



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

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March 20, 2023

Honorable Patricia A. Serpa
Chair, House Committee on Oversight
State House, Room 101
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Serpa:

Please accept the attached report as the state's most recent update on the RIBridges system, which covers the reporting period February 16, 2023 – March 15, 2023. This document provides monthly updates on the following topics:

- System Performance and Improvement
- RI Department of Human Services (DHS) Employee Training
- Pending Applications
- SNAP Timeliness and Lobby/DHS Call Center Summaries
- CCAP Off-Cycle Payments
- Correspondence with Federal Partners (if any)

We appreciate your continued advocacy on behalf of those we serve, your interest in the health of the RIBridges system and the progress made to address outstanding issues. Please contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito".

Kimberly Merolla-Brito, Acting Director
RI Department of Human Services



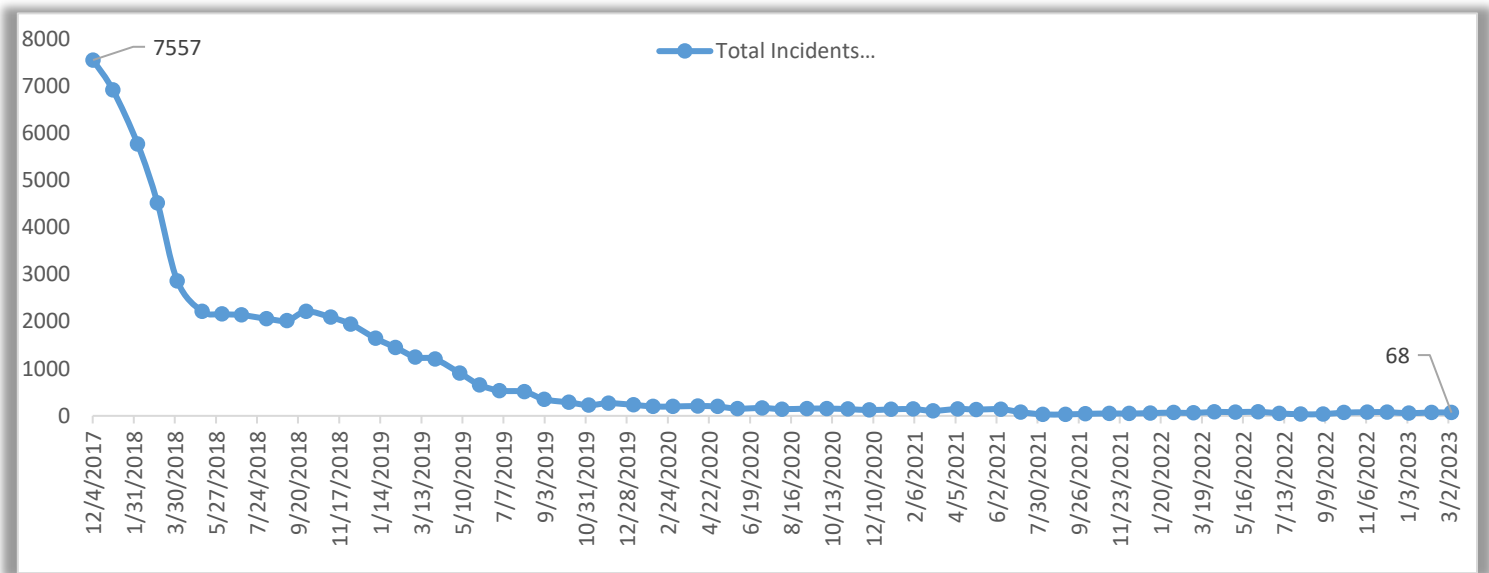
RI Bridges: Monthly Update

March 2023

Our team takes its charge seriously in promoting health, nurturing quality of life and being there for Rhode Islanders when needed. Our oversight of the work on the RI Bridges system is an important part of the equation. System stabilization remains a priority for DHS, and we continue our focus on ensuring full system compliance. This report provides an update on our efforts and progress to date.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE + IMPROVEMENT

Due to a focused effort on consistent and stable system operations, the number of new and existing incidents (when the system does not operate as expected for a DHS customer, worker or provider) has **decreased by 99 percent** since December 2017. As of March 6, 2023, there were **68** open incidents.



DHS STAFFING

Since January 1, 2023, the cumulative hiring count at DHS for this year is 29 positions and this includes all promotional opportunities, lateral transfers and new hires. DHS continues to make progress in hiring candidates for critical positions identified. For this reporting period, DHS hired 10 employees since February who have started in their new roles. These include:

- 2 Eligibility Technician I
- 2 Customer Service Aide
- 1 Eligibility Technician II (Lobby)
- 1 Senior Case Work Supervisor
- 1 Principal Human Services Business Officer
- 1 Supervising Eligibility Technician
- 1 Implementation Aide
- 1 Social Caseworker

DHS TRAINING

Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# of Training Hours	# of New Staff	# of Current Staff
New Hire Orientation (Two half day and one full day sessions)	3-1-23 3-2-23 3-3-23	11.5	3	0
SNAP Training Series (Two full day sessions)	2-26-23 2-17-23	9	0	4
LTSS Eligibility Technician Training Series (5 full day sessions)	2-20-23 2-21-23 2-23-23 2-24-23 2-27-23	22.5	0	19
Knowledge Transfer: RI Works (2- three-hour sessions)	3-10-23	6	0	33
Quarterly Meetings (4 three-hour sessions)	2-23-23 2-24-23 2-27-23 3-7-23	12	0	340
Ex Parte Training 2 Day training Series (5 full day sessions)	2-23-23 and 2-24-23 3-6-23 and 3-7-23 3-14-23	22.5	0	42
Community Medical Training (1 full day session)	3-14-23	4.5	17	5
Interface Training Series (2 one-hour sessions and 1 two-hour session)	2-23-23 2-24-23	4	13	2
Computer Literacy Training (2 three-hour sessions)	3-13-23	6	0	13
	Totals	98	33*	458*
Self-Directed Learning: Learning Management System				
Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings (These trainings are self-directed) * This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.	Course Title	Number of Staff Enrolled	Number of Staff Completed	
	FTI, HIPAA, and Confidentiality	859	272	
	Asset Verification System	157	119	
	Customer Portal	386	276	
	Medical Renewal Refresher	297	185	
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.40	459	206	
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.41	459	202	
	Nov. 22 Knowledge Transfer	334	142	
	Dec. 22 Knowledge Transfer	313	145	
	RIW Miniseries	172	121	
	SNAP: Case Maintenance	339	209	
	SNAP: Case Notes	316	195	
	RIBridges: Scheduling Refresher	317	207	

	RIBridges: Visit Record	381	218
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates	382	179
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	290	204
	SNAP: ABAWD	328	190
	SNAP: ESAP	341	237
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	55	24
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	42	11
	VCC: Telephonic Signature	135	44
	VCC: Call Back Functionality	130	64
	Totals	6,492*	3,450*

Workshop Descriptions

New Hire Orientation: The goal of the session is to provide new employees with all the pertinent information they need to begin working at DHS and to familiarize them with organizational policies and procedures. Besides introducing employees to the RIBridges system, participants learn:

- The organizational hierarchy
- DHS's mission and vision
- A broader understanding of DHS' programs and services
- Policies and procedures regarding payroll, dress code, and other practices
- Rules, regulations and laws surrounding Federal Tax Information (FTI), Civil Rights, Voter Registration, and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Basic navigation and data collection training in RIBridges

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Training Series: The SNAP Training Series is designed to introduce new Eligibility Technicians to SNAP program policy and RIBridges. A wide range of operational tasks are covered and/or discussed to help ensure Eligibility Technicians are prepared for the variety of questions and challenges they may encounter in their role.

Computer Literacy Trainings: Participants take these basic and advanced excel training sessions to understand the commands and functions available. The courses are designed to help participants understand the tools available within Excel to improve efficiency.

LTSS Training Series: The LTSS Training Series provides participants with an introduction and breakdown to the LTSS program and RIBridges screens relating to LTSS. Participants must attend all sessions in this 5-day training series to get the full training scope of the knowledge and skills offered. This training is targeted for Eligibility Technicians and Supervisors who process LTSS applications.

Interface Walkthrough Training Series: This training series will walk participants through three major interfaces that are used in RIBridges, SOLQ, Bendex, and PARIS.

Ex Parte Virtual Learning Series: The Ex Parte Virtual Learning Series provides participants with an overview of Ex Parte policy and the integrated eligibility system designed to provide clarity when an individual faces possible closure to their current Medicaid and special circumstance questions that are a potential gateway to other forms of Medicaid. Specific topics discussed include pre-screening, age outs, MAGI and complex medical.

Community Medicaid learning Series: During this three-day learning series, participants gain an understanding of the difference between the two Medicaid coverage groups as well as eligibility requirements for community Medicaid. Participants also learn to integrate learning concepts within RIBridges, learn to interpret Medicaid eligibility results in RIBridges, and explore health plan enrollments at Managed Care Organizations (MCO).

Knowledge Transfer: Rhode Island Works Release: Led by the Principle Human Services and Policy and System Services (PHSPSS) office, the workshop focuses on ensuring that senior supervisors, Employment and Career Advisors (ECA), and eligibility technicians in the field offices are aware of the upcoming changes to the RI Works program with the March 2023, 7.43 Release. Each new and updated document is reviewed, and the end user impact is identified. Participants are also given the opportunity to ask questions.

Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings: These trainings are self-directed. Staff are enrolled through the Learning Management System.

- **FTI/HIPAA:** This is a required training for all DHS employees. Annual training on FTI/HIPAA is a requirement from our respective federal partners. This refresher training covers the federal regulations and internal procedures that staff need to follow in protecting customer information.
- **Telephonic Signature/Telephonic Signature - EAD:** To work new documents such as applications, recerts, interims (with a change) and employment plans over the phone, it is imperative that either a signed document is present in the case file OR the worker records a telephonic signature while the customer is on the phone.
- **Asset Verification Training System:** This training provides guidance to staff processing EAD and LTSS requests for Medicaid determinations at the time of application and renewals.
- **SNAP Reinvestment:** This course is designed as a refresher for operations staff on SNAP six-month interim processing. The intent of this course is to review best practices for interim processing.
- **Customer Portal:** This training provides a walk-through of the front and back ends of the Customer Portal.
- **Visit Record Refresher:** This course provides an overview of the Visit Record functionality in RIBridges. The purpose of the training is to increase knowledge on the Visit Record function in RIBridges that will be included in all field offices, enhancing consistency in our processes by appreciating the customer journey.
- **Scheduling Refresher:** This course provides a review of how to use the scheduling functionality in RIBridges.
- **Medicaid Renewal Refresher:** This training provides an overview on how to process Medicaid enrollment.

PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The State continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of March 8, 2023, the number of pending new applications across all programs was 7,262, representing an approximate 16 percent decline from the same time period in February 2023. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting State action was 3,839. With the November Release intended to archive active pending cases already resolved, the Department has seen progress in the way that erroneous, aged and duplicate applications are not being added to the overall pending Undetermined Medical backlog. Our IT vendor and state team are continuing analysis on the existing overdue undetermined medical (2,794 cases) and prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. Data is also showing some cases in pending status and have already been worked with tasks needing to be disposed. Importantly, this system fix is only part of the solution to address the increase in pending cases.

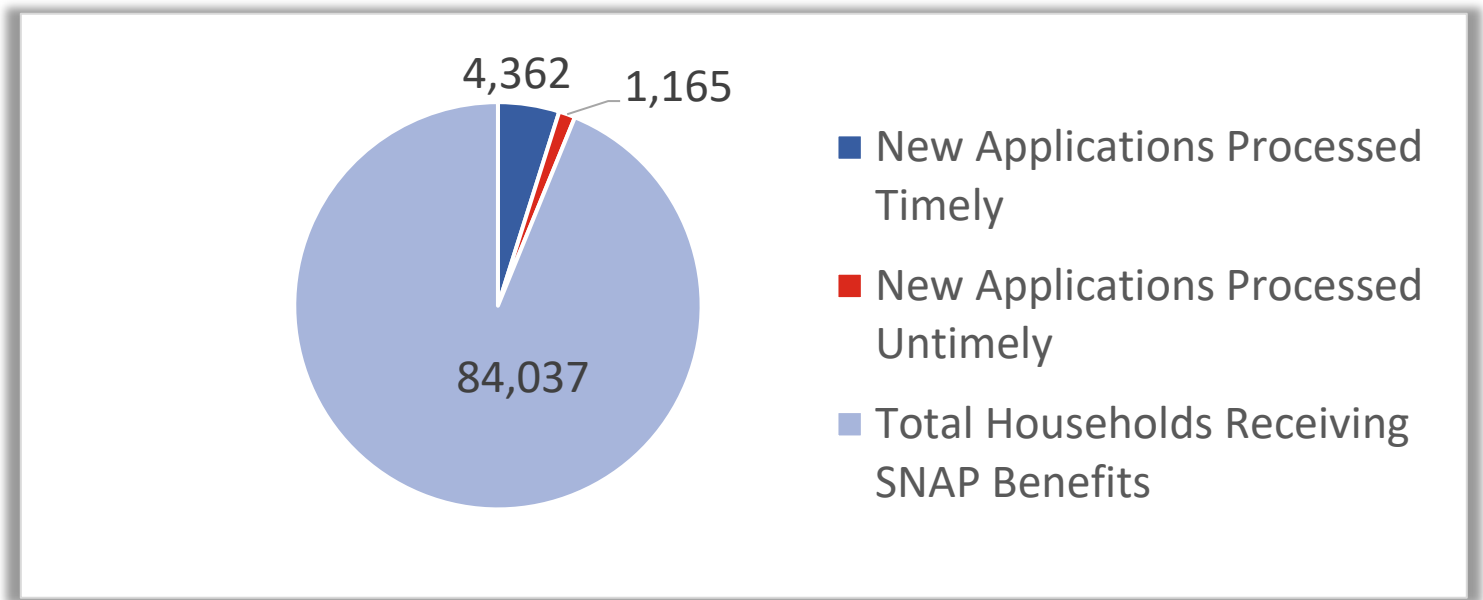
On February 8, 2023, DHS launched a pilot called Processing Wednesdays intended to prioritize call center staff to process applications, update customer files, reports and other operational tasks, which will support efforts to reduce the backlog. All regional offices remain open with regular services available according to their posted schedule. As of March 15, DHS has the initial data needed from the pilot and an assessment of the early findings will be provided in the next report.

	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	Grand Total
SNAP Expedited	38	281	319	4	8	12	331
SNAP Non-Expedited	581	319	900	74	112	186	1,086
CCAP	9	190	199	7	43	50	249
GPA Burial	0	5	5	0	4	4	9
SSP	0	32	32	0	23	23	55
GPA	28	51	79	12	24	36	115
RIW	113	123	236	27	24	51	287
Undetermined Medical	17	396	413	174	2,620	2,794	3,207
Medicaid-MAGI	27	45	72	175	169	344	416
Medicare Premium Payments	8	290	298	55	417	472	770
Medicaid Complex	5	68	73	54	347	401	474
LTSS	5	205	210	5	48	53	263
Grand Total	831	2,005	2,836	587	3839	4,426	7,262

Please note that some undetermined medical cases awaiting state action have already been resolved but were added to this reporting metric as part of broader system fixes in 2022 to ensure an accurate accounting of applications.

SNAP TIMELINESS

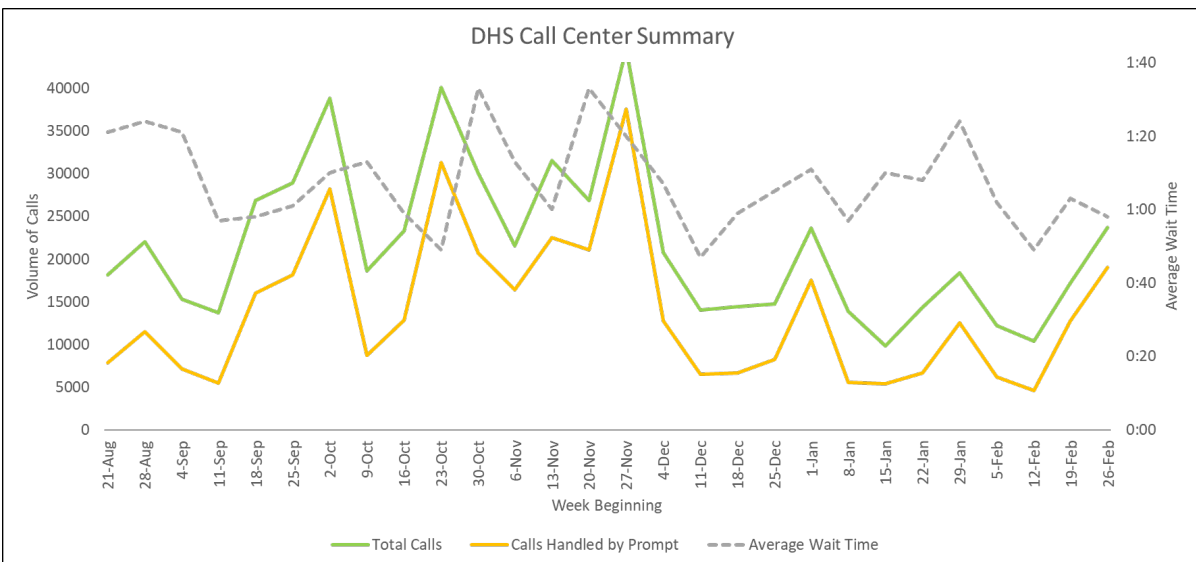
In February 2023, **84,037** households received benefits. About **79** percent of new SNAP applications were processed in a timely manner. Approximately 21 percent of new applications were processed untimely.



CALL CENTER

For the month of January, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 4 minutes**. DHS recognizes this average wait time remains longer than it should be and has implemented call back functionality to reduce the time customers spend waiting on the phone. Customers may experience longer than usual wait times during high call volume days if they are not able, or do not choose to opt into the newly implemented call back functionality, available across all programs. The busiest week at the Call Center was the week beginning February 26, 2023, and there were **23,687** calls. DHS has changed its scope of work in the Call Center and continues to implement operational changes to achieve its goal of reducing wait times to 30 minutes.

The RI Department of Human Services anticipates receiving more calls than usual in February and March due to the federal government ending [COVID-19 SNAP Emergency Allotments](#). Additional resources including a poster, a social media toolkit, and partner messages ([available online](#)) were provided to regional office staff, community partners, and other state agencies to help customers seeking assistance.



CCAP OFF-CYCLE PAYMENTS (PENDING)

Below are the total number of batch payments made to child care providers for the reporting period of February 16, 2023 through March 15, 2023.

Batch	Date Issued	# of Providers	Amount after Union/PAC removed
18	2/9/2023	535	\$2,310,342.69
18A	2/10/2023	17	\$29,653.48
18B	2/17/2023	22	\$41,466.688
19	2/23/2023	535	\$2,304,937.25
19A	2/24/2023	18	\$28,530.24
19B	3/3/2023	24	\$98,073.66

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (18, 18A, & 18B)	574	\$2,381,462.85
Off-cycle (18A & 18B)	39	\$71,120.16
Provider off-cycle/total	7.29%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	3.08%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (19, 19A, & 19B)	577	\$2,431,541.15
Off-cycle (19A & 19B)	42	\$126,603.90.
Provider off-cycle/total	7.85%*	-
Payments off-cycle/total	5.49%*	-

Please note retroactive payments were distributed under batch 19A. More information is available below.

	Benefit Amount	Union	PAC	Net Benefit	Providers
Retro	\$3,033,409.73	\$15,412.47	\$6.93	\$3,048,829.13	331
Retro and Off-Cycle	\$3,061,939.97	\$15,607.49	\$18.48	\$3,077,565.94	18
Off-Cycle	\$28,530.24	\$195.02	\$11.55	\$28,736.81	

UPDATE ON RECERTIFICATIONS PROCESS

The planning and preparation to date on the return of Medicaid renewals has been significant. DHS, in partnership with numerous state agencies, and many community-based organizations, continues to focus on the important work ahead beginning April 1. Importantly, Medicaid renewals for families with children will not start until January 2024. The state is working with community partners, advocates, and other trusted messengers to outreach to the state's most vulnerable populations. Applications have opened for mini-grants to enlist the support of community partners to reach the broadest group of Rhode Islanders, with special attention paid to those most at risk in the renewal process, whether through barriers to awareness or struggles to complete the process fully and appropriately. In addition, the state has launched staycovered.ri.gov as a resource to support the Medicaid renewal process. The site provides an array of resources for both individuals and community organizations, including informational and multi-lingual materials, posters, pamphlets, videos, and more. Also, beneficiaries now have access to look up their renewal date through the Customer Portal/HealthyRhode mobile app. Finally, DHS can report the standard mail distribution of Letter 1 to more than 200,000 customers, serving as an overview of the renewal process.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH FEDERAL PARTNERS

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) are important partners to the State. We continue to communicate regularly to review progress with the RIBridges system. There were no communications from our federal partners related to the RIBridges System.