



## NATIONAL ELIGIBILITY WORKERS ASSOCIATION: PROFESSIONALS ASSOCIATED THROUGH HUMAN SERVICES

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### **FNS-SNAP Team/NEW: PATHS Teleconference**

**The December 7, 2011** teleconference with the FNS-SNAP Team was a smashing success with lively interaction between the SNAP team and NEW: PATHS participants. Below is a synopsis of the call.

#### **Introductions**

Angela Kline, Chief, Certification Policy Branch introduced the members of the SNAP team making presentations.

Patrick Waldron, NEW: PATHS Board of Directors, asked participants to identify the locations they were calling from. Members who identified themselves hailed from counties in California, Minnesota, North Carolina, North Dakota, Virginia, and Wyoming.

#### **Hunger Champions**

Walter Zaumseil talked about the Hunger Champions competition – there were over 80 nominations from advocacy groups and others for offices providing exemplary service to SNAP applicants and participants. Representatives from FNS, NEW: PATHS, APhSA, FRAC, and World Hunger Year served on the evaluation panel. In October, FNS announced four Gold Level winners and 10 Silver Level winners, with the rest receiving Bronze level awards. Also there was a special category recognizing the efforts of local agencies operating the Disaster-SNAP during a long season of floods and storms. Click on the following link for further details:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP/outreach/coalition/hunger-champions\\_11.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/SNAP/outreach/coalition/hunger-champions_11.pdf)

#### **Promising Practices/Waivers**

Patrick Lucrezio showcased several recently approved waivers which were thought to improve program access and reduce the administrative burden on eligibility workers:

Waiver allows States to postpone the interview for expedited service if the identity of the applicant can be verified through State records. The waiver has an evaluation component which includes impact on program integrity.

Waiver allows States to approve applications from elderly or disabled households without earnings without conducting an interview. The State cannot deny the application without contacting the household.

Waiver allows States to offer the option of households receiving electronic notices of case actions through a secure web site in lieu of receiving notices through the mail.

Waiver allows States to reinstate households whose case closed due to failure to submit a

required periodic report. No application is required when households submit the required information; however, benefits are prorated from the date the information is provided. Waiver allows “on-demand” scheduling of interviews. In lieu of scheduling a definite time/date for a telephone interview, the applicant is given a 7 to 14 day window to call in and have their telephone interview. The waiver allows working households to have better access to the interview process.

We will obtain copies of examples of these waivers and post them on the NEW: PATHS web site.

### **Status of Issued and Proposed Regulations.**

Jessica Dziengowski reported that FNS had issued a number of proposed rules in the Spring and Fall of this year. Jessica discussed four that had significant impact for eligibility workers:

- Eligibility, Certification, and Employment and Training provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill – issued May 4, 2011; comment period closed July 5, 2011
- Clarification of Eligibility of Fleeing Felons – issued August 19, 2011; comment period ended October 17, 2011
- Major changes in program design and management evaluation systems – issued May 3, 2011; comment period ended July 5, 2011
- Major System Failures – issued August 18; comment period ended October 18, 2011

The SNAP team is currently evaluating the public comments and preparing final regulations. You can view the actual comments submitted by visiting Regulations.Gov, choosing “proposed rule” and using a key work (for example, “Fleeing Felon”) to find the comments folder for the rule you want to research.

### **Prisoner Re-Entry Task Force**

Stephanie Davis talked about the Prisoner Re-Entry Task Force led by the Justice Department. The purpose of the task force is to explore policies and means of easing the entry of former offenders into society. FNS is expanding the information available on line regarding the life-time ban on drug felons participating in SNAP. The SNAP law provides an option for States to eliminate or modify this ban. SNAP will be collecting more detailed information on the way certain States have modified the ban. Click on the link below and see page 19 of the State Options Report, Ninth Edition:  
[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/Support/State\\_Options/9-State\\_Options.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/rules/Memo/Support/State_Options/9-State_Options.pdf)

### **Disaster Wrap-Up**

MaryRose Conway gave a short description of the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP), including the prerequisite issuance of a FEMA disaster declaration for the jurisdiction. This was a busy year natural disaster-wise – the season started in April with tornados in the Mid-West and Southeast and ended up in November with Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee striking the Northeast. All told, FNS approved 23 D-SNAP operations in 16 States. In addition, FNS approved 59 ancillary waivers in 24 States to provide administrative relief in the wake of these natural disasters. For example, FNS approved waivers to allow States to extend reporting time frames in disaster areas, to provide for early issuance of benefits before the storm hit, to allow SNAP recipients to purchase hot food, to allow mass replacement for destroyed food (based on a

percentage of loss) and early expungement (90 days) of D-SNAP benefits.

## **Program Integrity Issues**

Christine Daffen talked about several policy issuances relating to program integrity:

Policy clarification that "intent to traffic" such as offering benefits for sale on internet sites may be considered an Intentional Program Violation. Craig's List is now cooperating in preventing such abuse by banning such offers on their site.

Policy clarification encouraging States to use EBT data to link SNAP recipients to retail grocery stores that FNS has disqualified based on trafficking and other violations.

Letter encouraging States to match caseloads with bordering States to deter duplicate participation. FNS is currently testing a clearinghouse approach with several neighboring States in one region.

One State is testing procedures for tracking recipients who request multiple EBT card replacements.

## **Quality Control**

Laura Tapia reported that, thanks to the hard work of eligibility workers everywhere, the latest national error rate is the lowest on record. Laura also reminded participants to view the latest negative action review procedures. The language used on notices advising applicants and recipients of negative actions must match the actual action taken. There is a limited opportunity to correct improperly issued notices and avoid an invalid negative action finding.

### **Program Design Branch Issues**

Jackie Windfieldt talked about some Program Design Branch issues:

Currently, 12 States have approval to operate demonstration projects to test a standard medical deduction. Under the demonstration waiver authority, an elderly or disabled household member may households receive a standard medical deduction if the medical expenses exceed \$35 per month. The waiver allows the household to dispense with verification of medical expenses. The State must "pay" for the standard medical deduction by finding cost savings in another program area, such as reducing the normal standard deduction or the Standard Utility Allowance by a minimal amount for all households.

Starting in Fiscal Year 2013, FNS will start to measure timeliness of recertifications through the QC sample. A few States are currently testing procedures during the current sampling year.

FNS has revised the requirements for direct certification of children for the National School Lunch program. Children in households eligible for SNAP but receiving zero benefits no longer qualify for direct certification. Also, the "letter method", that is, requiring households to present an eligibility document to local school lunch program authorities, is no longer acceptable. States must implement an automated method for direct certification.

## **Discussion Issues**

After the presentation by the SNAP team members, the NEW: PATHS members were invited to dialog about problems they faced in their day-to-day duties. Several questions and concerns surfaced:

Participation in SNAP is at all-time levels. Is there any plan for additional stimulus funding to help States cover the increased administrative expenses? The SNAP team advised that there was no additional assistance in the offing.

There was concern that plans for implementing the new health care reform law seemed to be making it more and more difficult to coordinate definitions and policies between the medical assistance programs and SNAP. The SNAP team is attempting to coordinate as much as possible with CMS on these issues.

Participants were concerned about the proper procedures for processing applications received from incarcerated individuals prior to their release. Much depends on the State's use of available waivers and the degree of coordination between State parole authorities and the local human services agency. Participants would like to see FNS issue detailed guidance on this subject. The SNAP team will consider issuing additional guidance.

Participants voiced some concern about dealing with the transition from a paper-based application system to an on-line system coupled with telephone interviews in a service center environment. There was concern that the new procedures slowed, rather than improved application processing time frames. The SNAP team agreed to look into the situation