

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION WORKLOAD STUDY FACT SHEET

Background:

County Administration funding supports access to the essential direct assistance that helps Colorado's most vulnerable children, families, and individuals obtain health, food, and financial self-sufficiency benefits. Adequate county administration funding is critical to ensure counties have enough staff to efficiently and effectively administer public assistance programs.

Counties believe we need a workload study that not only helps us better understand the overall need, but also helps us:

- create a methodology to better predict what our system will need in the future (one that is malleable enough to reflect changes in rules, process and technology);
- identify efficiencies in the system that would allow for greater productivity and return on investment; and
- recognize the need to better compensate our staff who handle complex cases but are often paid wages that would qualify them for the very benefits they help administer due to a lack of funding.

The last workload study occurred six years ago. This workload study focused narrowly on timeliness and accuracy of SNAP eligibility determinations and relied heavily on CBMS data, CFMS data, and time related to entry of some of the work accomplished in the program. This study did not include a holistic study of the entire responsibilities of public and medical assistance administration including staff development and training, changes that occur to cases, the changing landscape of community needs and caseload growth, or the full interaction of a county worker with a resident. It did, however, help the county and state collectively accomplish systematic improvements such as:

- Improving processes and technology to successfully close out a lawsuit.
 - Many counties improved from determining timely 50 to 60% of the time to taking actions timely 95% of the time.
- Creating an environment where the state and counties agreed upon a mechanism for applying sanctions or penalties, should those ever come to fruition.

Reasons for a New Workload Study:

Public assistance and medical assistance programs have experienced many Federal and State regulatory changes and statewide benefits management system changes over the last several years. Necessary change management supports, technology, and practice changes have struggled to keep pace with the frequency and pace of these changes. In fact, the previous workload study was conducted prior to CBMS Transformation. Major CBMS reforms have had major impacts on work. At the same time, in order to meet the needs of low-income families, the work has expanded from the historical transactional approach of eligibility determination only to a more customer service-oriented approach that targets wrap around supports that integrate the social determinants of health and aim to prevent further reliance on government intervention. Keeping pace with these changes through finding technology

efficiency and worker supports are necessary. Some upcoming changes with workload implications include:

- Upcoming policy change related to signature requirement on Medical eligibility redeterminations
- Adult Financial modernization efforts
- A regularly changing regulatory landscape due to COVID-related policy changes at the State and Federal levels.

State and federal allocations for the administration of these programs have not kept pace with the cost of living and inflation, nor the increased work and expectations of eligibility workers, causing pay for the professionals completing this work to be paid way below what it costs to live in Colorado. In the metro Denver area, for instance, a living wage for one adult and two children is \$36.41. The wages for county eligibility professionals range from \$15.00/hr. to \$27.10. This has resulted in difficulty recruiting and retaining these professionals, which in turn leads to slower determinations of eligibility and higher risks of errors.

- While it is not easy to quantify the exact increase due to pandemic-related fluctuations, we know the statewide applications and caseloads in SNAP, Cash, and Medical assistance programs have increased since the last workload study in 2016.
 - Among the big 11 counties, the average monthly caseload for all programs managed through CBMS has grown from 73,452 in 2018 to 83,733 in 2021.
 - The big 11 counties have seen a 29% growth in applications from 2018 through 8/2021.
- **Counties anticipate being more than \$28 million dollars underfunded in County Administration funding this year, prior to closeout.** That includes:
 - CDHS County Admin - -\$15 million (approximate)
 - HCPF Reg County Admin - - \$3 million (approximate)
 - HCPF Enhanced County Admin - -\$10.5 million (approximate)

Vision for a New Workload Study:

We hope an updated workload study can simultaneously be more holistic and encompassing of the work of eligibility administration and also create a methodology to ascertain future funding needs based on changing policies and technology innovations. We appreciate HCPF's R-08 request to address systemic underfunding in county administration for the administration of the medical assistance program. That being said, the request assumes savings associated with a reduced error rate and focuses on oversight and monitoring. Reducing error rates doesn't come simply with greater oversight and monitoring, but by also improving the training of staff, increasing staffing levels, and improving technology systems, all of which can be considered in a workload study.

Workload studies in the past have looked only at CBMS data and RMS, and have failed to account for all of the work required to get to an accurate determination like phone interviews, manually processing interface data, attending to those in crisis, waiting for help desk tickets to be resolved, responding to

backlogs, and more. Time studies in the past have been very prescriptive and narrow in focus due to time or funding constraints. Instead, we hope the study could include the following:

- State and County solutions to drive greater efficiency and quality (qualitative, quantitative, and experience) in the state supervised, county administered system.
- The time and work included in a customer service-oriented approach, which takes more time, requires more specialized training, and enhanced engagement of the client.
 - The work eligibility workers engage in to help clients navigate other community resources to alleviate the immediate needs resulting from living in poverty.
- The full day and work of those funded through County Administration in a comprehensive manner:
 - The workload studies in the past have not taken into account administration, fraud, quality assurance, attorneys, fiscal staff, lead workers, supervisors, management, directors, trainers, support staff and others. These are hard to quantify with so many variations with 64 counties. A workload study needs to be comprehensive.
 - Individual eligibility worker time studies, including aspects like client interviews that require additional support, warm handoffs, etc. – to capture all of the work (including the one-off work).
 - Working reports and responding to multiple county audits, which includes quality assurance activities, and management evaluations.
 - Working through CBMS and PEAK deficiencies (i.e. CBMS issues, CBMS slowness, Help Desk tickets).
- County vacancies, work from home policies, and other changes in practice based on COVID-19 and other disaster responses.
- Assessment of current interfaces and reliability of data – when technology doesn't function as expected, then eligibility workers must step in to manually perform the duties.
- Current training and supports, both state and county, offered to professionals as well as the increased training and support around customer service and what it means to live in poverty in support of a customer service-oriented approach. (The upcoming SDC legislation should be considered and studied to determine estimated time commitments and workload implications.).
- Individual county workflow systems, providing efficiencies or inefficiencies depending on an individual county's ability to fund.

Conclusion:

We hope this undertaking will better prepare the state and counties to serve some of the most vulnerable Coloradans in our state. We also hope it can be done in a way that can predict future funding needs, potential cost savings, and greater efficiencies. We believe the Governor's budget request (R-08) for the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing can be expanded upon to cover all activities covered by County Administration funding and hope that, if done well, this effort will not have to be duplicated in the near future but instead be adjusted and utilized regularly.