

How Does The System Hurt Or Help?: Exploring Material Hardship And Administrative Burden

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What is material hardship?

An inability to meet basic needs

Food insufficiency

Housing hardship

Medical hardship

Utilities hardship



How common is material hardship?

1 in 10 food insufficient

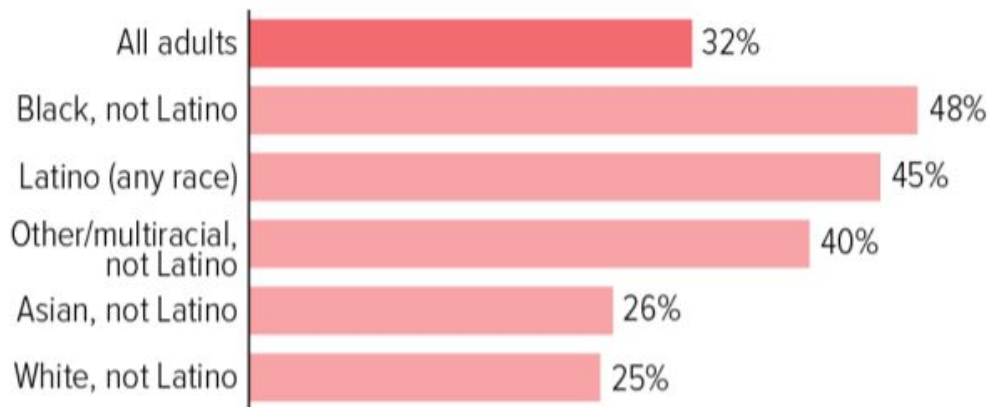
1 in 6 behind on rent

1 in 3 households difficulty meeting “usual household expenses”

FIGURE 6

1 in 3 Adults Had Trouble Paying for Usual Household Expenses in Last 7 Days

Share of adults reporting that it was somewhat or very difficult for their household to pay for usual expenses, as of September 16-28, 2020



Note: Other/multiracial, not Latino = people identifying as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race. Percentages are based on reporting distributions and do not include the populations that did not respond to the question.

Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey

Administrative Burden

Cost associated with interacting with the government

Learning costs

Compliance costs

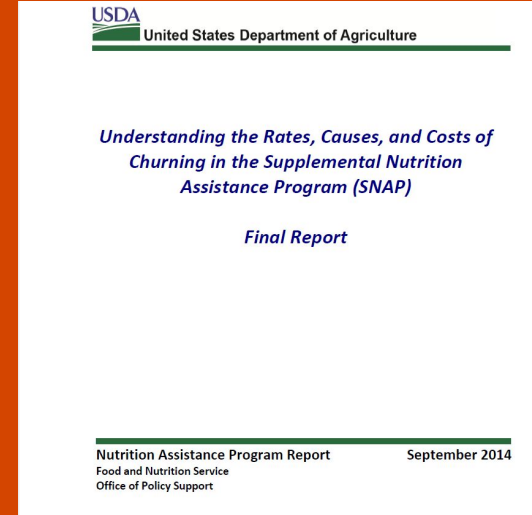
Psychological costs

To what extent do our programs
create material hardship through
administrative burden?

What can we do to reduce administrative burden and support our clients?

The Problem: Administrative Churn in SNAP

Churn: when a SNAP case exits the program and then reenters within four months or less.




Costs of Churn: Foregone benefits among eligible recipients results in food insecurity


“They’ll change your date without telling you in the mail or nothing, and you’ll be up there with a bunch of food, and you have to walk away and leave it [food at the grocery store]. That is one of the most embarrassing things.”


“They’re really nonchalant about telling you “oh, you’ll get it later.” Well, your kids need to eat now.”

Costs of Churn: Administrative costs closing and reopening the same case

 Closing and reopening a SNAP case takes more staff time than recertifying.

 Costs of recertification are 1/3 the cost of initial application

 State average costs per churn event range from \$82-\$133

 Churn may account for 12% of total statewide recertification costs

 1%-3.7% of total state administrative costs

Creating Evidence-Based Strategies to Reduce SNAP Churn

- USDA-funded project to link Hennepin County to research teams at Syracuse University and University of Minnesota Future Services Institute
- Apply insights from behavioral science to the SNAP recertification process
- Evaluate quickly and iterate to improve client experience and reduce administrative burden

Current Pain Points in SNAP Recertification Process

Unclear

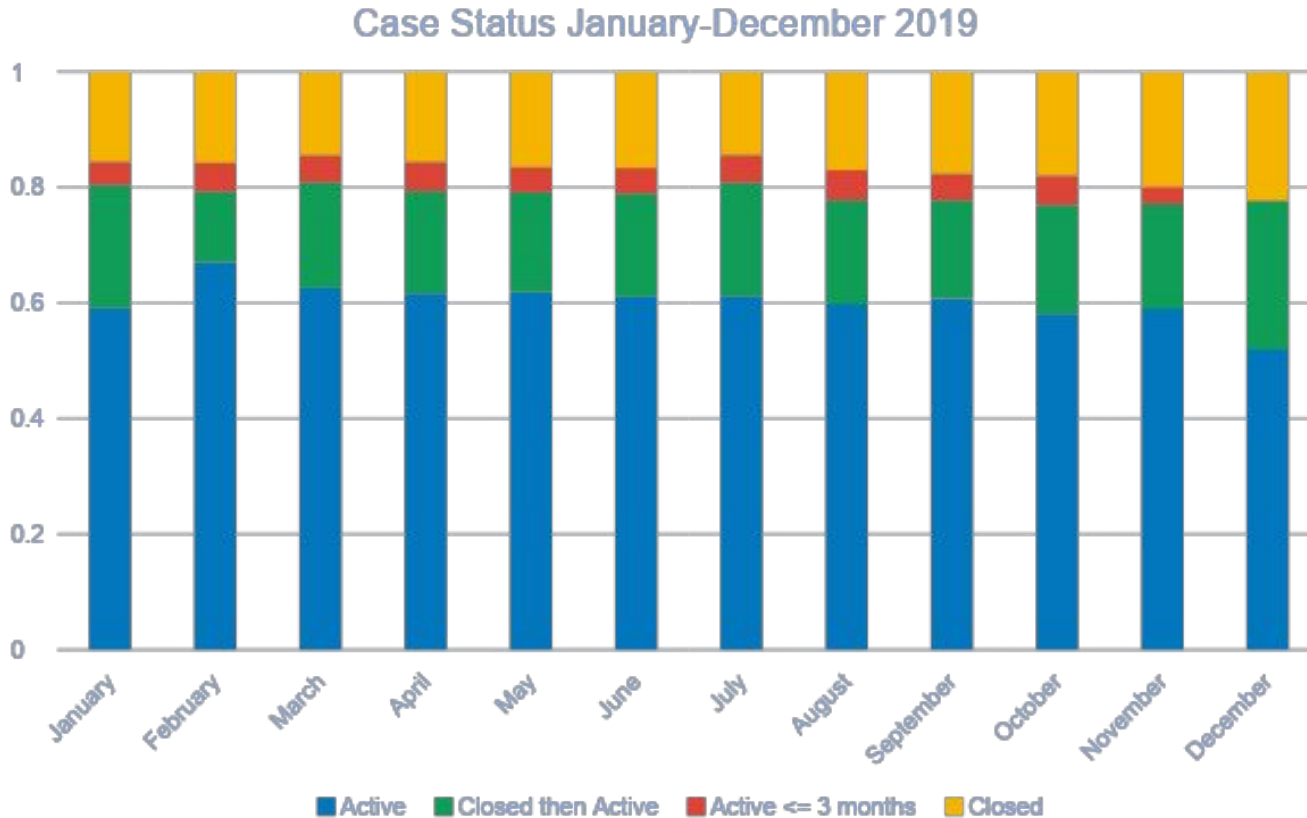
- Communication primarily uses mail for more transient population
- Notices have limited font and formatting options

Complicated

- Hennepin residents do not have to schedule interview
- Multiple deadlines and notices from both the state and county

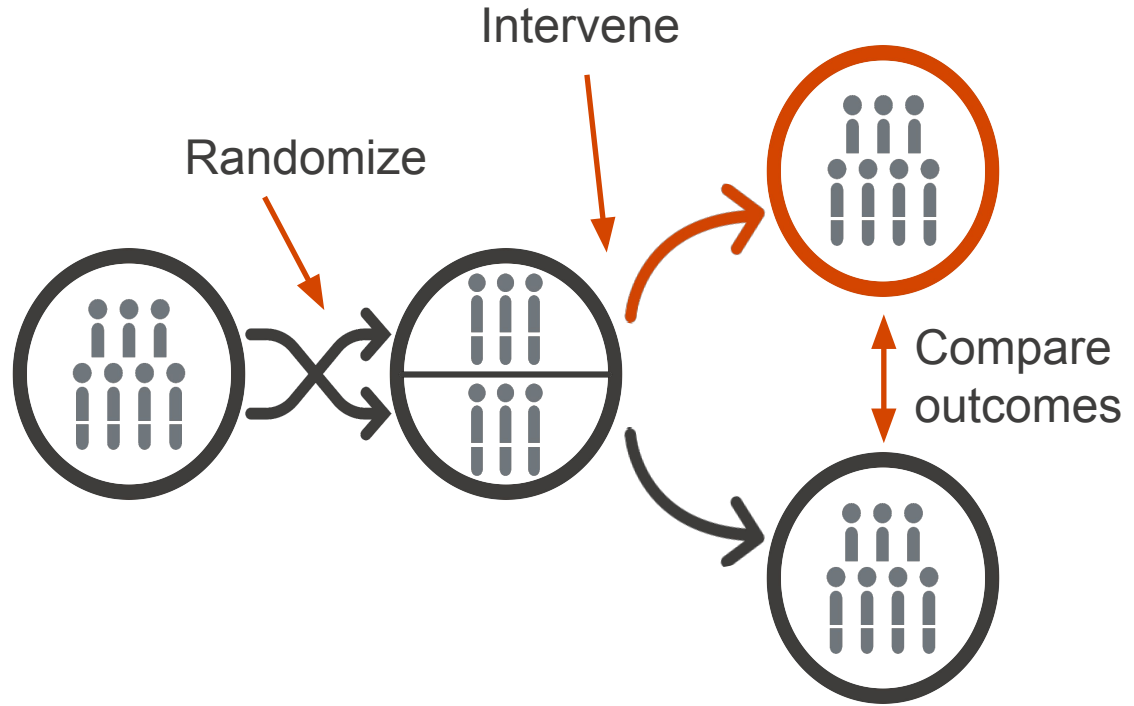
Case Status During Recertification Month

About 1 in 5 SNAP cases do not recertify on time and return within 30 days



Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT)

Rapid and low-cost RCTs are the most powerful way to cost-effectively improve program outcomes. We can be sure observed differences are due solely to the new intervention and scale up or trying something else.



Strongest Field Trail (July 2019-February 2020) focused on reminder to clients about 27 days before recertification date

3 Treatment Arms and 1 Control Group

Group 1: Behaviorally Informed Text

Group 2: HC Language Auto-dialer


Group 3: Text and Auto-dialer

Group 4: No reminder

"Hennepin: We want you to keep your food benefits. Fill out the forms we mailed and call us @ 612-596-1300 for an interview or questions."

Bottom Line


Recertification improved by 5-15%, depending on the group from 1 text reminder sent ~1 month before deadline.



(Preceded by 2 mailed notices and followed by 2 mailed notices.)



Administrative burden can be reduced by simple information strategies.



On-time recertification improves SNAP client experience, reduces material hardship, and reduces agency costs.

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