

## No Applicant Left Behind?

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*States are finding themselves ill-equipped to process human services benefits as unemployment continues to rise. In turn, states may start looking towards prescreening enrollment solutions to speed up the process. Any new solutions must also be able to simplify the application process for new applicants, seniors, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers, and be accessible to those in rural communities.*

While current times have seen a trend of falling economies and stock markets, there is one area of the United States that is on the rise- unemployment. With numbers reaching as high as 8.1 percent in March, social service programs are seeing soaring numbers of applicants for financial assistance through programs like Medicaid, food stamps, and Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF). Newly eligible individuals, while taking advantage of a system meant to help those in need in hard times, are swamping state and county assistance systems (which, in some cases, were outdated before the economic crisis hit). Requests for medical reimbursement and food stamps are going unanswered in some counties, with case workers over burdened with cases that they can't handle.

For example, the Kansas Health Policy Authority (KHPA) is looking towards its legislature to restore administrative cuts to alleviate the strain on internal staff to handle the increase in volume of applications for Medicaid assistance. The number of new applications for benefits under Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) has grown by an average of 987 applications a month since the beginning of FY2009, with over 10,000 applications and reviews remaining unprocessed to date. KHPA hopes to use some of the stimulus payments to replace the cuts to the budget to maintain staff and contractual services to handle the workload. Florida is another state that is brainstorming ways to improve food stamp, Medicaid, and welfare distribution in light of the stimulus packages increase in the amount that families are receiving in aid. The legislature hopes to approve money that would combine with federal funds to hire 288 workers to staff benefit call centers, where calls have skyrocketed from 1.5 million to 2.5 million over 2008. Although the aid to families is increasing, states are and will continue to struggle to serve all that are affected by the faltering economy.