



## Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project Request for Proposals: Apply by January 15, 2024

Direct certification has transformed the process of certifying eligible children for free school meals. Approximately 13 million children who live in households that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have been directly certified for free school meals,<sup>1</sup> meaning millions of families no longer have to fill out school meal applications, schools no longer have to process those millions of applications, and fewer eligible children are at risk of missing out on free school meals.<sup>2</sup>

*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 through Medicaid.*

### 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

Introduced in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the demonstration pilots create an important opportunity to further test the impact of Medicaid direct certification. Currently, 38 states are participating in the demonstration pilots.<sup>3</sup> Kentucky and New York directly certify children for free school meals based on participation in Medicaid and an income test. The remaining 36 states are using Medicaid data and an income test to directly certify children for free or reduced-price school meals: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.<sup>4</sup>

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

- ***Support Students' Access to Healthy School Meals.*** School meals are linked to numerous health and academic benefits, including improved food security and school attendance.<sup>5</sup> Medicaid direct certification helps ensure that students who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals have access to the nutrition necessary for growth and development.
- ***Reduce Administrative Work for Schools and Families.*** An evaluation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) of the six states<sup>6</sup> that participated in the first year of the Medicaid Direct Certification Project 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 increases the number of students eligible for free school meals outside of the school meal application, thus making [the Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\)](#) a more financially viable option for school food service departments. Community eligibility schools are reimbursed based on the number of students directly certified for free school meals. As states implement Medicaid direct certification, more children are directly certified for free meals and a school's ability to successfully implement CEP increases.<sup>7</sup>

### Medicaid Direct Certification in West Virginia

“West Virginia implemented Medicaid Direct Certification in the 2016-2017 school year. In 2023, 17% of the students directly certified came from Medicaid matching, and 51 of West Virginia's 55 counties were fully implementing CEP. 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

## Deadline and More Information

The deadline for state agencies to apply to participate in the Medicaid Direct Certification Demonstration Project starting in the 2024-2025 school year is January 15, 2024.

The Food Research & Action Center strongly encourages states to apply so that a greater number of children can benefit from healthy school meals. Learn more by reading [USDA's Request for Proposals](#).

## 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> States are required to conduct direct certification for the SNAP. Children whose households participate in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), 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.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2023). National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid. Available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/direct-certification-medicaid-demonstration-project>.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that if a child can be directly certified for free school meals through SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, foster care, Head Start, or through being migrant or homeless, that certification always will take precedence over Medicaid direct certification.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and certain school districts in California.

<sup>7</sup> 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>.