

**CHANGES IN CLIENT SERVICE IN THE FOOD STAMP
PROGRAM AFTER WELFARE REFORM: A SYNTHESIS OF CASE
STUDIES IN EIGHT STATES**

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Summary

This report is the final product of a study designed to learn about State Food Stamp Program (FSP) policy choices and local implementation of these policies after the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). The report presents examples of policies and practices that may have affected client service in the FSP in terms of program accessibility, quality of service and availability of employment and training services, particularly for food stamp recipients that do not receive cash assistance (non-TANF food stamp households).

The examples are based on information gathered from on-site interviews with program staff in 8 State agencies and 24 local offices located in one rural area, one small city, and one urban area in each of the 8 States. Focus groups discussions were also conducted in each State with staff from emergency food and shelter organizations and advocacy groups. The States were selected to provide descriptive information about programs that featured the following types of choices offered by PRWORA:

- a sanction-oriented approach regarding work requirements – Kansas, Tennessee and Mississippi;

- a less sanction-oriented approach and expanded E&T services for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDS) - Colorado and Washington; and
- changes in front-end operations at local welfare offices - Oregon, Utah, and Wisconsin.

Site-visit findings support the concern that local office design of FSP procedures since PRWORA may contribute to the decline in food stamp participation. The study describes a variety of local office practices that can confuse potential applicants about FSP requirements, impede the filing of FSP applications, increase the burden and cost of participation, and provide limited access to E&T resources particularly for non-TANF food stamp households. Site visits also revealed examples of local office policies and procedures that were designed to facilitate FSP participation. These include the use of designated workers to address participation by ABAWDs, better coordination of eligibility and E&T services, and outreach activities that built upon prior relationships with community-based organizations.

The task of identifying and remedying practices that can negatively impact access to the FSP is a difficult challenge for policymakers because, as this study demonstrated, official State policies are not a reliable indicator of what occurs at the local level. This study also revealed that many local procedures that may impede program participation are frequently the product of well-intentioned efforts to further the goals of welfare reform.

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