



Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project Request for Proposals: Apply by September 30, 2021

Direct certification has transformed the process of certifying eligible children for free school meals. By linking approximately 13 million children who live in households that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to free school meals through direct certification,¹ millions of families no longer have to fill out school meal applications, schools no longer have to process millions of applications, and fewer eligible children are at risk of missing out on free school meals.²

States can now apply to participate in the Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project and bring the same benefits of direct certification to children, families, and schools that are connected to Medicaid participation.

Medicaid Direct Certification in Texas

“The Medicaid Project in Texas was first implemented in October 2017. From 2017 to SY [school year] 2020, using Medicaid information, the number of students directly certified increased by 48 percent, reducing the paperwork burden on schools with 376,000 fewer household applications to approve statewide.” – Lena Wilson, Assistant Commissioner, Texas Department of Agriculture

Medicaid Direct Certification

The new demonstration pilots create an important opportunity to further test the impact of Medicaid Direct Certification, which was first initiated through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Illinois, Kentucky, New York, and Pennsylvania are able to directly certify children for free school meals based on participation in Medicaid and an income test. Additional states (California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) are

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2021). Direct Certification in the National School Lunch Program State Implementation Progress Report to Congress SY 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/NSLPDirectCertification2017-1.pdf>. Accessed on August 23, 2021.

² States are required to conduct direct certification for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Children whose households participate in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or who are homeless, migrant, in foster care, or in Head Start, are categorically eligible for free school meals. Children whose households participate in Medicaid can become categorically eligible for either free or reduced-price school meals depending on their family's income level if their state is participating in the Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project.

using Medicaid data and an income test to directly certify children for free or reduced-price school meals.³

Why Should My State Apply for the Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project?

- **Support Access to School Meals.** School meals are linked to education and health benefits and reduced absenteeism and tardiness.⁴ Medicaid direct certification will help ensure that students who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals do not miss out on much-needed nutritious school breakfasts and lunches.
- **Reduce Administrative Work for Schools and Families.** An evaluation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) of the six states⁵ that participated in the first year of the Medicaid Direct Certification pilots found that 11.6 percent more children were directly certified for free meals. This means less paperwork for families and fewer school meal applications for school districts to process and verify.
- **Expand Community Eligibility.** Medicaid Direct Certification can

Medicaid Direct Certification in Massachusetts

“Massachusetts has been approved to directly certify students for free school meals using state Medicaid data since 2012 and approved to directly certify students for both free and reduced-price meals since 2017. Maximizing the use of existing state data for direct certification has allowed more of Massachusetts’ eligible students to be offered free or reduced-price meals without households applying. In addition, expanding direct certification as a more efficient, electronic-based process has lessened the burden on both households and school districts.” – Robert Leshin, Director, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

help make community eligibility more financially viable for schools⁶ because more students will be certified for free school meals outside of the school meal application process. Community eligibility eliminates school meal applications and instead bases the federal reimbursement that a school receives on the number of students who

³ It is worth noting that if a child can be directly certified for free school meals through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, foster care, Head Start, or through being migrant or homeless, that certification always will take precedence over Medicaid direct certification.

⁴ Food Research & Action Center. (2021). *School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning*. Available at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>. Accessed on August 23, 2021.

⁵ This refers to Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and certain school districts in California.

⁶ The Community Eligibility Provision allows high-poverty schools to offer meals to all students at no charge. For more information on community eligibility, visit the Food Research & Action Center: <https://frac.org/community-eligibility>.

are certified for free school meals outside of the school meal application process.

Deadlines and More Information

There are two deadlines for state agencies to apply to participate in the Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project:

- September 30, 2021, for states wishing to participate starting in either the 2022–2023 school year or in the 2023–2024 school year; and
- September 30, 2022, for states wishing to participate starting in the 2023–2024 school year.

The Food Research & Action Center encourages states to apply now and participate beginning in the 2022–2023 school year. This will have a positive impact on children, families, and schools sooner. However, any states not selected this year will be welcome to apply next year, Learn more by reading [USDA's Request for Proposals](#).

Medicaid Direct Certification in West Virginia

“West Virginia is a state that expanded Medicaid in 2014. That decision allowed more West Virginia families to receive this health care benefit. Approximately 29 percent of the state’s population qualifies for Medicaid, making West Virginia the state with the highest share of its population enrolled. Participating in the Medicaid DC [Direct Certification] pilot allowed our state’s largest school districts to now qualify to participate fully in the Community Eligibility Provision [CEP]. Today, 48 of West Virginia’s 55 counties are fully implementing CEP. We know what this has meant for the number of families that were able to seamlessly qualify for P-EBT as a result of their student’s enrolled-CEP status. Until we have universal school meals equitably for all students, preserving, protecting, and expanding CEP works in the favor of West Virginia students.” – Amanda Harrison, Director, Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education