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During the COVID-19 national health emergency, the Administration made various waivers and exceptions to programs to ensure people could continue or begin to receive certain assistance and benefits regardless of income eligibility. This was to protect them from what is known as a benefit cliff or program cliff, a point at which someone no longer qualifies--typically due to small increases in income-- for an assistance or benefit program. The pandemic Child Tax Credit and Economic Impact Payments are not treated as sources of taxable income for this reason. State Medicaid offices at CMS direction aren't dropping people from Medicaid and agencies such as HUD have used their waiver authority to extend housing assistance and other resources to people who would not otherwise be eligible. Before the national health emergency ends and these waivers/exceptions expire, it would be helpful to get quantitative and qualitative data that provides greater insight into the potential impact that benefit/program cliffs will have on the economic mobility and social well-being of respondents.

Questions around working should delve into whether people feel discouraged from working for fear of becoming ineligible for certain assistance/benefits and whether people will choose not to pursue opportunities due to fear of losing certain benefits (which should be identified in the response). Questions around income and housing should uncover whether there is a fear of losing benefits because of asset increases or other disqualifying events once the pandemic protections have been lifted. It would be helpful if the survey questions posed could help with quantifying the impact of the program cliff in near-term and the long-term.

Lastly, since ethnic and racial data are collected in the survey, the questions should make it easier to quantify racial disparities getting access to certain pandemic-related benefits and services made available by federal, state, and local government agencies.