# Improving SNAP and Medicaid Access: SNAP Renewals

**Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**

**CLASP** — Policy solutions that work for low-income people

SNAP clients must periodically complete a renewal (an interim report and/or recertification) to continue receiving benefits. When agencies successfully complete renewals, clients receive accurate benefits without interruption. When an agency does not complete the renewal, clients lose benefits and those who lost benefits for a *procedural* reason (for example, they didn't submit paperwork or complete a required interview) may need to re-apply, which creates more work for agency staff.

Most SNAP households are certified for six or 12 months (these time frames may be longer for elderly/disabled households, or shorter for able-bodied adults without dependents, or ABAWDs) before the state must reassess eligibility through a recertification. If the household is certified for 12 months, an interim report is usually due after six months. Agencies process interim reports without an interview, whereas they generally must interview households yearly in conjunction with a recertification.

Although approaches will vary based on agency circumstances and system capabilities, agencies have implemented several strategies to minimize the number of procedure-related denials and reduce the burden on clients and agency staff.

## Minimizing Procedural Denials and Increasing the Renewal Completion Rate

For all renewals, to create program efficiencies agencies can:

- Notify clients that they are due for a renewal through texts and reminder calls in addition to mail and/or e-notices.

- Make sure notices are written in easily understood plain language and in the client's preferred language and provide clear instructions to clients on what steps they need to take to renew their eligibility.

- Provide clients with alternatives to traditional paper forms and office visits for completing their renewals:

    › Online portals for clients to fill out renewals or upload forms and verification documents.

    › Options that allow clients to complete their renewal over the phone, using a telephonic signature.

- Avoid requesting verification of eligibility factors that haven't changed.

- Use electronic data sources where available to verify information.

At the SNAP *interim report* stage:

- Limit the questions asked. The agency only needs to ask if the household has had a:

    › Change of more than $100/month in unearned income;

> Change in wage rate/salary or change between part-time/full-time status; OR a change of more than $100/month in earned income;

> Change in household composition;

> Change in residence and shelter costs; and

> If an ABAWD subject to the time limit has a change in work hours to below 20 hours per week.

- Pre-populate the interim report form with existing information in the case file, such as the names of household members and current income so the client can more accurately report if there has been a change.

- Automate processing of interim reports when clients report no changes.

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## State Spotlight

### New Jersey Automated Processing of SNAP Interim Reporting Forms (IRFs)

The New Jersey Division of Family Development recently found that its interim report process was error prone and led to eligible households losing their eligibility because their IRFs were not processed. The state agency redesigned its form and process for IRFs to get better results for families and to reduce workload created by unnecessary applications from families that had lost benefits. It developed a simpler form with responses that could be read by system software and used barcoding for automated indexing in the electronic document management system. The system automatically detects IRFs that report no changes in circumstances — over 2/3 of IRFs — and processes those without caseworker intervention. The remaining IRFs with changes reported are forwarded electronically to county offices for processing. The state realized significant reductions in churn and quality control errors, along with improved customer service.

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At the SNAP *recertification* stage:

- Increase the completion rate of interviews at recertification through:

  > Attempting to reach the client through cold calling before scheduling an interview.

  > Allowing clients to call at their convenience to complete the interview.

  > Calling clients at the scheduled interview time even if they have not returned their recertification form. In those calls, attempt to conduct the interview and remind the client that they need to send in their recertification form (or complete it over the phone).

- Minimize verification requests by verifying changes only when required (using electronic sources where available):

  > Verify change in income if change in source, or change in income is greater than $100/month;

  > Verify medical expenses if previously unreported or changed by more than $25/month; and

  > Verify work hours for ABAWDs who are subject to time limit.

- Avoid open-ended questions on forms, like "Anything else you want to tell us?", that expand the scope of reportable changes. Such questions cause more work, can be problematic for quality control reviews, and are better handled during an interview.

- Number (and percent) of cases closed each month at interim report for:

  › Interim reports not submitted and those received but not processed by the deadline.

  › Verification documents not submitted and those received but not processed by the deadline.

  › Of these, number of clients whose case is reopened or who reapply within a short period of time (e.g., within three months).

- Number (and percent) of cases closed each month at redetermination for:

  › Redetermination forms not submitted and those received but not processed by the deadline.

  › Interviews not completed.

  › Verification documents not submitted and those received but not processed by the deadline.

  › Of these, number of clients who reapply for SNAP within a short period of time (e.g., within three months).

- Number (and percent) of interim reports returned each month with no changes reported.

## For More Information:

- Code of Federal Regulations, 7 CFR §273.12 and §273.14.

- Lessons Churned: Measuring the Impact of Churn in Health and Human Services Programs on Participants and State and Local Agencies, CBPP, March 20, 2015.

- Improving Customer Service in Health and Human Services Through Technology, CBPP, August 23, 2018.