Principles for an Effective ACCESS Nebraska System

Over the last several years, the Department of Health and Human Services (Department) has taken steps to modernize enrollment and eligibility determinations in economic assistance and Medicaid programs, with goals related to efficiency, accuracy and responsiveness. This initiative, called *ACCESS Nebraska*, completely altered the way client cases are managed and moved towards a focus on use of technology and fewer caseworkers.

Since its creation, clients have experienced many problems with the system, including lost documents, long call wait times, and the untimely processing of benefit applications. Recently, the system was further changed by splitting apart medical assistance and economic assistance administration, resulting in many clients now facing two separate systems to navigate

With the consistent problems with the system, as well as the new hurdle of two separate systems to navigate, we offer the following principles that, if pursued, would help ensure system works effectively today and for years to come.

Establish a long-term vision for the ACCESS Nebraska system and measure accomplishments over time

- Establish a clear and public plan for creating an effective and efficient system in the long-term.

- Establish a clear and public plan on near-term improvements to the system with staffing and customer service in mind.

- Measure and publish important indicators, including but not limited to:

  - Eligibility systems (client participation rates, case dispositions, and case overlaps)

  - Document management (number of documents, tasks, pends, and actions taken)

  - Clients (interview time elapsed, case "touches," churning)

  - Call Centers (volume, waits, busy signals, call duration, common questions, resolution of task/issue)

  - Online applications (error rates, duration to complete, use)

(continued)

Ensure acquiring and maintaining eligibility for services is simple, streamlined, and efficient

- Establish "no wrong door" integration so that wherever a client encounters the system they are linked to the full set of services for which they are eligible. For example, if a client applies for food assistance they should also be able to apply for medical assistance without having to fill out a new or separate application (and visa versa). At least 18 states are pursuing this concept.

- Ensure there are many different methods to easily access the system (phone, in-person) without delay or difficulty. For example, we can retain a sufficient number of workers in local offices to handle in-person client assistance, and we can ensure the call centers are sufficiently staffed to meet client demand.

- Streamline the application and verification processes to make things more efficient for both clients and workers, as proposed in LB 309.[1] For example, we can automatically enroll children in medical coverage using SNAP information, share more information across programs, and utilize databases to verify information. Additionally, we can align eligibility factors in programs like child care assistance or energy assistance, and we can establish longer eligibility periods for programs in order to reduce the paperwork burden on clients and workers, as contemplated in LB 430.[2]

- Guarantee client information is automatically shared across programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid (to the greatest extent permitted under law) so that the same information is not requested or processed twice. For example, we could seek a waiver to allow SNAP client information to automatically be forwarded to the medical assistance program with a flag that identifies them as income eligible with no need for additional verification of income.

- Ensure that information provided to clients is timely, accurate, linguistically appropriate, and that there is a clear process for clients to resolve issues they encounter with the system. For example, the Department could re-establish a system advocate program for clients to contact with problems or questions.

Ensure ACCESS Nebraska staff is equipped and prepared to provide excellent customer service

- Re-establish a culture of service by emphasizing a client-centered focus among leadership and staff.

- Increase staffing to sufficient levels in order to manage caseloads in an effective and efficient manner.

- Provide training sufficient to ensure work is accurate.

- Ensure necessary documents/verifications are transmitted without loss or delay.

- Provide necessary tools and technology to be successful, including professional development.

- Retain staff by providing leadership training, independence, and preventing burnout.

Notes

[1] *See* Legislative Bill 309 (2013).
[2] *See* Legislative Bill 430 (2013), which would align the resource test in ADC, child care, and heating assistance with SNAP.