



# **IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES GUIDE**

Maximizing the Enrollment and Retention of  
Adults and Children in Medicaid and SCHIP

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## **IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES FOR MAXIMIZING ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION OF ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN MEDICAID AND SCHIP**

This Improvement Strategies Guide consists of a combination of general concepts and strategies that can be used to improve practices that positively impact Medicaid and SCHIP enrollment rates, eligibility worker productivity and customer service. *The Improvement Guide, A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance* by Gerald J. Langley et al. served as the basis for this guide. Because *The Improvement Guide* focused on performance improvement in businesses, the Southern Institute on Children and Families has adapted the concepts presented in the book to be more relevant to a social services environment.

This Improvement Strategies Guide is intended to be used by county Medi-Cal Offices to review concepts, select strategies relevant to their operations and test changes on a small scale to determine if the changes result in improvement. Successful changes can then be implemented. Some strategies may be beneficial to some states or local offices based on their structure, but the same strategy may create a more complex problem for another state or local office. It is clear there is no single solution to improving processes that will increase participation and eligibility productivity; rather, each state or local office must assess the positives and negatives of each approach to find the practices that best suit its needs. In addition, because of an ever-changing environment, it is important to frequently re-evaluate policies and procedures to determine if they are still consistent with the goals. State and Federal policy now offers considerable flexibility and opportunities to greatly simplify the application and renewal processes.

The Improvement Strategies Guide consists of six broad concepts with each concept followed by a list of specific strategies to consider for improvement. A useful approach is to compare each strategy to current operations for ideas to improve.

## IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT A

**Improve Customer Service:** Management ideas of customer satisfaction are often an illusion. While all departments within an organization may strive for the common goal of customer satisfaction, each group has a separate role to play and unique requirements for customer information, which can create varying levels of customer service. Understanding the specific needs and concerns of customers who visit eligibility offices and assuring they understand the services available to them can generate numerous ideas for improvement. By reviewing the process from the perspective of the customer and the worker and listening to their ideas, changes that lead to improvements can be implemented. To make customer satisfaction a reality, management should make every effort to test, analyze and implement some of the changes noted below.

1. Improve communication (written and oral)
  - Review wording on written documents sent to customers
  - Test documents with customers before implementation
  - Convert documents to the language of preference for the customer
  - Use appropriate translations for speaking and writing
  - Ensure customers' understanding by asking if they need help
  - Match workers to customers based on customer language of preference
  - Update customers on the status of their applications
  - Listen to customers
2. Simplify and improve the process for customers to provide information
  - Provide staff and other resources to assist with the application process
  - Use telephone renewals
  - Verify contact information (name, telephone number and address) at each contact with client
  - Provide self-addressed envelopes
  - Provide access to forms, computers, copy machine and a drop box for clients
  - Accept copies instead of requesting originals for verification, when possible
  - Accept client declaration when within policy
  - Use pre-printed or pre-filled renewal forms
  - Provide receptionists with basic information to assist clients
  - Provide an application status update phone line
  - Assign someone to assist customers in the lobby during peak hours
3. Minimize requirements for multiple interviews
  - Obtain information for eligibility determination for all Medi-Cal programs at initial interview
  - Use ex parte reviews
4. Develop electronic applications and renewals
5. Provide flexibility in clients' access to workers
6. Reduce wait time for customer assistance
  - Use scheduled appointments
  - Allow walk-in customers access to workers
  - Make same day eligibility determinations

## IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT B

**Improve Policies and Procedures:** Because of an ever-changing environment, it is important for states to frequently re-evaluate their policies and procedures to determine if they are still consistent with their goals. Policymakers also need to determine how individual program policies can be coordinated to increase the enrollment and retention of benefits for potentially eligible participants.

Federal policy offers states considerable flexibility and opportunities to greatly simplify the enrollment process.

1. Eliminate unnecessary verification
  - Provide staff with a verification checklist to avoid unnecessary verification requests
  - Provide periodic reviews of policies and procedures with workers to ensure understanding of requirements
  - Limit income verifications, e.g. consider using one pay stub instead of four
  - Accept alternate forms of verification
2. Determine ineligibility for all categories prior to denial/closure
3. Limit requests for child support enforcement on application and renewal forms
4. Adopt 12-month continuous eligibility for children
5. Maintain eligibility coverage when families move from county to county within a state
6. Eliminate asset tests
7. Eliminate face-to-face interview requirements at application and at renewal
  - Conduct interviews by phone
  - Accept applications by phone
  - Use ex parte review sources
8. Follow-up with customers prior to closure/denial
  - Use reminders for eligibility workers and customers
  - Contact client via telephone prior to closure/denial
  - Use generic sticker reminders on envelopes
  - Use advocacy and/or outreach workers to follow-up with clients
  - Discuss options with client prior to closure, particularly in instances where client requests closure
  - Send follow-up letters to supplement computer generated letters
  - Send reminder postcards
9. Standardize policies and procedures across programs
10. Restrict case closures or denials prior to peer or supervisory review

## IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT C

**Improve Workflow:** All work is a process and it is critical for the organization to understand all steps in the process. Some activities or resources in an organization that do not add value for the customer or the organization may be considered waste. How does work flow? Are the various steps in the process arranged and prioritized to obtain quality outcomes? How can workflow be changed so the process is less reactive and better planned? Is the application/renewal process standardized and documented?

1. Match staff skills and knowledge to needs
  - Consider specialized caseloads
  - Match staffing to customer needs during peak hours
2. Pull work rather than push work
3. Triage applications so that ready-to-work applications are completed first
4. Synchronize eligibility periods
5. Remove automatic closure and denial options
6. Make Medicaid eligibility decision first
7. Do tasks in parallel
8. Use rolling renewals
9. Minimize handoffs and bottlenecks
10. Take application and send, rather than refer customer to another office or program
11. Use automation
  - Give workers easy-to-use online manuals
  - Use online verifications
  - Program multiple automated systems to communicate with each other to avoid multiple data entry
  - Provide a telephone line specifically to report changes or to provide information
12. Outstation eligibility workers
  - Provide customer access to workers at non-traditional locations (hospitals, health centers, schools, migrant camps, other community organizations)
13. Prevent backlog
  - Allow overtime
  - Allow dedicated time during normal work hours
14. Reduce unneeded complexity and standardize office operations
15. Cross-train workers

## IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT D

**Change Work Environment:** Changes to the environment in which people work can often provide leverage for improvements in performance. Most social service agencies have implemented various computer applications designed to support the eligibility determination process. However, many of these systems have been modified to reflect the changes brought about by welfare reform, and the changes frequently involve complex “work-arounds” that make things more complicated for the worker. Many of these technical changes do not lead to improvements because the work environment or the workers are not ready to accept or support the changes.

1. Give workers and customers access to information
  - Provide a help desk for workers and clients
  - Provide information on policy and procedure changes
2. Provide access to other computer systems for ex parte reviews and verification
3. Give workers information on their performance indicators
  - Establish enrollment goals for the office
  - Track individual worker and office performance daily
4. Use proper measurements for performance indicators
  - Use management reports to track progress of applications and renewals
5. Provide training
  - Focus on staff buy-in
  - Use board games focusing on eligibility issues
  - Train using refresher quizzes
  - Cross-train
  - Use online training
6. Collocate eligibility workers
7. Create a worker problem-solving environment

## IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT E

**Eliminate Waste:** Some procedures utilized by states in determining eligibility do not add any value to the process for the customer or the eligibility office. Some examples of waste are requests for specific types of verification when another document would serve the same purpose, automated systems that do not interface with each other, therefore requiring multiple entry of the same information and the use of multiple codes that mean essentially the same thing. Eliminating some of the unnecessary steps in the process leads to improvements in customer service and reduces the workload for eligibility staff.

1. Eliminate waste of overproduction, such as:
  - Processing paperwork before the next person is ready for it
  - Creating unneeded reports
  - Printing reports that are not read or acted on
  - Unnecessary verification
2. Eliminate waste of time, such as:
  - Waiting
  - Batch processing
  - Bottlenecks
  - Equipment downtime
  - Delayed response time
  - Automated closings that have to be reopened (rework)
3. Eliminate waste in transportation, such as:
  - Unneeded steps
  - Unnecessary movement of documents and data
4. Eliminate waste in movement, such as:
  - Unneeded data entry
  - Extra steps (arrange processes in close proximity to each other)
  - Excessive reporting
  - Extra copies
5. Eliminate waste in inventory, such as:
  - Applications waiting to be processed
  - Physical piles of forms waiting
  - Callers on hold in a queue
6. Eliminate waste of processing, such as:
  - Excessive sign-offs
  - Limited tools or authority available to workers to carry out basic tasks
7. Eliminate waste of producing defective products or out-of-conformance services, such as:
  - Incorrect data entry
  - Eligibility determination process errors
  - Using incorrect addresses and contact information

## IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT F

**Customer/Worker Interface:** Understanding the specific needs and concerns of customers who visit eligibility offices and assuring they understand the services available to them can generate numerous ideas for improvement. By reviewing the process from the perspective of the customer and the worker and listening to their ideas, changes that lead to improvements can be implemented.

1. Coach customers to use services
2. Focus on the outcome to a customer
3. Focus on making the customer eligible