



COVID-19 Response, Guidance, and Actions

Updated: June 3, 2020

Governor Wolf, Dr. Levine, and local leaders across the commonwealth have taken unprecedented actions to protect the health and safety of Pennsylvanians. These measures, based on the guidance of public health professionals, are necessary to slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Life has slowed and it has changed, but it has not stopped for the millions of Pennsylvanians who depend on the Department of Human Services. The essential functions of this department cannot stop. DHS has an obligation to do everything we can to ensure continuity of services and programs for people who need them. Many of these services are critical now more than ever, and we are working internally and with providers and partners around the commonwealth to make adjustments as necessary. We are putting processes in place to ensure continuity of coverage so individuals do not lose their health care, cash assistance or food assistance during this uncertain time.

We will continue to update and reissue this document following each of our weekly calls. We hope that it is helpful to have all of these updates in one place, and we will note if new or updated guidance changes previous information.

Thank you for your support and partnership,

Teresa Miller
Secretary of Human Services

June 3, 2020 Update

Budget Update

Last week, Governor Tom Wolf signed Act 1A of 2020, a five-month budget that ensures continuity of services across government. In addition, the Governor signed Act 24 of 2020, which allocates funding from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act – also known as the CARES Act.

Here is a brief overview of how CARES funds will be distributed to human services programs and providers across Pennsylvania:

- **\$175 million** will be used for Regional Response Health Collaboratives, an assistive support network for nursing facilities, personal care homes, and assisted living facilities.
- **\$245 million** will go to nursing facilities in two one-time payments:
 - **\$196 million** of these funds will be distributed based on the number of Medical Assistance bed days in the third quarter of CY 2019. This will be for both fee-for-service and Community HealthChoices.
 - **\$49 million** will be distributed to all nursing facilities proportionally based on their number of licensed beds.

- **\$8 million** for a one-time payment will be made based on the proportion of MA residents who receive necessary ventilator or tracheostomy care during the 3rd quarter of CY 2019. Private or county nursing facilities may qualify for this.
- **\$140 million** will go to agency providers of personal assistance services to be split between agency and participant-directed service providers in the Office of Long-Term Living's programs.
 - **\$112 million** of this will be distributed to agency providers; AND,
 - **\$28 million** will be directed to support participant-directed service workers.
- **\$50 million** to assisted living residences and personal care homes.
 - **\$45 million** of this will be allocated based on facilities' occupancy during their last inspection prior to April 1, 2020.
 - **\$5 million** will be distributed based on the number of individuals living at the facility who received SSI payments during March 2020.
- **\$13 million** to adult day care services and **\$1 million** to residential habilitation, calculated based on payments from MA fee-for-service and CHC for the third quarter of CY 2019.
- **\$50 million** to CHC managed care organizations proportionally allocated based on their number of nursing facility clinically-eligible participants covered by each MCO on March 31, 2020.
- **\$10 million** to LIFE Program providers based on the organization's total amount reimbursed for long-term care managed care for the first quarter of CY 2020.
- **\$259.28 million** through the ID community waiver to provide one-time payments to residential, respite, and shift nursing providers. These funds will also be used to cover up to 75 percent retainer payments for home and community-based and community participation support providers for up to 120 days.
- **\$720,000** through Autism Services for one-time payments to residential, respite, and shift nursing providers. These funds can also be used to cover up to 75 percent retainer payments for home and community-based providers for up to 120 days.
- **\$116 million** for child care providers that will be allocated based on findings of the study we are working on with Penn State Harrisburg. This is in addition to the \$106 million included in the federal CARES Act through the Child Care Development fund, of which \$51M has been allocated.
- **\$10 million** to domestic violence programs and housing support services.
- **\$10 million** for the Homeless Assistance Program.
- **\$10 million** to hospitals based proportionally on their 2019-2020 critical access hospital payment.
- **\$8 million** for legal services.
- **\$625 million** to counties that did not receive direct funds from the federal government. Counties have some flexibility for how these funds can be used. One of those uses is to support behavioral health and substance use disorder services. These funds can be used for:
 - (1) Offsetting the cost of direct county response, planning and outreach efforts related to COVID-19, including the purchase of personal protective equipment. A county may incur direct administrative costs for the County Block Grant Program under this sub-article not to exceed 2% of the amount received, or \$200,000, whichever is less.
 - (2) Small business grant programs to support businesses with fewer than 100 employees with priority given to those businesses that did not receive a loan or grant through the Federal Paycheck Protection Program or the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program established under the CARES Act and to support businesses and other entities that are

primarily engaged in the tourism industry, including state and county fairs, regardless of the number of employees the business or other entity has. Counties may utilize Community Development Financial Institutions to administer all or a portion of their small business grant programs.

- (3) Grant programs to support the following entities for costs related to assisting businesses during the COVID-19 disaster emergency:
 - (i) Certified Economic Development Organizations.
 - (ii) Local Development Districts.
 - (iii) Industrial Resource Centers.
 - (iv) Small Business Development Centers.
 - (v) Economic Development Corporations.
- (4) Assistance to cities, boroughs, incorporated towns, or townships located within the county for response and planning efforts related to COVID-19, including the purchase of personal protective equipment.
- (5) Behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment services.
- (6) Nonprofit assistance programs for entities that are an exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (Public Law 99-514, 26 U.S.C. § 1 et seq.).
- (7) Broadband Internet deployment with priority given to unserved or underserved areas.

Staff across DHS are working to get these funds out to providers as quickly as possible, and we appreciate your patience and understanding as we work to make that possible. It is important to note that Act 24 requires these funds to be expended by November 30, 2020. Unused funds will be redistributed to counties and, by federal law, must be used by December 30, 2020. Additionally, these funds must be used for COVID-19 related expenses. Providers will need to keep documentation to prove that these funds were used for their response to COVID-19 in case of an audit.

Reopening

DHS' program offices continue to draft and issue guidance for providers in counties moving to yellow and green. This process requires close coordination with other commonwealth agencies and the Governor's Office, and as we all know, this is still an evolving situation. For this and other guidance updates, please visit the provider resources page of DHS' COVID-19 section, which is available [here](#).

We must all still remember that even as we move to green, COVID-19 is still a threat. We must remain vigilant and be mindful about our actions even as we resume the new normal life. Green does not mean all clear for anyone, and we cannot become too cavalier about mitigation efforts that are still necessary to keep people safe, especially those who are vulnerable and medically-fragile. We must all continue to do what we can to avoid spreading COVID-19, both in our work and in our personal day-to-day lives. Please keep wearing masks when you are able, and encourage those around you to do the same. It's no secret that masks have become a political statement, but it shouldn't be about that. Wearing a mask is an act of kindness that helps keep those around you safe. It may be difficult, but we must all do what we can to continue to normalize this so we do not lose the progress we've made fighting this virus.

As a reminder, restrictions and regulatory changes will remain in place even as counties reopen. People served in these settings often fall into that high-risk and medically-fragile population, and there is still serious danger and risk of COVID-19 outbreak occurring. In conjunction with the Department of Health, it was determined that restrictions on visitation in long-term, residential settings must remain in place for at least 28 days after a county moves to green. We understand that for residents of long-term care facilities and their families, these restrictions have been an isolating burden during a difficult time. We recognize that this is challenging for all involved, and residential providers should continue to be sensitive to this and encourage virtual interactions and visits as much as possible. We hope to ease this as soon as we can do so safely and appreciate your support in navigating this delicate balance.

Thank you all for your cooperation and understanding as we figure out what the new normal will look like as counties reopen. We all know these are unprecedented times, and this process is no different. We want to provide guidance that is responsive to the circumstances you are seeing, and developing helpful resources that meet current needs can be challenging. We're doing our best to get this out quickly, but we also need to do this right and minimize the need for updates or changes. Thank you, again, for your patience.

Regional Response Health Collaborative

As mentioned previously, the recently-enacted budget statute creates the Regional Response Health Collaborative Program (RRHCP) located within DHS. The purpose of the program is to provide support to long-term care facilities of all types throughout Pennsylvania. The program is based on DHS' existing Educational Support and Clinical Coaching Program, and DHS will partner with health collaboratives, comprising of local health systems, to provide support to long-term care facilities.

DHS will solicit grant applications to award at least one health care collaborative in each of six regions covering the entire commonwealth. The legislation appropriates \$175 Million to be awarded among selected grantees for that purpose. In addition to this, funding from the CDC will also be available to the collaboratives to support testing in long-term care facilities.

Specifically, the collaborative will provide operations, management, and administrative support to protect residents in facilities from COVID-19. The collaboratives will promote health and stabilize the economy of the region by directly supporting COVID-19 readiness and response in facilities and improve the quality of care related to infection prevention and other priority health care conditions common to facilities. The network will also help long-term care facilities implement best practices in infection control, implement contact tracing programs in facilities, support clinical care through on-site and telemedicine services, provide remote monitoring and consultation with physicians, and enhance testing capability at facilities. Through this effort and the CDC funding, we will be able to expand COVID-19 testing to include asymptomatic staff and residents in facilities to bolster public health surveillance. Additionally, the collaboratives will provide alternate care arrangements for patients no longer requiring acute care but who are not ready to return to long-term care facilities.

We understand the urgency of getting this funding to the facilities that need it and will work to responsibly and quickly award and administer the program. Additionally, we believe transparency and

accountability are critical and a multi-agency steering committee will oversee the programs and make data available to the public. We will keep you posted on the progress of the program.

Disaster State Plan Amendment Approval

Yesterday, Pennsylvania received response from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services indicating official approval of requested flexibilities amending requirements in our State Plan. These approvals include:

- Suspension of copayments for screening, diagnostic and treatment services related to COVID-19 to eliminate any fiscal challenges that may inhibit beneficiaries from seeking these needed services.
- Suspension of prior authorization requirements outlined in the SPA.
- Benefit flexibilities to include the expansion of coverage for agents used to relieve cough and cold symptoms, suspension of annual reassessments related to targeted support management for Individuals with an Intellectual Disability or Autism, the suspension of the prior authorization requirements for certain services, and adjustments to the day supply for covered outpatient drugs.
- A 90-day extension of the timeframe to complete cost reconciliation activities for Pennsylvania's School-Based ACCESS Program (SBAP).
- Suspension of the Random Moment Time Study (RMTS) requirements for the SBAP.
- Waiver of public notice requirements that would otherwise be applicable to the SPA submission.
- The authority to consider individuals who are evacuated from the state, who leave the state for medical reasons related to the disaster or public health emergency, or who are otherwise absent from the state due to the disaster or public health emergency and who intend to return to the state, to continue to be residents of the state under 42 CFR 435.403(j)(3).
- Redeterminations of eligibility for individuals excepted from MAGI-based financial methodologies under 42 CFR 435.603(j) once every 12 months in accordance with 42 CFR 435.916(b).
- Suspension of periodic reassessments for targeted case management for persons with SMI.
- Many of these actions were also previously requested and approved under our 1135 waiver request, but we were still required to waive those requirements under the State Plan Authority.

OIM Program Updates

Online SNAP Ordering

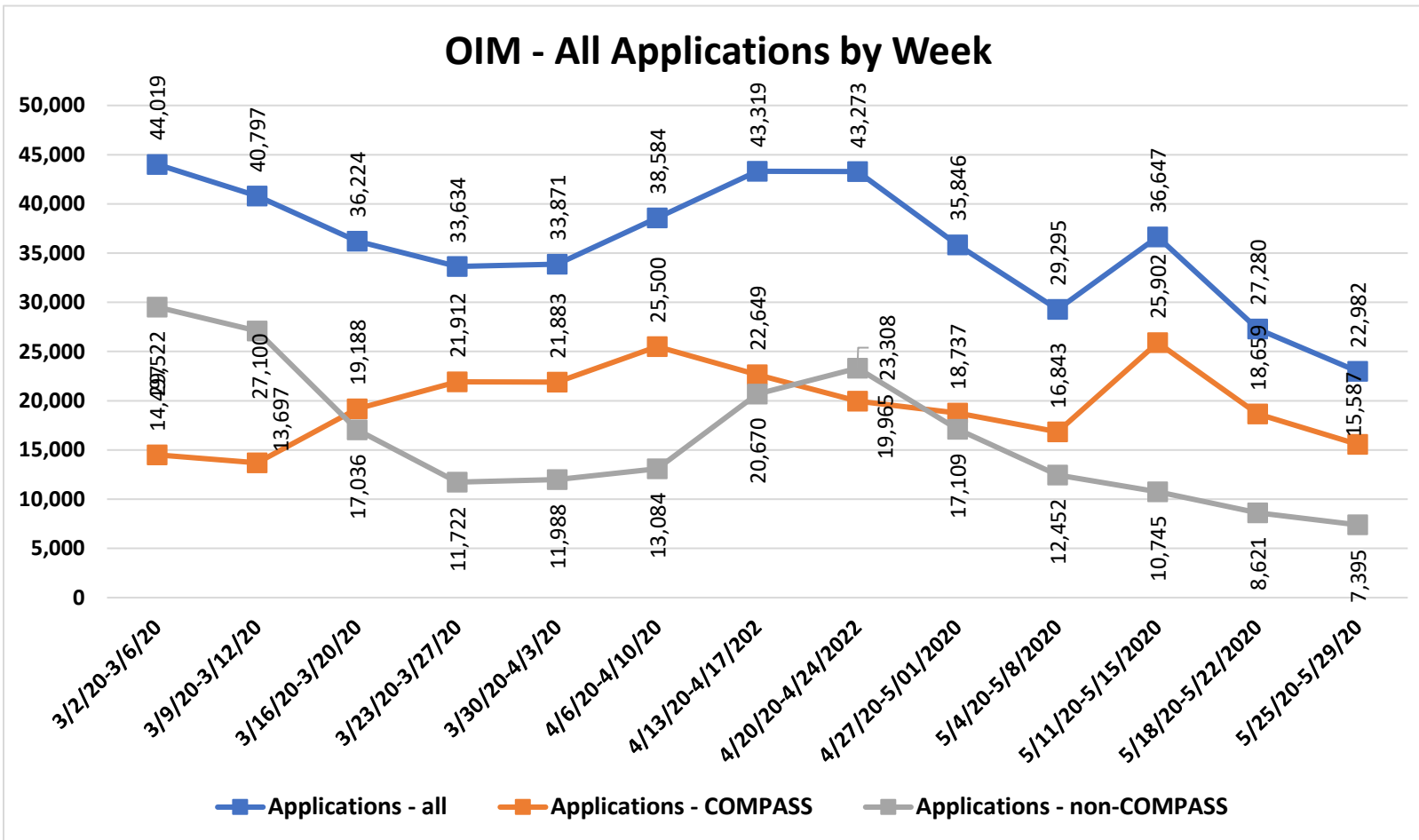
About two weeks ago, we received word from the United States Department of Agriculture that Pennsylvania was approved to join the pilot for online payment through SNAP for grocery deliveries. Necessary system changes were implemented and successfully tested, and online purchasing for SNAP recipients will be available through Amazon, Walmart, and ShopRite by the end of the week.

We've also learned that Food and Nutrition Service has approved one additional retailer to join this pilot – Fresh Grocer in Philadelphia. They are still working with Food and Nutrition Service to make system changes, so they may not be available with the first group at the end of the week but should launch soon. I'm excited that another retailer is joining to offer this option to clients, and I wanted to remind you all that retailers can contact FNS at any point to join.

Thank you all for your patience as we worked through the application process for this pilot and got systems updated to make it possible. I'm very glad that we're nearly over the finish line here and grocery delivery and prepayment for curbside pickup will be an option for our SNAP recipients.

Application Data/EAP/LIHEAP Recovery Crisis

Transitioning to our update on applications trends and other public assistance updates, we still are not seeing an upward trend in applications data.



We received 22,982 applications last week, down from 27,280 the week prior. Due to the holiday, it's not a surprise that applications were down. In addition to the total application data, to date, more than 10,350 applications have been received for EAP and nearly 14,100 applications have been received for the LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program. Of these applications, 3,444 people have been approved for EAP and 4,098 have been approved for LIHEAP Recovery Crisis.

Last Thursday I had the opportunity to hold a press conference at the PEMA building on the availability of public assistance, and the technology of that space let us reach more media outlets and viewers than what we've reached in our regular WebEx briefings. I'm hopeful that the message we delivered last

week reached some people who may not normally hear about these services, but we are continuing to reach out and communicate the availability of these services however we can. As we move through the reopening process and more of Pennsylvania moves to yellow and green, a new normal will be shaped in the weeks and months ahead. There are many questions still to be answered about what that normal will look like, but we must use the experience and lessons of the last three months – including protests following the murder of George Floyd – to inform our focus moving forward. COVID-19 has disrupted and changed daily life as we know it, and people are turning to government and community agencies as resources for guidance and support in ways we rarely experience. We as government must rise to this challenge and be that reliable resource that people can turn to during difficult times. We must use this time to strengthen our programs so they can respond nimbly to the economic uncertainty we face right now. There is no simple answer for how we do this, but we will try. COVID-19 has challenged and strained many of our systems and resources, but we will use this to emerge stronger and more responsive to how we help those in need during difficult times.

Thank you all for your help making this possible and your work to help people across Pennsylvania.

Stigma Stories Request

I wanted to give another reminder of our standing ask for stories of people we all serve. I know a few of you got in contact with Ali after last week's call, so thank you so much for that. If you haven't yet or think of others, please get in contact with Ali.

Public assistance can be confusing, and many people don't see it as being an option for them. Our public assistance system should be a safety net and a resource to help people during difficult times, but it's only effective if people are using it. I want people to know about public assistance not just as a resource that could help them, but one that they could pass on or recommend to someone else. But it's one thing to tell people that these programs exist, it's another to show the impact.

Again, if you know anyone who would be willing to share their story, please contact our Communications Director Ali Fogarty at alfogarty@pa.gov. Thank you again for your consideration and support.

Demonstrations Across the State

Over the last few days, significant attention has been directed to protests and demonstrations around Pennsylvania and the country in response to the murder of George Floyd. This event and the necessary conversations we are having are important, but I understand that they may also be challenging and trigger generational trauma, especially for those in Black and other communities of color. We are working on compiling resource for people affected by this, but we are mindful that these resources need to be equipped to approach these conversations with necessary cultural sensitivity.

In addition to this, we understand that these demonstrations and business closures may be disrupting services for people in these communities. Flexibilities around telehealth remain in effect, and our Medicaid managed care organizations have mail order options if people cannot access impacted pharmacies. Please encourage the people you serve to reach out to their MCO if they are concerned about accessing services.

Survey results

I wanted to provide an update on the survey on frequency of these calls sent following last week's call. We received approximately 75 responses, and about 60 respondents indicated that they would be comfortable moving to bi-weekly calls. We will do that moving forward, so unless a call becomes necessary next week, our next call will be June 17.

As mentioned previously, if circumstances change, we will move back to weekly calls if necessary. We will also continue to send written updates each week so you can receive updates even on weeks when a call is not necessary.

May 27, 2020 Update

Budget Update

Several bills are working their way through the legislature. Separate bills will allocate Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding as well as an initial FY 20-21 budget. The FY 20-21 budget will be a five-month budget with the remaining seven months being determined sometime in the fall. The CARES ACT funding will be focused on restoring operations and providing benefits to those adversely effected by the pandemic, either through illness or through loss or reduction of employment, and once the funding bills are passed and enacted we will be able to provide more information on how this funding will be allocated.

Reopening Pennsylvania

Last Friday, Governor Wolf announced that 17 counties will move to green on May 29 and by June 5, all of Pennsylvania will move to the yellow phase. More information about the reopening process, restrictions for red, yellow, and green phase counties, and how it is determined that a county will move from yellow to green is available [here](#).

DHS' program offices are working quickly to provide reminders and resources about necessary precautions for each phase to keep the people we care for and people providing that care healthy and safe. While we will provide more specific guidance about what green means for DHS' providers and partners in the coming days, I want touch on a few things for now. It is important to remember that even as we move to green, COVID-19 is still a threat. We must remain vigilant and be mindful about our actions even as we resume the new normal life. Green does not mean all clear for anyone.

For some providers, particularly those in residential or hospital settings, the risk and dangers of COVID-19 and a potential outbreak does not go away once a county moves to green. Because of this, restrictions and regulatory changes may remain in place even as counties reopen. Providers must be mindful when facilitating visitation between family and residents at a congregate setting. If potential visitors are coming from a red or yellow county, it is best to take caution and continue with video conferencing even if the facility is in a green county. Guidance will be issued when these restrictions can be lifted.

Telemedicine will continue to be an option for physical and behavioral health providers, and we encourage providers and Pennsylvanians to continue to use this as an option when appropriate. Any patient exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should use telemedicine for routine visits unrelated to the symptoms.

Adult Training, Prevocational and Older Adult Day facilities for adults with disabilities and seniors may re-open in counties in the green phase. Both ODP and PDA are providing guidance to facilities to ensure that proper precautions are in place for participant and staff screening and infection control procedures.

Work is still underway to prepare our County Assistance Offices for reopening. Sneeze guards are being ordered and installed for intake booths where clients meet one on one with caseworkers, and cleaning supplies, masks, and other supplies necessary to keep clients and staff safe are still being acquired. As

resources are secured and protective equipment is installed, we will begin reopening CAOs to the public, but we cannot do that until it is safe for both clients and employees.

We appreciate your patience as we work to safely bring these offices back online, but I do want to remind you all that services remain available through COMPASS at all times. Any client can use COMPASS to apply for assistance, update their case file if their circumstances have changed, or submit required documentation. Help with these services can also be reached through our hotlines. Clients in Philadelphia with questions or information to report about their case should call the Philadelphia Customer Service Center at 215-560-7226. Clients in all other counties can call the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930.

Thank you for your patience and for helping Pennsylvanians access these services remotely for the time being.

Resuming Licensing Operations

On March 30, DHS announced that we would temporarily cease annual licensing inspections in order to minimize risk of spreading COVID-19. Complaint and incident investigations have continued in the time since.

Renewal inspections will begin for providers located in counties that move to green, and some annual inspections may also begin for providers located in yellow counties on a more limited basis. During this time, we have been and will continue to investigate serious incidents and complaints statewide. More information will come from the licensing offices as this process moves forward. If providers have questions, they should contact their regional licensing office.

Long-Term Care Update

Even as new cases of COVID-19 begin to level and areas of Pennsylvania prepare to move to the green phase of reopening, we know that COVID-19 still presents a serious threat to congregate and long-term care facilities. We are not wavering on our commitment to support long-term care facilities as they work to protect residents and staff by managing or preventing outbreaks of COVID-19 at their facility.

As counties move to yellow and green, guidance in place for long-term care facilities under DHS' oversight like personal care homes and assisted living residences and skilled nursing facilities under the Department of Health's oversight will remain in place. This includes restrictions on visitation, regulatory flexibilities to support COVID-19 mitigation efforts, and enhanced testing guidelines ordered by the Department of Health. These measures will remain in effect until the administration advises otherwise.

In addition to this, our Educational Support and Clinical Consultation Program (ESCCP) continues to be a resource for personal care homes, assisted living residences, and skilled nursing facilities. ESCCP was launched at the end of March alongside the Jewish Healthcare Foundation to help personal care homes and assisted living residences facing COVID-19. The effort then expanded to include skilled nursing facilities. ESCCP offers regular webinars on topics like infection control practices and proper use and disposal of personal protective equipment. To date, more than 14 webinars have been held, reaching

nearly 2000 attendees.

Seven health systems also participate in ESCCP – Allegheny Health Network, Geisinger, Penn State Hershey Medical Center, Temple University, the University of Pennsylvania, UPMC, and the Wright Center. The health systems are available to provide direct clinical support to the long-term care facilities, an invaluable resource for facilities like personal care homes and assisted living residences who may lack in-house staff with clinical experience.

ESCCP has directly contacted providers to discuss their concerns and needs during the pandemic. So far, ESCCP has provided assistance to more than 75 percent of the 1,200 personal care homes and assisted living residences in Pennsylvania and 70 percent of DOH's licensed skilled nursing facilities. This support network has facilitated stronger regional collaborations between long-term care facilities, health systems, and state and local partners, and we will continue to be there for providers as they navigate the weeks and months ahead.

Summer Program & Child Care FAQs for Parents

As mentioned previously, child care providers are permitted to reopen without needing a waiver as counties move to yellow. We continue to support child care programs as they reopen. The Department will continue to pay all child care providers based on their Child Care Works Enrollments as of March 13 through the end of June.

We know that parents may have questions about things they need to know or how their provider will operate in order to keep children in care as well as staff safe from COVID-19. As parents begin to return to work and child care opens more broadly, there is likely some anxiety about broadening their children's social circles, but essential workers and parents whose offices are reopening still need to have a safe place for their children to go while they are at work.

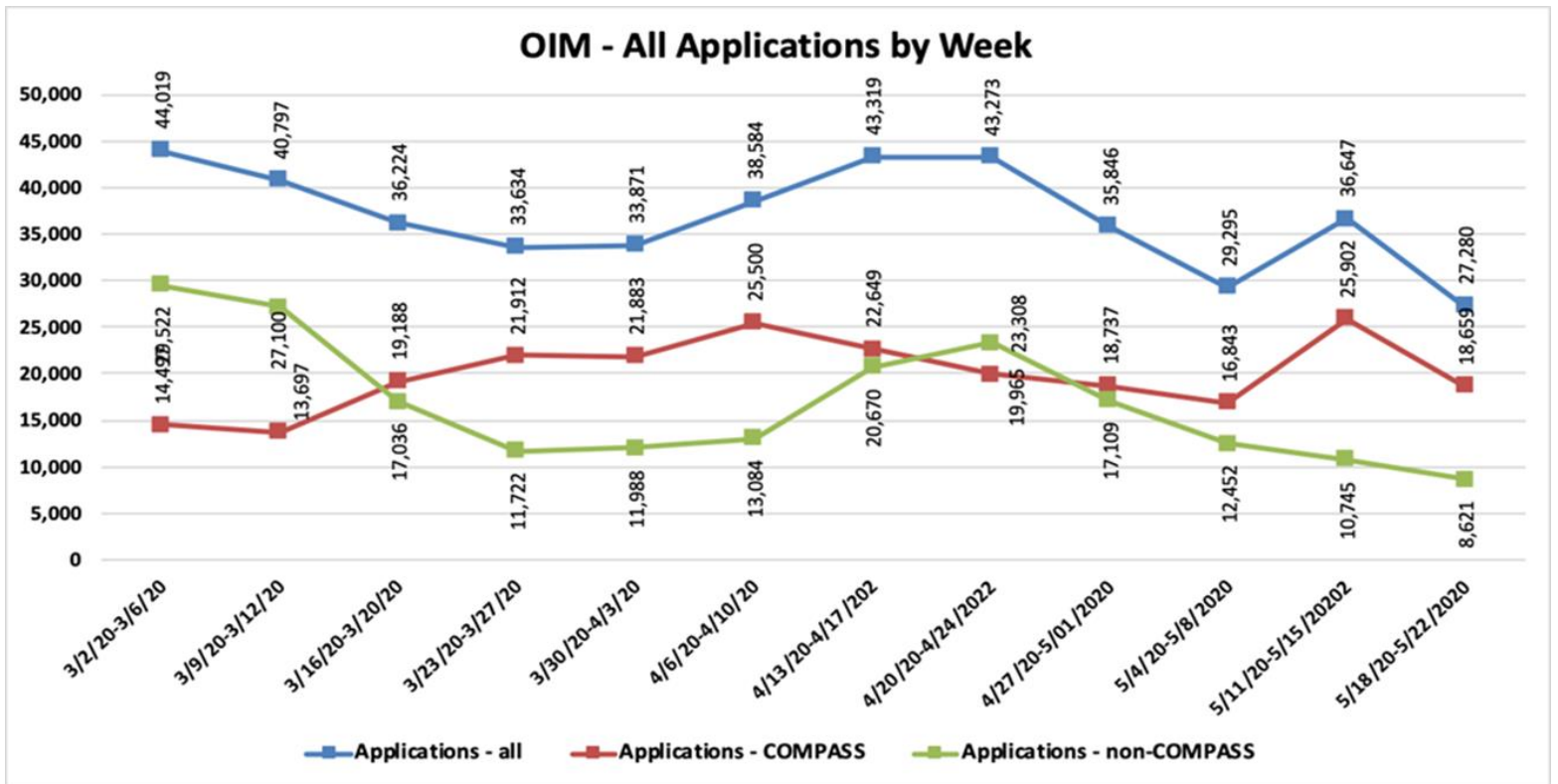
Earlier this week, [a set of frequently asked questions](#) were posted to DHS' website and sent through the Office of Child Development and Early Learning's provider listserv. We want to be sure that we are providing the most up-to-date information and guidance available to help families who still need to use child care services amidst the health crisis, so this document may be updated in the weeks and months to come. The FAQs outline how families who need child care can find a provider in their area, how families can get financial assistance for child care if they qualify, and how parents can get in touch with their local Early Learning Resource Center if they are having trouble finding an operating child care provider in their community. The FAQs also go over precautions and preventive measures that child care providers should be taking in light of COVID-19. This includes temperature screenings each morning, enhanced cleaning standards, and operational adjustments to facilitate social distancing as much as possible in child care settings. The FAQs also cover when children should wear masks. Children under two should not wear masks, and masks are not required for children in child care settings. Face coverings are still recommended by the CDC, especially for older youth, when feasible, particularly in indoor or crowded locations. We hope that these FAQs will be helpful as more parents begin to use child care settings around Pennsylvania.

Since this weekend marked the unofficial start to summer, there may be questions about children participating in camps and summer programs this summer. Last Friday, the Department of Health [released FAQs](#) that provide guidance on which types of summer programs for children are able to operate during the reopening plan, requirements for these programs beyond CDC guidance, group sizes and enrollment restrictions for summer programs, and other topics related to summer recreation. If you or people you serve have questions about camps and other summer programs, I encourage you to consult this resource.

Office of Income Maintenance Program Updates

Applications Update

At this time, we still are not seeing an upward trend in applications data. We received 27,280 applications last week, down from 36,647 the week prior. We’ve seen an oscillating trend of applications going up and down over the past month or so. This may be due to new programs being announced like the Emergency Assistance Program and the LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program and an initial spike in applications based on those announcements.



To date, over 8,900 applications have been received for EAP and nearly 3,300 applications have been received for the LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program. Of these applications, 2,766 people have been approved for EAP and 1,252 have been approved for LIHEAP Recovery Crisis. We will continue to promote availability of these programs and others like Medicaid, SNAP, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and TANF through social media and media outreach, and we appreciate all of your efforts to spread the word as well. DHS will continue to be here for Pennsylvanians who need an extra hand, and

we need all Pennsylvanians to know that there are resources available if they need help.

Our data sharing agreement with the Department of Labor and Industry is nearly finalized, so as soon as that is set, we will be able to begin looking more closely at areas of the state where we can target additional outreach about our programs. No one should be alone during this time, and we will continue to be that helping hand that can help people get through the weeks and months ahead.

P-EBT Benefit Issuance

The first issuance of benefits under the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer program, or P-EBT, will go out this week. This first phase will cover families known to DHS because they are already enrolled in Medicaid or SNAP. This covers more than two-thirds of families that will receive P-EBT – about 688,000 students in total. These benefits will be issued over approximately the next week.

The second phase will cover about 270,000 students who receive free or reduced-price school lunches through the Department of Education's direct certification authority. We expect to begin to issue these benefits by mid-June. From there, a third phase of benefits will be issued for households who applied and became eligible for the National School Lunch Program in the months since the pandemic began. At this time, we do not know how many families will be covered for this, but families who have experienced a change in income or job loss can still apply online at any time at:

www.compass.state.pa.us.

Stigma Stories Request

On last week's call, I mentioned that we are hoping to do more to lift stories of people served by DHS' programs. I just wanted to put out another plug for this ask. I think this time gives us the opportunity to try to shift perception of government and the services we offer. While none of us could have imagined this time last year or even at the start of this year that we'd be where we are right now, this is exactly why DHS exists – to help people navigate challenging times that you did not see coming. I want people to know about public assistance not just as a resource that could help them, but one that they could pass on or recommend to someone else. But it's one thing to tell people that these programs exist, it's another to show the impact.

Each of you have more direct connections to the people served by DHS' programs, so again, if you know anyone who would be willing to share their story, please contact our Communications Director Ali Fogarty at alfogarty@pa.gov. This is going to be an on-going effort, so there isn't really a cut-off or deadline to this request – just an on-going hope that you can keep this effort in mind and help us reach people who are willing to and deserve to have their story told.

Thank you again for your consideration.

May 20, 2020 Update

Long-Term Care Facility Data

Yesterday, the Department of Health [began posting data](#) on cases of COVID-19 among residents and staff at long-term care facilities as well as deaths associated with the facilities. For the purposes of this reporting, long-term care facilities include nursing facilities licensed by the Department of Health and personal care homes and assisted living facilities licensed by DHS.

As we work through the public health crisis, releasing information on these facilities will allow families of residents to know the status of their loved one's home. There may be some challenges in reporting this data or inconsistencies, and we are working closely with the Department of Health to continue to adjust and streamline reporting when necessary so we are presenting accurate and up-to-date information.

We are also working towards posting data for other DHS' licensed residential settings. We are determining the level of detail that will be published for these facilities and hope to begin reporting soon.

Reopening Updates

Our program offices continue to draft and issue guidance responsive to considerations and questions that arise as counties transition to the yellow phase. As this is issued, I wanted to reiterate our understanding of operations for the yellow phase. While child care will be permitted to reopen and we are preparing County Assistance Offices for reopening, in many cases, flexibilities and guidance issued for the red phase should continue in counties moving to yellow.

Yellow does not mean the pandemic is over, and there is still great risk that must be considered, especially considering the medically-fragile populations DHS serves and the risk to providers. We intend to keep flexibilities for remote services and restrictions on visitation and in-person services in place until otherwise directed. Time is our ally in this process, and while I know we want to resume something close to normal life, we cannot rush this process. Yellow is still a period of extreme caution, and we must heed this so we can continue to progress towards green.

Child Care Funding

Earlier today, the [first round of funding for child care providers](#) permitted under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was announced. Pennsylvania received \$106 million total for child care providers through CARES, and \$51 million will be distributed to nearly 7,000 child care providers in this first wave of funding. This initial funding will help providers preparing to reopen as counties move into the yellow phase. Funds will be distributed to eligible, certified child care providers through regional Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs).

Our Office of Child Development and Early Learning determined eligibility for funding and amount of award based on the type and size of provider, number of active enrollments in Child Care Works subsidized child care, regional child care capacity, and licensure status. A base payment is set by licensure type, and providers can receive additional funding for Child Care Works enrollments and if they operate in one of 27 counties determined to have moderate or acute capacity issues based on capacity of licensed child care providers and projections on the number of children needing care. A breakdown of

the funding ranges and total award to each county was included as a separate attachment with this email.

Remaining funding allocations will be informed by OCDEL's study with Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs that is assessing the economic impact of COVID-19 on Pennsylvania's child care providers. I encourage all providers to participate in this survey so we can get as complete a picture of this impact as possible.

Thank you all for your patience as the administration and the General Assembly work to allocate this funding.

ChildLine Update

Since schools closed and stay at home orders took effect, there has been significant concern around children who may be experiencing abuse and neglect in their home being more isolated from adults who could make a report to ChildLine. All of us in the Wolf Administration share that concern, and many of us have been doing what we can to broaden education around child abuse reporting and encourage people to make the call to ChildLine.

We've discussed this on previous weekly updates, but ChildLine transitioned to remote work at the start of the stay at home period and has been fully operational ever since. Child abuse investigations are continuing despite the public health crisis. All reports made to ChildLine are screened and directed to the appropriate authority for investigation and follow up. While this work is continuing, we have seen a significant drop in reports made to ChildLine. While we wish that a data trend of fewer child abuse reports could be reasonably interpreted to indicate fewer instances of child abuse, we know this is unlikely to be the case. In April 2019, there were 21,232 reports made to ChildLine. Comparatively, 10,674 reports were made last month – a 50 percent reduction from the previous year.

We've employed numerous strategies to try to combat the decrease in reporting. We worked closely with the Department of Education to get guidance to teachers who are still interacting with students through distance learning on signs of potential abuse or neglect. We are also working to educate the public on signs of potential abuse and how to report through social media, media outreach, an on-going paid media campaign, and through Dr. Levine's daily briefing. We also provided this group with a media kit with talking points and social media posts so our partners across the DHS system could help educate their constituencies, and I want to thank all of you who have helped lift this message up. I think these efforts are beginning to pay off, because over the last few weeks, we have seen a continuous increase in reporting. From May 4 to 8, we received a weekday average of 437 calls per day to ChildLine, whereas from March 23 through 27, we received an average of 318 per day.

Reports to ChildLine allow the proper authorities to begin assessments and investigations that may not otherwise start if the report isn't made. Anyone who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected can contact ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313, and we will continue to make this reminder. Thank you to everyone who has helped lift this message up over the past few months.

Fingerprinting Guidance

Two weeks ago, Governor Wolf signed Act 18 of 2020, which extends the time period for certain professions to obtain an FBI background check upon hiring. Certain individuals who are required to

obtain an FBI background check are given additional time to meet this requirement if they are unable to complete their fingerprinting scan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

DHS has published an [FAQ document](#) explaining Act 18 of 2020, who it applies to, and what people should know. Thank you all for your patience as we've worked through this. And, as a reminder, we still strongly encourage individuals to get fingerprinted and obtain their FBI Criminal History Clearance as soon as they are able, and a map of operating Identogo locations is available [here](#).

Office of Income Maintenance Updates

SNAP Online Ordering

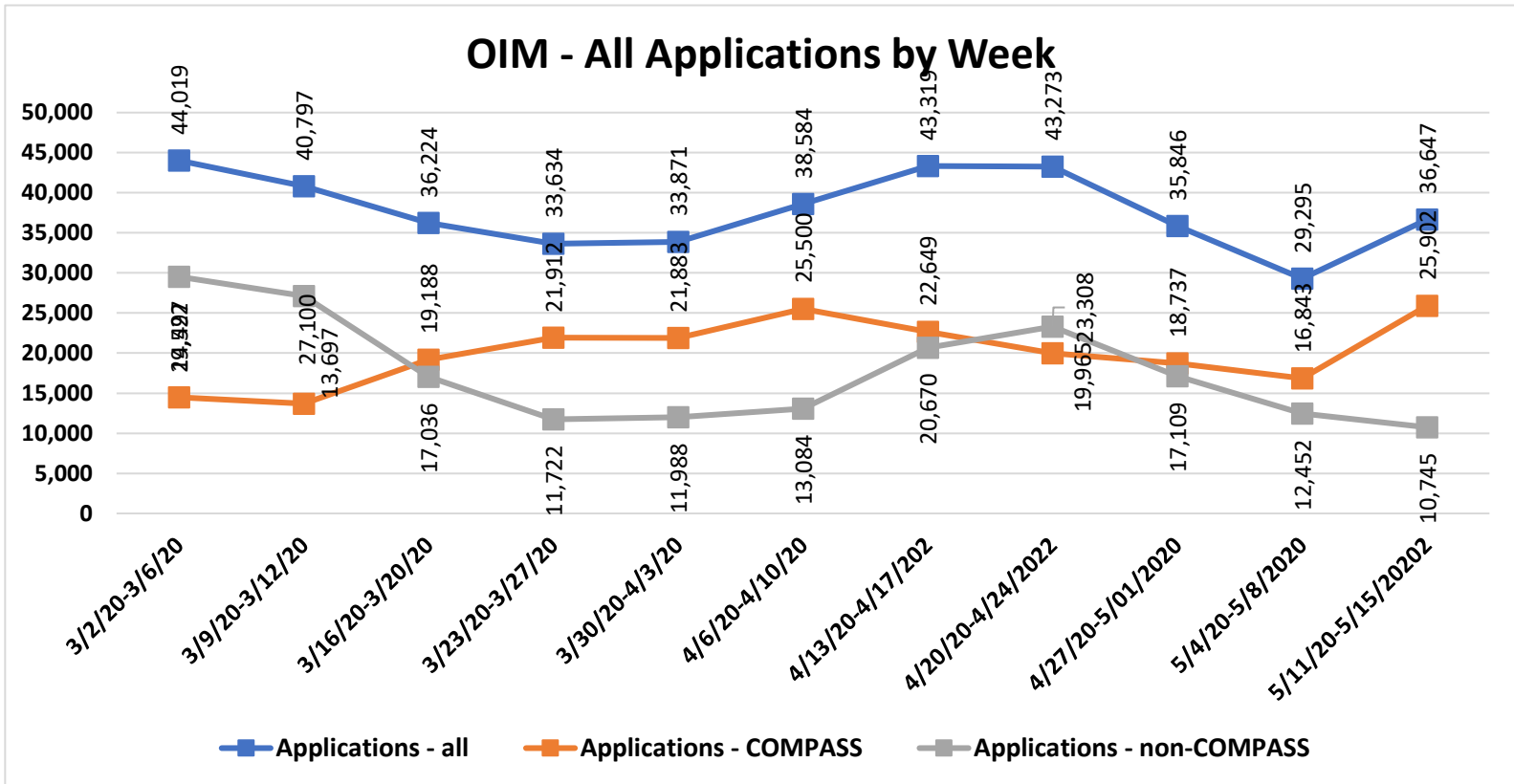
We have some exciting news to report today – earlier this week, Pennsylvania [received approval](#) from Food and Nutrition Service to join the pilot program that lets SNAP recipients purchase groceries online through participating retailers.

Now that approval has been received, DHS is working with its EBT vendor and approved retailers to implement system changes necessary to implement online payment for PA's SNAP recipients. These system changes will take approximately two weeks to complete the testing and validation. Implementation could not begin without FNS' approval. Now that approval has been received, DHS expects to have online grocery purchasing activated for SNAP recipients by the beginning of June. Once active, only eligible food items normally paid for by SNAP will be able to be purchased online with SNAP benefits. Delivery fees, driver tips, and other associated charges may not be paid for with SNAP benefits. Due to the expedited timeframe to implement, this initiative does not include the ability to transact Cash Assistance benefits using the EBT card. Therefore, individuals will need to use another method of payment to cover the non-allowable fees such as a pre-paid debit card.

The pilot program currently includes three approved retailers: Amazon, Walmart, and ShopRite. Retailers that are interested in participating must contact FNS to review the requirements to be added to the program. And, just as a reminder, retailers that do not wish to join the pilot program can still offer delivery or pick-up flexibility options for SNAP recipients by using mobile EBT processing equipment that would allow customers to pay with SNAP when groceries are delivered or picked up. Farmers markets may be able to receive this processing equipment at no cost [through a grant opportunity](#) provided by DHS.

Thank you all for your patience as we waited for approval on this. I'm really glad that we will be able to extend this flexibility to SNAP recipients in the next few weeks. We will continue to keep you posted on this implementation timeline and when it is officially available.

Applications Data



After about three weeks of declining application numbers, we did see an uptick of about 7,000 applications last week. This follows a decline of about 6,000 applications between the first and second weeks of May, so we are still below the numbers we were seeing prior to COVID-19 and the shutdown that followed. We do, however, have data on enrollments for April and we are seeing increases in Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP.

- Medicaid enrollment has increased by 62,000 people or 2.2 percent since February, for a total enrollment of 2.89 million people.
- CHIP enrollment surpassed 200,000 children in April, up from approximately 186,000 children in March.
- SNAP enrollment has increased by 123,000 people since February to 1.86 million Pennsylvanians enrolled – a 7.1 percent increase.

While we still don't have a clear picture of why we have not yet seen a surge of applications, we have a theory as to why there was an increase in enrollment. Before COVID, we would see about 2 percent of our Medicaid population leave each month, either due to failing to renew Medicaid coverage or experiencing another life change. Some of these individuals would reapply the next month. Since COVID, we've been directed by CMS to ensure Medicaid and CHIP coverage continues even if the household is otherwise ineligible with the only exceptions being a move out of state, voluntary withdrawal from the program or death of a recipient. This means that we may not see the normal churn in MA applications because individuals are remaining eligible. Many people are not being disenrolled from SNAP or TANF

either. For these programs we have extended recertification periods into the future, so people are not recertifying at this time. Because of this, we are not seeing people leave these programs unless they report a change to their case that makes them ineligible. We are still taking steps to examine the volume of applications and our enrollment in Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF.

We are also now accepting applications for both the Emergency Assistance Program and the LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program that was announced last week. To date, just over 1,900 people have been approved for EAP out of 4,300 applications, and about 800 people have applied for the LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program. We've processed just under 200 LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Applications so far, and of that group, 142 applications have been approved.

Applications for these programs can be submitted through [COMPASS](#), and paper applications are available at www.dhs.pa.gov. Thank you, as always, for your support in connecting your constituents to these programs.

Stigma Stories

We need to make sure those who qualify and could use help understand how they can apply for services, and we think there is an opportunity to reframe some misconceptions about public assistance. We have been trying to encourage use of public assistance through media outreach and digital media, but it may be difficult for people who haven't used these programs previously to see how they can help them navigate the challenges of this time.

To help shift this, we want to tell the stories of people who have been helped by public assistance programs. We want to highlight people and families who are the reason why these programs are so important. Many of you have more direct connections to the people served by DHS' programs, so if you know anyone who would be willing to share their story, please contact our Communications Director Ali Fogarty at alfogarty@pa.gov. Depending on a person's comfort level, there are different ways and levels of anonymity that we can accommodate for this, but our first step is to start collecting a repository of stories that can be part of a broader campaign to better humanize these programs and provide real testimony to the difference they can make during times of uncertainty like what we currently face.

Thank you all in advance for your help with this effort.

143 Day in PA

I think many of us are familiar with the Mr. Rogers quote that rings true here now more than ever: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

This Friday, May 22 is the 143rd day of the year, making it 143 Day in Pennsylvania – our official day of kindness inspired by the lessons and legacy of Mr. Rogers. In honor of 143 Day, let's spread a little kindness in our communities.

You can make an appointment to donate blood, spend a little time volunteering with your local food bank or pantry, or visit the United Way of Pennsylvania's 211 website at www.uwp.org/211gethelp to find organizations in your community that need extra help. Or you can do something as simple as

sharing resources like [COMPASS](#), 211, the number for DHS' Support and Referral Helpline, or a local food bank or pantry on your social media. You may be helping someone without realizing. You can also visit www.pa.gov/143-Day for more ideas of how to help out and spread kindness in your community.

People who work in the human services field know better than anyone that when we all take a little bit of time for a small gesture, that impact grows quickly and reaches more of our friends and neighbors. I hope you'll join me by participating in 143 Day on Friday and encouraging your family, friends, and coworkers to do the same however you can.

Share and spread the word about 143 Day with the hashtag #143DayinPA. These times are challenging and isolating, but we are in this together.

May 13, 2020 Update

Testing in Long-Term Care Facilities

There is a lot of attention and concern surrounding how COVID-19 is affecting residents and staff of long-term care facilities like nursing homes, personal care homes, and assisted living facilities.

The Department of Health (DOH) is [implementing a robust testing strategy](#) that will help staff detect COVID-19 and isolate anyone affected by or exposed to the virus. The testing will be performed on anyone entering the facilities, including residents and staff, to prevent the virus from also entering. Results from these tests will help facilities group residents based on health status and exposure and better understand the extent of COVID-19 in their facility. The federal government will be supplying testing kits to facilities that do not have enough, and the Pennsylvania National Guard will use mobile testing units to support facilities that need assistance with testing. This expanded data will help the state and our partners continue to respond to the needs of our long-term care facilities caring for Pennsylvanians who face a high risk of complications if they contract COVID-19.

We remain committed to supporting long-term care facilities, and I know this move towards universal testing will strengthen our response as we navigate this pandemic together.

Reopening Updates

Last Friday, 24 counties transitioned to the yellow phase of the reopening, and most of Southwest Pennsylvania will move to this phase this Friday, May 15. We are continuing to work on a plan to safely reopen our County Assistance Offices to the public. We are assessing the needs of each office to determine what adjustments are necessary to ensure the health and safety of our staff and clients. As we solidify what these resumed operations will look like and counties begin to move from red to yellow, we will communicate when and how these offices will open and operate.

Our program offices continue to issue guidance and respond to questions regarding what is permissible for the reopening phase, and all guidance coming from DHS will be in line with Governor Wolf and the Department of Health's recommended timeline for reopening as well as guidance issued by DOH and the CDC.

I urge our partners and providers to heed this guidance as well. We must be careful and deliberate during this process so we can avoid a situation where a county has to move back to the red phase as much as possible.

For child care providers in a county still in the red phase, information about applying for a waiver is available through OCDEL, and the process is very simple. Please do not resume operations without this waiver unless Governor Wolf indicates that your county has moved to the yellow phase.

Thank you all for your cooperation and patience during this time. We all want to begin to resume operations as they once were, but we know the risk of COVID-19 is still very real. Working carefully and deliberately together will help us operate in a way that mitigates that risk, and we appreciate your partnership and the adjustments you have made to keep your staff and the people you serve safe.

OIM Updates

LIHEAP Recovery Crisis

We previously indicated our intent to launch a LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program using additional LIHEAP funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus, or CARES, Act. Late last week we received word that Pennsylvania would receive \$34.9 million in LIHEAP funds through CARES, and DHS will use these and funds remaining from the 2019-2020 LIHEAP season to fund the LIHEAP Recovery Crisis Program.

The program will begin on Monday, May 18 and will offer a crisis benefit as well as a supplemental payment for households that previously received a crisis payment during the 2019-2020 LIHEAP season. These benefits will be paid directly to utility companies or fuel providers with a few exceptions to help qualifying families offset costs for home utilities.

Pennsylvanians may qualify for LIHEAP Recovery Crisis benefits if they were notified that their utility service will be shut off in the next 60 days, have had their main or secondary energy source completely shut-off, are in danger of being without fuel in 15 days or less, or if they owe funds to a provider that would constitute a service termination if not for the Public Utility Commission's temporary moratorium on termination. The program will run through August 31, 2020 or until all budgeted funding is expended. The maximum benefit for the Recovery Crisis Program will be \$800, and eligibility guidelines will be the same as those used during the 2019-2020 LIHEAP Season.

We are going to formally announce the program shortly, and we are sending social media graphics and messaging regarding the program. We appreciate any help you can give to get the word out about this program. Our hope is this will be another option to help individuals and families who are feeling the impacts of the current economic uncertainty meet essential needs during this time, so thank you for your support in this effort.

Emergency Assistance Program

Last Friday, we publicly announced our Emergency Assistance Program, which provides a one-time cash benefit to families who have experienced a significant income reduction or complete job loss due to COVID-19. We began accepting applications for this program on Monday, and in the two days of this program, we received more than 3,400 applications.

We appreciate you helping us spread the word on this program so we can get this benefit out to people who need it. These numbers definitely show that there is a real need for this assistance, so thank you for helping lift this up.

SNAP Updates

If you were on last week's call, you may remember that we received approval from the federal government for the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer program, or P-EBT, during our briefing. We expect to begin issuing the P-EBT benefits to families that also receive cash assistance, SNAP, or Medicaid and the National School Lunch Program in the next week, but I wanted to remind you all that families who have experienced a change in income can still apply for the National School Lunch

Program. If eligible, they will receive a pro-rated P-EBT benefit.

Families can apply for the National School Lunch Program through [COMPASS](#), so I encourage any family who has experienced a job loss or change in income due to the pandemic to see if their family could get a little extra help through the P-EBT program. Families that never applied but whose children receive free or reduced cost lunches do not need to submit an application. We've also heard concern that families who receive reduced-price lunch but have outstanding debt for these lunches will not receive these benefits. This does not affect their participation in P-EBT, and they will still receive this benefit.

We are still waiting for approval from the federal government for our request to participate in the online grocery pilot, and we also submitted a request to Food and Nutrition Service to extend our waiver allowing face-to-face interviews for SNAP quality control to be conducted by phone.

This request would permit these interviews to continue by phone through November, and we hope that the federal government will allow us to keep this option that keeps both staff and clients safe while meeting program integrity requirements.

Application Data

We have been actively looking at our weekly applications volumes for Medicaid, TANF and SNAP the past two months. Our initial thought was we would see a significant increase in applications because of the number of people who have recently become unemployed. To date, we have not seen any significant surges in applications and in fact the past few weeks we have seen a decrease in applications – from 43,319 four weeks ago to 29,295 last week.

Some states have experienced a significant increase in applications. One reason for the differences in experience between the states is the different dates states began to shut down, for example California was 3- 4 weeks ahead of Pennsylvania. Also, we believe that some states included a "backlog" of applications in their count of applications. We did not have, nor do we currently, have any backlog in applications. I also want to report that we are still processing applications in the same timeframes we did prior to COVID-19. Specifically, for Medicaid we are making determinations in 12.2 days on average and for SNAP, our average application determination time is 6.2 days. One reason for the lack of a surge in applications is the fact that we are not currently terminating anyone from Medicaid, unless they voluntarily withdraw, pass away or move to another state. In general, we see 2% of our Medicaid population leave each month. Some of these individuals leaving include those who failed to renew their MA. In some cases, these individuals will reapply for services the next month. Another factor to consider is the high SNAP participation rate in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania has been recognized by FNS as one of the states with the highest estimated enrollment of those who are potentially eligible.

We are still taking steps to examine the volume of applications and our enrollment in Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF. We want to make sure those in need understand how they can apply for services. There are two things we will be doing in the coming months to try to better understand why we are not seeing an increase in applications. First, we are working with the University of Pittsburgh to survey newly unemployed individuals to understand why newly unemployed individuals may or may not be applying for benefits and any barriers that exist to applying for benefits. Second, we are working internally within the Commonwealth to do some data matching to identify if there are areas of the states where we are

seeing a higher number of people on unemployment insurance who are not enrolled in Medicaid or SNAP. We also hope to see other potential demographic factors that provide us information as to why people may not be applying. This will help us target outreach or other strategies that help us work with populations in need.

Our goal is to make sure that people who could be helped by these services know we are here and what is available, so these efforts will broaden data available to help us reach more people.

Family First Implementation Delay

Earlier this week, we announced that Pennsylvania received approval from the federal government to delay full implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act until July 1, 2021.

If you are unfamiliar with this, the Family First Prevention Services Act is a federal law that prioritizes providing services to children and families in the least restrictive manner and with their families as much as safely possible. It allows states to use federal payments for trauma-informed evidence-based prevention services to allow children who may otherwise be placed in congregate care settings to stay with their parents or relatives. In the event placement outside the home occurs, the law directs federal funding towards family-like settings or other specialized settings that are best suited to a child's individual needs. We recognize that the pandemic has greatly altered life and operations for county child welfare agencies and service providers, and we want to be sure that there is adequate time and resources to successfully implement this shift.

The additional implementation time will allow for interested providers for specialized settings to apply or to adjust their programs to meet standards outlined in the Family First Prevention Services Act. Specialized settings are trauma-informed child residential facilities or supervised independent living programs specializing in providing care and treatment for children and youth with special circumstances. Additionally, the delay will support our efforts to build additional evidence-based prevention programs used by counties in a way that safely keeps families together, allows for staffing and data needs to be met, and will not result in the loss of federal funds.

I want to thank our county child welfare agencies and service providers for your partnership in this implementation thus far.

Mental Health Awareness Month

I wanted to take a minute to highlight Mental Health Awareness Month, which is recognized annually in May. Normally, this month would be marked by events in the Capitol and around the commonwealth. Obviously we cannot do that this year, but we are doing what we can to lift this message virtually through social media and through the press.

Far too many people struggle with mental health or substance use disorder issues in silence, and only about half of people impacted by mental illness seek treatment. Too often, stigma of behavioral health disorders keeps people from seeking the treatment they need.

COVID-19 and the challenges coming from this pandemic are only amplifying stress, anxiety, and fear people may face every day, and for some, those feelings may be surfacing for the first time during this pandemic. If you or someone you know are experiencing these feelings, please remember you are not alone.

The Support and Referral Helpline is still available 24/7 for anyone needing someone to talk to or extra support during this time. The helpline can be reached toll-free at 1-855-284-2494 or at 724-631-5600 for TTY. Please remember this resource and take advantage of it if you need it. No one needs to be alone during this time.

May 6, 2020 Update

Reopening Pennsylvania

We continue to prepare to support providers in counties that will transition to the yellow phase and our expectations for this phased reopening. Even as we prepare to restart certain operations in the 24 counties that will move to yellow on Friday, we must remember that this is not a return to normal life. This is just the beginning, and the dangers of the pandemic are still very real. We must all still do all we can to prevent spread of COVID-19 to avoid these counties going back under a stay at home order.

When a county moves to the yellow phase, child care providers are permitted to reopen without a waiver. Our Office of Child Development and Early Learning has prepared a webinar to review considerations and guidance on reopening. Child care providers preparing to open should continue to consult guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for [child care that remains open](#). This guidance speaks to steps providers should take to keep child care spaces safe and properly monitor staff and children for potential exposure to and symptoms of COVID-19.

Many stakeholders are looking for the Department of Health or DHS to issue guidance specific to Pennsylvania child care. The CDC is the most current and update information relating to COVID-19. As the CDC learns more about the virus, this guidance is the most trusted source of information.

Because there is still great risk of potential spread and outbreaks of COVID-19 during the yellow phase, we are not relaxing operational changes for all DHS-operated and licensed functions. Mitigation efforts in licensed facilities serving older Pennsylvanians, people with disabilities, people with mental illnesses, and youth in the child welfare system should continue until otherwise directed.

Our Office of Developmental Programs published guidance on May 4 specific to community service providers for what components of services may be resumed and the conditions under which they may resume.

We are also preparing for the eventual reopening of County Assistance Offices in counties that transition to yellow. Our CAOs will not immediately reopen on May 8. We must equip the offices with adequate protective equipment like masks, sneeze guards, and cleaning supplies to maintain building safety guidelines and keep workers in these offices safe once they open for public access. All CAO services continue to be available through [COMPASS](#), the helpline and customer service centers, and other channels, and we are not ending waivers that limit the need for in-person service like accepting self-attestations and not requiring in-person interviews. Our goal is to keep both CAO staff and the public that visit CAOs safe, so we are not rushing reopening public access until offices are equipped to manage additional public traffic given the public health risk.

Supporting Long-Term and Congregate Care Facilities

As Pennsylvania makes progress in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that residential settings continue to experience challenging outbreaks among their residents and staff. Long-term and residential care facilities serving older adults, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness play an invaluable role in supporting aging Pennsylvanians and other special populations. People served in these settings often have co-occurring disabilities and chronic medical conditions like heart or lung disease

and diabetes, making them immunocompromised or putting them at greater risk of a more aggressive case of COVID-19 and serious complications from the virus.

We are working closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and other partners across Pennsylvania to support long-term and congregate care facilities throughout the public health crisis. All congregate care providers operating in communities across Pennsylvania – group homes serving people with intellectual disabilities, personal care and assisted living facilities, and private intermediate care facilities, among others, are expected to continue to closely heed recommendations for safety in long-term care facilities from DOH and the CDC as well. Specifically, we are working closely with licensed providers to adhere to the CDC's long-term care facility guidance that speaks to screening for COVID-19 and visitation restriction as we try to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Long-term care providers are in an extremely precarious situation in this pandemic, and we are doing all we can to allow necessary operational adjustments and provide support from the state level. DOH and PEMA have been updating guidance regarding PPE distribution and are directing resources towards nursing facilities and other congregate long-term care facilities based on need. Congregate facilities who have a critical need for PPE should contact the program office under which they are licensed for assistance with this process.

We also continue to issue new guidance as necessary and will make additional requests to the federal government to support the flexibility we all need to properly respond as the pandemic evolves. As mentioned previously, we are not beginning to scale back these adjustments as counties transition to yellow because situations in these facilities can be delicate. We do not want to risk new or more serious outbreaks by moving too quickly.

We're also facilitating support networks between long-term care providers, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, health systems, and health care quality units to help assist with preparedness, mitigation, and infection control efforts. Health systems involved with this effort continue to engage with personal care homes and assisted living residences to provide educational support and clinical coaching to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Just last week, the health systems also began reaching out to nursing facilities to help with infection control efforts as well.

We also know that COVID-19 testing for these long-term care facilities remains a concern. DHS is currently following the guidance of the CDC as well as DOH when determining when it is appropriate to test long-term care residents. If guidance regarding testing changes, we will communicate that to our licensed providers and provide guidance.

This is an incredibly difficult time for many people, and people providing care in long-term and congregate care facilities and in the community must endure these challenges while maintaining continuity and services for people under their care. On behalf of the Wolf Administration, I want to thank everyone working in direct care and long-term care. Each of you do critical work every day, and right now, that work comes at great personal risk. Despite this, that work and care goes on because it must. These dedicated professionals cannot abandon the people they serve, and we will continue to support our licensed providers as they navigate this pandemic. We are with you, and we will overcome

this challenge and the months to come together. Thank you, again, for your commitment to and protection of your patients and residents.

Coverage for uninsured individuals

While coverage for COVID-19 testing is mandatory for individual and marketplace insurance, Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP, individuals who are uninsured have been concerned about how to get their testing covered.

As part of the Family First Coronavirus Relief Act and CARES Act, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, administered through the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) will provide claims reimbursement to health care providers generally at Medicare rates for testing uninsured individuals for COVID-19 and treating uninsured individuals with a COVID-19 diagnosis. The first day HRSA is accepting claims from providers is today, May 6, and they will accept claims for services back to February 5, 2020.

Providers should access the [HRSA website](#) for more information, what services are covered and who is eligible, and to submit claims.

Office of Income Maintenance (OIM) Program Updates

Data Update

We experienced a dip of approximately 7,400 applications between April 27 and May 1 as compared to the previous week – a 17 percent decline.

We are not sure exactly why this occurred, but so far for this week, we are seeing a bit of a rise. Nearly 800 more applications were received on Monday, May 4 than Friday, May 1, which is typical. We tend to get more applications in on Mondays compared to other days during the week. As some sectors begin to return to work or people begin receiving unemployment compensation, this could affect what we experience in benefits application.

We are still encouraging people to apply for these programs, especially those who may not have needed public assistance previously. I participated in a media briefing on this earlier today with First Lady Wolf and Secretary Redding of the Department of Agriculture, communicating availability of these programs and supports will continue as we navigate the months ahead.

Emergency Cash Assistance

Last week, I shared information about the Emergency Cash Assistance Program (ECAP) we will launch soon. ECAP will be open to families with a child under age 18 or pregnant women making 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or less. Families must also meet resource limits and have at least one person who was employed as of March 11, 2020 and lost employment or experienced an hour and wage reduction of at least 50 percent for at least two weeks due to the pandemic. Eligible families will receive a one-time payment equal to two months of TANF benefits for their household size, so a family of three would get an average one-time payment of \$806.

We are formally announcing this program tomorrow and will begin accepting applications on May 11 online through COMPASS or through a shortened paper application. The program will run through June 12 or until all funds are expended.

ECAP is designed to help low-income families stay financially stable during this period, and I want to thank you all in advance for helping us spread the word on this opportunity.

SNAP Waiver Status

At this point, you likely remember that we have requested authority to establish a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program to provide SNAP benefits for children who normally receive free or reduced-price school meals through the National School Lunch Program.

During today's call, we received approval on our P-EBT program from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Now that the program has been approved, we will begin to issue this benefit to families within 15 days.

We also formally submitted our request to join the United States Department of Agriculture's SNAP online grocery payment pilot, and we are awaiting approval of this request.

Unfortunately, we did hear back from FNS on a waiver DHS submitted on April 1, 2020 requesting authorization to allow contracted SNAP-Ed providers to assist in distribution of school lunches. FNS sent a letter dated May 1, 2020 denying the waiver request citing SNAP-Ed activities and associated costs, including staff time, must meet the current Federal guidelines. Based on the denial, SNAP-Ed staff will not be permitted to assist in the distribution of school lunches.

Fingerprinting

As announced last week, HB 360 passed the Senate with language to provide temporary relief from the fingerprinting requirement to some individuals working with children. The House concurred in those changes. Just today the Senate convened briefly and signed the bill, so it is on its way to the Governor for signature.

DHS and our sister agencies are finalizing guidance for affected individuals.

April 29, 2020 Update

Reopening Pennsylvania

Many of you are aware that Governor Wolf and Dr. Levine have begun to discuss what a reopening process would look like for Pennsylvania. While this process will be phased and gradual in order to protect public health, DHS is working closely with our partners across the administration to prepare for what the reopening will look like for our DHS-run and licensed services and facilities.

You all can understand why we must be careful and deliberate in this process. All of us want to go back to normal life however we can, but we must continue to diligently follow social distancing and mitigation guidelines even as we reopen to do what we can to try to avoid a future resurgence. With that being said, we want to work with our providers so that when they are authorized to begin resuming services, they operate and provide services in a way that keeps staff and the people we serve safe.

Program offices will be issuing guidance as to how providers can operate through the reopening phases as well as recommendations on how to provide services in an adjusted manner. We are also working on a plan to safely reopen our County Assistance Offices to the public. As we solidify what these resumed operations will look like and counties begin to move from red to yellow, we will communicate how these offices will open and operate.

The threat of COVID-19 will not disappear completely as we move to yellow and to green eventually, so we must continue to be cognizant of this as we move forward. Specifically, we will need to remain cognizant of the fact that for our seniors, people with disabilities who are dependent on some level of care, and people who are immuno-compromised or have other conditions that put them at higher risk to contract and/or become ill from COVID-19, the threat of COVID-19 will remain very real until we have a vaccine. On behalf of these more vulnerable Pennsylvanians, we need to remain vigilant, in the red, yellow and green phases.

We will have more information to share on this in the coming days and weeks, and I want to thank you all in advance for your patience and flexibility as we navigate what will become our new normal.

Applications for Public Assistance Programs

There has been a lot of interest in data and trends we are seeing on public assistance applications, so we are going to begin providing an update on this each week.

We are anticipating that the economic challenges of the pandemic will eventually cause the public assistance system to see increased need, but we are not at that point yet. Since many of the impacts of this crisis didn't occur until late March, we wouldn't anticipate seeing increases until April's enrollment data, which becomes available in mid-May. We are monitoring application data closely, though. At this point, we have not seen a significant spike in overall applications, and our application level is about where it was before the crisis began.

We experienced about three weeks of declining applications from mid-March until early April, which occurred due to a significant decrease in paper applications. Online applications through COMPASS did increase during this period, but not enough to compensate for the decline in paper applications. We are

beginning to see paper applications increase again and we are seeing nearly the same number of applications now as we did prior to the CAOs closing to the public.

In previous recessions, there was often a delay in terms of an impact on Medicaid and other public assistance applications. We expect the same will happen here as the increase could come from Pennsylvanians who may not have previously used DHS' programs. There is likely a knowledge gap regarding what kind of help is available and how someone could qualify, and, unfortunately, there's likely some level of stigma or fear of turning to a government program. We are communicating availability of these programs regularly through DHS' social media, press releases, and media availabilities, and we are working on messaging targeted to Pennsylvanians who may not be familiar with or do not see themselves as someone who could be helped by SNAP or other DHS programs. We understand that it may be difficult to ask for help from the government if you've never taken that step before, but we need all Pennsylvanians to know that they do not have to weather this period alone.

We will share this messaging when it is ready as we did with resources on child abuse, and we hope you can help us get this information out to the people you serve and your constituents.

Emergency Cash Assistance Program

The economic disruption caused by this pandemic is affecting families and communities across Pennsylvania in different ways. For many low-income Pennsylvanians, especially those awaiting unemployment compensation, this disruption could be completely destabilizing, and we must do what we can to help them weather this uncertain period.

DHS is in the process of establishing an emergency cash assistance program to extend support to families with low incomes using existing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. The emergency cash assistance program would be open to families with a child under age 18 or a woman who is currently pregnant. Families must meet emergency cash assistance income and resource limits and have at least one person who was employed as of March 11, 2020 and lost employment or experienced an hour and wage reduction of at least 50 percent for at least two weeks due to the pandemic. Eligible families will receive a one-time payment equal to two months of TANF benefits for their household size, so a family of three would get an average one-time payment of \$806.

We are finalizing details of the program and plan to announce more broadly and begin accepting applications in the coming days. When the program is formally announced, we will send you a copy of the press release so you are aware and can alert the people you serve.

Status of Other Office of Income Maintenance Initiatives

DHS' Office of Income Maintenance continues to work on numerous initiatives to extend support to Pennsylvanians during the public health crisis and recovery period to follow.

LIHEAP Crisis

On last week's call, we mentioned that we intend to begin a LIHEAP Crisis program to help with home energy bills during the public health crisis. We are still waiting for word from the federal government on

how much additional LIHEAP funding Pennsylvania will receive, so we do not have more information to share at this time.

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)

We are still awaiting approval on the P-EBT program. DHS and the Department of Education have answered numerous questions from FNS, so we hope to receive authorization soon so we can extend this assistance to families across Pennsylvania. Again, this program will assist families eligible for free and reduced-price meals as children no longer have access to these meals with schools closed.

SNAP Online Grocery Purchasing

We are very close to submitting our plan to FNS to bring Pennsylvania into the pilot for online grocery purchasing through SNAP. As mentioned last week, it is important to remember that participation in this does not mean that retailers can work through DHS to begin to accept online SNAP payments. Retailers still need to work through FNS for this, and currently, just Amazon, Walmart, and ShopRite would be available for online payment in Pennsylvania.

Once our plan is submitted and approved, we will work with these retailers and our EBT vendor Conduent to activate online ordering for SNAP recipients in Pennsylvania. I encourage any retailer who is interested in accepting online payment for SNAP participants to contact FNS to join the pilot.

As a reminder, retailers can create flexibility for SNAP recipients looking to utilize delivery or pick-up options without having to join the federal pilot program or seek approval by using mobile EBT processing equipment that would allow customers to pay with SNAP when groceries are delivered or picked up.

Letters to United States Department of Agriculture and Congressional Delegation

We appreciate the flexibility we've been given thus far to make adjustments to our SNAP program, but we still think that more could be done to help us utilize SNAP in a way that truly meets the need presented by this crisis.

Yesterday, Governor Wolf sent letters to Pennsylvania's congressional delegation and United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue requesting greater flexibility for SNAP moving forward and reconsideration of denied waivers. Specifically, we are asking both Congress and the USDA to:

- Allow for low-income households with a student who is attending an institution of higher education to receive SNAP benefits. Current SNAP rules do not allow college students to be counted when determining a household's monthly SNAP benefit. Now that students are home, these families may not have the resources, either monetarily or in food supply, to support the additional person now residing with them. FNS previously denied this waiver, saying they did not have the authority to make this change to federal SNAP policy.
- Permit additional SNAP payments to all enrolled households. Pennsylvania previously requested authority to issue an extra payment equal to half a month's benefits to all SNAP households. FNS interpreted the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to mean an extra payment that would bring households up to the maximum monthly benefit. However, this interpretation means that

households currently receiving the maximum monthly benefit – 40 percent of Pennsylvania’s SNAP households – received no extra assistance. Broader issuance of emergency payments would help to further shift some demand from the emergency food system and into grocery stores, directly supporting Pennsylvania’s struggling retail and agriculture economy. Congress must be clear about how future SNAP payments should be allocated so we can maximize support to SNAP households during this difficult period.

- Allow states to accept self-attestation for verification documents when we are unable to obtain such information due the pandemic.
- Permit states to exclude Pandemic Unemployment Compensation from the SNAP grant benefit calculation. This is not counted as income for Medicaid or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs, but is for SNAP. Counting this short-term payment as a regular payment would create an administrative burden that could result in households being removed from SNAP for a short period, only to be eligible again when payments end. This would create unnecessary confusion and loss of benefits for households that were eligible for SNAP prior to losing their employment.

Our focus should be easing processes for people needing assistance during this time, not creating hurdles that could result in loss of benefits, and we appreciate the support of the USDA and Congress to make this possible.

Elective Procedures

Earlier this week, the Department of Health announced hospitals may begin elective admissions and may perform elective surgeries and procedures if they are able to do so without jeopardizing patient health and safety and the hospital’s ability to respond to COVID-19. Ambulatory surgical facilities may do the same. Because of this, guidance issued by the Office of Medical Assistance Programs in response to elective procedures during the public health crisis is now obsolete. OMAP is revising the previous operations memo in light of these new recommendations.

Fingerprinting Update

We continue to work towards a solution on fingerprinting. HB 360, introduced by Representative Topper, was amended yesterday with language to provide a reprieve for individuals seeking their FBI clearances under the CPSL in order to work with children. The Senate passed this bill today and sent it back to the House, where it passed the concurrence vote.

Once it is signed into law, we will work quickly to issue guidance on any changes to the fingerprinting process. In the meantime, everyone should continue to attempt to get FBI fingerprint checks necessary to keep vulnerable Pennsylvanians safe. This bill will be a short-term solution for the challenges faced right now, but if you are able to get fingerprinted, you should continue to do so.

I would like to thank the legislature for their fast assistance in addressing this important issue for foster and adoptive parents, child care facility workers, and teachers. I hope this can be fully resolved soon.

Budget Update

There continues to be interest in how and when stimulus funding will be available to support providers. We hear these requests, and we are communicating these requests to the Governor’s Budget Office.

Over the past week, the Governor's Budget Office has received guidance for funds under the CARES Act. Pennsylvania will receive approximately \$4.964 billion. Of this amount, \$3.9 billion will be used and distributed by the state and \$1.0 billion will go to local governments. These funds are intended to be used to address the needs throughout the state due to the impact of COVID-19.

The Governor's Office is working closely with the legislature to determine the most appropriate way to distribute these funds to assist providers with their financial needs, and as we have more information to share, we will keep you all in the loop. Thank you all for your patience as we navigate this process.

Thank you all again for taking time out of your day to join us today and for all you are doing to serve the people of Pennsylvania during this time.

April 22, 2020 Update

Fingerprinting Update

We continue to understand the difficulty of attaining FBI fingerprint clearances due to the limited number of available sites. We are working on multiple efforts to alleviate this situation.

We are working with legislative staff to prepare language to provide a temporary reprieve for some individuals who are required to be certified or recertified under the Child Protective Services Law. This reprieve would still require individuals to complete available state clearances, sign an attestation where the individual confirms in writing that they have not been convicted of certain offenses, and complete the FBI clearance within certain timeframes following the lifting of the Governor's orders.

As we are awaiting this temporary reprieve, DHS has supported temporary mobile sites to help alleviate the current needs. Our first mobile site was earlier this week. During the call, we mentioned that a second site would take place on Thursday, April 23 in Allegheny County. Earlier this evening, we received word that this site was canceled and will be rescheduled. We apologize for any inconvenience. While we are doing what we can, these mobile sites will in no way meet the full demand or lessen the need for the legislative solution, which we continue to work towards.

Preventive Efforts in Congregate Settings

As we fight this pandemic, we remain keenly focused on doing all we can to protect vulnerable populations under DHS' care and oversight.

Long-term and residential care facilities serving older adults, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness are feeling particular strain and pressure due to the circumstances we're facing. People served in these settings often have co-occurring disabilities and chronic medical conditions like heart or lung disease and diabetes, putting them at greater risk of a more aggressive case of COVID-19 and serious complications if they do test positive. This time creates serious risks and challenges, but these populations are care-dependent, so we cannot lose sight of our obligation to ensure both DHS staff and providers in the community are able to continue these services while keeping residents and staff as safe as possible.

DHS is following all guidance issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in our state-run intermediate care facilities, hospitals for people with mental illness, and youth development centers and forestry camps. We have also directed all congregate care providers operating in communities across Pennsylvania – groups homes serving people with intellectual disabilities, personal care and assisted living facilities, and private intermediate care facilities, among others, to closely heed these recommendations as well. Specifically, we are working closely with licensed providers to adhere to the CDC's long-term care facility guidance that speaks to screening for COVID-19 and visitation restriction as we try to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Long-term care providers are in an extremely precarious situation in this pandemic, and we are doing all we can to allow necessary operational adjustments and provide support from the state level. We continue to issue new guidance as necessary and make additional requests to the federal government to support the flexibility we all need to properly respond as the pandemic evolves. We're also [facilitating](#)

[support networks](#) between long-term care providers, health systems, and health care quality units to help assist with preparedness, mitigation, and infection control efforts. This week, the majority of personal care homes and assisted living residences have been reached by a health system partnering with DHS to provide educational support and clinical coaching to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We know that there are concerns around availability of personal protective equipment for community providers. PPE distribution is centralized through a process overseen by the Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. This process is prioritizing hospitals and nursing facilities. For other congregate care settings, including person care homes, assisted living residences, intermediate care facilities, and licensed community homes, they are doing their best to be responsive to other needs as resources become available. Facilities with active cases are prioritized. We also know that COVID-19 testing for these long-term care facilities is also a concern. DHS is currently following the guidance of the CDC as well as DOH when determining when it is appropriate to test long-term care residents.

We know this period is difficult, but we need our care providers to know that they are not alone, and we are doing what we can to listen to your needs and support you through this difficult period. Care providers around Pennsylvania are heroes every day in normal times, and during times of great challenge like we face now, that heroism comes at great personal risk. On behalf of the Wolf Administration, I want to thank everyone working in direct and long-term care. We are with you, and we will overcome this challenge in the coming months together.

State-Run and Licensed Facility Data

I wanted to give an overview of what we are experiencing in our DHS-run facilities – our state centers, state hospitals, and our youth development centers and forestry camps.

As mentioned previously, we are paying meticulous attention to guidance and following protocols to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Protecting the health and safety of people receiving care and services and our staff who provide these critical services is our utmost priority. We have published and discussed guidance related to changes in admissions and visitation policies to protect residents and staff during the public health crisis.

As the pandemic progresses, we want to be transparent about the status of our state-run facilities. This week, we started publishing [data on cases of COVID-19](#) among staff and people served in these facilities. This information is accessible through the “DHS Data” section of our COVID-19 landing page at www.dhs.pa.gov and will be updated every weekday. The data reflects active cases of COVID-19 among staff and people served, so as individuals recover, they will not be reflected in active case counts.

Currently, positive cases are found among both staff and residents at Norristown, Wernersville and Torrance State Hospitals. Hospital staff and leadership in the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services have made numerous adjustments to limit further spread as much as possible.

Staff at all state hospitals have their temperature checked and are screened with four standard questions that evaluate risk of exposure to COVID-19 at the beginning of every shift. Anyone who works

a shift longer than eight hours is screened again before the overtime shift begins. Staff who work in the isolation units have temperature taken every four hours. All staff have a final temperature check at the end of their shift before leaving the facility.

Staff with a temperature higher than 100 degrees are directed to go home. Any staff who call off sick are asked to report their reasons to the hospital's Infection Control Nurse so they can be properly counseled on next steps. Staff with possible symptoms of COVID-19 are required to provide documentation from their physician or meet with an infection control professional before returning to work.

Currently, our state hospitals are requiring all residents to wear masks in compliance with the recent guidance from the Department of Health and Governor Wolf. Additionally, residents have their temperature checked every eight hours. Anyone with a temperature over 100 degrees has temperature checks every four hours, and if their temperature does not drop, residents are moved to isolation in the infirmary unit for closer observation.

Both residents and staff who demonstrate high risk for exposure or symptoms of COVID-19 are tested. Residents awaiting test results are also isolated to mitigate risk of further exposure. Presently, test results take several days. DHS is in the process of acquiring testing equipment and supplies to enable a higher volume of tests to be performed with faster test results at multiple locations in the commonwealth, and Norristown State Hospital will be a testing site. Staff are being trained in the proper use and maintenance of the equipment so that testing may begin on site in the near future.

All state hospital staff are utilizing PPE according to Centers for Disease Control and Department of Health guidelines. The kinds of PPE utilized may vary based upon the risk of exposure per area to which staff are assigned, but some level of PPE is mandatory and being provided for all staff on the campuses. Hospital housekeeping staff are using Electrostatic Disinfection Process regularly in all buildings to enhance the cleaning and disinfection processes.

We are monitoring these situations closely and at all other DHS-run facilities should circumstances begin to change. We are working on a method to provide data on our licensed facilities as well, so look for an update in the future on that data.

OIM Programs

LIHEAP Recovery Crisis

As the pandemic progresses, we are working to support access to vital public assistance programs and establish new opportunities to support Pennsylvanians through this difficult period and the months of recovery ahead. The 2019-2020 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) season closed on April 10, 2020. Before the season ended, there were numerous suggestions to extend the season, expand services, or increase benefit amounts due to the pandemic.

There has been significant interest in this important program and we value the suggestions countless stakeholders have made over the last several weeks. We appreciate all the input we have received and are making adjustments to our proposed LIHEAP Recovery Program in light of those recommendations that will provide utility and energy assistance for households affected by COVID-19's economic

challenges. This program will be funded through LIHEAP funds contained in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus Act – also known as the CARES Act. However, it has not yet been made clear to us exactly how much funding will be received for LIHEAP. Requests for information to the federal government have been denied, so we cannot move forward until we know how much funding we will receive.

Once funding becomes available, DHS intends to operate a Recovery Crisis program beginning in mid-May and running through August 31, or until funds are expended. Parameters for the Recovery Crisis program will be the same as the normal LIHEAP Crisis program with a few adjustments that take into account circumstances created by COVID-19.

We are ironing out final details on this program, but as soon as we are ready to move forward, we will be asking for your help in making sure the people who need to know about this opportunity can apply and receive assistance. Thank you, as always, for your support and partnership in connecting the people you serve to DHS programs that can help.

SNAP Online Ordering

Over the past several weeks, there has been significant interest in how Pennsylvania can join in the United States Department of Agriculture's pilot program to allow SNAP recipients to purchase groceries online. We share an interest in helping SNAP recipients access this resource and option to help SNAP participants mitigate risk of being exposed to COVID-19, but this is not a program we can simply opt into.

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) is responsible for approving both states and retailers for participation in the pilot. In Pennsylvania, only Amazon, Walmart, and ShopRite would be available through the pilot. If other retailers want to join this pilot, they would need to work through FNS directly. DHS does not have authority to add retailers. I also want to caution that in some states where the program currently exists, SNAP recipients face higher prices and difficulties accessing delivery or pick-up times that other customers are experiencing right now. DHS would not have any authority to address these issues or make accommodations for customers paying with SNAP. Additionally, SNAP funds would not be able to be used for delivery fees. DHS cannot waive this federal requirement, but we would be open to partnering with stakeholders and legislators to suggest that these fees be waived for SNAP customers.

We are planning to join this pilot and are preparing to submit the plan to FNS. If approved, there would be necessary system changes required by our EBT contractor and other business partners to make implementation possible. We have already had conversations with Amazon, Walmart, ShopRite and FIS, the third-party processor and all have agreed to provide commitment letters. We are now working with our EBT contractor to determine the timeline for the required changes that would allow us to make both SNAP and cash benefits available through the EBT card online. As soon we finalize these details, we will submit our plan to FNS. We will provide additional updates as we receive them.

There are options, though, for retailers to create flexibility for SNAP recipients looking to utilize delivery or pick-up options without having to join the federal pilot program or seek approval from anyone. The

pilot establishes a way for SNAP recipients to pay online for groceries, but if a retailer already has mobile EBT processing equipment, they can allow SNAP customers to pay when groceries are delivered or picked up. Wireless point of sale devices can be purchased at any time, and we are working with the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association so their members are aware of this on-going opportunity to create flexibility for customers paying with SNAP.

We also received a grant prior to the pandemic to provide EBT processing equipment to farmers markets. Interested markets would have to be an approved SNAP retailer through FNS, but once approved, a free mobile point of sale device can be obtained through our EBT vendor, Conduent. These grants also cover setup costs and one year of SNAP transaction fees. We are working with our partners to make farmers markets and their vendors aware of this option.

SNAP Emergency Allotments

We also received updated guidance from FNS regarding the issuing of [additional emergency SNAP allotments](#). States have been granted approval to continue issuing emergency allotments each month until such a time as the Secretary of Health and Human Services rescinds the public health emergency declaration. This means that beginning in mid-May and thereafter, we will issue additional payments to current SNAP households for the difference between what they received in their regular scheduled benefit in the previous month and the maximum SNAP amount for their household size. Current SNAP households that already receive the maximum benefit are not eligible for the additional emergency allotment.

We are drafting a letter to the United States Congress expressing our concern about FNS's interpretation of the Families First Corona Virus Relief Act as it relates to the issuance of the SNAP emergency allotment and requesting additional resources for the 40 percent of SNAP households that do not benefit from this change.

Pandemic EBT

DHS and the Department of Education did [submit our Pandemic EBT plan](#) to FNS on Monday. If approved, this plan would provide SNAP to students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program. This would provide an approximate benefit of \$365 per child for approximately 958,000 Pennsylvania school-aged children.

We are still awaiting approval, and will keep you all in the loop when this hopefully moves forward. If approved, the first round of payments will be issued 14 days after approval.

Child Care Updates

On April 21, OCDEL released an [updated policy announcement](#) to child care and the Early Learning Resource Centers that Child Care Works (CCW) payments will continue to all providers. Payments will be made based on CCW enrollments for the month of May regardless of whether the provider remained open or closed. The policy continues the suspension of CCW co-payments charged to families if their children are not actively attending child care due to COVID-19 or if the child care is closed.

Last week, we mentioned the receipt of the CARES Act Stimulus funds released through the Child Care Development Fund. OCDEL is continuing to review data and consider stakeholder input to develop a plan to best direct these funds.

The Department of Labor and Industry's website for COVID-19 Employment Opportunities has linked directly to the [DHS COVID-19 Child Care map](#), allowing Pennsylvanians seeking to find work in an open life sustaining business the ability to review available child care near the job or their home. We continue to share available resources with individual families, employers, and associations regarding the availability of child care during COVID-19. Early Learning Resource Centers can connect families with open child care in their communities. The easiest way to identify which ELRCs serve a community is to visit www.raiseyourstar.org.

Stimulus Funding Update

We and the entire Wolf Administration realize the financial strain that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed upon providers. Over the past several weeks, DHS has been collecting data from providers on the impact of COVID-19 and are working closely with the Governor's Budget and Policy Offices to develop plans to help stabilize our provider community to ensure they are there and able to serve participants once the pandemic is over. Part of these plans include accelerating some fourth quarter payments to hospitals so they will receive them in May instead of August. Retainer payments and alternative payment arrangements are another way DHS is providing relief.

Like many of our providers and partners, the state also has been put under a financial strain due to decreased sales tax revenue, payroll tax, and several other income sources – with an estimated \$3 to \$5 billion in projected revenue loss. However, under the CARES Act, Pennsylvania will receive approximately \$2.7 billion, with another \$2.2 billion going to local governments. These funds are intended to be used to address the needs throughout the state due to the impact of COVID-19. While we have begun to receive some of the CARES Act funding, federal guidance is not yet available on how these funds may be used.

The Governor's Office will need to work closely with the legislature to determine the most appropriate way to distribute these funds to assist you with your financial needs, and as we have more information to share, we will keep you all in the loop. Thank you all for your patience as we navigate this process.

April 15, 2020 Update

Child Abuse/Protective Services

This unprecedented disruption creates challenges across nearly every facet of both our personal lives and our work at the Department of Human Services, but one area that brings deep concern is our work to protect children across Pennsylvania.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month – a month normally marked by state and local recognitions of precious lives affected by and lost to abuse and an opportunity to educate everyone on signs of abuse and neglect and the role we all can play in keeping kids safe. As we navigate this public health crisis and the necessary disruptions, we cannot lose sight of our obligation to do all we can to keep kids safe and prevent child abuse, and the Wolf Administration is not compromising that duty.

Our child abuse reporting hotline – ChildLine – adapted quickly to office closures and transitioned to telework on March 19. We are, however, seeing a decrease in calls. Since March 19, calls to ChildLine have ranged from a daily low of 287 calls to a high of 365 calls on weekdays. The number of calls on Saturdays and Sundays is lower – ranging from 138 to 169 calls per day. These numbers represent a roughly 50 percent reduction in average daily calls to ChildLine since the commonwealth’s implementation of significant social-distancing measures advised by public-health professionals to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus and save lives. This is in comparison to the same two-week period in 2019. We’re projecting that ChildLine will receive approximately 11,000 calls in April – 5,000 fewer than average thus far this year.

Unfortunately, the data trend of fewer child abuse reports cannot be interpreted to indicate fewer instances of child abuse. Rather, one unfortunate effect of school closures and the general disruption in life is the lack of interaction between children, their teachers, and other mandated reporters in school and other social services settings. We do normally see a drop in reporting during the summer months when school is closed, but during this time when we all must protect ourselves, our families, and our communities by staying home, how are we looking out for children who may be in danger at home?

To try to work against this trend, we are working to educate the public on signs of potential abuse and neglect, how to report to ChildLine, and what people should know when making a report to ChildLine. The Child Protective Services Law specifies who is and isn’t a mandated reporter, but that designation shouldn’t stop someone from making a call if they are concerned about a child’s safety. That call allows trained professionals to properly investigate and intervene if necessary.

We are lifting these messages through an on-going paid media campaign for ChildLine and through social media, but we need your help to reach Pennsylvanians more broadly. We put together a media kit with talking points, social media graphics, and other resources to help educate on child abuse reporting. The resources also include support outlets for parents who are likely experiencing extra stress as a result of this crisis.

I hope that you can join us in helping to do what we can to educate on reporting and preventing child abuse during this difficult time. We can all help keep kids safe – it starts with a call to ChildLine.

Fingerprinting

As mentioned on previous weeks' calls, we continue to work closely with our partner agencies on the fingerprinting issue.

This morning we received new guidance from the federal Children's Bureau regarding fingerprint-based background checks. DHS is currently assessing what this guidance means for Pennsylvanians. We have also continued work in Pennsylvania to determine next steps for moving forward based on our own state laws and regulations.

For the time being, we are actively working on establishing temporary mobile fingerprinting sites for targeted programs to help meet this need. If you are interested in setting up a mobile fingerprinting site for individuals you serve, please email statemobileservices@us.idemia.com. Some IdentoGo locations are also either still operational or beginning to reopen, so I encourage you to call your local site if you or someone you know needs to get fingerprints at this time.

We will keep you all informed as this process and potential solutions develop, and thank you all, again, for your patience.

Education Support and Clinical Coaching Program Update

I wanted to provide a brief update on something we announced during last week's call. Our Education Support and Clinical Coaching Program, which established a learning support network for personal care homes and assisted living facilities that includes the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and health systems across Pennsylvania, is continuing to grow. We've added two health systems – Geisinger and Allegheny Health Network – to help support long-term care facilities during the public health crisis.

The educational support component of this program includes weekly webinars hosted by the Jewish Healthcare foundation on important topics for personal care homes and assisted living residences and direct connections between the facilities and health systems to provide clinical coaching to address needs and challenges. Our hope is that this network will give our facilities the support they need and deserve as we all work through this difficult time. More information on trainings and how to sign up can be found at <https://www.tomorrowhealthcare.org/>.

Child Care

It's been a few weeks since we touched on child care during this call, so I wanted to take a moment to remind you all that while most types of child care centers were closed under the Governor's order to close all non-life-sustaining businesses, many are operating with a waiver from our Office of Child Development and Early Learning to support essential workers with children needing care.

More than 1,500 child care providers are still operating as of today. 725 of these are operating with a waiver, and about 800 of these are family child care homes or group child care in a private residence, which do not require waivers. A centralized list of all operating child care facilities is available on [DHS'](#)

[COVID-19 webpage](#), and this map is updated every day to reflect new waivers and closures.

We are still urging these essential services personnel to consider their options if their child care provider chooses to close even if they are operating with a waiver. If families are able to make alternative child care arrangements at home, please do so to allow vacancies to be used for those who do not have other options, and begin to make an actionable contingency plan if your child care arrangement has to change.

DHS received notification from the federal Office of Child Care regarding the CARES Act Stimulus funds allocated to Pennsylvania in support of the Child Care Development Fund. Pennsylvania received \$106,397,624. Allowable uses for these funds include:

- Payments to child care providers in the case of decreased enrollment or closures to lend support to providers remaining open or for when they reopen;
- Payments to assist with costs of cleaning, sanitation, and other activities necessary to maintain or resume the operation of programs due to the coronavirus. Funds under this activity are available to child care providers, even if such providers were not previously receiving CCDF assistance;
- Providing child care assistance to health care sector employees, emergency responders, sanitation workers, and other workers like grocery store employees deemed essential during the response to the coronavirus, without regard to the income eligibility requirements; and;
- Any other allowable CCDF uses.

DHS is also partnering with Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs on a short-duration, high-effort, mixed-methods research study looking at the impacts of COVID-19 on Pennsylvania Child Care Providers. The study will seek to answer the following questions:

- How have child care providers responded to COVID-19, and what are the financial costs?
- How many child care providers will remain operational without revenue in the next few months?
- What level of investment is needed to cover provider costs to enable their continued operation after restrictions on public movement are lifted?
- What level of investment is needed to ensure that child care services are accessible to families during a transition period of low demand because of unemployment and fear of infection?

Results of this study will inform future investments and allocation of resources to support child care providers' recovery. Providers will be selected to participate through a random selection of all licensed providers, so we encourage all who are contacted to participate.

CAO Updates

We continue to monitor our County Assistance Offices closely and are making more adjustments to keep staff safe while CAO operations continue.

Effective this past Monday, in lieu of the staggered shifts in the larger offices, we implemented dual shifts where some staff will work in the morning and some in the evening. Implementing dual shifts also allowed us to maximize productivity since all staff are working full time. This allows us to continue

to protect employee safety and limit the number of people in an office at one time. Additionally, we are ramping up teleworking capacity for CAO employees. Last week, more than 90 employees were transitioned to telework as part of a pilot, and we now have more than 2,900 staff teleworking with more to come over the next few weeks.

As we face growing economic challenges in the wake of this public-health crisis, assistance programs that help people and families access health care and keep food on the table will be vital in helping Pennsylvania recover. We are committed to doing all we can to keep staff safe as they keep this critical function of government operating and available for Pennsylvanians who need it most.

SNAP Disbursement and Waiver Updates

On Friday, April 10, the Food and Nutrition Service issued blanket denials of certain waivers that had been requested by individual or multiple states, including Pennsylvania.

The first waiver denied pertains to eligibility for college students. Under normal SNAP eligibility rules, college students enrolled more than half-time in an institution of higher education must meet an exception to potentially qualify for SNAP. The exception that most students meet is working at least 20 hours per week. Many other students have meal plans on campus and while these plans do not cover all the nutritional needs for students, they are no longer available since colleges have transitioned to distance learning and low-income students have returned home.

Under federal rules, college students cannot be counted towards a household's SNAP allotment. In other words, SNAP households may be supporting more people without additional benefits to meet this need. This leaves many of these families, who were already struggling, trying to feed an additional family member with no additional financial support. And if they are able to work, students may not be able to meet this exception criteria due to the COVID crisis and cannot qualify for SNAP without risking their health or the health of their families. FNS denied this waiver stating that the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFRCA) allows them to adjust SNAP issuance methods and application and reporting requirements, but not to adjust SNAP eligibility requirements.

The second waiver denied is related to the interpretation of the response act as it pertains to the issuance of the SNAP emergency allotment. While all states are approved to provide an emergency SNAP allotment up to the maximum amount for the household size, there was a disagreement about the interpretation of the rule between the states and FNS. States interpreted the language to mean that all SNAP households would be issued an additional payment to cover 14 days' worth of food as recommended by the CDC. FNS interpreted the language to mean that if a SNAP household received less than the maximum amount in the previous month, they would be eligible for the difference between what they received previously and the maximum amount in the subsequent month. The correspondence received by FNS reiterated their position on the issuance of the allotment.

This interpretation means families that received the maximum SNAP payment for their household size – about 40 percent of the cases in Pennsylvania – received no additional funding and, therefore, are unable to fill their pantries as recommended. We are proceeding with issuance of the emergency allotment based on FNS' interpretation and those payments will begin going out on April 16.

The third waiver denial pertains to the state's ability to not reduce or close SNAP benefits when a household's circumstances change or the household is found to be ineligible. This waiver would have resulted in no SNAP reductions or closures during the COVID-19 health emergency, similar to the procedure currently used for Medical Assistance benefits.

We continue to work with FNS and hope that they will reconsider some of these denials in recognition of the serious situation we all find ourselves in.

Pandemic SNAP (P-SNAP)

Pandemic SNAP benefits provide funds via EBT card for low-income kids who are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch through the National School Lunch Program. These programs are temporary in nature and designed to help meet the gap left by schools closing due to the COVID-19 crisis. Eligibility certifications for the National School Lunch Program are administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, however, DHS provides direct certification for about 680,000 kids based on participation in SNAP or Medicaid. PDE certifies students as eligible based on their income, or they can certify schools at large based on the percentage of students that qualify for free and reduced cost lunches.

P-SNAP will allow us to provide additional funds to cover the cost of lunch and snacks for approximately 958,000 kids. To participate in P-SNAP, we are required to submit a detailed plan to FNS outlining the process for identifying the eligible populations and how the funding will be issued.

For the last several weeks, we've been collaborating with PDE to work through the process and we are now working on the formal request with the goal of sending it to FNS by the end of the week. This is yet another opportunity for us to help those families in need, and we hope FNS will support us in this effort. As we have additional updates, we will communicate with all of you.

Job Portal

I wanted to be sure you are all familiar with a new resource launched by the Department of Labor and Industry earlier this week – a centralized job portal for life-sustaining businesses hiring during the public health crisis. This resource is available by visiting [PA CareerLink online](#).

All businesses posted on this resource are life-sustaining and therefore are still operating. And because these jobs are life-sustaining, if people need child care, they would be able to use one of the [operating child care providers](#).

This resource will be updated daily, so I encourage you to refer people you serve who are looking for work during this difficult economic period.

April 8, 2020 Update

Education Support and Clinical Coaching Program

More than 65,000 Pennsylvanians live in over 1,200 personal care homes and assisted living residences throughout the Commonwealth, and these facilities care for some of the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians. Unlike nursing facilities, they normally lack clinical staff, and so direct care workers in these settings may feel ill-equipped to deal with COVID-19.

DHS, in partnership with health care systems and the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, is launching the Educational Support and Clinical Coaching Program to help these facilities during the COVID-19 public health crisis. The educational support component of this program includes weekly webinars hosted by the Jewish Healthcare foundation on important topics for personal care homes and assisted living residences. Our first webinar was scheduled for April 7, and so many people signed up for it that we needed to expand the technological capacity of the webinar.

The Office of Long-Term Living is also reaching out to personal care homes and assisted living facilities to conduct preliminary needs assessments. When needs are identified, they are referred to the five health systems that are partnering with DHS for this initiative: Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, Penn State Hershey Medical Center, the Wright Center, and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Outgoing calls from these health systems are slated to begin this week, where the health systems will provide clinical coaching on how to prepare and manage COVID-19. Health systems are also holding daily office hours for individual facilities that need extra coaching, explaining the latest guidance from DOH and CDC.

This is a frightening time for these DHS-licensed facilities and the vulnerable residents they serve. But we have their backs. Collectively, we believe that with the additional educational support and clinical coaching that we are providing, personal care homes and assisted living residences will finally have the support they need.

Fingerprinting

As we discussed last week, we are aware of the ongoing concerns around fingerprinting requirements and limited access to IdentiGo scanning sites because of closures related to COVID-19.

We, in collaboration with the Departments of Education, Aging, and General Services, sent a letter to “Enroll Your Own” fingerprinting sites (approved by the fingerprinting vendor Identigo) asking that they reopen additional locations. Some of these sites have agreed to open up and we will be updating the list of open fingerprinting sites as that information becomes available. Additionally, we understand some Identigo locations are beginning to reopen, so I encourage anyone needing fingerprints to call the closest locations to verify whether they are or aren’t operating as this may begin to change. As a part of our efforts with other agencies, we were able to produce a [map that shows the open fingerprinting sites](#) across the commonwealth. We continue to monitor and update this map.

We are not able to broadly waive this requirement from the state level because it is contained in numerous federal laws like the Family First Prevention Services Act, the Adam Walsh Act, and the Child

Care Development Block Grant Act. However, we continue to work towards solutions that can alleviate the challenges presented by this.

We released guidance on waiving licensing requirements in Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences, but understand that this guidance does not align with information just issued by the Department of Aging. We are working with the Department of Aging to address the discrepancies and will provide clarification.

We know that there are many more people who first obtained clearances in 2015 following changes to the Child Protective Services Law who will need to renew these clearances this year. We are open to temporarily delaying the five-year requirement, but this would need to happen through legislative action. DHS and the Governor's Office are working with the legislature to try to accomplish this, but we know this cannot be our only option. We are also pursuing potentially opening additional, temporary fingerprinting sites that can help us meet this need as we work through the public health crisis.

We will keep you informed as this moves forward and appreciate your patience as we navigate the challenges that arise due to this crisis.

Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services (BJJS) Admissions

Last week, there was some concern and media attention over concerns regarding transfer of youth to juvenile justice facilities operated by DHS.

DHS does not have a right of refusal at these facilities, but we are, however, monitoring operations closely and working with our partners at county juvenile parole offices and delinquency courts to ensure transfers are absolutely necessary and made safely as we navigate this public health crisis. We do not want to risk the health of youth or staff at our youth development centers and youth forestry camps, and operational adjustments are necessary to meet the challenges of this unprecedented period.

As of April 4, we temporarily suspended all transfers to our state-run juvenile justice facilities. This step was taken to allow staff in BJJS to create two ten-bed intake units to mitigate risk of spread at the state-run facilities. Youth awaiting transfer to the YDC/YFC system will be admitted to the intake unit on the same day and remain in the unit for 14 days until they are cleared for entry into their designated program. If any youth test positive for COVID-19 during this 14-day period, that youth will be moved into isolation and the youth who are in the intake unit will re-start their 14 days in the unit to make sure that they do not develop symptoms of COVID-19.

Screening for COVID-19 must occur and be documented prior to admission and include questions about exposure to COVID-19 and assessment for symptoms. Youth who are not documented as having been appropriately screened will not be accepted for admission. Youth who do not pass pre-admissions screening will not be accepted for admission until they are medically cleared for transport.

Youth in the intake unit will have access to a temporary counselor, psychological and medical services, physical activity, and other individualized recreational activities. Social distancing will be enforced, and youth will be able to maintain contact with their family through phone calls, video conferencing, and

letters. Youth will be transported to the YDC or YFC following 14 days without testing positive for COVID-19, without symptoms, or without contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

Transfers to the intake unit will be accepted based on the number of YDC/YFC beds projected to be available 14 days after intake begins and will be based on each program operating at 100 percent capacity. Youth and staff safety is our first priority, so this shift will allow us to maintain our responsibility to provide an option for youth who need these services while recognizing the risk presented by COVID-19.

Federal Funding Requests

Many of you have reached out regarding issuance of funding contained in the federal stimulus bill. At this point, we do not have a timeline for when these funds will become available, but I assure you that as soon as we have more information to share, we will communicate that.

We also wanted to make sure you were aware of three key elements of the federal CARES Act. For those of you that have less than 500 employees, there are the Small Business Administration (SBA) grant and Economic Injury Disaster Loan programs. Also available is the Payroll Protection Program that is available through SBA-approved banks. These programs offer a limited amount of loan forgiveness and other benefits that are designed to keep staff employed. Please consult with your accountant to see if these are right for your situation.

Information about available federal relief programs may be found from the [U.S. Treasury](#) or the [Small Business Administration](#).

Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) update

The LIHEAP program provides assistance with heating needs through the heating season. It was scheduled to close on April 10, and that is the last day we will accept applications for the current season.

DHS knows how vital this program will be to help those who have been financially impacted by the COVID emergency. Because of this, we started to plan a recovery program that would be made available to assist with accumulated bills. We have met with representatives from the PUC, the Energy Association, local community groups, Rural Electric, the Petroleum Association and others to discuss how this program can best be designed to meet the needs of those who need help to recover economically.

To further assist these households, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act included additional funding for the LIHEAP program. Pennsylvania anticipates receiving approximately \$50 million in additional LIHEAP funding. This funding can go a long way to helping people in the economic recovery process.

We are working with partners to further develop this plan so that it will meet the needs of as many as possible. We will provide updates as this program becomes more final.

SNAP Waivers

We've previously discussed requests made to the United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – better known as SNAP. As of today, we've requested the following changes to SNAP:

- We sought to delay implementation of rule affecting work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents – also known as the ABAWD rule. This request was negated by provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.
- We requested a waiver of the requirements for face-to-face interviews and interviews for expedited SNAP applications. FNS provided a blanket waiver of all SNAP interviews including expedited, application and renewals.
- We requested an extension of SNAP certification periods so households will not lose access to benefits during this public health crisis, which was also waived at the federal level by FNS.
- We are currently awaiting response on two waivers: one that would allow SNAP education providers to assist with distribution of national school lunch program meals, and another that would waive college student eligibility criteria so students and families with college students can receive their own benefits or additional benefits for the household so needs are met during this period.
- We received approval from FNS to issue emergency allotments to all ongoing SNAP households as part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. This approval will allow us to increase the current monthly allotment up to the maximum monthly allotment for a household of that size. The approval is for March and April and we will make this as one payment that will be issued on a staggered basis beginning April 16 through April 29. This payment is in addition to their normal April benefit issuance that's made in the first half of the month.

We will continue to keep you all informed as we receive a response on outstanding waivers and if future changes become necessary.

CAO Operational Update

As I've mentioned over the past few weeks, concerns have been raised due to CAO employees continuing to work from the office during this time. I'm aware that there have been questions of whether we would close offices.

CAO staff are the backbone of our public assistance system, and we are committed to keeping them safe as they perform their critical role. Without their work and efforts, benefits applications would not be able to be processed. As we face growing economic challenges in the wake of this public health crisis, assistance programs that help people and families access health care and keep food on the table will be vital in helping Pennsylvania recover. Programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, (SNAP), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid will be necessary as we weather this public health crisis. We cannot eliminate this function, and we have taken numerous steps to protect the health of these workers as all essential sectors are doing at this time.

Social distancing and staggered shifts were implemented and offices are being cleaned and sanitized regularly. The Department of General Services has been in regular contact with lessors regarding this

expectation. We are also working to scale up teleworking for CAO staff as quickly as we can. This week, more than 90 employees were transitioned to telework as part of a pilot, and our goal is to significantly ramp up the number of staff teleworking over the next few weeks so thousands of our staff will be able to work from home in the very near future. Additionally, over this past weekend, DHS delivered masks to CAOs in all of Pennsylvania's 67 counties so that CAO staff were equipped on Monday morning with cloth masks to help protect against the spread of the COVID-19 virus consistent with the latest guidance from public-health professionals.

Keeping our staff safe is an utmost priority, and we will continue to do all we can to make this possible so operations that allow us to maintain our vital safety net can continue.

Support & Referral Helpline Update

Finally, last week we used this call to announce the launch of our Support & Referral Helpline – a resource for anyone struggling with anxiety, mental health challenges, or other difficult emotions due to the COVID-19 crisis. In the first week since this was launched, the helpline has received nearly 1,300 calls – people who may not have known where to turn without this resource.

The Support & Referral Helpline will continue to be available toll-free, 24/7 throughout this public health crisis, and helpline staff will refer callers to local resources in their community that can continue to help if needed. It can be reached at 1-855-284-2494 or through TTY at 724-631-5600.

Thank you all who have helped us promote this resource, and I hope you'll continue to spread the word for those who need it.

April 1, 2020 Update

1135 Waiver Approval

On Friday, March 27, Pennsylvania received approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for part of our 1135 Waiver request. You can read our press release [here](#) and the approval letter [here](#).

A federal public health emergency allows the federal Secretary of Health and Human Services to grant temporary changes to Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program to ensure needs of people covered by these programs are met during an emergency. The waiver also allows flexibility in how providers are paid for health care services to ensure they are able to adequately respond to and adjust care in light of a public health emergency. States may request these changes through an 1135 Waiver.

Approval received Friday speaks to part of DHS' and the Department of Health's request, and we were given approval to:

- Suspend Medicaid fee-for-service prior authorization requirements and extend pre-existing authorizations through the end of the public health emergency;
- Suspend Pre-Admission Screening and Annual Resident Review (PASRR) Level I and II assessments for 30 days;
- Extend the timeframes for beneficiaries to file an appeal;
- Temporarily waive provider enrollment and screening requirements, including:
 - Payment of an application fee;
 - Criminal background checks and fingerprinting;
 - Site visits; and
 - State licensure, if the provider is licensed in good standing in another state.
- Provide payment to some out-of-state providers who are not enrolled in the Pennsylvania Medicaid program for services rendered to Pennsylvania Medicaid recipients; and
- Provide payment for facility services rendered in alternative settings.

DHS is working on guidance to providers on how we intend to implement operational changes based on these waivers and will issue it as soon as we can. We also continue to work with CMS and will keep you all in the loop if we receive further approval for other requests.

We are also aware that CMS issued additional guidance Monday waiving requirements from their level. We are still reviewing this action and at this time, we're still trying to understand how this affects our programs. When this is complete, we will issue guidance as necessary.

Community HealthChoices

As we face this public health crisis, we are particularly focused on how we can maintain services and supports for the vulnerable populations we serve without jeopardizing their health and safety. A big focus for DHS over the last few years has been transitioning long-term services and supports to the managed care Community HealthChoices program. CHC was implemented statewide in January and provides assistive services through Medicaid for more than 400,000 seniors and adults with physical

disabilities.

We are very cognizant of both the risk of exposure for this population and the importance that this population still gets care. We're working very closely with the three CHC managed care organizations, their network providers, and our stakeholder partners to ensure that necessary care is not disrupted.

This public health crisis is a difficult test of a still new system, but so far we are not aware of major disruptions of life sustaining services, and our CHC MCOs are in regular communication with participants to educate them about COVID-19 and encourage use of telemedicine to keep both participants and direct care professionals safe during this time. On behalf of all of DHS, I am grateful for their partnership and their efforts to keep this population safe while ensuring continuity of services during this unprecedented period.

Personal Care Homes & Assisted Living Facilities

On Sunday, March 29, the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) suspended, with conditions, specific license regulations for Personal Care Homes and for Assisted Living Residences. OLTL has also imposed restrictions on visitations and temporarily suspended annual inspections. This guidance is available online [here](#).

MATP

As we face this public health crisis, we are doing all we can to ensure continuity of services however possible. We know, though, that there will be and should be some level of disruption in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect people served by DHS' programs.

We know that this crisis is having a significant impact on the Medical Assistance Transportation Program, or MATP. We've advised county administrators and other MATP providers that MATP use should be limited during this time. Elective procedures have been prohibited in certain medical facilities, and non-urgent routine visits should be limited or handled through telehealth, if possible.

Despite this, there are still driver and vehicle shortages. We are encouraging individuals to use personal vehicles whenever possible and will be increasing the mileage reimbursement rate for personal vehicles. More information on this increase is forthcoming. We are monitoring this situation and plan to issue guidance soon.

Mental Health/Warmline

As I've mentioned previously, we're in an unprecedented time for everyone. It's uncertain and very scary. This fear is completely understandable, and the indefinite timeline is likely creating a lot of anxiety during a time where we may be or feel more removed from our support networks. But social distancing doesn't have to mean social isolation, and we want people to know that even as we all face this difficult period, no one is alone.

Beginning at 6 p.m. on April 1, we are partnering with the Center for Community Resources to offer a 24/7 mental health and crisis support line for people dealing with anxiety or other difficult emotions. Callers will be able to speak with staff who are trained in trauma-informed principles and will listen,

assess the person's needs, triage, and refer to other local supports and professionals as needed.

The Mental Health Support Line can be reached toll-free, 24/7 at 1-855-284-2494. We're going to be formally announcing this soon, but I hope you all help us spread the word on this critical resource.

It's a difficult time, and it's easy to feel alone and cut-off from the world, but we need people to know that they are not alone, and support is available. Thank you for the help in advance. We will be sharing information about this resource on our social media accounts, but if you need more information, feel free to reach out to our Communications office at RA-PWDHSPressOffice@pa.gov.

Fingerprinting

We continue to monitor access to fingerprinting services in order to obtain FBI clearances and fully appreciate the impact the closure of fingerprinting sites has had on our providers that offer services to children. This is a critical issue, and we continue to explore all options with our state and federal partners.

Just yesterday and as a result of the approval of our 1135 waiver request, the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) announced that it will suspend the FBI fingerprinting check for employers hiring staff serving adults and will accept a self-attestation on a temporary basis for staff serving adults if an FBI clearance is unable to be obtained. We are hoping to issue similar guidance for OLTL's providers.

Unfortunately, the ability to provisionally hire is prohibited by federal law for programs and providers serving children so this remains an issue. We are working closely with the Pennsylvania departments of Education and General Services on potential paths forward, but as mentioned in our written update following last week's call, we encourage interested parties to discuss this with federal lawmakers as well.

Federal Funding

I understand that there are likely questions about legislation being passed at the federal level in response to the COVID-19 crisis and how this stimulus funding will be allocated in Pennsylvania. We do anticipate receiving stimulus funds that may affect DHS' programs, but we are still evaluating the level of funding and the exact method of distribution.

One thing we are happy to report, is that it was determined that the federal stimulus check issued to individuals will not be considered income for eligibility purpose for our federal benefit programs, and from what we've been told, individuals who did not file taxes because they receive Social Security will be able to receive this as well.

Once we have more information to share, we will communicate with you all.

CAOs/Essential Staff

As this public health crisis progresses, we find ourselves in an increasingly challenging position with regards to continuity of government. The health and safety of our team is a primary objective and will

continue to be at the forefront of our decisions as we move forward.

As we've discussed previously, our County Assistance Office workers had to be recalled so we can keep eligibility determinations and benefits issuance going. Our CAOs are the backbone of DHS, and their work is needed now more than ever.

Operational adjustments have been implemented in response to the ever-changing tide of this emergency situation. To date, we are doing the following in an effort to protect OIM staff:

- Closing CAOs to the public indefinitely to limit person-to-person contact;
- Enacting staggered shifts in large CAOs, with two groups of staff rotating shifts in a 2-days-on, 2-days-off pattern;
- Mandating social distancing practices such as seating people at least 6ft. apart in offices or switching to staggered shifts in spaces where this is not possible;
- Ordering antibacterial soap, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies for all offices and supporting CAOs purchasing items if they become available;
- Collaborating with DGS to send a communication specifically to the CAO lessors reminding them of their contractual obligation to properly clean our offices and requesting that they complete a log identifying when the office was cleaned; and,
- Continuing to explore and evaluate other solutions such as telework and the identification of alternate work sites that will ensure the safety of our staff while maintaining the ability to ensure access to critical benefits.

Since this crisis began more than two weeks ago, there has been significant attention and questions about continuing this work while responding to employee concerns. And that concern extends beyond our CAO staff – while our licensing operations are altered, we are still responding to and investigating complaints. We are still investigating cases of abuse and neglect. We are still maintaining operations at our state-run facilities. There are many functions of government and DHS that cannot run on telework, and we must keep these going to keep the people we serve safe and healthy. We also have an obligation to protect our staff as they do this critical work.

As we make operational shifts to keep these functions going, we must remember that our first priorities are to keep staff safe while ensuring continuity of operations and services. We are doing all we can to respond to suggestions for improvements during this period and new guidance from the federal level, but we must keep these services going. Other states are seeing significant spikes in applications for benefits due to economic challenges associated with the public health crisis, and we expect that this will occur in Pennsylvania as well.

Our staff are working through an incredibly difficult situation – a situation that is likely to become more challenging before it eases. We are and will be receptive to opportunities to make adjustments as we can, but we must remember that the staff who make these adjustments are also the staff that we need to keep essential operations going. As COVID-19 spreads, our staffing levels are being impacted, creating new challenges we have to overcome. We expect our resources to become increasingly strained in the coming weeks and are trying to remain cognizant that we not overload staff, who have a myriad of competing priorities at times.

This is an unprecedented period for all of us, and we really appreciate your partnership and support as we navigate it together.

March 25, 2020 Update

1135 Waiver Request

DHS and the Department of Health submitted our request for an 1135 Waiver on March 24. The application [letter](#) and [checklist](#) are available on DHS' COVID-19 Provider Resources page. As of March 25, we are still waiting for a response from the federal government.

When the president declares a disaster or emergency under the Stafford or National Emergencies Act and the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) declares a public health emergency under Section 319 of the Public Health Service Act, the HHS Secretary is granted additional authority. Under section 1135 of the Social Security Act, this authority permits changes to Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to ensure needs of people covered by these programs are met during an emergency.

DHS and the DOH submitted an 1135 waiver request to the federal government seeking temporary changes to our Medicaid Fee-for-Service Program, the HealthChoices managed care programs for both physical and behavioral health services, Community HealthChoices (CHC), Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers, the Section 1115 Demonstration waiver for Former Foster Care Youth and Substance Use Disorder, and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). If granted, this waiver request would allow us to:

- Enhance provider access by expediting provider enrollment, permitting services from providers not yet enrolled in the Medicaid program, permitting services from providers enrolled in another states' Medicaid program, and permit payment for services provided in alternate sites of care;
- Enhance benefit access by suspending some prior authorization requirements, permitting non-physician directed services by physician assistants and certified registered nurse practitioners, reducing limitations on institutions serving people with mental illness, reducing need for face-to-face visits for durable medical equipment prescriptions, reducing limitations on service locations, and reducing acute care hospital space demand;
- Enhance benefit access in eligibility by extending continuous eligibility periods and suspending the Pre-Admission Screening and Annual Resident Review (PASRR) assessment for 30 days;
- Ease state administrative burdens by permitting eligibility determinations to exceed typical timeframes, extending grievance and appeal timeframes, and implementing a lock-in period for CHC participants.

Now that the waiver has been submitted, we will keep you all informed of its progress and, ideally, when our request is granted.

Child Care Updates

Child care centers and group child care homes outside of a residence were closed under the Governor's order to close non-life-sustaining businesses, but waivers are being granted to continue operation

recognizing that these services are necessary to allow essential personnel like health care workers, first responders, home care workers, and grocery and food service staff to keep doing the critical work they provide. We continue to receive and process waiver requests for child care centers and group child care homes seeking to continue to operate during this time, and as of March 25, more than 690 child care providers continue to operate with a waiver.

As the non-life-sustaining business closure order is being enforced around Pennsylvania, we are working closely with law enforcement agencies so they know that some child care providers may continue to operate. Child care providers operating with a waiver should be prepared to present this waiver if contacted regarding how or why they are operating during this time. The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) also recently [issued guidance to operating child care providers](#) on keeping children, their families, and staff safe during this public health emergency. We encourage all providers to take this guidance seriously.

We are also urging these essential services personnel to consider their options if their child care provider chooses to close even if they are operating with a waiver. If families are able to make alternative child care arrangements at home, we are encouraging them to allow vacancies to be used for those who do not have other options, and begin to make an actionable contingency plan if their child care arrangement has to change.

We centralized a list of open child care facilities if families working in essential jobs need to contact a new provider. This is now available on [DHS' COVID-19 resources section](#) on the resources for citizens page. We are updating it regularly as new providers request waivers and as some may choose to close.

Early Intervention Guidance

OCDEL continues to develop guidance responsive to child care and early learning providers' needs. Guidance was recently issued for early intervention providers and is available [here](#).

County Assistance Office Updates

Our county assistance offices (CAOs) continue to operate as closed to the public during this time. We are working closely with the unions and the commonwealth's labor relations staff to ensure both continued operations and safe workspaces for our staff doing this essential work.

We are monitoring this situation hour-by-hour and actively working to address employee concerns and implement strategies that mitigate the risk of exposure to the coronavirus while maintaining these essential functions. For example:

- CAOs with large staff complements are implementing staggered shifts – two days on, two days off – rotated between total staff. The Office of Income Maintenance (OIM) is also actively evaluating the use of alternative office locations so that employees will have more space to work and reduced contact with each other. Although the initial focus is on the larger CAOs, 50 or more staff, we will extend mitigation efforts to all CAOs as soon as feasible.
- The Department of General Services, which manages leases with the owners of many CAO offices, is in communication with landlords across the commonwealth about proper cleaning and CDC guidelines. All of these leases include requirements for regular cleaning;

- We have ordered additional sanitation supplies and CAOs have been provided the ability to purchase these items as they become available;
- DHS is also actively evaluating the feasibility of and options to facilitate telework for CAO staff.

We are in constant contact with employee unions to address concerns and collaborate on solutions that protect employees and maintain these essential functions.

SNAP and Food Security Efforts

Maintaining access to food – one of our most basic needs – continues to be a top priority for DHS during this period.

The federal government approved our request to extend the time that people are eligible to receive benefits. This will allow us to continue benefits during this crisis. We also continue to engage with Food and Nutrition Services regarding additional SNAP benefits that may be issued to eligible households during this crisis. We hope to have guidance soon so we can offer additional SNAP assistance to all the SNAP eligible households.

We are also submitting a waiver request to waive restrictions preventing most college students from receiving SNAP. The waiver will allow for low-income households with a student who is attending an institution of higher education to receive additional SNAP benefits to feed the whole family during the COVID-19 emergency.

Federal regulations state that an individual who is enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education shall be ineligible to participate in SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption or are employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week. The Wolf Administration's waiver request seeks to give DHS the ability to waive these regulations for students that meet the income thresholds for SNAP benefits until COVID-19 health emergency has ended.

Current federal regulations also state that students not meeting additional eligibility criteria are not included in their household's SNAP eligibility. For example, in a household of three where one member is a student, the household would only receive SNAP benefits for two of the members, despite the student still residing and eating meals with that household. Now that students are home, these families may not have the resources, either monetarily or in food supply, to support the additional person now residing with them.

We know that this pandemic has caused many people and families to find that they are suddenly food insecure and require assistance. The Feeding Task Force has been operationalized to support Pennsylvanians and charitable food networks during this time. The task force is comprised of public, private, and non-profit partners from across the state, including, among others, the Governor's Food Security Partnership state agencies, the Salvation Army, Feeding PA, and the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association. This centralized hub allows us to determine where our needs are, how many meals are needed, how we are getting food to people, and how we are getting volunteers to help charitable food networks across Pennsylvania.

One example of the task force's work is coordinating a donation of 19 pallets of milk from Powers Brand Communications LLC (Giant Distribution center) to an anti-hunger program serving Centre and Clearfield Counties. If you know of other businesses with resources to share, the task force is collecting this information. Companies can share information about resources available with the Feeding Task Force [here](#).

The Feeding task force has also created a second survey that'll attempt to capture where people who are suddenly food insecure are so we can operationalize and allocate resources appropriately. If people suddenly find themselves needing help keeping food on the table due to COVID-19 mitigation efforts, we are encouraging them to [fill out this survey](#) to help the task force meet food needs around Pennsylvania. If people are in immediate need of food assistance, [Feeding Pennsylvania](#) and [Hunger-Free Pennsylvania](#) are hubs of information for where people can get assistance locally in their communities.

We know that this time is also creating an incredible strain on charitable organizations, so if organizations need volunteers or resources, they may visit the [United Way of Pennsylvania's 211 website](#). We are also encouraging anyone who is healthy and able to consider taking some time to volunteer with their local food bank. Their operations are seriously altered because of this situation, but their services are and will continue to be incredibly needed as COVID-19 continues to disrupt daily lives. We need to be sure our charitable food networks are able to continue their daily operations and meet the needs of their communities, so we will continue to encourage healthy and able people to contact their local food bank to get involved and help their neighbors and community during this time of great need. To find a food bank or pantry in your community, visit [Feeding Pennsylvania](#) and [Hunger-Free Pennsylvania](#).

Protective Services

We've made adjustments to ensure continuity for ChildLine and Adult Protective Services, but these critical outlets are not effective if potential abuse or neglect is not being reported.

People who are mandated reporters under the Child Protective Services Law should report online at www.KeepKidsSafe.pa.gov, but ChildLine is also available to anyone wishing to report, 24/7 at 1-800-932-0313.

Adult Protective Services protects adults who are 18 to 59 and have a physical or intellectual disability. Reports can be made 24/7 to 1-800-490-8505. Reports submitted are still fielded and directed to the appropriate parties to investigate. We appreciate you continuing to lift these resources so we can keep Pennsylvanians safe.

In addition, domestic violence programs and rape crisis centers continue to provide services to victims and survivors. If you need to find rape crisis services, please call 1-888-772-7227 or visit www.pcar.org to be connected with your local rape crisis center. For domestic violence services, please visit www.pcadv.org or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-

799-7233 (SAFE), 1-800-787-3224 (TTY for people who are deaf). If you are unable to speak safely, you can also log onto www.thehotline.org or text LOVEIS to 22522.

March 17, 2020 Update

Medicaid and CHIP Programs

Our offices that oversee and administer Medicaid access for the millions of Pennsylvanians who rely on it – the offices of Developmental Programs (ODP), Long-Term Living (OLTL), Medical Assistance Programs (OMAP), and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) - are working closely together to get [guidance out to providers](#) to support operational changes while aiming for continuity of services.

COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing and Treatment

OMAP is also working with [CHIP](#) and [Medical Assistance](#) program-enrolled providers and managed care organizations to ensure that people needing testing and treatment related to COVID-19 [are able to get this without copays or prior authorizations](#).

Home and Community-Based Services

ODP and the OLTL have submitted waiver requests to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services allowing for flexibility around staffing for direct care and direct support workers. We are working to create flexibility given the evolving situation but are communicating with participants in these programs to ensure that services are still being rendered when needed. The [Appendix K waivers](#) OLTL and ODP submitted were approved on March 18, and we are in the process of drafting guidance to providers pursuant to this.

Update: March 25: The Appendix K waivers were approved.

OLTL has also directed the Community HealthChoices managed care organizations (CHC-MCOs) to not reduce or terminate any personal assistance services or reassess long-term services and supports for at least the next three months. The three CHC-MCOs will also verify service continuity with all long-term care and HCBS participants and to ensure all HCBS participants have an executable back-up plan in place to guard against potential disruptions in service with personal assistance providers and direct care workers.

Telehealth Services

[OMAP](#) and [OMHSAS](#) issued guidance around telehealth to ease this option for providers around Pennsylvania and Pennsylvanians seeking services while observing social distancing and mitigation guidelines.

County Assistance Offices and Public Assistance Programs

We are also doing everything we can to ensure continuity of benefits and application processing for new applications for benefits that come in during this period. This uncertain time is undoubtedly going to create difficult situations for people around Pennsylvania, and we need to continue to administer these vital programs for those who need it most. We also recognize that there may be changes based on federal action that will affect these programs, and we continue to monitor and will adapt if necessary.

CAO Operations

[On March 16, the decision was made to continue to operate county assistance offices but close them to the public.](#) This is necessary to ensure continuity of program operations so we may continue to process applications and maintain existing cases.

I recognize the frustration and concern that this decision has prompted. However, these job functions are essential and cannot be performed off-site with existing technological capacity. We continue to monitor this on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour basis. If additional adjustments become necessary, decisions will be made and communicated, but this work is essential and we cannot abandon the people who need or may need these programs when they need them most.

Medicaid

We continue to accept and process Medical Assistance applications. Individuals can notate on the application if they have a health emergency including COVID-19. We will continue to prioritize Medical Assistance applications where there is an immediate health concern. Self-attestations will be accepted.

SNAP

SNAP certification periods will be extended at least for the next three months so SNAP cases will not be terminated during this period. We have submitted a waiver request to the federal Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for this extension.

When processing changes to hours worked, we are exercising flexibility as we recognize that this may be difficult to verify as business operations shift across the private sector as well. We are also closely monitoring developments related to the Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) rule at the federal level. Last week, we submitted a waiver request to FNS to delay implementation of this rule. On Friday night, the DC Federal District Court issued an injunction for the rule. The Commonwealth is exploring ways to ensure ABAWDs do not lose benefits due to the time limits.

We also submitted a request for a SNAP Issuance Waiver that would allow us to issue a payment of 50 percent of a household's maximum SNAP grant to ensure food security and the ability of SNAP recipients to comply with CDC guidelines calling for households to have two weeks' worth of food available. If this is granted, we will communicate this broadly.

TANF

We are encouraging employment and training providers to provide remote services where possible and, if not, exercise flexibility for participants. We are also suspending face-to-face interviews and will not terminate or sanction recipients based on RESET requirements.

LIHEAP

We are evaluating the best possible way to support the needs of the LIHEAP eligible population with the limited federal funds available.

Protective Services

Protective services also continue to be administered by DHS. The Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF) and OLTL continue to operate both ChildLine and Adult Protective Services and will continue to

work with our partners at the county level to ensure these vulnerable populations are protected and referrals are investigated.

State-Run Facilities

The offices that oversee our state-run facilities – ODP, OMHSAS, and OCYF – are restricting access to these facilities, exercising increased cleaning and sanitation efforts, and screening staff to protect the health of people we serve. We recognize that this may create challenges for individuals under the care of these facilities and their loved ones, and we are working to facilitate visiting and interactions through programs like FaceTime and Skype.

Licensing Operations

DHS' routine annual licensing visits are on hold at this time. DHS' licensing offices will continue to monitor facilities and are prepared to respond to and investigate complaints as they are received.

Child Care Operations

Child care facilities [were closed statewide](#) on March 16 to support COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Exceptions to this policy are family child care homes and group child care homes operating inside a residence. All child care providers will continue to receive Child Care Works payments through April. Closures and operational guidance are communicated directly to child care providers and other early education and early intervention providers through the child care certification listserv and the Pennsylvania early education listserv.

This temporary closure of child care facilities may be a burden for Pennsylvania families who depend on this service. Because it is especially burdensome for essential personnel such as health care workers and first responders who must have safe and stable care options for their children in order to report to work, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has implemented a waiver process for child care centers and group child care homes that serve these families. Operators of these facilities who seek a waiver from the Governor's temporary closure order should contact OCDEL at RA-PWDRACERT@pa.gov. Waiver requests will be processed as quickly as possible.

Coordinated State Response

The Office of Administration's Division of Emergency Preparedness and Safety Operations (DEPSO) team has been working closely with state agencies and partners around the state to support the COVID-19 response across Pennsylvania since the beginning of February. DEPSO has provided ongoing support to DOH and PEMA at the CRCC through coordination and communications as needed. We have responsibility for Emergency Support Function #6, which is to provide for mass care, shelter and human services including food distribution.

Currently, the Mass Task Force is coordinating multiple food distribution programs to ensure appropriate food availability to our children, older Pennsylvanians and families. The Sheltering Task Force is supporting quarantining and sheltering coordination. The Disabilities Integration Task Force is working to ensure that those with access or functional needs are supported during these trying times.