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# Lessons from the Work Support Strategies Initiative

## Coalition for Access and Opportunity Webinar

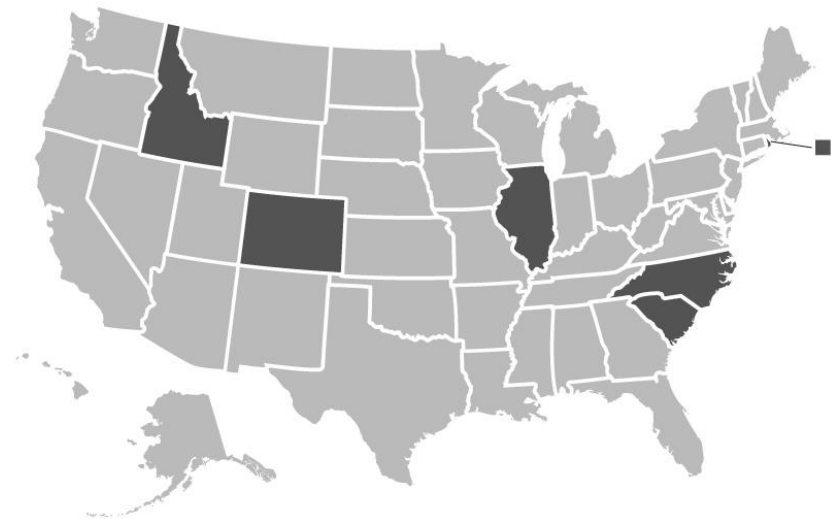
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# Coalition for Access and Opportunity

- Coalition for Access and Opportunity is a collaboration of advocates, researchers, and practitioners working to improve access to and better coordinate the range of federal income and work supports. Our effort is uniquely focused on coordination across programs.
- To join our list-serve and receive future webinar announcements, email [accessandopportunity-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:accessandopportunity-subscribe@yahogroups.com)
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  - Andrew Stettner, Single Stop USA, [astettner@singlestopusa.org](mailto:astettner@singlestopusa.org)

# Presentation Overview

- WSS Overview
  - Background
  - Lessons for Advocates
- Messages from Advocates:  
*Building Relationships and Getting Involved*
  - Laurie Harvey, CWEE Colorado
  - Stephanie Geller, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT



# WHAT IS WSS?



Improve families' well-being by increasing enrollment in the full package of work supports.



Help states deliver benefits more effectively and efficiently.



Share lessons learned to inform state and federal policies.

# WSS NATIONAL TEAM

## FUNDERS



THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

JPMORGAN CHASE & Co.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT & EVALUATION



## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



# THE STATES

Colorado

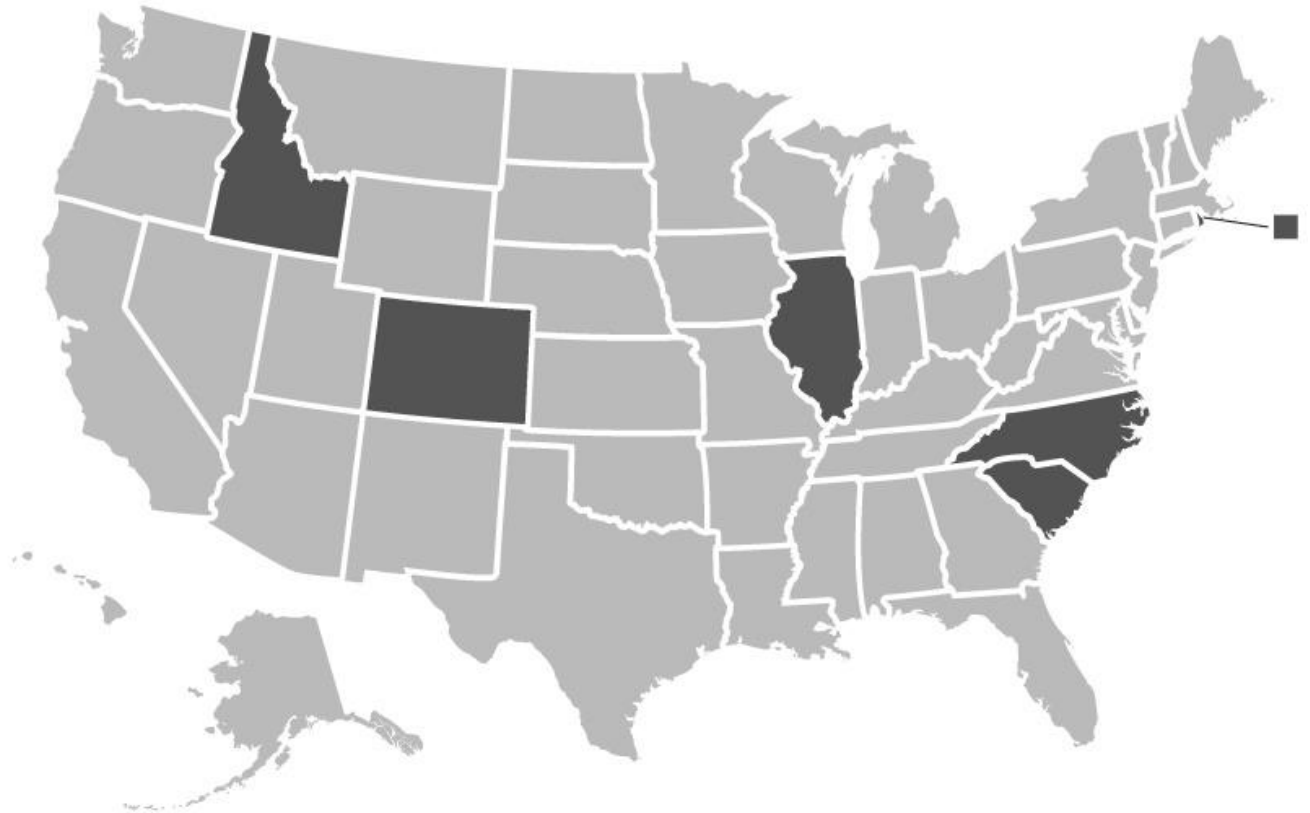
Idaho

Illinois

North Carolina

South Carolina

Rhode Island

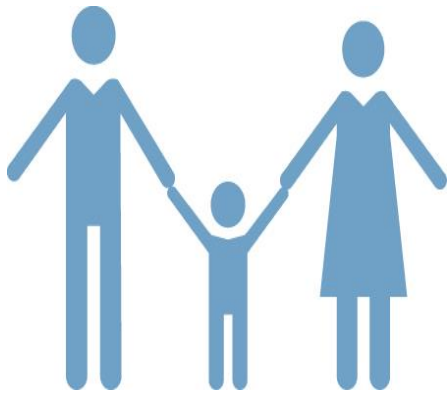


# DATA: Many people don't get what they are eligible for.

- 35% of eligible parents do not receive Medicaid/CHIP.
- 35% of eligible working poor families do not receive SNAP.
- Child care subsidies (capped dollars) reach about 30% of eligible families.
- Even fewer get continuous coverage, because families “churn.”
- Very few get the whole package.
- Participation rates vary greatly by state.

# Why WSS?

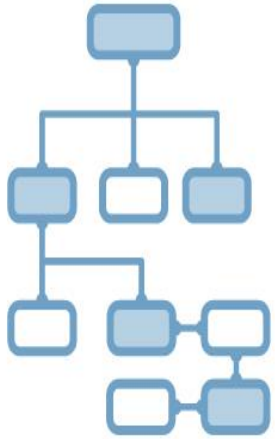
## Responsive Government is a widely shared value



- Work supports can help low-income families meet needs, improve outcomes, and stabilize work.
- Yet many families do not receive the full package of benefits.
- State policy, processes, systems are part of the barrier.
- Barriers for families also hinder agency efficiency.



# State Activities



**Business processes**



**Policy**



**Technology & Information systems**



**Data Analysis & Use**



**Management & Communication**

# Meet Families Needs

- Families do not exist in silos. Both health and human services are essential.
  - Health advocates must learn human services.
  - Advocates in poverty and human services must understand health.
- Families need access to the full package of work supports.

# Partner with State Agencies

- Efficiency and effectiveness in government is a shared value across states.
- States face similar challenges to making change.
- States are inspired by one another.
- It is important that direct services organizations work together.



# Facilitate Learning

- Site visits and peer-to-peer exchanges between states are valuable learning experiences.
- Engagement and discussion spur change in states.
- Take advantage of conferences and other learning opportunities.

# Increasing Access and Program Integration

- Offer multi-benefit applications.
- Reduce duplication by sharing data across programs.
- Reduce the length and complexity of applications.
- Pay attention to barriers customers face at redetermination as well as new applications and work to reduce churn.
- Align redetermination dates across programs.

# Express Lane Eligibility

- Use SNAP information to “express” enroll customers into Medicaid.
- Use SNAP income information for customers applying for child care.
- Automatically re-enrolling customers: use electronic data match to verify that some customers’ information has not changed.

# Ask for DATA

- Use data to hold agencies accountable to offering the full package of benefits. Ask for more than just SNAP timeliness data.
  - Cross program participation data
  - Percent of customer receiving same-day service
  - Customer wait times
- Know what the data means in terms of impact on customers.
- Stay vigilant: continually review data, set goals, review again, revise and enhance goals.

# In the midst of ACA Opportunities and Challenges...

## *Opportunities*

- States can use the 90-10 and cost allocation match to build integrated systems.
- Refresh policy knowledge and implement new ways of doing business.
- Opportunity to improve human services as well as health access.

*Implementation has challenges, and we should be paying attention.*

- Deadlines mean extraordinary intensity.
- New technology + weak or inconsistent business processes = unpredictable failures along the way.
  - Tech lessons take a lot of development and time.
- May uncover large needs for staff training at front-line, supervisory, management, policy levels.
- Participants losing access to services can be an unintended consequence of changing systems.



# Laurie Harvey



- Executive Director at Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE), Denver, Colorado
- Background/Involvement with WSS
  - Involved with advocacy and policy concerning workforce and poverty for over 25 years with state and counties
  - Member of the WSS Coordinating Committee (working with efforts since 2011)
  - Member of AFDC coalition, All Families Deserve a Chance – Advocating for interests of vulnerable/low income individuals and families

# Building a Strong Relationship with the State is Key

- AFDC Coalition brings a diverse perspective of advocacy and direct service organizations working together as partners.
- Colorado is 1 of 13 states that devolve the administration of TANF to the counties. State Dept. of HS has a supervisory role only.
- Coalition has a strong voice: state agencies attend their meetings or events and members participate in rules committees.
- Voice allows them to bring honest debate about issues that are harming customers.
- We work across silos with health and human services advocating together. AFDC represents housing, health, homeless, disabled, food, employment, etc.

# Make time for policy and advocacy

- Direct service organizations may find it hard to make time or staff available for meetings with the state or policy/data analysis.
- There is a high return on that investment for customers.
- Policy and advocacy work take time but is as important as fundraising and program development.



- Learning from the state while teaching them
- Poverty Reduction/Economic Opportunity Legislative Task Force identified bills and issues over the past several years.

# Accomplishments and Challenges

- *WSS accomplishments:* application reduced from 26 to 8 pages; processing timeliness for new and ongoing applications; aligned redeterminations across program.
- WSS developed integrated training and planning, including CBO's for technology and other new initiatives.



- *Challenges:* State human services computer system has ongoing challenges. Need to understand both sides, can't completely scrap the system.

# Stephanie Geller



- Policy Analyst at Kids Count, Rhode Island
- Involvement with WSS
  - Saw WSS application and sent it to the state
  - Had been working with state before WSS, and bringing ideas from other states implementing online apps
  - Helped write the proposal for WSS
  - Partnered with Economic Progress Institute on WSS work



# Advisory Groups

- New advisory groups
  - WSS Leadership Team
  - WSS Advisory Team
- Pre-existing advisory groups
  - RI Works Advisory Committee
  - SNAP Advisory Committee
  - Child Care Community Exchange
  - Children and Family Consumer Advisory Committee (Health)
  - Child Support Advisory Committee

# Working under Multiple Administrations

- WSS' message resonated across administrations
- Advisory council that worked with state agencies' career professionals
  - Working with career professionals, not only appointed people, provides continuity when administrations change.
  - WSS team was consistent across the administrations.

# Keys to Maintaining Good Relationships

*Do more than just finding things wrong*

- Express critique but try to work from the inside.
- Help state publicize the good things they are doing.
- Translate ideas into legislative proposals
  - Some may be introduced by the state and others may make sense coming from an outside entity.
- Help states identify opportunities to receive funding and technical assistance like WSS.



# Keys to Maintaining Good Relationships

- Helped form an advisory group of advocates
  - Variety of voices need to be at the table
  - Brought voices from direct services
  - Helped connect existing advisory bodies to this work



- Made sure the voices of people on the ground informed state choices

# Policy Committee

- Differentiated between state and federal policy to identify opportunities for change on the local level.
- Identified federal change, state change, legislative change, rule change or practice change.
- Reviewed and commented on new paper and online application.

# Data Committee

- Reviewed performance data
- Used data to identify needed changes
- Used data to evaluate effectiveness of changes made (unintended consequences)
- *Addressed churn*
  - Families experience difficulty not only gaining initial access to benefits but in keeping them
  - Creates administrative burden for families state workers

# Business Process Committee

- Examined current “as is” process
- Developed ideas for better processes
  - Moved to a more efficient task-based system
  - Developed a recertification unit
  - Redesigned lobbies

# Working Across Programs is Powerful

- Lots of attention on health, how do you make sure human services integration is part of that conversation?
  - Encourage state to take advantage of funding opportunities to make changes to human service systems when also working on health
  - Don't take your eye off the ball during implementation
  - Look out for unintended negative consequences and advocate for needs of those left behind
- Advocacy to make sure there was a plan to bring all human services programs into the system.
  - This means there is a period where some programs are not available in the new portal/system but health is already in the new system.

# The Highlights

- Build relationships with a balanced approach combining honest critique and support.
- Be active in technology reform
  - Ask state agencies for training.
  - Help families understand new technology to ensure they don't lose benefits.
- Implement a long-term data strategy
  - Review data, plan and implement improvements and REPEAT.
- Connect state staff with development opportunities

# Work Across Silos

- Direct services organizations should make time for policy and advocacy.
  - State policy/practice change can address issues for thousands, instead of one family at a time.
  - Direct service providers are best positioned to alert state agencies and other advocates of issues that customers facing.
- Policy/advocacy, direct services and state agency working together across siloes is as important as integrating across programs like SNAP, Medicaid, child care, and TANF.

# Q&A

- Please submit your questions through the tool on your screen.
- If we are unable to get to your question during the webinar, we will address it in a follow up Q&A document that will be sent out.



# For more information

## **Work Support Strategies**

<http://www.urban.org/worksupport/>

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