

September 21, 2017

The Honorable Representative Patricia A. Serpa
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Serpa:

Thank you for the ongoing opportunity to share the progress the State is making towards improving RI Bridges and the way in which we deliver health and human services to Rhode Islanders.

This submission shares data from **August 28 through September 10.**

Below, please find our monthly updates and attachments in addition to our standing bi-weekly submission points.

Standing Bi-Weekly Updates and Attachments:

1. Correspondences with federal partners

Please see the following attachments:

- File: **FNS FFY 2017 Combined Review Report** – Our partners at Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) submitted a letter and report to the Department of Human Services on September 5, 2017.
- File: **FNS Report**
- File: **FNS Backlog**
- File: **Lobby Volume**
- File: **SNAP Monthly Terminations with Reasons**

2. Number of off-cycle payments for the Child Care Assistance Program

- Sixty-one (61) off-cycle payments were made during this period.

3. Interim payments for Long Term Services and Supports

- Seven (7) off-cycle payments were made during this period.

Monthly Updates and Attachments:

1. Update on staffing and training plans at the Department of Human Services

To date, we have hired 141 of our 143 goal, 140 of whom have started their new positions with the Department including our latest cohort of employees who started on September 5.

To comply with the State's collective bargaining agreements, postings for union positions must be advertised for five (5) days on the State's internal lateral human resources website. If these positions are not filled, they are then posted on Rhode Island's public web page.

We are now posting and actively recruiting our remaining two positions: (1) supervising Eligibility Technician (ET) with a limited term and (1) Permanent Senior ET. We are waiting

on candidate referrals for these two positions. We have a Supervising ET who begins in her new role on September 18. This will bring our total to 141 staff who have started in their new roles.

New Staff training: N/A

Current staff training: This week we launched the Learning Labs. The Learning Lab is a space created for ETs and their supervisors where staff have the opportunity to practice in RI Bridges in a self-paced learning environment. The Learning Lab has prepared lessons that target expressed areas of focus with an emphasis of building capacity on RI Bridges.

The Learning Labs will last 12 weeks covering three different areas:

- Basic Navigations
- Interims and Re-certifications
- Trouble shooting strategies and complex cases

In addition, Employment Career Advisors are receiving training.

2. Changes in State personnel involved with the project

- No change

3. Overall system improvements and focus areas

The state made a number of system improvements and enhancements during the month of August, including a major development release on August 26. Ten key improvements from August are as follows:

1. **Restaurant Meals Functionality:** The new Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) functionality allows qualified households receiving SNAP to use EBT cards to buy prepared meals at participating Subway restaurants around the state. Households are eligible for this program if all qualified SNAP individuals are either homeless, elderly or disabled.
2. **Customer Portal Improvements:** Additional content and language improvements make it easier for customers to complete self-service applications.
3. **RIDE Notices:** Functionality to help students who are eligible for the school free lunch program through the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) enroll automatically.
4. **RIW Hardship Benefits:** For those applying for Hardship benefits from RI Works (Rhode Island's Temporary Assistance for Needy Family program), they will be able to secure benefits from the first of the month rather than the application date. Clients will also receive eligibility for RI Works starting from the first of the month in which they apply.
5. **Worker Portal Improvements:** Building on the worker portal improvements made in July, additional validation messages will be highlighted in red when data is incomplete, invalid or empty. Screen level validation errors and warning messages will also be displayed without reloading the page. These improvements should further help with processing applications accurately and efficiently.
6. **Cross Policy Year Health Insurance Coverage:** In order to comply with federal policy, new system functionality was deployed to allow for cross policy year coverage. If an individual eligible for a Qualified Health Plan experiences a qualifying life event outside of the annual Open Enrollment period, they can obtain health insurance coverage through a Special Enrollment Period (SEP). If the individual needs coverage for the same year, during the Open Enrollment period for the following year, the system now can accommodate this through normal processes. For example, previously, if an individual

- qualified for an SEP for 2016 plan year coverage during the 2017 Open Enrollment period, workers needed to undergo a manual workaround to accommodate the customer.
7. **Scheduling Appointments Better:** Supervisors will now be able to easily view appointments at a given time so they can divide the work more effectively and efficiently. They can also search appointments by Appointment and Appointment Type, such as telephone, home visit or in person, and sort by time and date.
 8. **Age Curve Factors:** Age Curve Factors, the ratio by which premiums can differ based on the enrollee's age, have been updated to align with new, federal Center for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) policy requirements. It could result in plan premium rate changes for individuals with plans with 2018 effective dates. The new age factors that will be used in plan premium calculations apply to a specific policy year rather than the standard ones in place from 2013.
 9. **Open Enrollment Notices:** The system will now generate two new notices and one newly enhanced notice to support open enrollment. These new notices were created or enhanced to simplify communication and enhance the user experience.
 10. **Medicaid Termination Reconciliation Efforts:** These are system improvements to continue to reduce the number of discrepancies between the RI Bridges system and the Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) system, which handles Medicaid billing. These changes will help the State properly terminate individuals who are no longer eligible, and appropriately reflect their status in both systems.

As we indicated at our last hearing, our aim is to get the system to a place where it is correctly determining eligibility and making payments in a timely manner, accurately dispersing benefits, meeting federal requirements, providing workers with the tools necessary to be productive and customers with a user-friendly experience. In support of these goals, please find below summaries of our top four focus areas for the fall.

1. **Medicaid Functionality:** A priority for the State is the ongoing effort to improve and automate functionality related to the Medicaid program. Our ability to return caseload to normal levels of enrollment is dependent on the deployment of functionality for automatic closure, termination for aging out of program eligibility and passive renewals. These improvements are included in the upcoming releases and will be deployed and operationalized by the Medicaid team in close collaboration and coordination with the Department of Human Services and HealthSource RI (HSRI).
2. **Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Application Backlog:** We are subject to a statutory requirement to approve or deny LTSS applications within 90 days of receipt and currently have nearly 1,400 applications overdue. System fixes are scheduled for the remaining fall releases, but will not fully address our ability to catch up on the backlog. As a result, an interagency DHS/Medicaid team has been working diligently on an alternative approach for determining eligibility and transmitting enrollment into the MMIS while simultaneously creating a process for keeping up with incoming LTSS applications.
3. **Open Enrollment and Change Freeze Period Preparedness:** This is a priority across the agencies as the system will not be modified or enhanced in any significant way for four months starting in October. As a result, we need to have comprehensive understanding and training on the functionality, including the manual processes necessary to work with known system issues during the change freeze period. To prioritize system fixes prior to the change freeze, the State is prioritizing based on three main considerations: 1) how the fix would improve access to care, benefits or improve the accuracy of payments, 2) how the fix would improve federal compliance and reporting, and 3) how the fix would improve HSRI open enrollment readiness.

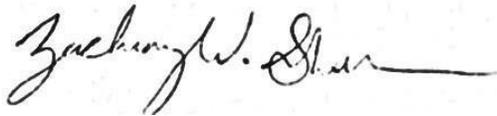
4. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Timeliness and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Compliance: DHS continues to make system and business process improvements to ensure that we meet federal timeliness requirements for SNAP administration. This is especially critical given the settlement agreement that was reached stemming from the lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (Gemmel vs. The State of RI) regarding the State's inability to meet these requirements. Additionally, as the Committee is aware, FNS has been in direct communication with the Department regarding potential future penalties that may be imposed related to other policy compliance issues. DHS continues to implement policy, program and technology changes to improve our compliance with federal regulations.

Attached Reports:

- Daily Health Report

Thank you for allowing us to provide details related to the State's RI Bridges improvement efforts. If you, or the Committee, have any further questions regarding the project, or any other matter, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Sincerely,



Zachary W. Sherman
Director
HealthSource RI

CC: Honorable Members of House Committee on Oversight