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Food and Nutrition Service
United States Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22302

RE: Improving Coordination Between SNAP and Medicaid in State Agencies

To Whom it May Concern:

We commend the USDA's initiative to explore opportunities for coordination between SNAP and Medicaid programs. These programs serve similar populations, and improving their coordination can lead to increased efficiency, better customer service, and enhanced program access. The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger and its network of advocates strongly supports this effort, recognizing that many of our residents rely on programs such as both SNAP and Medicaid to meet their basic needs. Coenrollment across programs is not universal for all who may be eligible for them.

Colorado is keenly interested in understanding the national landscape regarding barriers to program coordination. The ability to address people's needs holistically is of paramount importance. It aligns seamlessly with the White House Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, which emphasizes the need to make it easier for eligible individuals to access federal assistance programs. We believe that every eligible person should have the opportunity to be enrolled in the programs for which they qualify.

One significant challenge that Colorado has encountered in recent years is related to data sharing among agencies and community partners. To address this, we propose two essential considerations for the SNAP and Medicaid Program Coordination Study:

1. **Federal Funding for System Enhancements:** Substantial system enhancements are needed to support data sharing practices across programs. We recommend that the link between ample federal funding and positive data sharing outcomes be explored. We also encourage the study to identify the barriers to making federal funding more available to support these enhancements. Federal financial support would enable states

to build the necessary infrastructure for secure, compliant data sharing between SNAP, Medicaid, and other human services agencies, thereby facilitating efficient program coordination.

2. **Clear Case Studies on Best Practices:** It is crucial to provide clear case studies that showcase best practices in data sharing. Many states, including Colorado, encounter challenges related to understanding the legal frameworks governing data sharing. Having access to case studies that illustrate how data should lawfully be shared, both within and across agencies and with community partners, would be immensely beneficial. These case studies should emphasize compliance with all relevant regulations, ensuring that states can actively share data to support coenrollment without fear of reprisal for being out of compliance. Furthermore, this data sharing practices should be expected, and not optional.
3. **Clearer Connections Between Programs Outreach:** Both SNAP and Medicaid had enrollment provisions that for our state of Colorado, are vital to ensuring eligible individuals access the programs. Organizations that complete this outreach would like to see more coordination and ability to assist Coloradans with both Medicaid and SNAP applications rather than being restricted to one or the other due to funding or scope.

We believe that optimizing data sharing is crucial due to the demonstrable, positive effects of SNAP enrollment on health care utilization and cost reduction. Dillman et. al. found that SNAP enrollees experienced 16% and 21% lower total health care costs and pharmacy costs, respectively, within the first year post-enrollment in SNAP. These findings underscore the potential for SNAP and Medicaid coordination to yield health and cost benefits, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Additionally, we would like to draw attention to "The Nourishing Effect," a report by Bread for the World, which sheds light on the significant economic impact of hunger and food insecurity in the United States. This report underscores that the consequences of hunger and food insecurity extend far beyond the immediate suffering of individuals and families, with profound implications for our nation as a whole.

According to the report, in 2014, the estimated health-related costs of hunger and food insecurity in the United States amounted to a staggering \$160.07 billion. These costs encompassed healthcare expenses and lost work productivity attributed to diet-related chronic diseases and illnesses. This figure serves as a stark reminder of the immense financial burden that food insecurity places on our healthcare system, workforce, and economy.

As the SNAP and Medicaid Program Coordination Study seeks to enhance program coordination and accessibility, we urge the USDA to consider the profound economic implications of food insecurity highlighted in this report. By investing in coordinated efforts between SNAP and Medicaid, we can work towards a more food-secure nation that benefits both the well-being of our citizens and our economic prosperity.

Thank you for considering our input, and please do not hesitate to reach out if you require further information or collaboration.

Sincerely,

Greta Allen
Policy Director
The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger