

# Improvements to HHSC Eligibility System

The Texas Catholic Conference **supports improvements of the eligibility system, including adequate staffing levels, streamlined processes and documentation requirements, and outreach and application assistance, to ensure prompt access to food and health care assistance during this recession.**

Even more than an expression of solidarity, it is a matter of justice to overcome the temptation to reduce public services for a short-term benefit against the long-term human cost... aid for development should be maintained and even increased as a critical factor in renewing the economy and leading us out of the crisis. *(Intervention of the Holy See at the 2009 High Level Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, July 2009)*

## *A Texas Bishop Speaks:*

"When an individual or family is in need of the safety net services of food or health care, they need true assistance and not roadblocks and delays. The systemic problems of the eligibility system in Texas extend the difficulties of families who qualify but cannot access the safety net the state has to offer."



*-Bishop Joe Vásquez, Diocese of Austin*

## Church Teaching

- ★ Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good. Concern for the health of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance. *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2288)*
- ★ To guarantee people and peoples the possibility of overcoming the scourge of hunger is to assure them concrete access to adequate, healthy food. Indeed, this is a practical expression of the right to life which, although it is solemnly proclaimed, all too often remains far from being implemented fully. *(Pope Benedict XVI, Message on 2009 World Food Day)*
- ★ Going to the aid of the human being is a duty: both in response to a fundamental right of the person and because the care of individuals redounds to the benefit of the group. *(Pope Benedict XVI, Addressing the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Health Care)*
- ★ Food security must stress components such as: the production of a sufficient amount of food, a stable supply throughout the year, access to food for all, the proper and equitable distribution, and a commitment to producing the components of a balanced and healthy diet in keeping with local nutritional practices. *(Intervention by the Holy See at the United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture on the Realization of the Human Right to Food)*

## Resources

- ★ **CHIP | Children's Medicaid Texas** ([www.chipmedicaid.org/](http://www.chipmedicaid.org/))
- ★ **Texas Medicaid Program** ([www.hhsc.state.tx.us/medicaid/med\\_info.html](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/medicaid/med_info.html))
- ★ **SNAP Food Benefits Texas** (formerly "Food stamps")([www.hhsc.state.tx.us/help/food/foodstamps/index.html](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/help/food/foodstamps/index.html))
- ★ **Texas Health and Human Services Commission** ([www.hhsc.state.tx.us](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us))
- ★ **Catholic Charities USA** ([www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org](http://www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org))

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The Texas Catholic Conference (TCC) is the association of the 15 Roman Catholic dioceses of the State of Texas, and is the Official Public Policy Voice of the Catholic Bishops of Texas.

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# Improvements to HHSC Eligibility

## Access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits<sup>i</sup>

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides low-income households with electronic benefits they can use like cash at most grocery stores. SNAP is the cornerstone of the Federal food assistance programs, and provides crucial support to needy households and to those making the transition from welfare to work. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers SNAP at the Federal level through its Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). State agencies administer the program at State and local levels, including determination of eligibility and allotments, and distribution of benefits.

Based on a study of data gathered in Fiscal Year 2006:

- 49 percent of all participants are children (18 or younger), and 61 percent of them live in single-parent households.
- 76 percent of all benefits go to households with children, 16 percent go to households with disabled persons, and 9 percent go to households with elderly persons.
- The average gross monthly income per SNAP household is \$673.

The federal government pays for the cost of the food, while the state pays for half of the administrative costs for the program. The SNAP program therefore helps fund jobs as well as assist the state economy by enabling Texans to make local purchases. Texas has the worst performing food stamp program in the nation and ranks last in processing food stamps applications and getting eligible low-income people to apply, said Kevin Concannon, the federal director for food assistance, at the beginning of 2010. Further hindering eligible applicants from receiving aid, Texas is one of three states that fingerprints applicants for the program and imposes a "time-consuming and complicated" assets test, leading to an enrollment of only 55% of eligible applicants in the program.<sup>ii</sup>

## Access to Health Care

25% of Texans are uninsured and 20% of Texas Children are uninsured.<sup>iii</sup> To prepare for the implementation of the Health Care Exchanges in 2014, Texas must work now to fully eliminate delays, backlogs, and erroneous denials that stand between eligible Texans and the health care they need. Staffing levels, computer processes, and procedures must be designed to meet or exceed federal processing timeliness standards. Every Texan should have the opportunity to enroll in good, affordable health care coverage.

We support efforts to:

- Improve the eligibility system, including outreach and application assistance, to enroll every eligible child in CHIP & Medicaid with 12 months continuous eligibility.
- Fix problems with the Integrated Eligibility System to prevent eligible kids from losing CHIP and Medicaid coverage.
- Provide adequate reimbursement for Medicaid and CHIP providers.
- Eliminate bureaucratic roadblocks to encourage personal responsibility and help low income families achieve self-sufficiency.
- Invest in outreach and education to ensure that all eligible children get the care that they need.
- Ensure that the working poor who access both CHIP and Medicaid have access to affordable, quality healthcare.

*(Last updated August 12, 2010, 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Session)*

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<sup>i</sup> "Food Stamp Program." *Health and Human Services Commission*. 10 June 2010. Web. 12 Aug. 2010. <[www.hhsc.state.tx.us/help/food/foodstamps/index.html](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/help/food/foodstamps/index.html)>.

<sup>ii</sup> Scharrer, Gary. "Texas Ranks Last in the Nation on Food Stamps - Houston Chronicle." *Houston News, Entertainment, Search and Shopping | Chron.com - Houston Chronicle*. 12 Jan. 2010. Web. 12 Aug. 2010. <[www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/6811169.html](http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/6811169.html)>.

<sup>iii</sup> "Texas Facts at a Glance." *Kaiser State Health Facts*. Web. 12 Aug. 2010. <[www.statehealthfacts.org/profileglance.jsp?rgn=45&rgn=1#](http://www.statehealthfacts.org/profileglance.jsp?rgn=45&rgn=1#)>.