Benefit Cliff Mitigation in
OHIO

THE SPARK

Ohio's journey to mitigate benefit cliffs was catalyzed pre-pandemic by a forward-thinking director who recognized the challenges faced by working families striving for economic stability and tasked her team with finding a solution to address benefit cliffs. After several plans were rejected by upper leadership, the team adopted a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach, involving an outside nonprofit and Stanford University, to gather insights from individuals experiencing benefit cliffs. This data-driven approach led to the development of a pilot to bridge the gap between benefits and upward mobility.

INITIATIVES

Benefit Bridge Program

The Benefit Bridge Program was piloted in 13 out of 88 counties, specifically focused on bridging the gap between the end of benefits and upward mobility. The program started in July 2021 and involved a collaborative effort with the Columbus Foundation, Stanford University, and various state departments. The program utilized a Human-Centered Design (HCD) approach to identify issues and create solutions tailored to the needs of individuals. Pilot participants receive support from CARE teams led by peer mentors with lived experience that also include budgeting coaches, career coaches, benefits coaches, counselors, and child support workers. CARE teams, as diagramed on the right, help to address the holistic needs of participants.

Benefit Bridge CARE Team

Care Team · EMPath Training (for workers) · Trauma Training (for workers) · Bridge Score · Financial Literacy and other services · Goal Setting · Incentives · Flexible spending

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE)

On October 1, 2024, Ohio changed its BBCE to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), allowing more people to take additional work hours without losing benefits at the previous 130% FPL threshold. This change was driven by feedback from a workgroup that included employers, advocates, and legal aid representatives. The workgroup highlighted the need to prevent the churn of individuals cycling on and off benefits due to small income increases. The new BBCE policy aimed to reduce administrative burdens and support continuous employment for individuals between 100-200% FPL.

OH Lesson Learned
Ohio learned BBCE is a policy tool that can be leveraged to prevent the churn of individuals cycling on and off benefits due to small income increases. By increasing the BBCE FPL threshold, Ohio reduced administrative burden and supported continuous employment.

SNAP Employment and Training Redesign

Ohio transitioned from a mandatory to a voluntary SNAP E&T system, focusing on meeting employer needs and providing soft skills training to help individuals retain jobs. The redesign was prompted by feedback from the Federal Nutrition Service (FNS) and a workgroup of employers who emphasized the importance of soft skills for job retention. The redesigned system sought to minimize the frequent transitions of individuals entering and exiting benefit programs while promoting sustained employment

FINER DETAILS

Funding

The initiatives were funded through a combination of state and federal resources. The Benefit Bridge Program received general revenue funding for 3.5 years, which was essential for its implementation. Additional funding was provided to address crises and support trauma-informed care. The BBCE and SNAP E&T redesigns were supported by budget language and federal requirements, which mandated improvements to the state's SNAP E&T program.

Key Collaborators

Ohio's success in advancing these initiatives was due in large part to the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders. The Benefit Bridge Program involved partnerships with the Columbus Foundation, Stanford University, and various state departments, including the Office of Workforce Development and the Department of Job and Family Services (JFS). The BBCE and SNAP E&T redesigns were guided by workgroups that included employers, advocates, legal aid representatives, and individuals with lived experience. These diverse coalitions ensured that the initiatives were informed by a wide range of perspectives and had broad support.

TIMELINE

Ohio built pathways to cliff mitigation strategies iteratively over time:

Pre-2020
- Ohio's JFS Director recognized the challenges posed by benefit cliffs and tasked her team with finding solutions. Multiple plans were developed, rejected, and iterated, leading to the adoption of a Human-Centered-Design (CD) approach.

2020
- OH's JFS team began working with an outside non-profit and Stanford University to gather insights from individuals experiencing benefit cliffs.

2021
- The Benefit Bridge Program was launched in 13 out of 88 counties.

2022
- The Benefit Bridge Program continued to refine its approach based on feedback from participants and counties.

2023
- The program expanded its reach and continued to adapt based on lessons learned. The formation of CARE teams became a critical element, addressing the hoistic needs of participants.

2024
- OH changed BBCE limit to 200% FPL.
- OH transitioned from a mandatory to a voluntary SNAP E&T system.

Ongoing
- OH continues to implement and refine policies aimed at mitigating benefit cliffs, including adjusting TANF grant amounts and child care subsidies.