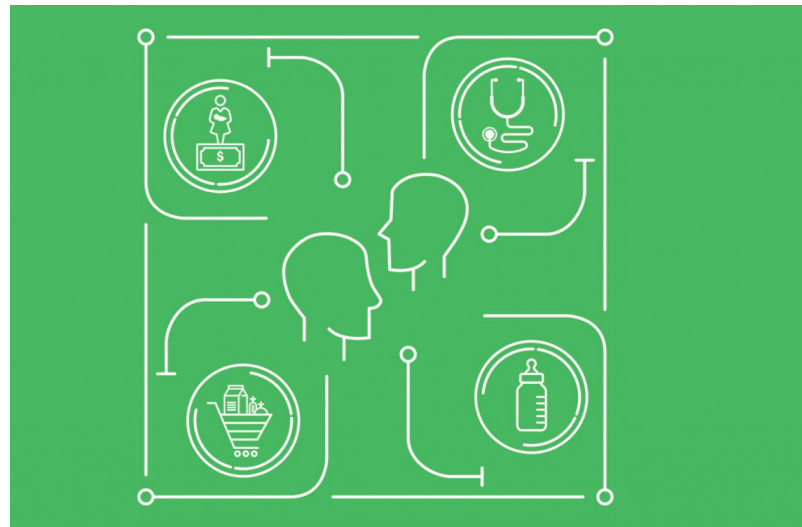


How Data Sharing Can Improve Equitable Access to Public Programs

Social safety net programs can be effective poverty reduction strategies, but the safety net system can also be cumbersome and inefficient. Accessing these life-saving benefits can involve complicated and duplicative processes, like re-entering the same information on multiple applications, having to verify across multiple platforms, and long waits to be informed of eligibility.



When our community members are facing challenges like unemployment, illness, disability, domestic abuse or poverty, getting access to life-saving resources should be quick, simple and dignified. To do this, we have to transform the safety net starting from the back end. One readily available way to remove barriers for people who need help is to identify opportunities for programs to share data with one another, enabling people to enroll in the benefits they are eligible for in one place, or cut down on the need to enter and verify the same information across multiple platforms and applications.

Optimize Your Application Process With Cross-Enrollment

What is cross-enrollment?

By establishing data-sharing agreements, safety net agencies can use information collected by one public benefit program to help enroll low-income people in other benefits for which they qualify. Identifying and maximizing these opportunities for people to enroll in multiple programs using the same data makes programs more efficient and reduces hassles for struggling families. This practice is referred to as **cross-enrollment**.

To make cross-enrollment possible, in some cases, a program can use another program's eligibility determination to eliminate a duplicative process. In other cases, a program can use data (such as income) that another trusted program has collected and verified to reduce burdens on state and local administrators and enable applicants to avoid having to provide the same paperwork to multiple offices.

Below, find a few key resources and best practices to help your agency explore and incorporate the benefits of data-sharing for cross-enrollment.

Cross-enrollment can help program administrators and applicants

State and local agencies administer public benefit programs that help vulnerable populations make ends meet and support those who may not be able to work due to a disability — providing children, for instance, with affordable health care, safe housing, and adequate nutrition. Individuals eligible for one program are often eligible for (and could benefit from) other programs. Often, however, program staff spend time on duplicative work because they gather the same information from a family multiple times. These unnecessary administrative steps increase the cost of operating benefit programs and can lead to many eligible individuals not receiving benefits for which they qualify.

Making sure each agency's data collection processes are efficient is a start, and the next step is to achieve data sharing across agencies, so that families enrolling in health or nutrition supports can enter their information and have that verified by one program, which then in turn will allow them to enroll in other programs they're eligible for.

Best practices for establishing data-sharing are:

- **Assess the landscape:** Examine current processes to understand the ways that data is already being shared across agencies and programs in your state or county to help identify opportunities to expand on what is already working;
- **Define the purpose:** Ensure clarity regarding how the data-sharing would be used and how it could improve outcomes. You may be more readily able to streamline data-sharing agreement processes by painting a specific picture of how many currently enrolled WIC families could also be benefitting from Head Start, for example.

- **Invest the time:** It can take months or years to finalize data-sharing programs across a county, region, or state. Successful data-sharing takes time — both to develop the trusting relationships necessary to execute MOUs and data-sharing agreements, and to gather the data that will be used to enable cross-enrollment.
- **Track outcomes and value:** Consider the short- and long-term benefits of data-sharing by developing metrics to measure outcomes of data-sharing activities to determine business value, cost savings, and enrollment. If your agency has equity goals, this would be a great place to ensure that the values and outcome you are tracking map to the kinds of equitable outcomes you seek.
- **Establish consent:** Depending on the types of data you collect, differing state and federal statutes dictate the data use consents required. Develop educational materials and training for agency staff to aid their ability to inform applicants or recipients of other programs for which they may be eligible, and in gaining proactive consent when needed from individuals.

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We’ve examined various benefit programs that can engage in cross-enrollment via existing program links. The graphic on the next page provides detailed information about the different types of linkages between 14 programs reviewed for this report. Programs listed in the left-hand column provide a linkage — or streamlined opportunity — to enroll in one, many, or none of the programs listed in the top row. An interactive version of the diagrams is available [here](#).

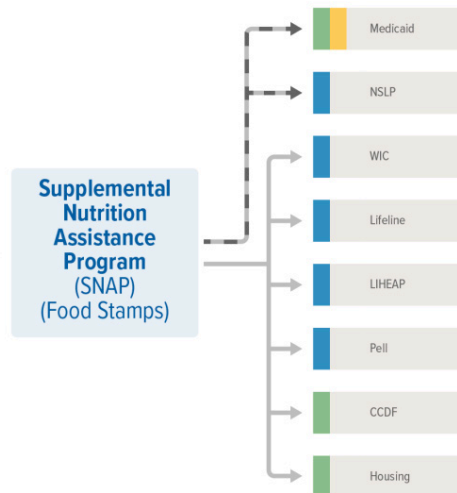


Figure 1. Summary of Linkages

		TO		Food Assistance				Health				Income Supports						Housing and Utilities		
				SNAP	NSLP	WIC	Medicaid	Medicare	MSP	LIS	TANF	SSI	UI	EITC	CTC	Pell	CCDF	Housing	LIHEAP	Lifeline
FROM		SNAP	NSLP	WIC	Medicaid	Medicare	MSP	LIS	TANF	SSI	UI	EITC	CTC	Pell	CCDF	Housing	LIHEAP	Lifeline		
Food Assistance	SNAP		●	●	●									●	●	●	●	●		
	NSLP				●									●						
	WIC													●						
Health	Medicaid		●	●			●	●						●	●	●		●		
	Medicare																			
	MSP							●												
	LIS						●													
Income Supports	TANF	●	●	●	●									●	●	●	●			
	SSI	●			●			●						●			●	●		
	UI																			
	EITC																			
	CTC																			
	Pell																			
	CCDF																			
Housing and Utilities	Housing																	●		
	LIHEAP																			
	Lifeline																			

Data-Sharing Success Stories

States like Oregon, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania have started using data sharing services to create opportunities for cross-enrollment. In each example following it shows how this approach drives equity and accessibility for all.

Oregon

Oregon WIC used data-sharing to coordinate services with the Head Start Program in Oregon. The agencies that operate these programs entered into a data-sharing agreement to allow for greater coordination of care between WIC and Head Start staff to ensure clients receive streamlined certification, nutrition education, home visits, and parent training, among other resources. WIC recipients sign a release to share their personal information when they first sign up for WIC. Data-sharing enabled agencies to team up to improve outcomes for families. For example, Head Start nutrition classes can be used to satisfy nutrition education requirements for WIC eligibility, WIC staff are able to attend Head Start events to enroll families, WIC members receive information about the benefits of Head start, and so on, increasing participation in both Head Start and WIC, essential programs which improve life and health outcomes for families and young children.

Pennsylvania

In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the Department of Human Services embraced innovation to establish data-sharing across agencies to create a data warehouse to improve services to clients, inform policy making, and evaluate program and operational effectiveness. A handful of other states (Colorado, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, as well as Pennsylvania) leverage Medicaid enrollment data to connect low-income seniors to SNAP in partnership with a third-party agency, based on research showing that increased food security improves health and reduces costs for this vulnerable population.

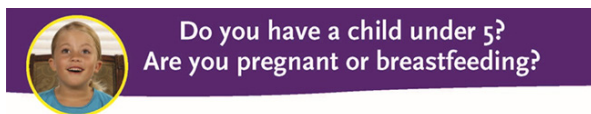
That data warehouse, with permission from applicants, uses the data from those applications to check eligibility for other benefits, enabling residents to enroll in multiple programs via one application.

Massachusetts

In 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's WIC program entered into a data-sharing agreement with Massachusetts's Office of Medicaid (MassHealth) to enhance enrollment, coordination, and collaboration across programs. In particular, the agreement provides for

“targeted outreach to families who are receiving MassHealth benefits and who are eligible for WIC benefits in order to increase utilization of program services.”

The agreement addresses HIPAA concerns by referring to regulation that allows covered entities to share information with other public benefits agencies if authorized by state law or regulation. Finally, there is reference to the state laws that provide authority under the HIPAA regulatory pathway. The agreement allows for the state Medicaid agency to use data matching to find people who are eligible for WIC but not enrolled. Once they are identified, families with young children receive information about the benefits of WIC and instructions to easily enroll.



Do you have MassHealth or SNAP?

Most MassHealth members and SNAP recipients who are pregnant or have children under age 5 are eligible for WIC benefits and services.



WIC offers:

- Personalized nutrition consultations
- Breastfeeding classes and one-on-one breastfeeding support
- Free, healthy food
- Tips for eating well to improve health
- Referrals for medical and dental care, immunizations, health insurance, childcare, housing and fuel assistance, and other services that can benefit the entire family *and A Whole Lot More!*

Did you know...

- WIC moms receive prenatal care earlier and are healthier after delivery.

When Data-Sharing Is Not Possible: Other Types of Cross-Enrollment Opportunities

If data-sharing agreements are not possible, or not yet in place, cross-enrollment/enrollment streamlining can also be achieved using other strategies, including:

- **Joint Applications.** If multiple applications require the same information, create opportunities for one packet of questions to apply to multiple programs.
- **Area eligibility.** Rather than individual eligibility determinations, use options to provide resources for entire high-poverty areas. For instance, some school lunch programs offer meals for free if 40% or more of the population are directly certified for the free-lunch program based on their eligibility for another high-needs program.
- **Targeted Outreach.** States can use information about an individual’s qualification for one program to target outreach for another program.

Learn More

Using cross-enrollment strategies means more people have access to the resources they need. To truly achieve economic, social and physical well-being, we need thoughtful policy and effective technology to rebuild the social safety net system to be equitable and efficient. Alluma has decades of experience working to move people out of poverty and attain social and economic mobility. We have a core understanding of the barriers applicants face in the eligibility process and how to innovate the backend to ensure all people can access what they need.

Alluma can support your administrative team with cross-enrollment strategies specific to what you have to offer. **Sign up for a free demo by contacting us at connect@alluma.org.**