



ESA: Reducing Disparities & COVID-19

July 2, 2020

MI Bridges

Programs

Go to Michigan.gov/MIbridges today to apply for benefits and learn about resources in your community:



Cash Assistance

Help meet the basic needs of eligible pregnant women and low-income families with minor children.



Childcare Assistance

Helps pay for childcare costs.



Emergency Assistance

Provides assistance for emergency housing, utility and burial situations.



Food Assistance

Provides benefits to buy or grow food.



Health Care Coverage

Offers programs to pay for medical costs through Medicare, Medicaid or the Healthy Michigan Plan.



Nutrition Assistance

Provides healthy foods for Women, Infants and Children.



Explore Resources

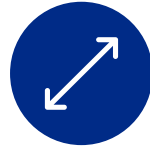
Lists helpful state and local resources near you, whether you have a new baby, lost a job or experienced the loss of a friend or family member.

Do you know an older adult who needs meals or wellness checks while we stay home and stay safe?

Visit Michigan.gov/AASA.



Goals



EXPAND ACCESS



PROMOTE FAIRNESS



ENCOURAGE SUCCESS



SIMPLIFY PROGRAMS



STRENGTHEN BENEFITS

MI Bridges Community Partners



Navigation Partner ?

Helps clients apply for benefits, find resources, and use MI Bridges.



Access Partner ?

Provides Internet access and computers for clients to access MI Bridges.

Caseload and Issuance Growth

Program	January 2020	May 2020
FIP – Active Cases	15,206	24,429
FIP - Issuance	\$5,262,417	\$10,472,958
FAP-Active Cases	624,163	811,099
FAP - Issuance	\$135,870,042	\$263,227,982
Medicaid- Active Cases	1,048,857	1,071,739

COVID-19 Response

Leveraging time-limited federal flexibilities to streamline access, maintain benefits throughout crisis

Food Assistance

- Become one of the first states to deliver emergency allotment food assistance with federal funds totaling \$66.3-\$75 per month (March-June) to help 386,000 Michigan families put food on the table.
- Gained federal approval to temporarily suspend work requirements for 27,000 able-bodied adults without dependents receiving food assistance during the public health emergency to help them adhere to the state's shelter-in-place order.
- Became the first state to issue Pandemic EBT benefits to nearly 900,000 children eligible for free or reduced lunch benefits. This provided beneficiaries with \$193.80 for March and April benefits in addition to \$182.40 for May and June benefits
- Gained federal approval to defer all recertification activities for families accessing food assistance so that families do not lose food aid during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Implemented on-line EBT technology allowing food assistance recipients the ability to purchase groceries on-line through Amazon and Walmart.

Cash Assistance

- Suspended requirements that families on the Family Independence Program (FIP) leave home to participate in employment activities, to enable them to adhere to the state's shelter-in-place order
- Postponed requirements for K-12 school attendance of children in families receiving FIP while schools are closed

Refugee Cash Assistance

- Under direction of the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, provided an extension to Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) eligibility beyond 8 months to a total of 18 months eligibility

COVID-19 Response

Leveraging time-limited federal flexibilities to streamline access, maintain benefits throughout crisis

Cross Program

- Suspended requirements for in-person interview requirements on all programs to the greatest extent possible to allow families to adhere to the shelter-in-place order.
- Allowed for applications to be taken over the phone to ensure individuals can sign up for benefits while social distancing.
- Deferred applicants from having to attend employment and training activities to avoid congregating in public settings.
- Ensured that Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) and direct economic impact payments were disregarded as income so that the payments did not affect eligibility for programs, except for SNAP.

State Emergency Relief

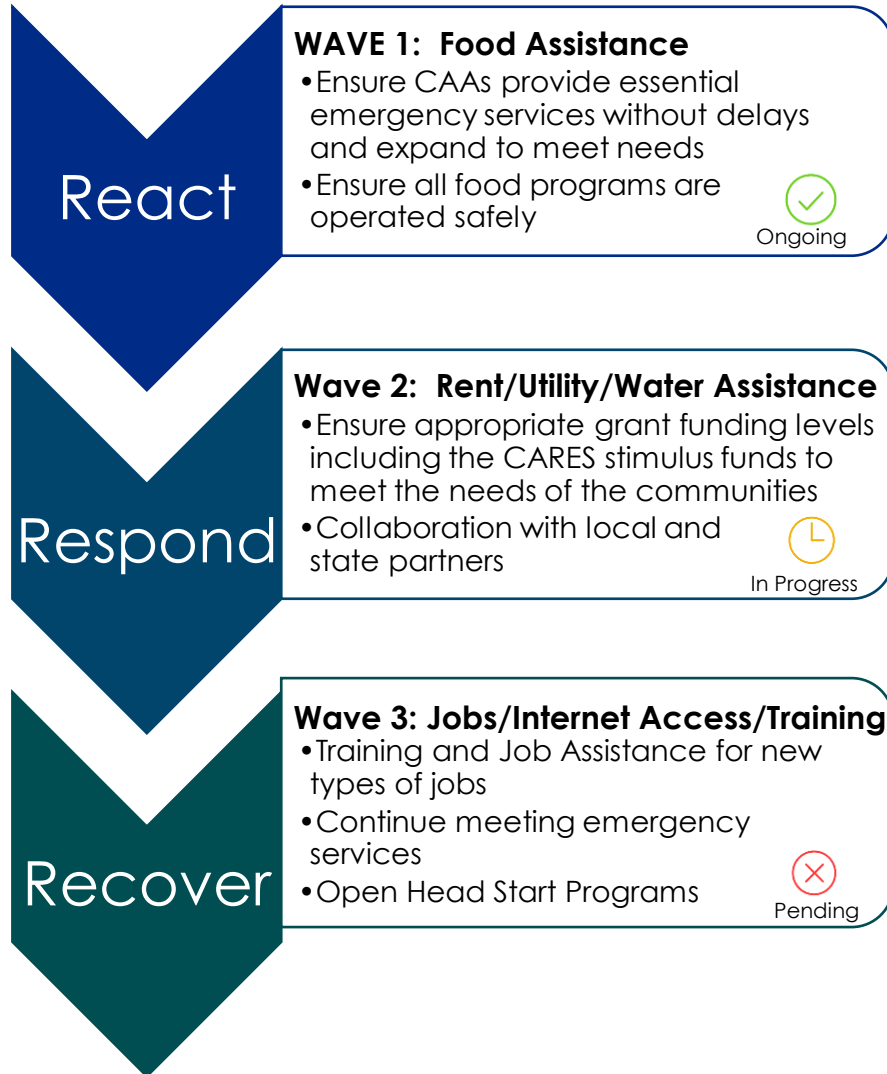
- Implemented numerous policy changes to streamline access to energy assistance through State Emergency Relief (SER), such as removing interview requirements, simplifying asset tests, and eliminating the one-time limit on aid and co-pay requirements.
- Increased the energy caps on deliverable fuel, natural gas, wood, electricity, and others to provide additional assistance to households during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Made direct payments to families facing utility shut offs to more than 47,106 families served by DTE, Consumers or Semco.

State Disability Assistance

- Temporarily waived Disability Determination Services (DDS) determinations to encourage adherence to social distancing.
- Continued to provide benefits when redeterminations were overdue, ensuring benefits were not ending prematurely.
- All interviews completed via phone and assisting clients if they are not able to get verifications due to closures.

COVID-19 Response

Leveraging time-limited federal flexibilities to streamline access, maintain benefits throughout crisis



MDHHS – Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity provides funding to

28 Community Action Agencies

to assist low-income individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency and to assist communities in reducing poverty in all 83 Michigan counties for over 50 years.




COVID-19 Response Goals:

- Keep people safe
- Quickly respond to needs
- Reduce face to face contact
- Provide Emergency Services Safely
 - Food
 - Housing
 - Household Goods/Hygiene Items
 - Utility
 - Water
 - Minor Home Repair
 - Transportation
 - Tax Preparation
 - Childcare
 - Other Needs



CAAs will address the consequences of unemployment, economic disruption, social distancing, lack of supplies, isolation/quarantine impact, and harmful effects of the virus on vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. CAAs have expanded their emergency services intake, delivery, and distribution activities using multiple technologies to reduce and limit face to face contact with clients, guests, staff, partners, and volunteers

Emergency Policy Updates for CAAs

	Purpose	To provide relief and immediate recovery efforts for low-income individuals and families negatively impacted by the conditions of COVID-19.
	Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Service Block Grant • CSBG CARES • Weatherization Assistance Program
	Apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to find a CAA near you: https://mcac.memberclicks.net/agency-map • Call 211 for a referral • Use Mi Bridges portal and select a CAA in your county https://newmibridges.michigan.gov/s/isd-landing-page?language=en_US

Conditions on Program Participation

Family Size	200% of Poverty
1	\$25,520
2	\$34,480
3	\$43,440
4	\$52,400
5	\$61,360
6	\$70,320
7	\$79,280
8	\$88,240



Household Income Eligibility updated to **200%**, from 125%, of federal poverty level for **the preceding 30 days**



Automatic Eligibility for Emergency Services for clients active in MDHHS's programs 200% or below FPL



CAAs have the flexibility to use a client's **electronic signature** or have CAA staff document phone consent



CAAs create their own internal policy on required verifications within the parameters of funding requirements

Water Utility Assistance

Purpose

Retain water service for FAP eligible residential households through December 1, 2020

Program

Reimburse water utility providers for forgiving arrearages* and fees incurred during the COVID-19 state of emergency and for providing a 25% discount on the total water bill for eligible customers.

Conditions on Program Participation



No water shutoffs for 90 days beyond when customer receives assistance



Forgive 25% of water bill sent to residential customer before December 1, 2020



No collections and no action that affects residential customer's credit score



Notify client of discount provided and bill forgiveness



Benefits in addition to local water utility assistance program

* Maximum reimbursement for each arrearage is \$700.00

Eviction Diversion Program

Purpose

Prevent households with incomes up to 100% of Area Median Income (AMI) from being evicted after the moratorium on evictions ends on July 15th.

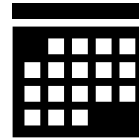
Program

Provide a lump sum rental assistance payment covering 90% of a tenants COVID-19 housing debt.

Conditions on Program Participation



Non-COVID-19 housing debt must be paid by tenant either in a lump sum or as part of a conditional dismissal



Conditional dismissals that include EDP rental assistance must require the defendant's share of the amount due to be paid in 12 equal monthly payments



Plaintiff must waive any late fees or penalties and forgive 10% of remaining amount due

Equity Reforms

PROGRAM **REFORM**

BENEFIT

FAP

Drug Felony Disqualifications

Remove the lifetime ban on public benefits for those formerly convicted of drug related crimes.

SNAP benefits can reduce recidivism and provide benefits to children of families affected by drug felonies.

Restaurant Meals Program

Implement RMP, which allows elderly, disabled, and homeless clients to purchase hot prepared foods.

Can address food insecurity for populations that lack kitchen access/face difficulty preparing their own food.

Elderly Simplified Application Project

Waives interview requirements, reduces need for verification, and provides simplified application for elderly applicants

Streamlines access to public benefit programs for elderly households

FIP

Time Limits

Increase the time limit to 60 months.

Providing additional months of assistance can address severe income needs and help families with multiple barriers to work.

Payment Standard

Raise the payment standard. MI is \$492 for a family of 3, compared to \$789 in NY and \$1,039 in NH.

Higher payment standard should reflect inflation in the cost-of-living for low-income families.

Sanctions

Reduce the severity of sanctions given for non-compliance with work requirements.

Michigan is above the national average in the use and severity of sanctions, which can lead to severe economic hardship for households permanently barred from assistance.

Equity Reforms

PROGRAM REFORM

BENEFIT

CROSS
PROGRAM

Equity Impact
Assessment

Systematically analyzing how different racial and ethnic groups are affected by a proposed action or decision.

Minimize unanticipated adverse consequences and identify options for remedying inequities.

Cross Enrollment

Reducing poverty & promoting equity by simplifying cross enrollment in programs

Simplify access to benefits and increase the number of individuals applying for and receiving MDHHS administered benefits (Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, WIC, State Emergency Relief).

Starting with WIC: Will text message residents that are on FAP/MA who may be eligible for WIC.

Expanding MIBridges to encourage cross enrollment to other MDHHS programs, non-DHHS state Government programs, and non-Governmental programs.

Increasing
Access

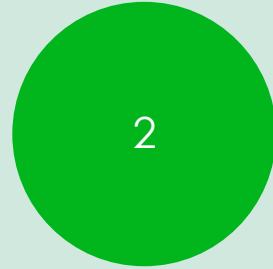
Improving access to MDHHS by expanding navigators and continuing to bridge the digital divide

Our most vulnerable populations often lack access to the internet/phones.

Discussion



What opportunities can DHHS pursue to better serve Michigan's residents?



What equity issues are you working on that we haven't covered?



How can we partner to address some of the issues surfaced today?