

ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Assess Basic Food Enrollment



2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET

Request	FY15	FY16	FY17	15-17
FTE		1.0	1.0	1.0
GF-State		\$84,000	\$78,000	\$162,000
Total		\$110,000	\$103,000	\$213,000

DECISION PACKAGE SUMMARY

The Economic Services Administration (ESA) requests one FTE to conduct a cost and benefit assessment of auto-enrolling a specific population of the Medicaid recipients onto the ESA cash assistance and Basic Food programs. Based on the results of this study, if a decision is made to move forward with this enrollment strategy, this position would be responsible for the development of a proposal seeking a waiver from federal law to allow the state to implement an auto-enrollment as a demonstration project. By funding this request, ESA expects to determine whether automated enrollment is feasible and worthwhile and, if yes, seek to gain federal approval to implement this change in order to increase efficiencies and reduce barriers to obtaining federal benefits.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As a result of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) implementation in Washington, most people now apply for Medicaid based on their modified adjusted gross income (MAGI Medicaid) using the online application portal called the Washington Healthplanfinder, which is operated by the Health Benefit Exchange (HBE). The HBE Call Center provides assistance in navigating the Washington Healthplanfinder site, or the applicants can seek assistance from the local community-based in-person 'HBE Navigators/Assisters' in their area of the state.

The ESA Community Services Division's (CSD) staff continues to have contact with a large proportion of the Medicaid population because the majority of MAGI Medicaid recipients also qualify for the ESA public assistance programs. The ESA programs include: food, cash, child care, and aged/blind/disability Medicaid coverage. The CSD staff are located in the Customer Service Contact Center or in the Community Services Offices (CSO) throughout the state.

The ESA clients must access two different systems to receive a MAGI medical, food and cash benefit eligibility determination. The systems create a barrier to accessing all the benefits to which a needy family may be entitled. It also is an inefficient means of enrolling clients and limits the state's ability to use federal funds to support low-income Washington clients in receiving an eligibility determination.

Various states and the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) have considered automatic enrollment in Basic Food and cash programs for MAGI Medicaid recipients as a means of improving access and efficiency. However,



DSHS VISION

People are healthy • People are safe • People are supported • Taxpayer resources are guarded

DSHS MISSION

To transform lives

DSHS VALUES

Honesty and Integrity • Pursuit of Excellence • Open Communication • Diversity and Inclusion • Commitment to Service

ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Assess Basic Food Enrollment



2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET

further analyses and negotiations are needed in order to determine whether such an approach could be worthwhile and feasible for Washington.

The US Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), called Basic Food in Washington, and MAGI Medicaid have different eligibility criteria, including the following:

- **Income limits:** Eligibility for MAGI Medicaid is capped at 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), whereas eligibility for Basic Food is capped at 200 percent of FPL based on gross income.
- **Countable income:** Medicaid eligibility determinations in the Washington Healthplanfinder are made by looking at a client's Modified Adjusted Gross Income while Basic Food and cash determines eligibility based on total gross income minus various deductions.
- **Income verification:** MAGI Medicaid allows self-attestation for income while food and cash programs require income verification prior to approving benefits.
- **Household composition:** Tax filing status is used in determinations for a MAGI Medicaid household unit while Basic Food household composition is determined by those in the home who purchase or prepare food together. For cash assistance, in most cases, there must be an eligible child in the household.
- **Duration of authorization:** Many MAGI Medicaid programs are authorized for a year and unaffected by changes in circumstances during that period. For food or cash programs, changes in circumstances may affect eligibility and benefit levels monthly.

In order to implement automated enrollment of MAGI Medicaid recipients onto Basic Food and cash assistance, significant modifications to the ESA Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES) IT system would need to be made to address these differences.

Because SNAP (Basic Food) eligibility standards are set in federal law rather than rule, varying from them (which is required for automatic enrollment for MAGI Medicaid recipients) would need to be operated as a demonstration project rather than a waiver of federal regulations. Demonstration projects are more difficult to get than waivers as the operations go outside of the scope of the Food and Nutrition Act that authorizes the Basic Food program. Because of this, demonstration projects have much more stringent reporting requirements, and must be 'cost neutral' meaning program benefits cannot increase under the demonstration project compared to the benefits states would have provided under standard operations. Additionally, any reduced administrative costs cannot be used to off-set benefit increases.

While several states have considered requesting approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for a MAGI-like eligibility process for SNAP, no state has yet submitted a proposal for approving automatic enrollment of MAGI Medicaid recipients in cash assistance and Basic Food because of the differences in eligibility criteria and the high standard for demonstration project approval.



DSHS VISION
People are healthy • People are safe • People are supported • Taxpayer resources are guarded

DSHS MISSION
To transform lives

DSHS VALUES
Honesty and Integrity • Pursuit of Excellence • Open Communication • Diversity and Inclusion • Commitment to Service

ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Assess Basic Food Enrollment

2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET



PROPOSED SOLUTION

Funding is requested for one FTE for a program and policy manager to:

- Review previous analyses by states and APHSA of the costs and benefits of automated enrollment of MAGI Medicaid recipients onto Basic Food;
- Develop an updated assessment of Washington State costs and benefits associated with such a change;
- Consult with the FNS regarding options for a demonstration project allowing automated enrollment in Basic Food; and if appropriate,
- Coordinate the development of a demonstration project proposal.

This work will provide additional information and options for medical and public assistance eligibility determination processes under the ACA, complementing the options identified by the Public Consulting Group (PCG) as part of its study (commissioned by the Office of Financial Management) of Washington's medical and public assistance eligibility systems and infrastructure. Options may include implementing automated Basic Food enrollment for selected MAGI Medicaid recipients such as non-disabled adults under age 60 or 65 who have no dependents.

The budget request supports DSHS Goal 5: Public Trust – Strong management practices will be used to ensure quality and efficiency.

The decision package supports the Results Washington goals to ensure effective, efficient and accountable government by increasing customer satisfaction and increasing on-time delivery of state services.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT

- Advocates for low-income individuals and families will likely support this concept as a means of reducing barriers to receiving public assistance benefits and improving customer service.
- HCA and HBE would need to be involved and may have concerns about feasibility.



DSHS VISION

People are healthy • People are safe • People are supported • Taxpayer resources are guarded

DSHS MISSION

To transform lives

DSHS VALUES

Honesty and Integrity • Pursuit of Excellence • Open Communication • Diversity and Inclusion • Commitment to Service