

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APHSA Honors California Department of Social Services and CalHHS Office of Technology and Solutions Integration with the Innovation Award

Arlington, VA — June 15, 2026: The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) is proud to announce that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California Health and Human Services Agency's (CalHHS) Office of Technology and Solutions Integration (OTSI) have been selected as the recipients of the 2026 APHSA Innovation Award for their leadership in the *California EBT Card Security Modernization Project: Pioneering the Nation's First SNAP Chip/Tap EBT System*.

The APHSA Innovation Award honors organizations, agencies, partnerships, and coalitions that demonstrate bold, visionary leadership and achieve meaningful, lasting impact across the human services landscape. The award recognizes transformative improvements that strengthen systems and services, improve outcomes, address disparities, and foster human-centered, community-driven cultures of service. The award was presented during the [APHSA National Human Services Summit](#), held June 14–17, 2026, in Arlington, Virginia.

Faced with a growing crisis of electronic benefit theft linked to vulnerabilities in traditional magnetic-stripe EBT cards, CDSS and OTSI pursued an ambitious solution that addressed the problem at its source. Rather than relying on temporary safeguards, the agencies led the development and deployment of Chip/Tap-enabled EBT cards, introducing a more secure technology that had never before been implemented in the EBT system.

“We are honored to accept this award, which reflects California’s continued commitment to protecting the integrity of public benefits,” CDSS Director Jennifer Troia said. “By modernizing our EBT system with first-in-the-nation chip and tap technology, we have strengthened security, reduced the theft of benefits, improved the customer experience, and helped ensure that these critical benefits are reaching the people they are intended to support.”

The scale and complexity of the effort required unprecedented collaboration across state and federal agencies, financial institutions, retailers, payment processors, and technology partners. Together, they modernized transaction systems, established new standards for secure EBT transactions, and successfully issued more than four million new cards while minimizing disruption for clients.

“This was a trailblazing project, years in the making through a dedicated EBT card security team. We also want to thank the USDA Food and Nutrition Administration, EBT processors,

financial institutions, and retailers for the partnerships to establish the SNAP EBT Chip/Tap standards we implemented, setting the foundation for the nation’s securing of EBT transactions,” shared Brandon Hansard, Chief Deputy Director of CalHHS OTSI.

Beyond strengthening security, the project improved the experience of both clients and frontline staff. Families have greater confidence that their benefits will be available when they need them most, while county caseworkers spend less time processing theft claims and more time supporting individuals and families. The initiative was designed with a strong focus on accessibility, trust, and seamless implementation, ensuring that clients could transition to the new technology with minimal disruption.

The project also demonstrates the power of human-centered, community-driven innovation. Throughout development and implementation, CDSS and OTSI worked closely with stakeholders, advocacy organizations, counties, and community partners to ensure the solution reflected the needs and experiences of the people it serves. By prioritizing both security and usability, the agencies strengthened confidence in the public benefits system while protecting access to essential supports.

Importantly, the *California EBT Card Security Modernization Project* has implications far beyond the state. By establishing a scalable model for secure EBT transactions, California has helped create a pathway for broader adoption of Chip/Tap technology nationwide and laid the groundwork for future innovations, including mobile wallet integration and other modern payment capabilities.

This achievement reflects the dedication of teams across multiple organizations who worked tirelessly over several years to bring the project to fruition. Their collective efforts have not only reduced theft and improved outcomes for Californians but have also established a new benchmark for innovation and collaboration in public service delivery.

The APHSA Innovation Award recognizes organizations that leverage innovation to improve outcomes and strengthen systems in ways that create lasting impact. Through their leadership, partnership, and commitment to protecting and improving access to essential benefits, the California Department of Social Services and the California Health and Human Services Agency's Office of Technology and Solutions Integration exemplify the spirit and purpose of this award. APHSA congratulates CDSS and OTSI on this well-deserved recognition and thanks them for their extraordinary contributions to advancing secure, human-centered service delivery for individuals and families in California and across the nation.

###



About APHSA

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) supports leaders from state, county, and city human services agencies to advance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities nationwide. As the premier bipartisan membership association for public human services, they work with their members to generate pragmatic solutions grounded in lived experience. Visit aphsa.org to learn more.

Media Contact:

Jessica Garon

Director, Communications

American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)

jgaron@aphsa.org

202-866-0535

