

November 1, 2021

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chairman, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
131 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

RE: 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report – Options for Simplifying Applications and Coordinating Benefits

Completed pursuant to 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 251-252

Dear Chairs Guzzone and McIntosh:

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is required to submit a report to the Joint Chairmen of the Senate Budget and Taxation and the House Appropriations Committees on Options for Simplifying Applications and Coordinating Benefits in accordance with the provisions of the 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 251-252. In accordance with this reporting requirement, DHS is pleased to provide you with the enclosed report.

If you should require additional information, please contact the Office of Government Affairs at 410-767-8966.

Sincerely,



Lourdes R. Padilla
Secretary, Department of Human Services



Dennis Schrader
Secretary, Department of Health



Michael L. Higgs Jr.
Director, Department of Assessments & Taxation



Mohammed Choudhury
State Superintendent of Schools

cc: Sarah Albert, Mandated Reports Specialist, Department of Legislative Services (5 copies)



**REPORT ON THE OPTIONS FOR SIMPLIFYING APPLICATIONS AND COORDINATING
BENEFITS**

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MARYLAND HEALTH BENEFIT EXCHANGE
STATE DEPARTMENT OF ASSESSMENTS AND TAXATION
COMPTROLLER

Completed pursuant to the 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 251-252

November 1, 2021

REPORT REQUIREMENT

This report is hereby submitted in response to the following reporting requirement found under the 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 251-252:

Submit a report describing current coordination among agencies, planned actions to simplify applications to reduce the amount of information required, limit documentation, and improve coordination of documentation required as part of the application for benefits between public benefit programs including:

- *benefits in the Assistance Payments program of DHS,*
- *energy assistance programs,*
- *Medicaid,*
- *the Maryland Children's Health Program,*
- *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children,*
- *school meals programs,*
- *Child Care Scholarship program,*
- *Homestead Tax Credit and any other property tax credit programs,*
- *Maryland Earned Income Tax Credit,*
- *Poverty Level Income Credit,*
- *Maryland Dependent Care Credit, and any*
- *other assistance programs administered by the agencies.*

The agencies shall provide a timeline for completing each action.

The agencies shall also describe any existing State or federal statutory and/or regulatory barriers to simplifying or coordinating application processes.

Source: 2021 Joint Chairmen's Report, pages 251-252

BACKGROUND

There are multiple State agencies impacted by this report. The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) administers most safety-net programs including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Transitional Cash Assistance (TCA), Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP), Public Assistance to Adults (PAA), Emergency Assistance (EA), and others; additionally, under the state Medicaid plan, DHS performs eligibility determinations for Medical Assistance (Medicaid), and is responsible for the system in which eligibility for non-MAGI Medicaid coverage groups is determined. The Maryland Department of Health is responsible for administering the Maryland Children's Health Program and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, and retains responsibility for policy respecting Medicaid (for both non-MAGI and MAGI coverage groups). The Maryland Health Benefits Exchange is responsible for Maryland Health Connection, in which eligibility for MAGI Medicaid coverage groups is determined. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is responsible for implementing school meals programs; and the Child Care Scholarship program. The Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation is responsible for administering the Homestead and the Homeowners property tax credit program. The Maryland Comptroller's Office is responsible for

administering the Maryland Earned Income Tax Credit (MD EITC), the Poverty Level Income Credit, and the Maryland Dependent Care Credit.

Each of the programs listed in the report requirement has a unique set of rules instituted by authorizing legislation and regulations. While more work has to be done to simplify the application process, there is a significant level of coordination among administrative agencies.

CURRENT COORDINATION EFFORTS TO SIMPLIFY APPLICATIONS TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION REQUIRED AND LIMIT DOCUMENTATION

To provide the best customer service and to efficiently administer Maryland’s human services programs, DHS is continually seeking opportunities to streamline applications, eligibility determination, and enrollment processes. This report outlines actions taken and actions planned by DHS to simplify the application and enrollment process, as well as the coordination of eligibility.

DHS is completing the statewide implementation of the new Eligibility & Enrollment (E&E) system. As part of the migration to E&E, DHS is now managing SNAP, TCA, TDAP, PAA, EA and Non-MAGI eligibility in a single case record for a household, supporting coordinated eligibility (processing the case once updates all programs). Below are some examples of how E&E supports simplified customer service/coordinated eligibility.

Implemented with E&E	Impact to Customers
Implementation of “one case” for a household where eligibility for all Family Investment Administration (FIA) programs is managed in one case and determined based on policy rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Household evaluated for all applicable sub-programs to ensure accurate eligibility/most advantageous program● Consolidated communication (notices) regarding all programs (no longer receive separate notices for each program)● Updates, e.g. an address update, are applied to all programs at the same time
Pre-populated re-application (re-determination) forms and online form	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● No longer need to complete a blank application at recertification, but review and provide updates● Online re-application form that can be completed on a phone, tablet, or PC
Coordinated Long-Term Care/Waiver Medicaid transition process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Customer informed through transition● Coordinated eligibility transition when entering or leaving a facility/transitioning to home (limiting gaps in eligibility during transitions)

Below are additional collaboration efforts:

School Meals Programs: School children who are receiving SNAP benefits, TCA, or Foster Care are categorically eligible to receive free meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs administered by the MSDE. DHS shares a daily file of SNAP, TCA, and Foster Care administrative records with MSDE, which is used to identify and enroll eligible children for free

school meals without having to apply for benefits through the school district. This process, which is seamless from the recipient's viewpoint, minimizes administrative burden, improves efficiency, and increases program accessibility. This file used to be shared in the legacy system; thus the daily exchange is a major improvement enabled by the DHS' MD THINK E&E application.

Additionally, MDH's Medicaid Program submitted a letter of commitment to partner with MSDE to participate in the USDA Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid beginning school year 2023. MDH, MHBE, and MSDE will partner to share files of Medicaid enrolled children to identify and enroll eligible children for free and reduced-price school meals without having to apply for benefits through the school district.

Earned Income Tax Credit: Recognizing that nearly all public assistance households are eligible for EITC, DHS collaborates with the CASH Campaign of Maryland to conduct an annual outreach campaign focused on informing recipients of their eligibility for EITC. The CASH Campaign promotes economic advancement for low-to-moderate-income individuals and families across Maryland. In addition to EITC information, the campaign provides information on free income tax preparation sites. The mail campaign reaches over 400,000 households every year. DHS also provides information regarding Maryland EITC to all individuals who receive assistance through the Maryland Emergency Food Assistance. This particular initiative reaches over 45,000 households every year. State EITC payments are counted as Maintenance of Efforts (MOE) required under the federal TANF Block Grant.

Child Care Scholarship Program: The Child Care Scholarship (CCS) Program, formerly known as Child Care Subsidy Program. DHS submits a TCA Approved Referral to MSDE for TCA customers that are approved for TCA. MSDE expedites the processing of completed referrals for TCA approved customers within three business days. DHS also assists customers that have applied and have not been approved for TCA with submitting a request for CCS services. Because pending TCA applicants have the same processing requirements of all Marylanders applying for CCS services, DHS completes a TCA Pending Referral on behalf of the customer and assists the customer with the completion of the CCS Application. DHS submits the completed TCA Pending Referral packet to MSDE for processing. Submission of the completed referral by DHS expedites the approval or denial process from 30 days to three business days, due to DHS verifying documentation required to approve the customer for TCA benefits. MSDE has been able to streamline the CCS Application process for the TCA approved customer due to DHS completing the referral and based upon MSDE's inquiry access to DHS' eligibility system that enables MSDE to validate that the customer has been approved for TCA. As DHS expands inquiry access to MSDE within DHS's eligibility system, MSDE will be able to determine if further reduction in documentation needed to complete CCS eligibility can be achieved.

Maryland Easy Enrollment Program: MHBE, the Office of the Comptroller, and MDH have collaborated to implement the Maryland Easy Enrollment program, through which uninsured Maryland tax filers can check a box on their state tax return in order to receive assistance enrolling in health care coverage. The program is now in its second year of implementation. In 2021, more than 27,000 eligible individuals "checked the box" to indicate interest in gaining coverage, of which 11% went on to enroll in coverage to date.

**PLANNED ACTIONS TO SIMPLIFY APPLICATIONS TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT
OF INFORMATION REQUIRED AND LIMIT DOCUMENTATION**

Below are planned projects supporting simplified application/enrollment processes and coordinated eligibility. Based on current planning, target completion dates are listed below, which are contingent upon funding and other dependencies.

Planned Project	Description	Target Completion Date
“Ex parte” Medicaid recertification	Automatically assess Medicaid recipients for recertification utilizing electronic sources (to not require completion of a reapplication form by customers)	Winter 2022
Integration with Maryland Health Connection (MHC) to support “No Wrong Door” Medicaid transfers	System integration to automatically transfer applicants and recipients between MHC (MAGI-based Medicaid eligibility and Children Health Insurance Program (CHIP)) and E&E (non-MAGI-based Medicaid eligibility). Customers will no longer need to reapply using two separate systems to be evaluated for all categories of Maryland Medicaid.	Fall 2022
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) integration to support Categorical Eligibility	System integration to support categorical LIHEAP eligibility determinations, e.g. for SNAP recipients	Fall 2022
Common Customer Intake: Assessment	An optional online assessment to refer customers to relevant programs and pre-populate applications	Winter 2022

BARRIERS TO SIMPLIFYING OR COORDINATING APPLICATION PROCESSES

Applications and eligibility determination processes for most DHS-administered programs must adhere to federal statutes and regulations that vary by program. For example, 7 CFR 273.2(b) outlines requirements for SNAP applications. DHS continues to seek opportunities to simplify application and eligibility determination processes for administered programs within the confines of federal and state statutes and regulations.

In early 2020, DHS and the Office of the Comptroller researched the possibility of data matching to evaluate the effectiveness of EITC outreach efforts. Under Maryland law, the Comptroller of Maryland is prohibited from disclosing tax information to DHS.

MHBE, MDH, and the Office of the Comptroller continue to collaborate on opportunities to streamline enrolling in coverage through the Easy Enrollment program. Current federal law presents two hurdles to fully simplifying enrollment through the program. First, enrollees through

MHC are required to attest to their citizenship status, information which is prohibited by state law from collection on the state tax return. Second, eligibility for Medicaid or financial assistance is based on current monthly or prospective annual income, which is not collected on the tax form. MHBE and MDH will continue to engage with their federal partners regarding potential flexibilities related to these items.

The MD THINK platform equips DHS to safely facilitate data sharing as needed to simplify benefit applications; however, the systems of other State agencies are not always compatible with our modern technology.