



HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT

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May 10, 2019
For Immediate Release

HSD exceeds the federal timeliness standard for processing New Mexicans' SNAP applications

Santa Fe, N.M. – The New Mexico Human Service Department (HSD) announces that it has improved the efficiency of processing new, renewal and emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications to above the federal timeliness standard of 95 percent for all its 34 locations since Oct. 1, 2018.

"I am firmly committed to ensuring that every qualified New Mexican receives their benefits as efficiently as possible," Gov. Lujan Grisham said. "Hard-working New Mexican families who struggle to make ends meet need every ounce of our support and assistance. We must combat hunger and provide economic security in our state. Improving the timeliness standard of the SNAP program underscores and amplifies our support for families in New Mexico. All across state government, we are seeing improvements in efficiency and service delivery. I wholeheartedly commend the diligent Human Services employees who give so much of themselves for the people of this state."

SNAP is the name of federal program funded by USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), formerly and commonly known as the Food Stamp Program. For more than 40 years, SNAP has served as the foundation of America's national nutrition safety net. It offers food assistance to millions of eligible, low-income individuals and families, serving as the first line of defense against hunger and offers a powerful tool for improving nutrition among low-income people.

"Our frontline employees deserve the credit for this remarkable performance," said Secretary David R. Scrase, M.D. "They work hard every day to ensure that many New Mexican families have food on their tables."

New Mexico receives more than \$650 million in federal funds annually to provide food assistance for over 450,000 low income individuals in more than 220,000 New Mexico households, with no state contribution required. Federal law entitles all eligible households to SNAP benefits within 30 days of application, or within 7 days, if they are eligible for expedited emergency food aid.

In May of 2016, the FNS Southwest Regional Office conducted a statewide compliance review of HSD with regards to administering SNAP and to determine compliance with federal requirements governing access to SNAP benefits by persons applying for or already participating in the program. The FNS review identified 127 specific opportunities for improvement.

"The department has been working collaboratively with our federal partners to improve our services since then," reports Scrase. "With their help we have closed all but 11 of the 127 issues."

As part of their improvement efforts, HSD has implemented new procedures and made extensive changes and upgrades to its computer system, while at the same time setting up systems to carefully track progress.

“Thanks to the partnership with FNS, we are very close to accomplishing our mutual goal of full compliance with federal regulations and program policies,” said Angela Medrano, HSD Deputy Secretary.

To complete its final 11 items on the to-do list, HSD plans on investing an additional \$1.3 million in system changes to support employees and customers to bridge the digital divide by further improving the system.

“We have to improve our system to meet our clients’ needs,” said Scrase. “If 95 percent of our clients have smartphones, but no broadband or computer access at home, we have to modify our online system so that tasks can be accomplished on a smaller screen.”

The PEW Research Center reports that the share of lower-income Americans who rely on their smartphone for going online has roughly doubled since 2013.

In addition to all these improvements, Secretary Scrase will be communicating clear guidelines to HSD employees for processing benefits during the period while the system configurations are being implemented, to ensure that every qualified resident receives timely and accurate benefits.

The Human Services Department serves more than 950,000 unduplicated New Mexicans through several programs including the: Medicaid Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Child Support Program, and many Behavioral Health Services.

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