



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Pat McCrory
Governor

Aldona Z. Wos, M.D.
Ambassador (Ret.)
Secretary DHHS

Sherry Bradsher
Deputy Secretary for Human Services

December 5, 2013

Dear North Carolina County Managers and Social Service Directors:

On behalf of Secretary Wos and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), I would like to thank every County Manager, County Director and all DSS personnel for their continued hard work and support as we strive together to implement the NC FAST Program. We are aware that recent months have been difficult and stressful for all partners. Through your commitment and perseverance nearly all of the 1.6 million food and nutrition services recipients in North Carolina are now receiving benefits.

As we move forward with implementation of the next phase of NC FAST, I want to encourage each of you to proactively address any concerns raised during your recent Project 2&6 readiness assessment. By addressing these issues now, counties can assure a greater likelihood for success moving forward.

There are several anticipated challenges moving into the next phases of implementation. Some of those include:

- Continued uncertainty around the quality of and timeframe for receiving pending Medicaid applications from the Federal Facilitated Marketplace (FFM). As of today there are more than 10,000 pending applications.
- Federal requirements that Family and Children's Medicaid re-certifications beginning in 2014 will be based on Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) rules and regulations.
 - A 90-day waiver has been implemented for all Family and Children's Medicaid re-certification for January through March 2014. Therefore counties will be processing cases from January through March in addition to the caseloads for April through June.
 - Completing re-certifications using MAGI rules will require additional household tax information from participants. This new federal requirement will likely lengthen or increase the time needed to complete Family and Children's Medicaid re-certifications.

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DHHS is working hard to plan for and provide support for counties in meeting these challenges. Some of these efforts include:

- Strengthened support provided by the NC FAST Help Desk with the addition of seasoned, knowledgeable Over-the-Shoulder-Support staff.
- Commitment to the resolution of all backlogged NC FAST Help Desk tickets by December 31, 2013.
- Closer alignment between the Work Support Strategies and NC FAST teams to share best practices to help counties prepare for and meet the challenges of processing applications and re-certifications using MAGI eligibility rules required by the Affordable Care Act.
- Reorganization and consolidation of technical assistance and consultation for all means-tested public assistance programs administered through local departments of social services, with an emphasis on Medicaid during the coming months.
- DHHS leadership will continue its efforts to counties with the opportunity to receive 75% federal reimbursement for allowable Medicaid activities. Currently, the DHHS Controller's Office is working with five counties to identify allowable cost in order to establish reporting procedures. We are optimistic that this reimbursement increase from 50% to 75% will begin in early 2014. This increased reimbursement will make available additional funds budgeted for SFY 2013-14, which may be invested in continuing best practices to ensure a successful transition to NC FAST.

Lastly, we have a new addition to the NC FAST leadership team. Angie Taylor has joined the team as Deputy Director and will work along side Anthony Vellucci to manage the overall implementation strategy. Angie brings strong project management skills as well as vast program knowledge. She has successfully led many large IT initiatives for DHHS in the past. As Project Director, Anthony Vellucci's time will be spent more on overall program governance and technology related matters while Angie Taylor will work closely with the business team and support county implementation and communications.

Clearly, by implementing the above strategies, it is our deepest desire to continue to enhance state support leading to a successful complete implementation of NC FAST.

With that being said, we strongly encourage counties to continue to pursue several key success factors including:

1. Investing in temporary staff and over time authorization for staff to help meet the increased workload detailed above over the next several months.

2. Ensuring a supportive and responsive county IT presence that stays engaged with the local DSS.
3. Ensuring county DSS facilities have appropriate network bandwidth dedicated to their use, as well as ensuring that all DSS computers meet NC FAST software and hardware requirements.
4. Adding computers or self-service kiosks for clients to use onsite at local DSS offices.

We appreciate the support of county leadership, managers and commissioners to provide county departments of social services with needed resources to be successful with NC FAST implementation. We also thank the leadership of the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services for providing continuous feedback and recommendations and for their frequent and consistent communication with us. Our success depends on our continued joint efforts.

Sincerely,



Sherry Bradsher
Deputy Secretary for Human Services

cc: Joe Cooper, Chief Information Officer
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