

Medicaid and SNAP Data Coordination Case Studies

Using Data-Driven Outreach to Improve Access to Public Assistance Programs in North Carolina

North Carolina’s Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) programs are state-supervised, but administered at the county level by the Department of Social Services (DSS) in each of North Carolina’s 100 counties. While local DSS staff are responsible for the day-to-day operations of FNS and Medicaid — including eligibility determination, enrollment, and program renewals — the FNS program, overseen by the Division of Child and Family Well-Being (DCFV) in North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) is responsible for collecting data and contracts with [Benefits Data Trust \(BDT\)](#) to reach community members who are enrolled in Medicaid and may be eligible for FNS. Through BDT’s data-driven outreach and engagement tools and several other contracted outreach partners, North Carolina is able to reach a wider audience and target populations that may previously have been overlooked, increasing access to public benefits for many North Carolinians.



North Carolina Key Facts

- State population: 10.7 million
- County administered SNAP
- SNAP participation: 69%
- SNAP enrollees (as of Feb 2023):
 - 1,656,417 Individuals
 - 836,317 Households
- SNAP income limit for household of four: \$4,626/month
- Medicaid enrollees: 2,238,772
- Medicaid income limit for family of four with children 0-18: \$3,076 /month

Structures to Support Data Sharing

To apply for public assistance benefits, one option North Carolinians have is the [Electronic Pre-Assessment Screening Service \(ePass\)](#), a secure, web-based, self-service tool that is a part of [North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology \(NC FAST\)](#), a shared eligibility system. Through the ePASS online portal, applicants can apply for and manage their Medicaid, FNS, Energy Assistance, Work First Cash Assistance benefits, and North Carolina Child Care. Although the Medicaid and FNS applications are separate, using the ePASS online application, clients can apply for both at the same time. After clients apply through ePASS, their personal data is stored in NC FAST.

MEDICAID AND SNAP DATA COORDINATION CASE STUDIES

This case study series highlights innovative state strategies to improve data coordination between SNAP and Medicaid agencies and increase access for eligible people. The series is a product of *Improving Data-Matching Strategies to Better Coordinate Information Between SNAP and Medicaid Programs*, a national initiative led by Benefits Data Trust in partnership with the Center for Health Care Strategies and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

County DSS agencies use NC FAST to collect data to support eligibility determinations for Medicaid and FNS, along with other public benefit programs, including Work First Cash Assistance, Energy Assistance, and North Carolina Child Care. When a North Carolinian applies for any of these public assistance programs – in person, on the phone, through the mail, or online – NC FAST compiles their information to help streamline eligibility processes and decision-making. NC FAST allows caseworkers to locate the information supplied by the client to determine eligibility for the different programs.

Data Sharing with External Partners to Support Outreach

North Carolina’s state FNS outreach program contracts with the external vendor BDT, to reach individuals enrolled in Medicaid but not FNS. Using NC FAST, North Carolina’s FNS data team generates a report showing Medicaid enrollees. BDT cross-references the report against individuals not receiving FNS benefits and attempts to reach these individuals and determine if they are eligible for FNS. Partnering with BDT to increase participation in FNS has been incredibly effective — the FNS enrollment rate is 7.6 times higher for individuals who received BDT’s outreach and application assistance, compared to those who did not¹.

BDT uses a targeted outreach model, which includes texting, mailings, and managing a hotline that Medicaid enrollees can call to inquire about FNS benefits. Through the hotline, a BDT representative is available to help answer questions and assist individuals in applying for FNS using NC FAST. The representative can also support the individual in identifying the necessary documents for their FNS application and assist in collecting the documents through a mobile upload. Once the FNS application is complete, BDT sends it to the individual’s county DSS office for review. The county DSS workers determine eligibility or assist the applicant from that point.

Along with BDT, North Carolina uses four other outreach agencies to identify and support individuals who may need additional help accessing FNS. Using enrollment numbers generated by NC FAST, these smaller vendors specifically target underrepresented communities and populations with a focus on local in-person outreach and education opportunities. These outreach partners provide in-person assistance to educate individuals about FNS and provide application help. Senior centers and community colleges are examples of a few of the places these outreach partners will frequent to find and assist individuals in applying for FNS. Currently, not all counties in North Carolina are served by outreach partners, but DCFW is always looking for more opportunities to expand outreach.

FNS has a SNAP Outreach and Education Coordinator, who is responsible for overseeing the outreach processes and maintaining relationships with each outreach vendor. To protect the sharing of confidential data and the movement of the report, there are several contracts in place, including a business agreement and a memorandum of understanding between BDT, North Carolina’s FNS agency, and North Carolina’s Medicaid agency.

Data sharing with North Carolina’s Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) has also helped county DSS agencies access data more effectively. MCOs not only help administer Medicaid but are also able to collect and share contact information with the state and counties when it changes. This enables better and more consistent communication with all enrollees, reducing lapses in coverage due to no response or not being able to locate an enrollee.

¹ Benefits Data Trust. <https://bdtrust.org/new-research-shows-snap-reduces-hospital-and-er-visits-lowers-medicaid-costs-by-2-360-per-person-annually/> (October 19, 2021)

Challenges to Partnering with External Vendors to Facilitate Program Enrollment

While external vendors have helped to expand North Carolina’s community outreach to improve the provision of public benefits, there are some challenges in working with external partners for outreach. For North Carolina’s state FNS program, federal funds granted by the USDA provide up to 50 percent of the funding for contracts with external outreach partners. Interested vendors are responsible for the 50% local match.

Contracting with an external partner also leads to FNS hearing client feedback secondhand, rather than being able to address concerns directly. When clients have a problem or want to ask specific policy questions, the vendors need to coordinate with their North Carolina state contact, the Outreach and Education Coordinator, or find a policy specialist at the county level to see if there is an appropriate action to take or to clarify a policy question.

Another challenge to external contracting for targeted outreach is that community members sometimes mistake text and mailing outreach from BDT as fraudulent. NCDHHS occasionally needs to provide additional notice or alert clients that BDT is a partner organization and the outreach is legitimate.

Spotlight on Rutherford County

How Data Sharing Assists in Eligibility Determinations and Renewals at the County Level

Due to North Carolina’s public assistance programs being county-administered, there is a large variance in how each county-based DSS office chooses to administer its programs. In Rutherford County, North Carolina, caseworkers specialize in one program — Medicaid or FNS. Rutherford’s DSS office found that due to the complicated policies and ongoing changes, having one individual responsible for Medicaid determinations and another for FNS allows for more timely and personal assistance.

Rutherford County Medicaid’s process for redetermining eligibility each year relies heavily on previously submitted data. Through NC FAST, Rutherford County employees have access to all client data and documents previously submitted for Medicaid applications or redetermination. To make the renewal process as easy as possible for caseworkers and clients, Medicaid caseworkers first access NC FAST to find client information that may already be available in the system. Medicaid caseworkers review the documentation most recently submitted for any changes that would affect eligibility for Medicaid. If any differences are found, Medicaid redetermination paperwork is mailed to the client to verify and provide the correct information. Once updated information is received, the Medicaid caseworker alerts the FNS caseworker about the change so they can explore updating any FNS applications/renewals.

Next Steps

Each year, the SNAP Outreach and Education Coordinator works with each of the vendors to set specific outreach goals to increase overall enrollment by five percent and target populations that may not be accurately represented in enrollment numbers. Targeted populations include the elderly, mixed immigration status families, students, veterans and the unemployed. The coordinator works with each vendor and may even alter their contract when a gap is identified in terms of outreach.

Through North Carolina's collaboration with external outreach partners, the state's public programs can reach additional people that the county workers would not have the bandwidth to proactively engage. Creating a partnership for sharing data has benefited the county workers, state workers, and enrollees in these programs.