

Survey of USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) Program Case Management (Summary)

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program is designed to help participants gain skills, training, or experience to increase their ability to obtain regular employment. The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) required States to provide case management to all SNAP E&T participants. Some States and programs were already providing case management to participants, but their case management practices were not well documented.

Case management involves assessing participants' skills, interests, strengths, and challenges, and using this knowledge to inform an individualized plan for addressing barriers, developing more skills, and finding a job. In addition, case managers can use assessments to identify the support services participants need to complete E&T activities and succeed in a job. As part of the E&T program, State SNAP agencies are required to reimburse participants for reasonable expenses that directly relate to their participation, such as child care and transportation.

The purpose of this study is to help the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) better understand how States are implementing the SNAP E&T case management requirement. It also highlights promising practices and lessons learned that FNS can use to support States as they work to provide case management services.

Methods

In 2021, a self-administered web survey was sent to all 53 State agencies, including the 50 States, Washington, DC, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. Fifty-two of the 53 State SNAP agencies responded, for a 98-percent response rate.

The survey was directly administered to State agency administrators. Survey questions focused on State-level policy and guidance related to case management, assessment, and participant reimbursements. As a result, the survey yielded less information about case management implementation for States that lack policy or guidance on topics of interest or give discretion to counties and providers in how they implement case management.

Key Findings

- Case management is provided by a variety of types of providers, and most States provide guidance on the types of activities case management should include in its program.
- Almost all States require case managers to administer initial assessments to participants after referral to E&T, and most require case managers to use a specific tool.
- States offer a variety of participant reimbursements to E&T participants, including transportation assistance, work clothing or work equipment, and fees associated with tests, licensing, or credentialing.
- In response to the requirement for case management in the 2018 Farm Bill, two-thirds of States invested in staff training, and more than half added new E&T providers.

The survey was augmented with case studies in four States: Arkansas, Kentucky, New York (specifically, New York City), and Washington, DC. Site visit data included interviews with State SNAP and SNAP E&T staff, local SNAP office staff, and E&T provider staff, and virtual observations of case management meetings. The study team also collected aggregate administrative data and reviewed program documents to describe case management implementation in these locations.

Findings

Case management is provided by a variety of types of providers, and most States provide guidance on the types of activities case management should include in its program. Community-based organizations (CBOs) provide

case management as part of their E&T services in 73 percent of the States. Other common providers are Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) agencies or other U.S. Department of Labor-funded workforce programs (in 54 percent of States), community colleges (in 50 percent of States), and local SNAP offices (in 39 percent of States). Most States (71 percent) report that case management is provided to E&T participants by more than one type of provider.

Case managers conduct various activities with participants, but most States require them to provide participant reimbursements (92 percent), develop individualized plans (88 percent), conduct assessments (85 percent), refer participants to other support services (83 percent), motivate or support participants to engage in the program (83 percent), and coordinate with other service providers (81 percent).

Almost all States (51 States) require case managers to administer initial assessments to participants after referral to E&T, and 31 of these States require case managers to use a specific assessment tool. Most of the States (65 percent) that require case managers to use a specific assessment tool require them to use a background or needs assessment tool developed by the State or provider. Case managers may also administer other assessments to E&T participants after the initial assessment. Half of the States instruct case managers to provide additional assessments of needs and barriers, aptitude, or abilities.

Among States that have policy or guidance for how case managers should use assessment results, most direct case managers use the results when: developing individualized plans (97 percent), discussing with the participant about their service interests and needs (94 percent), identifying the programs or components a participant is eligible or qualified for (91 percent), and assessing the need for reimbursements or support services (78 percent).

States offer a variety of participant reimbursements to E&T participants, including transportation assistance (98 percent); uniforms, work or interview clothing, tools, or other work equipment (96 percent); and fees associated with tests, licensing, or credentialing (92 percent). Other commonly offered reimbursements include fees for

identification or other documentation, course tuition or fees, testing fees, and funds for child care.

Reimbursements are disbursed by CBOs in most States (65 percent), but WIOA agencies or other DOL-funded workforce programs, local SNAP offices, and community colleges also disburse them in these and other States. Most States (71 percent) place caps on the monetary value of a single reimbursement a participant can receive, but some have monthly and annual caps. Only four States have lifetime caps on some reimbursements, including for rent and other housing assistance and for auto repairs.

In response to the requirement for case management in the 2018 Farm Bill, two-thirds of States (67 percent) invested in staff training, and more than half (58 percent) added new E&T providers. Notably, more than half of States (57 percent) report making no changes to how they conduct case management in their programs since the 2018 Farm Bill went into effect. Of the 22 States that made changes, about one-quarter adopted new case management approaches and techniques and one-quarter expanded existing case management services to make them available to more participants.

The case studies highlighted several practices that may foster success in case management implementation. For providing case management, these practices include building strong, trusting relationships with participants; using case management teams to ensure coordinated support; offering an individualized approach with flexibility to accommodate individual needs and strengths; and setting clear processes and procedures to ensure case managers know how to best serve participants.

Practices related to assessments include keeping assessments short and targeted; using strengths-based assessments to help participants gain confidence; and taking care to help participants feel comfortable with sensitive questions during assessments.

Practices related to providing reimbursements include using a streamlined reimbursement process so participants receive support on time; reimbursing participants in amounts that match their needs; and building strong partnerships with community organizations to connect participants with support services beyond SNAP E&T-funded participant reimbursements.

For More Information:

Joyce, K., Reid, N., Kharsa, M., et al. (2023). Survey of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) Case Management. Prepared by Mathematica, Contract No. 12319819F0128. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Kristen Corey. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.