SNAP Payment Accuracy: Effective Practices, Promising Initiatives, and Helpful Resources

States are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by issuing accurate benefits to eligible households. In August 2023, FNA invited states to participate in listening sessions focused on understanding states' experiences with payment accuracy, including areas for improvement, training and support, and state-led initiatives. The following is a summary of the valuable information contributed by participating states.

Effective Practices and Innovative Strategies

Team collaboration and regular communication

Many states have recently implemented initiatives to collaborate across offices within their SNAP agencies to share information and break down bureaucratic silos. These meetings or working groups focus on aligning policy and strategy to improve payment accuracy. Examples include:

- *In one state SNAP agency, representatives from policy, systems, training, operations, and quality control(QC) units meet monthly to discuss current issues related to SNAP payment accuracy.*
- *Other states conduct discussions among similar groups to focus on trends in payment error rates, determine root causes of payment errors, create guidance and training to address errors, and develop corrective action plans.*
- *A county-administered state has a working group, referred to as a payment accuracy collaborative, that consists of the deputy and assistant deputy directors of the state department of human services, as well as QC and monitoring staff. The group develops specific strategies, outlines best practices, and provides training opportunities for county offices.*

Staff and supervisor training

States repeatedly brought up ongoing training, in addition to new-hire training, as a successful strategy for improving payment accuracy. Approaches used by states include:

- *Targeted trainings that include case examples, mock interviews, and interactive games, and focus on individual error elements with the highest dollars in error, such as wages and salaries and shelter and utilities.*
- *Short training videos that focus on error trends.*
- *Monthly emails that highlight different causes of common payment errors and steps to take to avoid those errors.*
- *A website that provides resources and supports information sharing and collaboration between supervisors.*

Analyses and tools

Root cause analyses

Many states regularly conduct root cause analyses to find the reasons for payment errors, and other states are beginning to implement root cause analysis.

- *One state's process includes identifying data elements associated with payment errors, sampling some cases for review, and talking with frontline workers to determine how errors occurred.*
- *One state is reviewing monthly QC data to identify the payment error types associated with the highest dollar errors. The state reviews impacted cases to learn how an error occurred and considers options for addressing the cause of the error—for example, clarifying policies, providing updated training, or sending workers a simple reminder email.*

Certification tools and checklists

Some States use manual or automated tools to reduce errors.

Factors impacting payment accuracy:

States described a number of competing factors impacting their ability to improve SNAP payment accuracy, including:

- **Unwinding from the public health emergency.** Ending the program flexibilities implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changing policies, readjusted operations, and case processing backlogs.
- **Staffing.** High staff turnover has meant loss of knowledge; new staff and supervisors need time to learn the intricacies of SNAP.
- **Application volume.** Applicants may submit multiple applications when they do not get timely feedback that their initial application was received. This leads to duplicate applications in the state's queue, increasing the backlog.
- **Systems and technology.** Data systems, whether older legacy systems or complex integrated systems, may be difficult to update.

- *Counties within one county-administered state use a pre-certification review tool to confirm if case information needs additional worker review before certifying a case.*
- *Another state has developed a pre-certification checklist, referred to as "2-4-Q", meaning two minutes for quality. This checklist reminds workers to confirm that all required steps have been completed before case certification.*
- *States also use error proofing tools that allow supervisors to review cases before certification to catch any mistakes and identify areas where more training is needed.*

Cross-state connections

States benefit by connecting with and learning from other states about efforts to improve payment accuracy.

- *Some states visited other states to observe their data systems and office processes, and to establish professional peer relationships.*

- *Several states also collaborate through relationships with their FNA regional office and professional organizations, like the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA).*

Promising Initiatives

States highlighted some initiatives that show promise for promoting payment accuracy.

Hiring and retaining staff

Multiple states have recently ***increased salaries*** to attract new employees and retain their current staff. States are also exploring alternatives for recruitment, with some ***opening positions statewide*** instead of limiting hiring to specific counties.

Training

States are seeing positive results from putting resources into ***strengthening and standardizing training*** and creating ***dedicated training teams***. One state ***developed new quick reference guides*** to answer common questions without needing to consult supervisors or more experienced staff. Other states also perform ***second-party reviews*** of cases processed by new staff before those cases are certified.

Helpful resources

Resources states find valuable in addressing payment accuracy include:

- **FNA training, technical assistance, toolkits, and policy guidance**. We provide training and technical assistance to states. Some FNA regional offices hold regular calls with their states. Additional program and policy information is available on the documents and resources page.
- **Peer support.** We can facilitate cross-state conversations and meetings to share strategies and resources, and support peer learning.

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