



COORDINATING SNAP & NUTRITION SUPPORTS **IMPACT REPORT**

— NORTH CAROLINA —

Background & Context

Through the Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports (CSNS) initiative, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' (NCDHHS) Division of Child and Family Well-Being (DCFW) partnered with Meals4Families to improve access to SNAP by strengthening cross-sector partnerships and modernizing how residents get connected to benefits.

Programs including Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC support millions of people across North Carolina, but some families experience barriers to accessing public benefits. These include barriers such as limited awareness of available programs, complex enrollment processes, and fragmented systems across sectors. North Carolina operates a state-supervised, county-administered model for SNAP, meaning that while the state office issues policy guidance and provides oversight, local county agencies are responsible for day-to-day implementation. While this structure allows for flexibility and responsiveness to local needs, it can also create variation in processes, capacity, and coordination across counties. These dynamics make it important to strengthen alignment across state, county, and community outreach partners, particularly when working across sectors such as healthcare and education.

Building on their existing outreach program and efforts to improve benefit access, the North Carolina CSNS project team focused on expanding innovative outreach and enrollment strategies that meet families where they are through school partnerships, health systems referrals, and digital tools and systems. By leveraging trusted community institutions and improving coordination across sectors, the team aimed to reduce administrative burden and increase participation in SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid.

BUILDING ON CSNS COHORT 1: [MECKLENBURG COUNTY](#)

North Carolina's project team built on lessons from Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, a site from the first cohort of CSNS. Mecklenburg's project focused on improving food security by simplifying access to wraparound supports and increasing enrollment in nutrition assistance programs. The project demonstrated several strategies that informed future work, including centering people with lived experience, using coordinated community outreach to increase SNAP enrollment, and strengthening collaboration among agencies and community organizations to create easier pathways to food resources.



Project Description

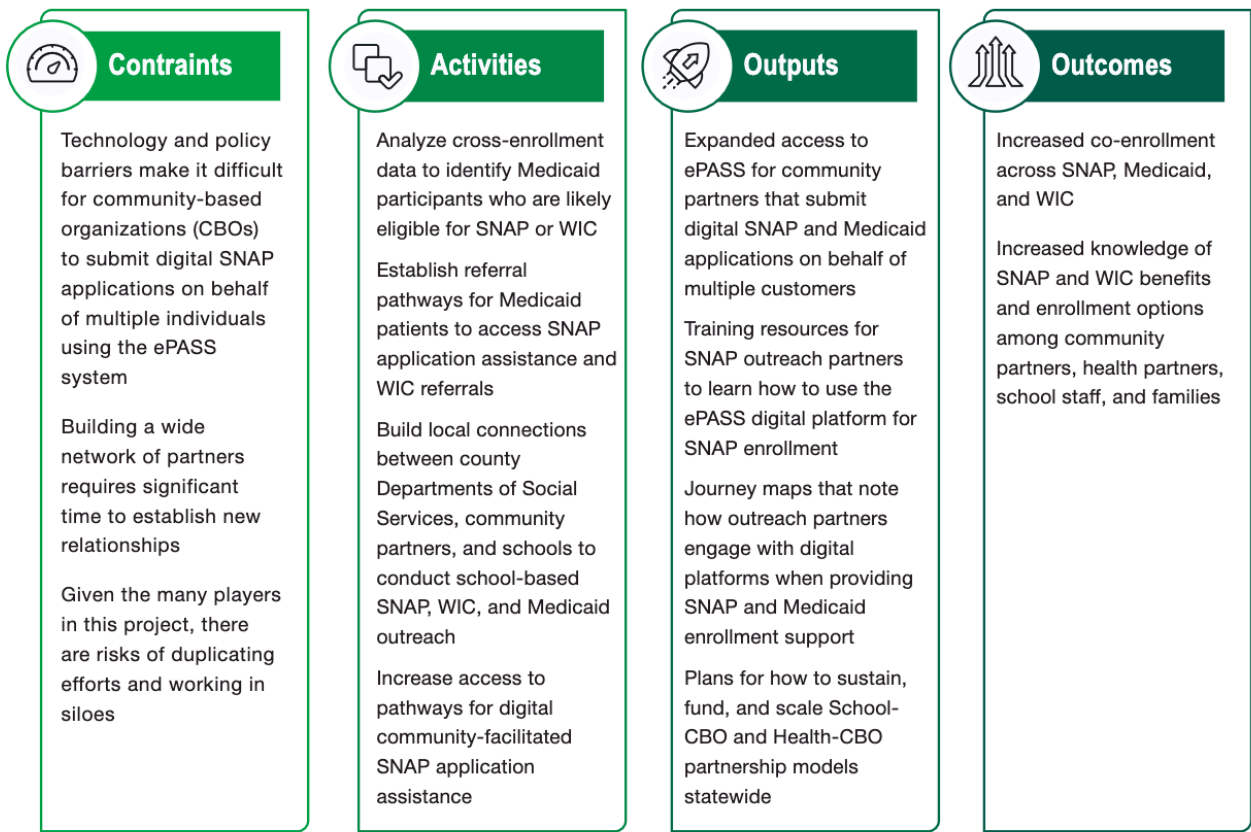
The North Carolina CSNS project focused on expanding and refining cross-sector outreach and enrollment models to improve access to SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid through K-12 schools and healthcare systems, while enhancing digital tools to support application and enrollment.

Rather than relying solely on service centers, the project aimed to embed SNAP access into systems that families already interact with, creating more seamless and accessible entry points.

Key Objectives

-  Expand access to SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid by embedding enrollment assistance within trusted community institutions, including schools and healthcare settings.
-  Strengthen cross-sector coordination and co-enrollment strategies to improve alignment across SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, and community-based support systems and reduce co-enrollment gaps.
-  Enhance digital tools and enrollment support infrastructure to simplify application processes, reduce administrative burden, and improve the experience for both applicants and enrollment partners.

Logic Model



Approach

The North Carolina project team prioritized collaboration across agencies and organizations, creating a team of more than 70 people across 22 organizations. The team's project focused on three primary strategies: school partnerships, health system referrals, and improvements to digital application support. Together, these approaches aimed to create multiple, coordinated pathways for individuals and families to access SNAP.

School Partnerships

The North Carolina CSNS team partnered with school districts across Western and Eastern North Carolina to embed SNAP support within trusted community institutions. Recognizing that schools often serve as a primary point of connection for families, the team leveraged existing relationships between schools, community-based organizations, and families to increase awareness of available benefits and reduce barriers to enrollment. The school-based model proved especially effective in reaching families who may not otherwise engage with traditional service channels. By integrating SNAP enrollment into the school environment, the project increased awareness, trust, and access, while strengthening relationships between schools, families, and community partners.



SNAP IN SCHOOLS MODEL

Through the CSNS project, North Carolina piloted the first successful No Kid Hungry SNAP in Schools model in the state, embedding enrollment support directly within school communities. This model demonstrated how schools can serve as effective hubs for connecting families to nutrition benefits. Through this approach, school districts partnered with community-based organizations (CBOs) to identify eligible families, conduct outreach, and provide application assistance. The model proved highly impactful, resulting in hundreds of SNAP applications and over \$1 million in projected SNAP benefits returned to school communities, while also strengthening relationships between schools, families, and service providers.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

School partnerships also created opportunities for deeper community engagement and relationship-building. The project supported a range of family engagement activities, including community nights, family resource events, and “A Seat at the Table” conversations, which brought together over 130 participants, including families, students, and partners to share experiences and inform program design. The North Carolina team provided stipends for community members to enable participation and designed events to center families as experts in their own experiences. This community engagement increased awareness of SNAP and related programs, built trust, and created ongoing feedback loops to inform implementation.



STRENGTHENED SCHOOL & CBO PARTNERSHIPS

The project significantly strengthened collaboration between schools and CBOs, creating more coordinated and holistic support systems for families. School districts partnered with food banks, legal services organizations, local nonprofits, and other community partners to connect families with SNAP enrollment assistance and other economic and nutrition support programs. Across North Carolina, partners developed lasting relationships that have evolved into what one team member described as a “true coalition,” enabling organizations to respond collectively to family needs that extends beyond SNAP enrollment, including food insecurity, housing instability, and health-related challenges. These strengthened relationships improved service delivery and created a foundation for ongoing collaboration and expansion.

Health Systems Partnerships

The North Carolina CSNS team partnered with healthcare providers, Medicaid partners, community organizations, and researchers to explore how healthcare settings can serve as effective pathways to nutrition supports. By strengthening coordination between healthcare and human services systems, the project aimed to create more seamless pathways to enrollment while reducing administrative barriers for families. Together, these efforts established a strong foundation for future data-informed, cross-sector enrollment strategies and demonstrated both the promise and complexity of integrating healthcare and human services systems.



NUTRITION INSECURITY CROSS-ENROLLMENT (NICE) PILOT TIER 2

The North Carolina team built on the state’s Nutrition Insecurity Cross-Enrollment (NICE) pilot, which works to integrate benefit eligibility indicators into care management datasets used by Medicaid providers, enabling healthcare teams to identify and refer eligible individuals to SNAP and WIC through trusted healthcare settings. As the next phase of the NICE pilot, the North Carolina team conducted a 12-month SNAP and WIC enrollment support study to test how different outreach approaches could improve enrollment outcomes. The study examined the effect of “high-touch” phone calls and “low-touch” text messages paired with application support from enrollment specialists.

While data analysis is ongoing, this study has already provided deeper insight into how to operationalize benefit referrals within large health systems. It highlighted challenges such as the dynamic attribution of Medicaid members across provider networks and the disconnect between individual-level healthcare data and household-based eligibility requirements for SNAP and WIC. At the same time, it created an opportunity to better understand the enrollment process and assess the economic impact of SNAP participation for Medicaid-enrolled households.



CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION & DATA SHARING

To advance cross-sector enrollment strategies, the North Carolina team convened a coordinated study team that included a state agency partner (NC Medicaid), two major health system partners including a Medicaid Managed Care Organization (Carolina Complete Health) and the coordinated outpatient care management team for a major health network (Duke Health's Population Health Management Office), a community partner (Meals4Families), SNAP-enrollment support specialists (More in My Basket), and an academic research evaluation team (Duke Margolis Institute for Health Policy). This collaboration required developing data sharing agreements and protocols across four partner organizations and represented one of the state's first large-scale efforts to integrate data across the Medicaid ecosystem to support nutrition benefit outreach.

This study is expected to provide insight into the implementation and outcome of data-driven cross-enrollment outreach while also generating valuable information about the enrollment process. By analyzing application approval rates and reasons for denial, the team will be better positioned to identify common pain points and target future outreach, enrollment assistance, and system improvements. The data will also provide a representative description of the economic benefit of SNAP enrollment for Medicaid-enrolled North Carolina households.

Digital Tools & Services

To complement its school- and healthcare-based enrollment strategies, North Carolina invested in improving the digital tools and systems that support SNAP access. The goal was to create more efficient, coordinated, and user-friendly pathways for enrollment while reducing administrative burden for both applicants and partner organizations. By pairing technology enhancements with community input and partner training, North Carolina worked to build both the technological infrastructure and the partner capacity needed to support long-term improvements in benefit access.



EPASS ENHANCEMENTS

A central focus of North Carolina's project was improving ePASS, the state's online benefits application platform, to reduce administrative burden and expand access to more efficient, digital pathways for enrollment. Through a participatory co-design process, a cross-sector team of agency staff, community organizations, and enrollment specialists worked together to identify challenges and develop solutions that would improve the experience for both applicants and enrollment support partners.

This work resulted in upgrades to ePASS self-service features and the design of new tools that better support partner-facilitated enrollment, increasing transparency for applicants and community partners by making it easier to track application status, access information, and manage benefits online. These improvements give individuals and enrollment support partners greater visibility into the status of their benefit applications by going online instead of waiting in line to reach county DSS offices in person or by phone. The initiative also helped the cross-sector team identify ongoing policy and process barriers that must be addressed to support

future innovation. More broadly, the North Carolina project offers a model for how states can use participatory co-design and technology improvements to streamline enrollment, strengthen partner engagement, and improve customer experience.



NCID BUSINESS ACCOUNTS

The project significantly expanded the use of NCID Business Accounts, accounts operated by approved organizations allowing them to submit facilitated applications directly through ePASS on behalf of clients. At the start of the project, none of the seven core enrollment support organizations participating in the initiative were using this functionality. Through the CSNS project, partners co-designed a new onboarding process and ePASS interface for organizations providing enrollment assistance. As a result, ninety organizations across North Carolina are now actively using NCID Business Accounts to support SNAP and Medicaid enrollment, facilitating thousands of benefit applications each year through ePASS instead of using paper applications. The project also led to a 50% increase in the number of inquiries about Business Accounts.

The project also led to the creation of a new dashboard that allows partners to track the status of submitted applications, improving transparency, coordination, and follow-up throughout the enrollment process. These improvements strengthened enrollment partners' ability to assist clients and made the application more accessible for individuals who rely on trusted partners for help completing applications, gathering documentation, or navigating program requirements.



TUTORIALS & TRAININGS

To support adoption of these digital tools, the project invested in training, technical assistance, and ongoing engagement for partners and staff. The North Carolina team developed new onboarding processes, training materials, and technical assistance resources to support organizations using ePASS and NCID Business Accounts, promoting take-up and consistency in how the tools are being used. Building on this work, partner organizations are planning regional trainings focused on Enhanced ePASS accounts and are continuing outreach efforts to prepare partners and residents for upcoming Medicaid policy changes related to H.R. 1.

Results



IMPROVED IDENTIFICATION & ACCESS TO BENEFITS

North Carolina expanded access to SNAP by embedding enrollment support in trusted community settings and creating new pathways for identifying and connecting eligible households to benefits. Through the SNAP in Schools model, school districts and community-based organizations worked together to provide direct enrollment assistance, submitting 368 SNAP applications and supporting 141 SUN Bucks applications in the first year alone. These applications are projected to generate more than \$1 million in SNAP benefits for families, representing the equivalent purchasing power of more than 250,000 meals and an estimated \$1.5 million in local economic activity.

At the same time, the project expanded opportunities for benefit access through healthcare settings. By building on the Nutrition Insecurity Cross-Enrollment (NICE) pilot, North Carolina demonstrated the potential for healthcare providers to identify and refer individuals who may be eligible for SNAP and WIC. Together, these approaches reduced barriers related to awareness, trust, and access by connecting families to nutrition supports through systems they already engage with regularly.



ENHANCED DATA INFRASTRUCTURE & ENROLLMENT SUPPORT

The project strengthened North Carolina's digital benefits infrastructure by improving tools used by both applicants and enrollment support partners. Through enhancements to ePASS, the project improved self-service features and streamlined the experience for organizations assisting residents with applications. A new onboarding process and dashboard for NCID Business Account users increased transparency and made it easier for partner organizations to track the status of applications. These improvements reduced administrative burden, strengthened coordination between community partners and state agencies, and established a stronger foundation for future digital innovation.



STRENGTHENED CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION & PARTNER CAPACITY

A significant outcome of the project was the development of stronger relationships across education, healthcare, human services, and community-based organizations. Through regular collaboration, shared planning, and joint problem-solving, partners developed a deeper understanding of each other's systems, constraints, and opportunities for collaboration. These relationships strengthened implementation efforts and created a more coordinated approach to supporting families.

The project also expanded the capacity of community organizations to provide enrollment assistance and benefit navigation services. Through training, technical assistance, and ongoing learning opportunities, partners increased their ability to support families while contributing to a growing statewide network of more

than 70 individuals across 22 organizations working to improve access to nutrition supports. In both Western and Eastern North Carolina, school districts and community organizations developed lasting partnerships that continue to support families beyond the grant period. These strengthened relationships proved especially valuable during times of crisis, including efforts to support families affected by Hurricane Helene in late 2024.



ELEVATED COMMUNITY VOICE & PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

The North Carolina CSNS team remained committed to engaging community members, enrollment specialists, and partner organizations as co-designers in developing more accessible and efficient enrollment supports. Through community nights, surveys, family engagement events, “A Seat at the Table” conversations, and participatory co-design processes, the project created opportunities for individuals with lived experience to shape implementation and identify barriers to access. These efforts helped ensure that project strategies reflected the realities families face when navigating benefit programs.

Community voice also played a central role in the development of digital tools and enrollment support systems. Enrollment specialists and community partners worked alongside state agencies and technical teams to identify challenges within ePASS, design improvements to partner-facing tools, and inform the development of future system enhancements. This collaborative approach resulted in solutions that were more responsive to user needs while strengthening trust and shared ownership across partners.

By incorporating community voice throughout project implementation, the team strengthened program design and service delivery while building trust among residents, community organizations, and state agencies. Beyond informing specific project activities, these engagement efforts contributed to a broader culture shift toward participatory design and continuous feedback.

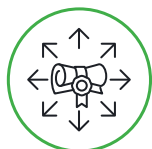
Lessons Learned

-  **Partnerships are a smart investment.** Partnerships were the driving force behind North Carolina's CSNS work, enabling collaboration across sectors that had not previously existed. These relationships strengthened implementation, supported problem-solving, and will continue to generate impact beyond the grant period.
-  **Systems change work is complex and requires strong coordination.** Coordinating across multiple systems requires aligning stakeholders, navigating differing data structures, and managing operational complexity. Strong project leadership and consistent communication were essential to bringing partners together and advancing shared goals.
-  **There is no single solution to improving access.** Expanding access to SNAP requires a combination of strategies, including partnerships, policy alignment, and technology. The project demonstrated that meaningful progress happens at the intersection of these areas, rather than through any one approach alone.
-  **Participatory co-design strengthens innovation and outcomes.** Engaging community partners and individuals with lived experience as co-designers, not just participants, led to more effective solutions and uncovered insights that would not have emerged through traditional top-down approaches.
-  **Dedicated staffing and capacity are essential.** Limited staff capacity constrained participation in some aspects of the project, highlighting the importance of dedicated roles supporting coordination, implementation, and long-term sustainability.

Sustainability & Improvement

North Carolina is committed to sustaining and expanding the partnerships, tools, and outreach and enrollment models developed through the CSNS project. While the grant provided an opportunity to test new approaches to increasing SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid access, the project's long-term impact extends beyond individual initiatives. Through this work, NCDHHS and its partners strengthened cross-sector relationships, built new enrollment support infrastructure, and established models that will continue to inform benefit access efforts across the state.

Key elements of sustainability include:



CONTINUED EXPANSION OF SCHOOL-BASED ENROLLMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Building on the success of the SNAP in Schools model and an initial pilot partnership in Western North Carolina, partners will continue expanding school-based enrollment support efforts across the state. These partners will engage additional schools, community organizations, and school-based health centers, and regional healthcare providers to connect families to SNAP and other economic supports through trusted community institutions. By expanding the model through regional partnerships rather than individual schools, North Carolina is demonstrating a scalable approach to benefits access and community-based enrollment support.



ONGOING COLLABORATION WITH HEALTHCARE PARTNERS

North Carolina will continue working with Medicaid partners, healthcare systems, researchers, and community organizations to refine referral and enrollment models informed by the NICE pilot and Tier 2 study. Insights from this work will help identify opportunities to strengthen cross-enrollment pathways and improve coordination between healthcare and nutrition assistance systems.



CONTINUED ENHANCEMENT OF DIGITAL ENROLLMENT TOOLS

Improvements to ePASS, NCID Business Accounts, and partner-facing enrollment tools have established a foundation for more efficient and accessible enrollment support. The project team will continue refining these tools, expanding partner access, and supporting implementation through training, technical assistance, and ongoing collaboration.



STRENGTHENED INVESTMENT IN BENEFIT NAVIGATION AND CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION

The project demonstrated the value of coordinated enrollment support and trusted community partnerships in improving access to benefits. North Carolina will continue building the case for sustained investment in benefit navigation capacity, community partnerships, and cross-sector collaboration as critical components of an effective nutrition support system.

Through the CSNS project, North Carolina established a strong foundation for a more integrated, coordinated, and community-centered approach to benefit access. By continuing to invest in partnerships, technology, and enrollment support infrastructure, the state is better positioned to connect residents with the nutrition supports they need.

Key Takeaways

- 1 Embedding enrollment in trusted institutions expands access.
- 2 Cross-sector partnerships are critical to addressing complex barriers.
- 3 Digital tools can improve access but must be aligned with systems and processes.
- 4 Sustained investment in coordination and capacity is essential for long-term impact.

Project Library

[Coordinating SNAP & Nutrition Supports \(CSNS\) Cohort 2 Case Study — North Carolina: Meeting Families Where They Are](#)

[Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports \(CSNS\) Impact Report: Mecklenburg County, NC](#)

[Breaking Barriers to Food Access: North Carolina's SNAP Coordination Story](#)

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Co-published by APHSA's Process Innovation team and Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign Center for Best Practices team, with contributions from Blake Turpin and Miranda Lauzon, respectively.
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