



Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports, Cohort 2 Policy Insights

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ABOUT THE COORDINATING SNAP AND NUTRITION SUPPORTS PROGRAM

The Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports (CSNS) initiative is a cohort program developed by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) and No Kid Hungry, a national campaign run by Share Our Strength.

The goal of the initiative is to align the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with other federal, state, and local nutrition supports, such as SUN Bucks, WIC, and Medicaid, to combat hunger for children and families.

Cohort 2 builds on lessons from the first cohort, emphasizing the use of real-time data, language justice, cultural humility, and community-centered service delivery. Participating sites tested new approaches to cross-program coordination, strengthened partnerships with community-based organizations, and explored strategies to reduce

administrative burden for both families and staff. The insights from this cohort provide a clearer understanding of the policy environment shaping access to nutrition supports and offer a foundation for continued learning across states and agencies.

For more information about the program, including case studies, reports, and resources, visit: <https://aphsa.org/coordinating-snap-and-nutrition-supports-csns/>

This brief summarizes experiences and observations reported by participating CSNS Cohort 2 sites. It is intended to support peer learning and does not constitute legal or fiscal guidance. Program requirements may vary by jurisdiction and funding source; agencies should consult applicable federal guidance, state policy, and counsel when implementing specific approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Human services agencies across the country are working to modernize eligibility and technology systems, improve service delivery, and better connect individuals and families to the benefits they are eligible for.

However, efforts to coordinate services across programs often encounter barriers rooted in policy, funding structures, technology systems, and administrative processes.

Because many public benefit programs were designed and implemented independently, agencies frequently face challenges aligning eligibility requirements, data systems, funding streams, and customer-facing services.

Because SNAP is federally funded but state administered, and because federal and state leadership priorities evolve over time, agencies often operate within different policy environments. These differences can influence how coordination efforts are designed and implemented across states.

Through the Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports (CSNS) initiative, sites in Illinois, North Carolina, San Francisco County, California, and Caroline County, Maryland tested strategies to strengthen coordination among SNAP and other nutrition and public benefit programs. Their experiences demonstrate both the challenges of cross-program collaboration and the opportunities that emerge when agencies, community-based organizations, schools, healthcare providers, and people with lived experience work toward shared goals.

This report highlights key policy and operational barriers identified by CSNS Cohort 2 participants. It explores strategies used by sites to improve coordination, reduce administrative burden, and create more seamless experiences for families. While the specific challenges varied across communities, several common themes emerged: fragmented funding and program structures, limitations in data sharing and technology, and the importance of trust, communication, and community engagement in service delivery.



Image courtesy of APSHA.

FUNDING STEAMS & BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Funding structures play a critical role in agencies' ability to coordinate SNAP with other nutrition and public benefit programs. Across CSNS Cohort 2 sites, participants identified challenges related to funding restrictions, administrative capacity, and implementation resources that can limit cross-program collaboration and integrated service delivery.

POLICY BARRIERS

Several sites identified funding restrictions that make cross-program coordination challenging. Differences in allowable uses, matching requirements, and funding structures across SNAP cost-share funding¹, WIC funding categories², and TANF's defined allowable uses³ limit agencies' ability to braid or align funding streams to support integrated service delivery. While these requirements support program accountability, they can also create barriers to designing services around the needs of families rather than individual programs.

For example, SNAP outreach funds generally cannot be used to support enrollment in other benefit programs, even when individuals are likely eligible for multiple services. These restrictions can contribute to missed opportunities for co-enrollment and require agencies and community partners to navigate multiple funding streams to provide coordinated support.

Sites also noted challenges related to accessing available federal resources. Although many SNAP administrative costs are eligible for federal reimbursement, states and local agencies must provide matching funds to draw down those resources. These challenges may become more significant as states assume additional SNAP administrative cost-sharing responsibilities under recent federal changes to SNAP cost-sharing requirements⁴, increasing pressure on already constrained budgets and potentially limiting investments in service integration.

OPERATIONAL BARRIERS

Even when policy permits coordination, agencies often face operational constraints that affect implementation. Staffing shortages, competing priorities, and limited administrative capacity

can make it difficult to conduct outreach, support multiple benefit applications, and sustain collaborative initiatives across programs and organizations. Procurement and contracting requirements across the programs can create additional challenges. Implementing new technology, establishing vendor partnerships, or launching innovative service models often requires lengthy approval and contracting requirements across the federal, state, and local level that can delay implementation and reduce agencies' ability to access and use real-time data, share eligibility information across programs, and respond quickly to emerging needs.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATION

Despite these challenges, CSNS sites demonstrated how partnerships can help agencies expand capacity and navigate funding and operational constraints. Cohort 2 project teams included partnerships among public agencies, community-based organizations, schools, healthcare providers, and other local stakeholders, allowing sites to build on existing community relationships and extend outreach efforts.

In North Carolina, the CSNS team implemented the No Kid Hungry SNAP in Schools model to connect eligible students and families to SNAP through school-based outreach. The team also partnered with healthcare organizations to incorporate SNAP and WIC screening into intake processes, helping identify potentially eligible households and reduce enrollment gaps.

To address limited funding for interpreters and navigators, the Caroline County team partnered with a local school system, community resource center, and community college to create an interpretation course for government employees. This collaboration expanded language access

capacity across agencies and strengthened support for residents with limited or no English proficiency. In San Francisco County, procurement-related delays affected plans for the Mobile Benefits Center. Rather than pausing progress, partners used the additional time to conduct planning sessions and host enrollment and troubleshooting events for Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and CalWORKs. These efforts provided valuable community feedback that informed the design of the future Mobile Benefits Center. Philanthropic investments also played an important role in supporting innovation. While philanthropy cannot replace sustainable public funding, initiatives such as CSNS provide agencies with opportunities to pilot new approaches, strengthen partnerships, evaluate outcomes, and build evidence for broader adoption.

LOOKING AHEAD

Opportunities exist to support greater flexibility and coordination across public benefit programs. Demonstration projects⁵, waiver authorities⁶, and stronger alignment among funding streams may help states address structural barriers and advance more integrated approaches to service delivery.

At the same time, sustained progress will require adequate administrative funding, staffing capacity, and implementation resources.

Without these investments, agencies may continue to face challenges translating policy flexibility into meaningful improvements for the families they serve.

RESOURCES

FUNDING

- [Philanthropy and Government Working Together: The Role of Offices of Strategic Partnerships in Public Problem Solving – The Center on Philanthropy & Public Policy at USC](#)
- [Get Funding – Civic Tech Field Guide](#)
- [Field Guide for Financing Public-Sector Integrated Data Systems and Evaluation – NAPA & USDR](#)

SNAP WAIVERS & DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

- [SNAP Rule Waivers – USDA](#)
- [SNAP – State QC Access to Waiver and Demonstration Project Information – USDA](#)

¹ SNAP funding regulations can be found at 7 CFR § 277.4.

² For more information, see <https://media.nwica.org/2018-wic-what-funding-basics.pdf>

³ TANF allowable uses are governed by 45 CFR § 263, which restricts spending to four statutory purposes and limits states' ability to fund cross-program activities.

⁴ Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), beginning in FY27, states will assume a larger share of SNAP administrative costs—up to 75 percent, increased from the previous 50 percent match requirement.

⁵ As of March 4, 2025, federal guidance on Medicaid 1115 waivers has been rescinded. However, CMS may approve waivers on a case-by-case basis. For more information, see <https://www.medicaid.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/cib03042025.pdf>

⁶ US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. WIC Modernization: Flexibilities. USDA FNS. Accessed May 22, 2026. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/modernization/flexibilities>

DATA, TECHNOLOGY, & CROSS-PROGRAM ALIGNMENT

Data sharing and technology infrastructure play a critical role in agencies' ability to coordinate services across public benefit programs. Across CSNS Cohort 2 sites, participants identified both policy and operational barriers that limit data sharing, technology modernization, and cross-program alignment. These challenges can contribute to fragmented service delivery, administrative burden, and missed opportunities to connect families with the full range of benefits for which they may be eligible.

POLICY BARRIERS

Many sites reported challenges navigating the complex legal and policy landscape governing data sharing and program administration. Federal benefit programs are often governed by separate statutes, regulations, and guidance, resulting in different eligibility requirements, verification standards, reporting expectations, and privacy requirements. These differences can make cross-program coordination difficult, even when agencies share similar goals and serve many of the same households.

Sites also identified concerns related to privacy and data-sharing requirements. Federal laws such as HIPAA and the Privacy Act of 1974 can create uncertainty about what information may be shared and under what circumstances. In some cases, agencies reported that cautious interpretations of these requirements delayed collaboration, slowed the development of data-sharing agreements, or discouraged agencies from pursuing promising initiatives altogether.

Frequent policy and regulatory changes can create additional challenges. Because updates are often implemented at the individual program level rather than across the broader public benefits ecosystem, agencies may face new inconsistencies that complicate efforts to streamline enrollment, eligibility determination, and ongoing case management.

OPERATIONAL BARRIERS

Even when policy permits greater coordination, agencies frequently face operational barriers that limit implementation. Many states and localities continue to rely on technology systems designed to administer individual programs rather than support integrated service delivery. These systems often

lack interoperability, making it difficult to exchange information across agencies or programs.

Fragmented data standards, inconsistent data entry practices, and disconnected case management systems can further complicate coordination efforts, limiting agencies' ability to access and use real-time data and share eligibility information across programs. Agencies may collect similar information in different formats, creating challenges for data matching, referral tracking, and performance measurement. As a result, staff and customers often encounter duplicative processes and administrative burden. Technology modernization efforts can also be slowed by procurement requirements, limited staffing, and competing priorities.

Enabling different technology systems to exchange information, implementing shared case management tools, or upgrading outdated technology often requires lengthy planning and approval processes that extend implementation timelines and reduce agencies' ability to respond quickly to emerging needs.

BUILDING ALIGNMENT THROUGH COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

Despite these challenges, CSNS sites demonstrated several strategies for strengthening collaboration and laying the groundwork for long-term systems alignment.

A common first step was bringing together agency leaders, frontline staff, community-based organizations, and individuals with lived experience to establish a shared vision for cross-program collaboration. Regular cross-agency meetings helped build relationships, identify opportunities for alignment, and address challenges before implementation.

Several sites also developed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and data-sharing agreements to support coordination among agencies and community partners. In Illinois, the CSNS team worked with the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Greater Chicago Food Depository to strengthen the state's data infrastructure supporting Summer EBT and school meal eligibility. By improving the quality and exchange of household information, the partnership helped increase direct certification and streamline eligibility determinations for children and families.

In Caroline County, Community Resource Navigators served as a bridge between residents, public agencies, and community partners. By helping residents navigate multiple services and sharing information about common barriers and unmet needs, navigators strengthened coordination across local organizations and improved visibility into the challenges families face when accessing benefits. This approach helped build stronger referral pathways and supported more coordinated service delivery at the local level.

Other sites focused on strengthening technology infrastructure and referral processes. In North Carolina, the CSNS team convened Food and Nutrition Administration staff, SNAP outreach partners, and the NC FAST team responsible for the state's ePASS platform to improve referral and enrollment workflows. The effort enhanced coordination among agencies and community partners while creating a stronger foundation for future systems integration.

LOOKING AHEAD

Opportunities remain to strengthen alignment across benefit programs at the federal, state, and local levels. Greater consistency in eligibility requirements, verification processes, reporting standards, and governance frameworks could reduce administrative burden and make cross-program coordination easier for agencies and their partners.

At the same time, policy alignment alone will not be sufficient. Sustained investments in technology modernization, interoperability, data governance,

and staff capacity will be necessary to support long-term systems integration. Without adequate resources to upgrade aging infrastructure and implement new solutions, agencies may continue to face operational challenges even where policy barriers have been addressed.

RESOURCES

- [Braiding Services for the Best Outcomes - USDA](#)
- [Recommendations to Increase Program Participation by Coordinating Outreach and Enrollment Opportunities - The Center for Law and Social Policy](#)
- [Benefits Enrollment Field Guide - Code for America](#)
- [Data Sharing to Build Effective and Efficient Benefits Systems: A Playbook for State and Local Agencies - Benefits Data Trust](#)
- [Leveraging Cross-Program Data to Modernize Outreach & Enrollment in SNAP & Connect Benefits - APHSA & No Kid Hungry](#)

- ¹ HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) limits the use and disclosure of individuals' health information by covered entities (such as healthcare providers and state Medicaid agencies) and their business associates. While HIPAA allows data sharing for treatment, payment, and healthcare operations, agencies often interpret its requirements conservatively, creating perceived barriers to sharing data even when permissible under the law. For a summary of the HIPAA Privacy Rule, see <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/laws-regulations/index.html#intro>.
- ² The Privacy Act of 1974 governs how federal agencies collect, maintain, use, and disclose personal information. Though primarily applicable to federal agencies, its influence on data-sharing agreements and perceived risk can affect state-level program coordination. For an overview of the Act, see <https://cssp.org/resource/parent-engagement-and-leadership-assessment-guide-and-toolkit/> (Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit)

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, TRUST, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Customer experience plays a critical role in how individuals and families access and navigate public benefits. Across CSNS Cohort 2 sites, participants identified both policy and operational barriers that affect agencies' ability to deliver coordinated, customer-centered services. These challenges can make it difficult for agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide clear, accessible, and consistent support across programs.

POLICY BARRIERS

Many customer experience challenges stem from program requirements that shape benefit administration. Public benefit programs often have distinct eligibility criteria, verification standards, reporting requirements, and recertification processes. As agencies seek to coordinate services across programs, they must navigate multiple policy frameworks that can create complexity for both staff and customers.

Sites also identified challenges related to language access and accessibility. Although federal civil rights laws establish baseline requirements, implementation can vary across jurisdictions and programs. Differences in guidance, resources, and capacity may result in inconsistent access to translated materials, interpretation services, and accommodations that support full participation in benefit programs.

OPERATIONAL BARRIERS

Even when policy permits flexibility, agencies and community partners frequently face operational challenges that limit their ability to provide seamless services. Benefit programs are often administered through separate systems, communication channels, and business processes, requiring staff and community partners to navigate multiple platforms and program rules.

Communication remains a significant challenge as agencies must translate complex policy requirements into notices, outreach materials, and customer communications that are both compliant and understandable. Frequent policy changes, inconsistent access to real-time data, and differences across programs can make it difficult to

maintain consistent messaging and ensure staff and partners have current information.

Staff capacity and training can further affect service delivery. Frontline workers are often expected to navigate complex policies, coordinate with partner organizations, and support multiple benefit programs simultaneously. At the same time, agencies may have limited resources for training on trauma-informed practices, cultural humility, disability access, and human-centered service design.

STRENGTHENING SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Despite these challenges, CSNS sites demonstrated how community engagement and trusted partnerships can improve service delivery and strengthen relationships with the communities they serve.

Many sites partnered with schools, healthcare providers, universities, and community-based organizations that already serve as trusted sources of information within their communities. These partnerships helped expand outreach efforts, identify service gaps, and provide agencies with a better understanding of local needs.

In Caroline County, Community Resource Navigators received training on available benefits and services, enabling them to connect residents with supports while sharing insights from people with lived expertise about the barriers encountered accessing benefits and services in their community. This approach strengthened relationships between agencies and community partners while creating an ongoing feedback loop to inform service improvements.

Several sites also focused on improving communication and reducing confusion around program participation. In Illinois, partners developed a statewide multilingual communication strategy for Summer EBT that included webinars, FAQs, and digital communications toolkits. The effort helped agencies, schools, and community organizations provide consistent information as federal guidance evolved. Illinois also launched a customer-facing Summer EBT portal that allowed households to verify information, check eligibility, and update key details such as addresses. The tool improved transparency for families while reducing reliance on call centers and streamlining customer support.

Other sites addressed geographic and access barriers through innovative service delivery models. In San Francisco County, the Mobile Benefits Center brought enrollment assistance directly into communities, helping reach residents who may have difficulty accessing traditional office locations. In North Carolina, enhancements to the ePASS online portal expanded opportunities for clients and community-based partners to manage benefits digitally, reducing administrative burden and streamlining enrollment processes.

COMPENSATING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE (PWLE)

CSNS sites also emphasized the importance of incorporating lived experience into program design and continuous improvement efforts. Individuals and families who interact directly with public benefit systems provide valuable insight into how policies and processes operate in practice, helping agencies identify barriers and improve service delivery.

However, agencies and partner organizations reported challenges compensating participants for their time and expertise. Budget constraints, administrative requirements, and limited organizational experience with community compensation can make it difficult to provide equitable reimbursement for participation. Sites highlighted the importance of dedicating resources for stipends or honoraria and establishing sustainable processes that recognize lived experience as expertise rather than volunteer input.

LOOKING AHEAD

Opportunities exist to support more coordinated and customer-centered service delivery across public benefit programs. Policymakers may consider simplifying verification and reporting requirements, promoting plain-language communication standards, and providing clearer guidance related to language access and accessibility.

At the operational level, agencies can continue investing in staff training, community partnerships, customer-centered design, and communication strategies that strengthen trust and improve service delivery. While technology can help streamline interactions, sustained engagement with community partners and people with lived experience will remain essential to creating systems that are responsive to community needs and reduce barriers to accessing benefits.

RESOURCES

LANGUAGE ACCESS

- [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#)
- [SNAP Language Access Study - USDA](#)

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN & ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

- [Introduction to Human-Centered Design - InnovateUS](#)
- [“The Power of Community Visioning: What It Is, Why You Should Start, and Local Government Examples” - Envisio](#)
- [U.S. public participation playbook - Digital.gov](#)
- [Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit - Center for the Study of Social Policy](#)
- [Blueprint for a Human-Centered Safety Net - Code for America](#)

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

- [Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [State Efforts to Address ACEs and Trauma and Build Resilience - National Governors Association](#)

CONCLUSION

The experiences of CSNS Cohort 2 sites demonstrate that meaningful systems change is possible when agencies, community-based organizations, and community members work together to improve access to benefits and services. Across diverse communities, sites developed practical strategies to strengthen cross-program coordination, improve customer experience, modernize processes, and expand access to nutrition supports.

Philanthropic investments and pilot initiatives provided opportunities to test new approaches, build partnerships, and generate evidence that can inform future policy and operational improvements.

Sustaining this progress will require continued investments in technology, staff capacity, community engagement, and cross-program alignment. Federal, state, and local leaders all have a role to play in reducing unnecessary administrative complexity, supporting data sharing and interoperability, and creating opportunities for more coordinated service delivery.

Ultimately, the work of Cohort 2 underscores a central lesson: when agencies center community voice, strengthen partnerships, and align systems around the people they serve, public benefits programs become more accessible, responsive, and effective.



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