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### Barriers to Food Stamps in New York State: A Perspective from the Field

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## **Barriers to Food Stamps in New York State: A Perspective from the Field**

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*Although the Food Stamp Program provides nutritional assistance to families and individuals in need, barriers to access, eligibility, and receipt of food stamp benefits do exist. Minimizing and potentially eradicating significant barriers requires a better understanding of which barriers are the most prevalent and persistent and a plan for addressing them. Using data from 73 community based organizations in New York State over a 4-year time period, the authors identify barriers that are most frequently mentioned and do not abate over time. A number of recommendations are presented to address barriers in general and the specific barriers that were identified.*

*KEYWORDS* food stamps, community-based organizations, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, benefits, eligibility, access

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) has been an important safety net for those facing temporary or long-term economic hardship since 1964. The purpose of the program, now known as Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is to “raise levels of nutrition among low-income households” (Food Stamp Program, 2008).

SNAP serves 10.3% of the population (Loveless, 2010) and more than one half of the households receiving benefits include children (Committee on Ways and Means, 2008). Recent economic hardships (precipitated by the

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Great Recession) and federal policy changes (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) have resulted in an increase in participation of low-income households, yet not all eligible family are participating in the program (Nord & Prell, 2011). Additionally, challenges to food security—confidence in having enough food at all times—remain, especially among children and vulnerable households (Lombe, Yu, & Nebbitt, 2009).

The literature identifies numerous barriers to food stamps (FS) including access issues, stigma, problems with the distribution process, and errors in benefit payment. This study sets out to further this research through the following: (1) comparing the literature on existing barriers to FS with the perspectives of field workers in New York State, (2) identifying which of those barriers are prevalent across three distinct regions in the state, and (3) identifying which of those barriers are prevalent and persistent over a 4-year time period. Based on this information, we offer recommendations to inform federal and state SNAP programs on how to address these barriers and to engage and empower families in relation to the SNAP.

Historically, New York State (NYS) has generously supplemented the federal SNAP with its own state-funded nutritional programs and outreach efforts. It has also taken a number of steps to remove barriers to the SNAP, including implementing an online application process, waiving resource testing in special circumstances, and expanding eligibility for select low-income households to attain minimum benefits (New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance [OTDA], 2008).

This study was a collaborative effort between researchers and Hunger Solutions New York, Inc, a statewide, private, nonprofit organization dedicated to alleviating hunger. Through its Nutrition Outreach and Education Program, Hunger Solutions New York Inc. works to expand participation in the SNAP by channeling state and federal funding for SNAP outreach efforts to local community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout NYS. The program's primary responsibilities include assisting individuals with applying for and receiving FS and working with local social service staff to facilitate these processes.

Although NYS faces unique challenges given its diverse population, regional differences<sup>1</sup> and local administrative structures, it can also serve as an example for other states. Having taken the lead in administering some new approaches to SNAP and being one of the larger states in the nation, other states may benefit from learning which barriers are prevalent and persistent in NYS.

## BACKGROUND OF SNAP AND LITERATURE ON BARRIERS

The federal budget covers all of the cost of FS benefits and shares administration costs with the states. However, states have flexibility around SNAP

implementation and can choose various waiver options or designate funding based on state preference or need for special projects. As a result, enrollment in SNAP varies across the states; in recent years the rate of low-income children receiving FSs ranged from 14% to 40% across states with a national average of 28% (Koball & Douglas-Hall, 2004).

A number of barriers to receiving FS have been documented. Lacking social capital (resources through connections and relationships) and cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and education related to status in society) is often an issue for marginalized populations such as the elderly and immigrant families (Fey-Yensan, English, Belyea, & Pacheco, 2003; Kaiser, 2008; Nord, 2001). They may be unaware of SNAP, or if aware they may misunderstand eligibility criteria and have limited capacity to find out about the criteria. This lack of capacity becomes an even greater handicap when policies are complicated and intertwined with other welfare programs (Fey-Yensan et al., 2003; Nord, 2001; Tschoepe & Hinderer, 2001).

There are challenges associated with the application procedure (U.S. Government Accountability Office [USGAO], 2004). Fulfilling verification requirements may be challenging for working families if the procedures need to be completed during regular work hours. People with disabilities and the elderly may face additional challenges with mobility and transportation; it is difficult for them to get to the FS office for a face-to-face interview, have fingerprints taken, and gather the documents needed at different locations (Schwartz, 2001). Once enrolled, some households leave SNAP because the procedures to maintain benefits are overly burdensome relative to the value of the benefit (Mills, Dorai-Raj, & Peterson, 2001).

Another widely recognized barrier to receiving FS is stigma. Food stamps are negatively linked with poverty and disability (Heflin & Ziliak, 2008; Kaiser, 2008; Nord, 2001). Married couples, noncitizens, or those with assets are especially likely to think that they do not fit the stereotype for public assistance and thus do not consider SNAP as an option (Hanratty, 2006; Kaiser, 2008). Further, studies have shown that many families leave SNAP because of the social stigma associated with welfare dependency (Algert, Reibel, & Renvall, 2006; Mills et al., 2000). To decrease stigma, the federal government introduced the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), which draws less attention to the beneficiary because it resembles a debit or credit card. Alternative approaches such as EBT provide flexibility and efficiency but bring a new set of challenges for disadvantaged groups including confusion over how to use the EBT card (Gabor, Williams, Bellamy, & Hardison, 2002; United States Government Accountability Office, 2007b).

Some households face problems with the benefit distribution process, including benefits being received late or with inaccurate amounts (United States Government Accountability Office, 2005, 2007a). For example, FS benefits are supposed to be issued within 30 days of application if eligible, and under special circumstances newly eligible recipients are to receive

expedited benefits within 5 days to avoid extensive hardship. However, states are often unable to meet these time requirements.

Errors in benefit amounts (overpayments and underpayments) are widespread (United States Government Accountability Office, 2007a). The United States Government Accountability Office (2005) found two thirds of errors attributable to caseworkers (e.g., applying benefit rules incorrectly), and one third due to participants' reporting errors. State officials identified program complexity, lack of resources, and staff turnover as factors contributing to the payment error problem.

## METHOD

### Data Sources

This study utilized quantitative and qualitative data collected by 73 CBOs throughout NYS to document perceived barriers to SNAP. These CBOs received state funding for SNAP outreach efforts to increase access to SNAP through the Hunger Solutions New York, Inc. Each agency submitted quantitative quarterly reports and one qualitative annual report. The quantitative quarterly report was based on a form created by the Hunger Solutions New York, Inc. with inputs from the CBOs. The form includes a list of 15 common barriers to FS and a space for CBOs to write in additional barriers that were not captured by the 15. The CBOs report on how many times each barrier was faced. This study analyzed 2004 to 2008 quarterly reports ( $N = 637$ ). For the annual report, the agencies identified one meaningful barrier and discussed what had been done to overcome that barrier. A total of 216 annual reports were collected for the study period, and 64 (30%) were randomly sampled for qualitative narrative analysis. The qualitative data were used to further illustrate the barriers and describe what the CBOs were or were not able to do to address the barrier/s they chose to discuss.

Each quarterly report was counted as a case. Although a few agencies did not submit all four reports per year, missing quarterly reports were not a significant problem. As Table 1 indicates, data were represented evenly across the 4 years. The proportion of CBOs represented in each time period was also similar, ranging from 63% to 81%. Some agencies were not included in all 4 years due to contractual decisions.

Table 1 also shows the distribution of reports and agencies by region: Upstate urban, Upstate rural, and New York City. The upstate urban region includes CBOs serving largely urban, racially mixed populations, such as Buffalo. The upstate rural region includes CBOs serving predominately White populations in counties of fewer than 250,000 residents. The New York City region includes a large number of minority and immigrant populations. Although New York City draws the majority of the SNAP recipients, that area has fewer CBOs funded through Hunger Solutions New York, Inc. than the upstate urban region (29% vs. 41%).

**TABLE 1** Quarterly Report and Community-Based Organization (CBO) Data by Year and Region

Year	Quarterly report % ( $n = 637$ )	CBO % ( $n = 73$ )
2004	24	75
2005	27	81
2006	23	75
2007	26	63
Region		
Upstate rural	27	30
Upstate urban	45	41
New York City	28	29

## Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistics were run to examine the frequency of each of the 15 predetermined barriers. Results showed great variation among these barriers. The most common barrier *excessive documentation required* occurred 1,754 times over the 4 years, with an average of 2.82 ( $SD = 8.829$ ,  $n = 621$ ) per quarterly report, whereas the most uncommon barrier *incorrect application of retirement account resource rule* occurred only 56 times over the 4 years, with an average of less than once in every 10 reports ( $SD = .534$ ,  $n = 607$ ).

More than one third of the quarterly reports also included written descriptions of “other” barriers. The authors reviewed all written responses to “other” barriers and found that some of them could be recoded into existing barriers. Many other responses related to issues concerning immigrants and elderly. A new category was created for analysis called special populations: immigrants and elderly. This new category includes all of the “other” barriers that related to immigrants and elderly as well as the four categories listed on the form that were also related to these populations. As a result of collapsing four of the predetermined variables to create one new variable, we were left with 12 variables for analysis.

Finally, we analyzed prevalence rate by region and contract year using the 12 barriers. To focus on how widespread these barriers are across the state and across different agencies, a dichotomous variable of whether the barrier occurred at each agency in each quarter was created for analysis. Chi-squared statistics were used to examine statistically significant differences.

Annual reports were used to triangulate our statistical results. The qualitative analysis of the annual reports gave us a deeper understanding of the barriers by providing context. Throughout the data analysis process, we sought clarification from the Hunger Solutions of New York who assisted with interpreting the findings. They also contributed to the policy and programmatic recommendations.

## FINDINGS

### A Barriers Framework: Access, Eligibility Processing, and Benefits

Informed by the literature and the field experience, we develop the following three categories of barriers: access, eligibility, and benefits. Although the categories are interrelated, each one represents a distinct stage in the SNAP application process. *Access barriers* are any barriers that interrupt the process of obtaining and submitting a SNAP application. This may include elements of the process conducted by local social service employees to determine eligibility, if failure to comply results in the withdrawal of the application before any determination of eligibility was made. *Eligibility processing barriers* are any barriers that negatively affect the process of determining SNAP eligibility or any part of the determination process that if done incorrectly by the social service employee would result in an incorrect eligibility determination and/or less benefits than the household is eligible for. This starts after the application is submitted and ends with a household either receiving FS benefits or receiving a denial notice. If the denial notice has eligibility processing mistakes this would be included in this barrier category. Lastly, *benefit barriers* are any that negatively affect FS recipients from receiving their monthly benefit allotment once eligibility was determined.

### Most Prevalent Barriers and Case Examples

To determine the most pressing issues, we identified eight barriers that were reported in more than 20% of the quarterly reports. Table 2 provides case examples drawn from the qualitative data of the eight most commonly reported barriers. Of these eight barriers, four are eligibility barriers, two are access barriers, and two are benefits barriers.

### Prevalence and Regional Differences

Table 3 describes the prevalence of each barrier overall and by region. The most common barrier is special population (46%) followed closely by ongoing FS not issued within 30 days (45%), and then excessive documentation required (39%). The three most common barriers for upstate rural are the same as the overall, though they rank differently. Upstate urban only differs from the overall in that expedited benefit not issued is tied for second place. The NYC region differs from the overall by including EBT issues and not ongoing FS not issued within 30 days.

Overall, NYC reports a higher number of barriers than the upstate rural and upstate urban regions. One half of the key barriers appear on more than 50% of the quarterly reports from NYC. The prevalence of even the

**TABLE 2** Categories of Food Stamp Barriers With Case Examples Drawn from Qualitative Reports

Category	Barrier description	Examples
Access	Face-to-face interview not waived	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDSS<sup>a</sup> refused to waive the in-office interview for transportation issues.</li> <li>• Interview was not waived for working single mom with 4 children.</li> </ul>
	Same-day application not accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients were told to return the next day because all interview times were taken that day.</li> </ul>
Eligibility	Excessive documentation required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required third-party statement for residency.</li> <li>• Requested documents proving resources for categorically eligible applicants.</li> </ul>
	Expedited benefit not issued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDSS weren't using the mandatory expedited screening form resulting in 5 eligible cases not receiving the benefit.</li> <li>• LDSS reorganized the processing of expedited FS and training was needed.</li> </ul>
	Fails to assist with application documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDSS didn't offer information on collateral proof when a client wasn't able to get a statement from his landlord.</li> </ul>
Benefits	Barriers experienced by special population: Elderly and Immigrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicaid spend down was not counted.</li> <li>• Ineligible immigrants were improperly discouraged from applying on behalf of eligible household members.</li> </ul>
	Ongoing food stamp not issued within 30 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52 clients waited longer than 30–45 days.</li> <li>• Client did not receive money on time; it was more than 3 weeks late.</li> </ul>
	EBT issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients had EBT transaction errors at the stores.</li> <li>• LDSS failed to issue a temporary EBT card ensuing in client's inability to access allotments.</li> </ul>

LDSS = Local Department of Social Services; EBT = Electronic Benefit Transfer; FS = Food Stamps.

<sup>a</sup>Local Department of Social Services which oversees the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program in upstate New York.

remaining four barriers is much higher than those reported by other regions. In contrast, the upstate rural area is the least likely to report barriers.

Using cross tabs and the chi-squared statistic, the prevalence of all the barriers except for *face-to-face interview not waived* are significantly different based on region. Some extreme examples of this are that New York City was the only region that identified EBT issues as one of the three most common barriers, and the upstate urban region alone identifies the problem of expedited benefits not issued promptly in the top three.

Some barriers, although mentioned frequently enough to make the key barriers list, are less of a problem in a particular region. For example, the upstate rural region does not seem to have much of a problem with processing of the same-day application (6%).



**TABLE 3** Distribution of Food Stamp Barriers Prevalence in Quarterly Reports Overall and by Region

Category	Barrier description	Total% ( <i>N</i> = 637)	Upstate Rural % ( <i>n</i> = 172)	Upstate Urban % ( <i>n</i> = 286)	New York City % ( <i>n</i> = 179)
Access	Face-to-face interview not waived	27	23	27	30
	Same-day application not accepted†	20	6	15	41
Eligibility	Excessive documentation required†	39	27	32	62
	Expedited benefit not issued†	31	12	32	46
	Fails to assist with application documents†	21	13	16	39
	Special population: Elderly and immigrant <sup>a</sup> †	46	24	29	60
Benefits	Ongoing food stamp not issued within 30 days†	45	28	49	56
	EBT issues†	30	11	23	58

EBT = Electronic Benefit Transfer.

<sup>a</sup>Category created based on responses to open-ended "other."

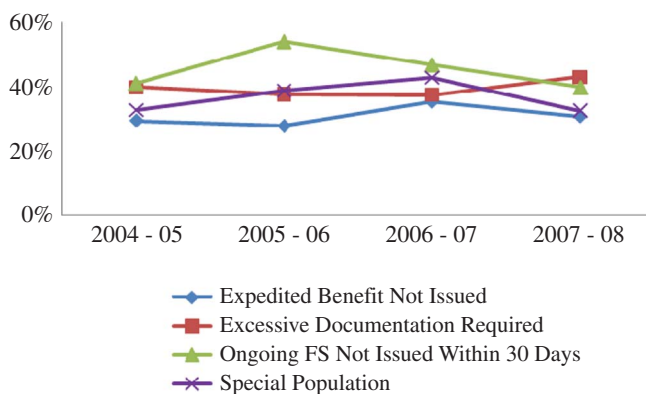
†Chi-square is significant at  $p = .00$ .

Although CBOs face different barriers according to their region, there are a number of common issues. Excessive documentation required is ranked either first or second in all three regions. Both upstate regions, rural and urban, experience problems with benefits related to ongoing food stamps not issued within 30 days; it is the barrier identified most often for both upstate regions and though it ranked fourth for the NYC region, it occurred in more than one half of their quarterly reports.

### Persistent Barriers Over Time

The criterion for identifying a prevalent barrier is whether it appeared in more than 20% of the quarterly reports. Yet not all of the barriers meeting this criterion remain problematic over the 4 years. Some barriers decrease over time, for example same day application not accepted is reported as a barrier in 20% to 25% of the quarterly reports in the first 3 years of this study, but in the final year it dropped to 12%.

Figure 1 presents the four persistent and prevalent barriers that have not changed significantly over the 4-year time period and rank in the top three for at least one of the regions. Expedited benefits not issued, excessive documentation required, ongoing FS not issued within 30 days and special populations are persistent and prevalent over time.



**FIGURE 1** Persistence of the Most Prevalent Food Stamp Barriers, 2004–2008. (Color figure available online).

FS = Food Stamps.

## DISCUSSION

Our findings offer a unique field perspective on barriers to FS, a more in-depth understanding of SNAP implementation in a large diverse state and point to particular areas that require greater attention.

Three of the barriers that are prevalent and persistent over time in our study are barriers related to the application process. The fourth barrier relates to the lack of social and/or cultural capital of special populations.

### Eligibility

Although prevalence of the key barriers varied by region, one eligibility barrier stood out due to its high prevalence and consistency across regions. Excessive documentation was a problem for all three regions and over time. This may be a result of two possible causes: (1) difficulties in interpreting federal rules and guidelines for documentation required for SNAP and/or (2) inconsistencies in the implementation and administration of the federal requirements at the local level. If the guidelines are overly onerous, they require review and modification. If implementation is inconsistent, there is a need for additional training of local administration personnel.

Another eligibility barrier *special populations* requires attention. The literature points out that immigrant populations and households with an elderly person or a person with disabilities face more challenges to participation in SNAP (Food Research and Action Center [FRAC], 2008), in particular after welfare reform initiatives (Marchevsky & Theoharis, 2008). This study supports these findings.

The eligibility barrier *not receiving expedited benefits promptly* is particularly prevalent in the upstate urban region. Perhaps it stems from the fact that social service agencies in urban areas see higher numbers of applicants than rural areas and have fewer service locations and staff dedicated to the SNAP than the NYC region. Other possible explanations include the loss of more frontline workers than other areas of the state and/or the need for more training for their workers.

### Access

We found that two access barriers are neither persistent over time nor prevalent compared to other barriers. However, they nonetheless present day to day challenges. Not providing waivers for face-to-face interviews is a significant issue in rural areas among applicants who did not have their own transportation or were home bound. *Same day application not accepted* is ranked lower than other barriers in all three regions. It is possible that the low ranking of access barriers is due to the design of the study. The CBOs are less likely to come into contact with applicants who are dealing with access issues. We speculate that many families do not know how to access a local CBO to participate in the SNAP.

### Benefits

EBT issues are very pertinent for New York City. Although EBT cards are used throughout the state, there are additional logistical factors that might have exacerbated problems with using EBT cards in New York City. Benefits were being stolen from households through computer hacking. The State office later made changes to resolve this problem.

### New York City

New York City reports all eight key barriers more often and consistently than other regions. One theory is that the concentration of population in New York City exacerbates the problems. The population density also lends itself to more bureaucratic methods.

### Upstate Rural

One possible explanation for the consistently low incidence rate of barriers reported in rural regions when compared to those in urban areas (NYC included) is the issue of stigma and how it plays out in rural areas. Rural areas have been known to have lower rates of social service usage related to higher levels of stigma associated with such usage (“The State of Human Service in Rural America,” 2008/2009).

## Improvement Over Time

It is encouraging to find that there have been improvements over time even though the study period is limited to 4 years. We found that changes in SNAP policy and subsequent implementation of the new procedures often resulted in temporary challenges, but these were ameliorated over time as staff and recipients/applicants became more familiar with the new procedures. For example, the number of quarterly reports indicating EBT as a barrier was consistently high for the three periods after the EBT system was introduced, especially in New York City. However, the severity of the problem declined noticeably in the 2007 to 2008 year when the most recent data are available. Other examples are within the access category. The problem of not accepting the same day application and the issue of not waiving the face-to-face interview decline over time. Although same-day applications have been permitted since the FS program began, the presence of a Nutrition Outreach and Education Program coordinator could have helped to alleviate this barrier. Not waiving the face-to-face interview is a problem in part because counties have discretion in defining *hardship*. Over the years adjustments to this policy have broadened and clarified it.

The four barriers that are prevalent and persistent over time are ranked first or second in at least one of the regions, drawing our attention to these four as important targets for policy or administrative intervention.

## Limitations

Although this study provides valuable insights about barriers to the SNAP from the perspective of the field, its limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

Some limitations arise from the representativeness of the study sample. Although the CBOs included in this study represent the regional and demographic diversity of SNAP participants in NYS, they were preselected by the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program to provide services to SNAP applicants. More importantly, although CBOs play an important role in giving voice to the concerns of SNAP applicants who are otherwise unheard, they do not serve all SNAP participants.

A specific area of interest in the literature, and our theoretical framing of barriers, deals with segments of the population who lack access to services. This study's discussion of access as a barrier is limited to only those who have already made it to the door of services. Those individuals and families who are unaware of these services, or that they may be eligible for them, are not captured in this study.

Limitations also stem from the way the data were collected. The quarterly report form is primarily designed to monitor program activity. The form covers various barriers to receiving FS, but available categories are neither exhaustive nor exclusive. For example, more than one category

relates to special populations, resulting in our decision to merge categories. Additionally, the content validity of the form can be questioned because there is a high proportion (36% of quarterly reports) of responses in the “other” category.

Lastly, the data source for this study is based on the reports from CBOs and is not based on any objective data set such as the State Quality Assurance data. Thus we caution that the study findings should be considered as complementary to those from other sources of data.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study’s findings, the Hunger Solutions New York, Inc. policy expertise, and their experience working closely with CBOs in the field, we present general and specific recommendations. The general recommendations include the following:

- Require participation in all available waivers options.
- Maintain initial and ongoing standardized training for all local case workers.
- Establish caseload standards for caseworkers.
- Simplify notices to households.
- Simplify policy directives to counties.
- Create consistency across the state around eligibility rules and rights.
- Enhance funding for FSP administration.

Although these general recommendations are based on findings in NYS, they may be applicable to other states. Some of these general recommendations do require additional resources which, in a time of a national recession, are difficult to justify. That said, if these recommendations are taken as a whole, they would create more efficiency in the entire system and therefore could result in being less resource intensive by reducing workload, simplifying processes, increasing training and creating consistency.

### Specific Recommendations: Eligibility

Regarding the eligibility barrier of requiring excessive documentation, we recommend reviewing current verification requirements, eliminating any verification that is not currently required by U.S. Department of Agriculture, and standardizing the verification request process with local districts. This could include educating counties and applicant households about the variety of options available to document eligibility. The state could direct local districts to utilize the least burdensome documentation alternatives that are available. Additionally, it should be ensured that SNAP staff understand and implement their duty to assist FS applicants in acquiring required documentation, and

that applying households are made aware that this is a staff responsibility. Lastly, the SNAP could be aligned with other entitlement programs such as Medicaid. Better coordination among entitlement programs could help to connect eligible nonparticipants to the SNAP, without the need to apply or verify documentation twice.

Recommendations to address the barrier of expedited benefits not issued include ensuring that all frontline workers understand the importance and legal obligations surrounding expedited FS screening and that every applicant household is screened for and, if eligible, receives expedited FS benefits. The EBT allows every household to apply through the Internet and be screened for eligibility for expedited FS. Exploring other ways to automate the procedure for those households not utilizing the online process is also recommended.

To encourage participation of eligible immigrants we recommend simplifying immigrant eligibility and budgeting rules. Additionally, we recommend increasing communication with this isolated population by creating outreach messages that target immigrant households and take place at community agencies that provide services for large numbers of immigrants. Finally, we recommend extending SNAP eligibility to all legal immigrants and, until the federal government restores FS eligibility to all legal immigrants, providing state-funded FS benefits.

The special populations barrier includes the failure of elderly and disabled households to receive the correct medical deduction. For the elderly and disabled, we recommend a standardized medical deduction with the option of using actual medical expenses if the actual expenses are greater than the standardized amount.

### Specific Recommendations: Benefits

We suggest closely monitoring and providing assistance to counties that are experiencing timeliness issues. We also suggest exploring innovative business models that have been successful elsewhere such as State Change Centers that strive to increase productivity and streamline the processing of FS applications. State Change Centers include state and county workers; based on the volume of work at each location, adjustments are made between local districts to meet demand and use resources most efficiently.

To address EBT issues, newly applying households can be provided with specific instructions about how to use the EBT card. For households that received EBT cards in the past, caseworkers would clarify that unless requested, EBT cards are not automatically reissued. Communication on how to use the EBT card and education about existing resources available to manage the card is especially important to those applicants who are not visiting their social service office when applying. With a variety of new access

initiatives many households no longer need to visit their local social service office. Communication and education could take place at kiosks in CBOs and other community locations. Worker training on how to assist clients in using the EBT card may address the issue.

## CONCLUSIONS

NYS plays an important role in setting precedents among the states with its innovative nutritional programs, initiatives to ease application processes, and outreach efforts. Despite ongoing efforts, removing barriers to SNAP continues to be a challenge. This study is part of NYS's ongoing effort to address prevalent and persistent barriers that warrant further attention.

The unique perspective of the Hunger Solutions New York, Inc., a statewide nutrition antihunger organization, and the perspective of frontline CBO workers in NYS over a 4-year period of time indicates that receiving services continues to be problematic and in particular, eligibility issues appear to be the most intractable. Of the four barriers identified as prevalent and persistent, three are considered eligibility issues: expedited benefit not issued, excessive documentation required, and special populations.

The recommendations we have offered encourage the use of the least burdensome methods, further training and education of all staff in contact with applicants and recipients, simplification of requirements, outreach to isolated populations, and reducing workload through efficiency and establishing caseload standards. These recommendations should be considered along with other available data on barriers to FS in an effort to make access, eligibility, and receipt of benefits a more seamless and successful process for families and individuals in need, as well as those who provide and those who administer these crucial services.

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## NOTE

1. One in ten residents in New York receives food stamps. But enrollment rates vary widely by county, from 1% in Putnam County to 28% in the Bronx.

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