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New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute Blog

New Hampshire Expands Access to Safety Net Programs and Supports During the COVID-19 Crisis

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Programs such as Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provide means-tested benefits that help support the basic needs of individuals and families with low incomes. During these times of profound [economic instability](#), assistance to families and individuals living at or near the poverty line, along with those who have experienced sudden large drops in income, is indispensable. Strengthening the safety net, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services announced [temporary changes](#), beginning April 1, 2020, to certain administrative aspects of these programs at the State level. In addition to other emergency federal and state-level changes to [unemployment benefits](#), the changes to these safety net programs expand access to targeted assistance for individuals and families during the COVID-19 crisis.

The [Medicaid program](#) provides health care coverage to those with lower incomes. Only those meeting certain eligibility requirements are provided benefits, and traditionally beneficiaries were required to have eligibility redetermined to continue their enrollment. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, temporary flexibilities have been implemented. Through May 31, 2020, individuals currently enrolled will remain enrolled even if there are changes in circumstances that might normally affect their eligibility. The only exceptions are if an individual moves out of state or chooses to end coverage, or if the individual passes away. Redetermination for Medicaid eligibility set to take place during this period will be delayed, while passive redeterminations will continue. Additionally, new applicants seeking eligibility for long-term care may provide self-attested income and assets for eligibility determination if the Department is unable to verify financial eligibility using other methods.

SNAP, also known as the [New Hampshire Food Stamp Program](#), provides means-tested nutritional assistance to those with low incomes. SNAP is an incredibly [responsive program](#) during times of recession, as all benefits are fully federally funded and can

quickly be deployed to those with low incomes and limited assets, including those experiencing a sudden decrease in income. The traditional redetermination and periodic reporting required to verify continued eligibility will be delayed through May 31, 2020. New SNAP applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for individuals unable to produce official income and resource documentation. Additionally, benefits will be increased to the [maximum amounts](#) during this period for certain households, which are \$194 per month for an individual and \$509 per month for a family of three.

TANF is a [broad program](#) that provides cash assistance directly to families with children that have low incomes; the program also funds tax credits, child welfare programs, work supports, and other services. Through May 31, 2020, the traditional TANF redetermination for continuation of these means-tested benefits will not be required. Additionally, certain requirements surrounding work participation rates are waived, and extensions to the duration of benefits for certain recipients extended, for 90 days beginning March 13, 2020.

Childcare is another area where New Hampshire has implemented temporary changes during the COVID-19 crisis. Those receiving childcare assistance will not need to be redetermined for eligibility through July 31, 2020, and any cost-sharing portions families were required to cover will be absorbed for eight weeks beginning April 6, 2020. Childcare providers may be able to bill and receive payment at a child's approved service level whether or not the providers are able to continue operating or the child is unable to attend due to COVID-19. Certain essential workers may be provided emergency childcare from the newly-created Emergency Child Care Collaborative throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

As the Covid-19 crisis progresses, the accompanying economic downturn has led to [thousands of Granite Staters](#) being newly in need of assistance, in addition to those who had previously required aid. Given New Hampshire residents' [access to health care, costs of living expenses, and incomes](#) vary greatly [across the state](#), these temporary changes to key safety net programs will help ensure Granite Staters can receive the assistance they need. As this crisis affects many New Hampshire workers throughout a variety of [industries](#) where transitions to remote work are difficult or impossible, strong safety net programs are essential during these unprecedented times.

- *Michael Polizzotti, Policy Analyst*