 (106) required Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, to continue increasing access to Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) benefits for individuals who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Appropriation in the amount \$600,000 was granted for the period of October 2020 through December 31,2020. Through federal legislation the funding was extended through June 30, 2021. After June 30,2021, BDT funded the project through philanthropic grants and

partnerships. This report identifies the outcomes for BDT beginning January 2021 through September 30, 2021.

Overview of Grant Implementation and BDT Dual Eligible Pilot Project

The North Carolina Benefits Center is operated by BDT to provide application assistance to NC residents. The Division of Social Services identified approximately 60,000 dually eligible seniors during FY 2020-21. The North Carolina Benefits Center contacted 17,400 dual eligibles not yet enrolled in SNAP resulting in the submission of over 3,886 SNAP applications. Of those applications, 1,964 were successfully enrolled in SNAP/FNS between January 2021 and September 30, 2021.

In BDT's efforts to assist North Carolina attain its goal of helping older North Carolinians access much needed food assistance, and therefore lower their Medicaid healthcare costs, many interesting facts were revealed that include:

- Seniors in North Carolina who are receiving Medicaid are highly likely eligible for SNAP / FNS.
- With response rates up to 21.5% (compared to 10 – 20% for typical direct mail), this population needs and wants benefits application and enrollment assistance, and the state agency messaging resonates with them.
- The annual average benefit amount for this population is \$883 ($\73.61×12), which increased their annual income by 6.55% on average (from approximately \$13,478 to \$14,361).

During the 2021 legislative session, there were no funds allocated to continue the pilot project. However, due to the success of the project BDT plans to continue the partnership during FY 2021-2022 utilizing philanthropic funding via Walmart and other partners.