How to Easily Initiate a SNAP Application for Med-Only Clients

Introduction

Since Affordable Care Act implementation in 2012, the rate at which Colorado Medicaid application sites have increased enrollment of eligible clients is astounding. In only a few years, the caseload for Medicaid has increased 100% to more than 1.3 million clients. The success of Medicaid’s efforts represents real and tangible support for eligible clients and has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands Coloradans.

During the same period, Colorado’s Food Assistance Program experienced a decrease in caseload for SNAP, more commonly known as food stamps. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that approximately 60% of Medicaid recipients under the age of 60 should also be eligible for SNAP. With close to 700,000 new enrollees in Medicaid since 2012, it is estimated that Food Assistance might have been able to capture more than 100,000 new participants during the same period.

Healthcare professionals recognize the strong link between having enough food (food security) and good health outcomes, and that food security impacts us in every stage of our lives.

- Food security during pregnancy means less vitamin and mineral deficiency, as well as better birth weights and neonatal development.¹
- Young children on SNAP are less likely than their peers to be obese adults and are less likely to suffer from other chronic diseases later in life.²
- SNAP can reduce food insecurity rates by up to 30%,² and these decreases in food insecurity can reduce annual healthcare costs for families by as much as 76%.³

Therefore, helping eligible clients access Food Assistance, in addition to health coverage, can provide the reinforcement needed to support and maintain a solid foundation throughout their lives.

PEAK now includes a Food Assistance checkbox, in hopes of shrinking the gap between Medicaid and Food Assistance enrollment and to improve measurable health outcomes across Colorado. The new tool simplifies the process for Medical Assisters and helps clients easily apply for Food Assistance when completing other applications in PEAK. It is a great opportunity to cross-enroll more eligible participants into programs that boost health and well-being—and our state as a whole.

¹ White House Council of Economic Advisors, Long-Term Benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, December 2015
³ Tarasuk V et al, Association between Household Food Insecurity and Annual Health Care Costs, 2015
Using the Food Assistance Checkbox

Previously, the only way to apply for Food Assistance in PEAK was to add it as a program at the start of the application where all programs were listed. This generated many additional questions specific to the Food Assistance application that were not required for the Medicaid program. As a result, Medicaid application assistance sites did not have the time to assist their eligible clients in applying for Food Assistance.

As of July 1, 2016, there is a new opportunity to quickly and easily apply for SNAP benefits in as few as two steps at the end of the PEAK Medicaid-only application. Clients and application assisters will be able to click “Yes” for Food Assistance at the end of the Medical Assistance Application Summary page, and then complete an electronic signature for Food Assistance on the following page.

Once “Yes” is clicked, a new question inquires which household members should be included on the application, with check boxes for selection:

Please select the household members you would like to include on your Food Assistance application:

☐ Andrew Applicant

Next, a series of questions for Expedited Food Assistance will be prompted. Expedited service is an application processing method that requires human/social services offices to provide benefits to the most at-risk families within seven calendar days from the date of application. It is not necessary to answer these questions to complete the application.

They are helpful in determining whether or not a client is eligible for expedited service, but they can be omitted if necessary. Fill out these additional questions, if possible, or click “Next” to sign electronically and complete the application.
The final page includes the Rights and Responsibilities for the client, in addition to an optional question about their preferred method of contact and times for the mandatory Food Assistance interview (either in-person or by phone).

**The Rights and Responsibilities are important to understand:** they indicate that it is necessary to be forthright during the application process, and that the applicant has the right to appeal and to not be discriminated against.

The client can complete the additional section on interview preference, but it is optional and can be skipped.

The only mandatory field in order to complete the application for Food Assistance is the electronic signature. It certifies that the client agrees to the aforementioned rights and responsibilities, and that they certify that any completed fields are true and complete to the best of their knowledge.

Once the electronic signature is completed, the application can be submitted. This will generate an application for the County Department of Human Services with the client’s basic information, which a county eligibility worker will then review.
Next Steps for Food Assistance

The client has taken the first step in applying for Food Assistance, but there may still be additional questions and information that the county needs to process their application and determine eligibility. The following is a brief outline of what a client can expect as they complete the process of applying for Food Assistance:

- **Monitor your mail and phone calls.** Read and save any mail you receive from the County Department of Social/Human Services (DHS). DHS may write to you or call you to ask for more information, to schedule an interview, or to tell you when your application for Food Assistance has been approved or denied. Look for the DHS logo on the envelope or paperwork.

- **The County Department of Social/Human Services (DHS) may need more information about the people who reside in your household.** You may get a letter or a phone call from DHS requesting more information or documents. DHS will use this to determine whether you are eligible for Food Assistance. DHS may ask for your pay stubs or proof that someone is living with you. Follow the letter’s instructions. If you do not provide the information in time (30 days), DHS may deny your application. Be sure to keep copies of all documents you give to DHS. If you need more time to provide information or get documents you need, you can request additional time from DHS.

- **For Food Assistance applications, DHS will need to conduct an interview.** You should get a letter from DHS scheduling your interview. This interview can be conducted over the phone or in-person. If you miss the interview, you will receive a missed appointment notice from DHS and will need to reschedule. If you need to reschedule your interview, contact your local DHS office. You do not need an interview to receive Medical Assistance.

- **How fast can I get Food Assistance?** Interviews for Food Assistance should be scheduled within 10 days after you apply. Your Food Assistance application should be approved or denied within 30 days. If you are eligible to receive Expedited Food Assistance, you should receive benefits within seven calendar days.

- **When do I find out if my case has been approved?** DHS will let you know if your application is approved after you provide requested information and complete your interview. If you are denied Food Assistance (SNAP/food stamps) for missing an interview, this should not delay your approval for Medicaid.

- **What if my application is denied?** If your application for Food Assistance benefits is denied, the letter you receive from DHS should identify the reason for denial. There will be a deadline for you to appeal if you do not agree with the determination. There also will be contact information for free legal assistance available to help with your appeal.

- **What happens after my case is approved for Food Assistance?** DHS will issue an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which you will need to obtain in-person at the county office. In most cases, photo identification, such as a driver’s license, will be required in order to obtain your EBT card. This is to protect your identity as well as to prevent your benefits from being given to another family in error. (If you are unable to obtain your EBT card in-person at the county DHS office, contact the county office to inquire about other ways you might be able to obtain the card.)

- **How do I access my benefits?** An EBT card acts like a debit card. Food Assistance benefits are loaded onto your card each month. Before using the card for the first time, you will need to call the phone number listed on the card to activate your benefits and select a four-digit PIN. Benefits can be used at any store that accepts SNAP/food stamps. The amount of your monthly benefits will be stated in your approval letter. For the first month, you may receive a partial month’s amount. You will start receiving your full benefits in the second month. You are not permitted to share the PIN with anyone outside of your Food Assistance household, and groceries must be purchased for a member of your household.

- **How long will I receive benefits if approved?** Four or five months after you begin receiving Food Assistance benefits you will be asked to complete a short report on your household, known as a Recertification or Redetermination. If you do not return this report, you will stop receiving benefits after six months. DHS will need a current address in order to contact you. You also are responsible for promptly reporting changes to your income or household while receiving Food Assistance benefits. There is information about how to report income changes in the letter from DHS approving your application for Food Assistance benefits.