



WORK SUPPORT STRATEGIES: AN INTRODUCTION

Purpose

North Carolina was one of nine states to be awarded grant funding for the **Work Support Strategies: Streamlining Access, Strengthening Families** initiative. This initiative provides our state with the opportunity to design, test, and implement more effective, streamlined, and integrated approaches to delivering key supports for low-income working families, including health coverage, nutrition benefits, and child care subsidies.

*Families will tell their story once
and receive the services they
need.*

This initiative, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations and its partners, Urban Institute and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, will invest \$15 million to build on recent state and federal innovations by providing states with expert technical assistance, peer support, and financial backing to take their efforts to the next level. North Carolina's grant funds one year of planning activities, and the state will be a candidate to receive additional funding for implementation years.

The goal of this initiative is to plan for a new service delivery model for North Carolina

families in need. At the end of our planning year, we aim to have a workable, achievable Action Plan. The Action Plan will provide a road map for realizing a new service delivery model and will lay out our vision for such a system.

Vision

North Carolina envisions an integrated service delivery system that will serve families and individuals in a holistic manner, asking them to tell their story once rather than multiple times. We aim to eliminate duplicative or redundant steps in application and recertification processes, improve coordination amongst human service benefit programs, support the integration and automation among program-based systems, and eliminate the silo approach to benefit delivery.

Through the WSS initiative, North Carolina aims to capture the attention and imagination of all stakeholders including the federal government, the state executive and legislative branches, counties, case workers, citizens and community partners, in order to build a visionary, forward-thinking service delivery system. Such a service delivery system will benefit the citizens of North Carolina, whether their primary perspective is that of a working family, taxpayer, business owner or state official.



regardless of jurisdiction. We will construct measures that connect the dots between WSS goals and performance at the local level.

Accessing benefits will not be a hindrance to working families. Service delivery will be designed in a way that supports working families and their ability to maintain employment. Guided by the assumption that working families receiving the full work supports package can be more successful, a new service delivery system should not *interfere* with employment. Processes need to be streamlined, consume a minimal amount of time for families, and be easy to manage. Once a family has been determined eligible for benefits, we will make all efforts to support the continuity of benefits for which families are eligible.

These tenets are firmly rooted in the vision, mission, values and service goals of DHHS Excels, a recent initiative aimed at shaping a new organizational culture that is customer focused, anticipatory, collaborative, transparent, and results-based. Most notably, the Excels initiative aims to “transform from a silo approach in the delivery and management of services to a coordinated, open and interrelated approach” and “improve decisions and accountability based on solid information/data.”

Planning Year Activities

In order to develop the Action Plan, North Carolina has been busy conducting several types of analysis. The project team continues to gather

information from a variety of resources to inform the planning process. Some examples are:

Site Visits to Counties

In July and August, the project team conducted site visits to Catawba, Wake, Nash, and Franklin Counties to understand and document business processes at these counties and identify inefficiencies and duplication of effort. The site visits also provided the team with the opportunity to review innovative processes the counties have implemented to manage work flows through their offices.

Best Practices

The project team identified and documented several best practices in North Carolina counties that support WSS tenets. We are compiling these best practices for distribution in early 2012.

Data Analysis

North Carolina is conducting data analysis to understand caseload activity across programs and counties to inform the strategic planning process. Areas of analysis include caseload overlap across programs, processing times, denial rates, and error rates. As we move toward a final Action Plan, these data points will provide context and the basis for setting goals moving forward.

Client Interviews and Surveys

The project team has conducted client interviews and surveys in various counties. The purpose of these interviews is to understand and document



What does this mean for my county?

The Work Support Strategies project can only reach its full potential with support from counties. We ask that you support these efforts in the following ways:

- Share any feedback and give input on the direction of WSS initiatives
- Communicate changes with your staff, Board, and other county stakeholders
- Share any best practice activities that your county has undertaken
- Continue to implement innovations or any of the WSS quick wins – and share your outcomes
- Bring back to the WSS planning team any input from staff or partners
- Create a culture of readiness for change in your county

