Public Benefits in MD During COVID-19

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April 20, 2020
Maryland COVID-19 Policy Changes
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

- 6 month extension on all redeterminations (in sync with SNAP)
- 90 days to provide verifications that the Dept. needs to support eligibility
- Good cause for work activity requirement (temporarily suspended)
- No sanctions for non-compliance
- Prior sanctions or instances of non-compliance will not stand in way of approving new application
- Granting hardship exemptions for anyone at 60 mo time limit
Common Legal Issues

• Incorrect benefit amount
  • Loss of income
  • Addition of HH members (birth, new HH members)

• Benefit terminations
  • Computer-generated notices requiring in person meeting during COVID-19
  • Notices setting case to terminate – no action to reverse closure

• Applications
  • Pre-COVID-19 denials
  • Processing time is not immediate
    • Significant increase in applications
    • Offices closed, many staff no remote capacity
    • Delays with emergency SNAP
Connecting with People Experiencing Homelessness

• New position: Ombudsman for clients experiencing homelessness

• Communication
  • Connecting with Continuum of Care (CoC) leads
  • Weekly calls with advocates
  • Presentations at meetings

• Data searches:
  • Individuals and families experiencing homelessness
    • “Homeless” or “no place to stay” entered on application
    • List of commonly used addresses (e.g. shelters, soup kitchens, Dept. office)
  • March and April benefit terminations
  • New post-COVID-19 application denials
  • Processing time for emergency SNAP applications
  • Families with TANF sanctions
Lessons Learned

- Clear, concrete communication plan is important!
- Outreach and engaging with people on front line
- Messaging is key
  - Unified state approach (e.g. not dependent on local jx)
  - Frame in public health terms (e.g. goal is for everyone to stay home, healthy and safe; don’t require people to go to doctors to receive a verification of disability)
  - Not terminating benefits or sanctioning frees up resources (e.g. it takes administrative work and time to sanction, time to approve application when person re-applies, etc.)
- Mass computer generated notices are still problematic
Culture Shift

- Work Participation Rate
  - Sanctions
  - Non-compliance
  - Terminations
  - No flexibility

- Accessing benefits
  - Approving applications
  - No sanctions
  - No terminations
  - Flexibility

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Advocates: Connecting with People Experiencing Homelessness

- Case managers at shelters
- Health care providers
- Social media (post flyers on twitter, FB)
- Email blasts
- Government agency social media
- Word of mouth
- State anti-hunger organizations (www.frac.org)
- Know Your Rights Videos
One-time payment or emergency benefit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core TANF Activities</th>
<th>Non-Core TANF Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Assistance</td>
<td>Program Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Activities</td>
<td>Refundable Tax Credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Supports and Supportive Services</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
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<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
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<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Spent on Core Areas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total Spent on Non-Core Areas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Source: CBPP analysis of Department of Health and Human Services 2018 TANF financial data
EBT Online Groceries

- Some retailers allow EBT use for online grocery pick up or delivery
- EBT Online Purchasing Pilot

more info  https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/online-purchasing-pilot