ES PROGRAM COMMITTEE

February 8, 2023

**FNS**

Emergency allotments – last issuance will be this month, issued between 2/22 through 3/1. Ending per the Federal government. In March 2023, benefit levels will return to amount recipient is eligible. No longer a transition month per USDA guidance. Catch up benefits will be issued if benefits are retroactively approved through 2/23. Federal PHE ends 5/11/2023.

Why are benefits ending? Federal government has made decision to end 2/23. Neither DHHS nor local counties have control over this change. If questions come from clients about their ongoing benefit amount, encourage them to view EBTEdge. Normal supplements are issued first, and the emergency allotments are issued the 22nd of the month and after.

Emergency allotments not subject to fair hearings but if clients believe benefits are incorrect can request a fair hearing. Press release issued January 12th. General notices posted. In the process of mailing general notices to households in batches over the next few weeks. Two virtual FNS Security Summits planned for 3/2/23 from 1-4 and 3/3/23 from 9-12.

Encourage counties to share press releases, share information on social media, attend stakeholder meetings, and reach out to county resources such as food banks.

Card Skimming – uptick is occurring. Replacement of stolen EBT benefits with federal funds is available due to cloning/card skimming and other fraudulent methods such as phone calls, text messaging mimicking official state agency messages. Time period of replacement will be 10/1/22 through 9-30-24.

During interim, USDA is required to come up with procedures to address security of EBT cards and card skimming.

Will replace amount lost/stolen or an amount equal to 2 months of allotments immediately prior to stolen date. Does not include P-EBT. Can include regular, emergency and D SNAP. Requires a signed statement and up to 2 replacements between October 1 and September 30 of each year until 9/2024. Must include a hearing process for denied replacements. Counties should encourage recipients to change pins and be aware when using card to look for anything suspicious. Can also block out of state or online transactions if wanted. Can also freeze EBT card.

Counties and recipients encouraged to report card skimming to law enforcement, especially trends with certain retailers.

**\*\*Waiting for state plan and once approved guidance will be issued on how to replace.**

Update on Waivers (see PowerPoint that was shared)

Approved through 3/31 – certification periods, waving the interview, allowing verbal attestation for telephonic signatures, temporarily suspension of claims, waivers for hearings. Several waivers will continue 30 days past PHE ending which would be through 6/11 – refer to PowerPoint.

USDA is allowing states to request waivers past PHE ending, from 6/1/2023 to May 31, 2024. First is waiving interviews and 2nd is alternative to telephonic signatures by using verbal attestation. Will request these.

P-EBT approved through 2023 for school and childcare, includes virtual and home schools. 2023 Summer Plan will be submitted shortly, reduced amount for students. There will be a state option for P-EBT in 2024 but funding would switch to 50% state and 50% federal instead of 100% federal. Would include students, childcare, virtual and homeschool. DCDL being worked on.

**SNAP – ARPA Update**

e-Notices 12/17/22, text messaging coming 4/28/23, Dashboards that will be effective at looking at workloads. 6 expected beginning April through September. Online COC and Reviews coming by 9/30/23 (proposal).

**Energy**

Portal – extended time for vendors to sign up for direct deposit through 2/10/23. After this Friday, vendors can next sign up in July. Issue with Duke Energy on the banking side, working with the state to resolve and post to accounts. Counties must enter full and accurate account numbers in NC Fast as vendors cannot identify payments with names alone.

Vendors are reporting they have not received payments, but county sees that payments have been issued. Encourage vendors to reach out to FIS helpdesk. FIS # 1-800-894-0050. We cannot see that payments were posted to vendor accounts, but FIS can. Next payment will issue 2/15, then 3/1, then 3/15, etc.

If county writes a check and issues a benefit, must update in NC Fast. Make sure this is completed so no issues at the end of the federal fiscal year. If not recorded in NC Fast, counties will have to do clean-up. Check date cannot be before create date of the payment request. Check recorded date is date the user enters the check information. Comments are required when recording and editing check details.

Reallocations in progress. Will move money into county buckets first then look at reallocations. More counties requesting additional funds than counties willing to give up funds. Applications up 5% over last year. Potential for additional funds but unknown amount or timeframe.

**TANF**

Payment Skimming – received notice of 3 cases where TANF benefits have skimmed from EBT card. Reached out for guidance, do not have a process yet and no timeline. Encourage counties to share same safeguards as FNS recommends. Happening in other states.

**DCDEE**

Non-Smart Start spending has flexibility, can do revisions and reallocations. Asking counties to work waiting lists as much as possible and not necessary to start one. Knows slots are challenging and workforce is an issue. As much as able, work down waiting lists. Let families find a provider later – have them approved and ready so they do not have to wait and go through the eligibility process. Working on guidance in writing around spending for Non-Smart Start.

Smart Start - not as much flexibility and cannot overspend. Wants to get overspending down as much as possible as year comes to an end. If you are overspending, work with consultant to get a plan.

Retroactive market increases implemented. Providers had 90 days after the effective date to update private rates. January 31, 2023 was the deadline. Last underpayment batch completed.

May see an uptick in subsidy applications as PHE ends. May allow a grace period for recertifications to offset workload. Mixed feedback from last time. Asked for feedback on should we allow a grace period and if so, what timeframe? Last time gave 20 days. Send feedback up through committee.

**DHB**

Tailored Plan update – FAQ available in county playbook this morning. PCP choice period now through 2/27. Can contact tailored plan to contact during this timeframe. NEMT scheduling can begin 2/22 for 4/1.

NCHC sunset as of 3/31. Move has been made to ongoing cases.

Consolidated Appropriations Act:

Decouples continuous coverage as of 4/1/2023. Added in reporting requirements, redetermination requirements and contacting from more than one modality prior to termination.

Reduces Covid-19 enhanced FMAP. Requires one-year continuous coverage for Medicaid and CHIP (no change) and extends postpartum coverage permanently.

Must report to HHS monthly, publicly available. State responsibility to submit.

PHE Update – announcement received 1/30, set to end 5/11. Covid coverage will not end 4/1, tied to federal PHE.

2023 Omnibus Bill – allows termination as early as 4/1. First terminations will be effective 7/1. Unwinding from 4/1/23 to 6/30/24. Using an age-based approach to continuous coverage. County guidance forthcoming. April 1st – react to changes that would result in a termination. 4 live webinars on completing recertifications in NC Fast, to be held in March. Will include basic instructions, details on new flexibilities, important guidelines. Training will be recorded and posted on NC Fast gateway. Q&T document will be available. A dedicated email address will be created for questions. Questions will be answered to sender and updated to the FAQ.

Returned Mail Condition: states must make “good-faith effort” to contact an individual using more than one modality when returned mail received. Must attempt to obtain up to date addresses and contact information (phone numbers, emails). During unwinding, must contact using more than one modality – phone call, email, text messages, forwarding address on mail.

Counties should be working PARIS matches, death reports, SSI reports, CIC reports and Returned Mail Reports.

Can use NCOA or USPS for returned mail to update addresses without additional confirmation from beneficiary. Reasonable compatibility has been updated from 10% to 20%. STP recertification statewide in place as of January. Working on a policy update cases with no AVS data returned within 7 days – can complete without requesting additional information as no change in resources. Will update case selection for STP for MAGI.

Working on renewals based on SNAP income. NC Fast will identify MAGI cases receiving SNAP and look at gross income, comparing to MAGI. If at/under limits, will automatically give a new 12-month period. Will increase number that go through STP without caseworker touching them. Target date 4/23, working on a letter.

Working on MAGI application STP for April.

Change in policy coming – only requires 1 form of residency verification instead of 2. Will reduce processing time. Awaiting CMS guidance.

Mandatory to generate all notices in NC Fast including the DSS-8110. Excludes DHB-5002 and DHB-5003 but must be uploaded in NC Fast.

Working on Traditional allowing 30-days for requests for information. Guidance to come.

Additional State Updates:

SA – changes surrounding Enhanced Rate and SA-IH unfolding, will be able to share details at the next meeting.