



STREAMLINING ACCESS TO CHILD CARE BENEFITS IN OHIO

May 2023

State: State of Ohio

Agency: Department of Administrative Services, Department of Job and Family Services

Award Category: Digital Services: Government to Citizen

Project Title: Streamlining Access to Child Care Benefits in Ohio: The Integration of the Child Care Benefits Program into Ohio Benefits

Project Dates: Child Care Pilot: March 2022 through Child Care Statewide Rollout: July 2022

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Executive Summary

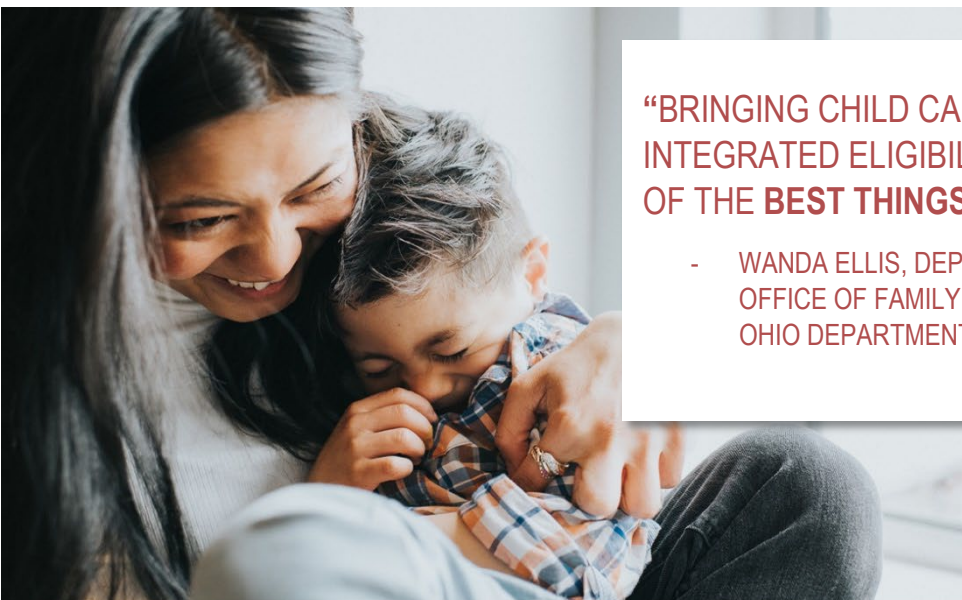
Streamlining Access to Child Care Benefits in Ohio

At a time when many Ohioans need multiple support services, including affordable and accessible Child Care, Ohio initiated a needs assessment across 88 Ohio counties to evaluate how to streamline access to Child Care benefits. This research revealed that **95% of the people receiving Child Care benefits in Ohio also receive Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or Cash Assistance benefits.** As a result of the overlap between two different systems, the state decided to integrate Child Care directly into the state's integrated eligibility system, Ohio Benefits, which already serves more than three million Ohioans across Medicaid, SNAP, and Cash Assistance.

This integration provides Ohioans the opportunity to manage multiple benefits, including Child Care, through a **single system**, making it easier for residents to access critical support services and reducing the workload for caseworkers. This project also led to a reduction in Child Care IT support costs by eliminating the need for a standalone Child Care eligibility system.

Ohio recognized that bringing Child Care into Ohio Benefits would not be trivial. To manage this complexity, Ohio chose a multiphase rollout approach that included separate application intake and conversion pilots ahead of the statewide rollout. This provided the opportunity to bring lessons learned and system modifications forward, in advance of a statewide implementation. It also helped ensure a positive change experience for system users.

The success of this project is evidenced by positive feedback from counties and the implementation outcomes, including a **99.48% accuracy rate for active case conversion.** As a result of this project, **70,000 existing beneficiary families** including **145,000 children**, as well as new families, can apply for and administer their Child Care benefits using a **single integrated application.**



“BRINGING CHILD CARE ELIGIBILITY TO OUR INTEGRATED ELIGIBILITY SYSTEM WAS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS WE DID FOR OHIOANS.”

- WANDA ELLIS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE,
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

IDEA



The Opportunity

The Child Care Benefits Program is a vital initiative aimed at improving the lives of parents, guardians, and their children. Most applicants eligible for Child Care benefits are also eligible for other benefit programs including Medicaid, SNAP and Cash Assistance. Therefore, the integration of the Child Care Benefits Program into the existing Ohio Benefits Worker Portal and Resident Self-Service Portal presented an opportunity to streamline the user experience for Ohioans and caseworkers, making it a strategic priority for the Governor’s Office for Children Initiatives.

Why Does it Matter?

Integrating Child Care into Ohio Benefits provides better accessibility to Child Care benefits and a superior experience for users, both Ohioans and case workers alike.

Prior to Child Care Implementation in Ohio Benefits		
Ohioans	County Case Workers	Program Office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Applied for Child Care benefits separately from other assistance programs × Provided the same information across different applications that ultimately came to the same agency, sometimes the same case worker × Did not have access to an application 24/7 in the language they preferred using a mobile device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Administered benefits in multiple systems requiring them to enter data multiple times × Had to learn two vastly different systems to deliver Child Care benefits versus Medicaid, SNAP, and Cash Assistance benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Operated and maintained multiple systems for different benefits eligibility × Supported a Child Care eligibility system on an aging infrastructure that was difficult to change

What Makes it Different?

The incorporation of the Child Care Benefits Program into the main benefits system, Ohio Benefits, sets Ohio apart as one of the early adopters of moving Child Care into an integrated system that includes other public assistance programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and Cash. This integration simplifies the process for Ohioans to apply for and manage their benefits and reduces the burden on case workers who no longer need to access multiple systems. By streamlining the user experience and making support services more accessible, Ohio is taking a critical step toward improving access and delivery of social services.

IMPLEMENTATION



What was the Roadmap?

Ohio rolled this project out over multiple phases in 2022. This approach enabled the program to incorporate lessons learned and improvements from earlier phases to continue to improve the experience as the rollout expanded.

MARCH 2022

Rollout Phase 1: Pilot – New Application Intake (March 2022)

The initial rollout phase focused on processing new applications in five pilot counties. Careful attention was paid to the pilot counties to understand how they adapted to using the new system, and to identify system and training improvement opportunities that could be applied to later phases.

MAY 2022

Rollout Phase 2: Pilot – Existing Application Conversion (May 2022)

The second phase converted data from the legacy system for the pilot counties so that all applications, new or existing, were now fully transitioned to Ohio Benefits for those five counties. Conducting this pilot conversion also enabled the project to learn what data challenges might be encountered with the statewide population in later phases.

JUNE 2022

Rollout Phase 3: Statewide – New Application Intake (June 2022)

With the third phase, the project expanded to the remaining eighty-three counties for processing new applications. Learnings from the first phase helped ensure a smooth statewide expansion.

JULY 2022

Rollout Phase 4: Statewide – Existing Application Conversion (July 2022)

The final phase concluded the rollout by executing the remaining statewide conversion. This enabled all counties to retire use of the legacy system and to operate entirely in the Ohio Benefits system going forward for Child Care processing.

Who Was Involved?

The success of the Child Care Integration initiative was the result of a collaborative effort across multiple stakeholders, spanning both the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). DAS and ODJFS brought a team of business subject matter experts, project managers, policy experts, communications leaders, and technologists together to create a solution that improved the experience of the residents and caseworkers who interact with Ohio Benefits.

To ensure a smooth rollout, DAS and ODJFS also partnered with the Ohio County Directors' Association (part of the County Department of Job and Family Services or CDJFS) and with the Ohio Child Care Resource & Referral Association (OCCRA). CDJFS and OCCRA active participation and feedback was critical in developing and executing an effective rollout strategy that impacted over 750 caseworkers and over 6000 Child Care providers.

How Did We Do It?

This project leveraged best practices and lessons learned from earlier implementation projects within the Ohio Benefits Program, including five key best practices:

1. **Research-led Stakeholder Analysis and Requirements:**

To design and implement the solution, we began by conducting a needs assessment, which involved visiting each county to gain a deeper understanding of unique needs and business processes related to Child Care. We then used the insights to develop standardized business processes along with supporting system requirements, ensuring that the needs of parents, providers, and agencies were all taken into consideration.

2. **Ongoing End User Participation:**

We involved end users both up front during the design process and again during test phases to ensure that we delivered on the promise of integrating Child Care into Ohio Benefits. During analyze and design, we carried out Human Centered Design (HCD) research that involved more than 300 Ohioans to evaluate the effectiveness of the online self-service application process. We also engaged county case workers during our design phase to seek early feedback, and again during User Acceptance Testing, where we involved more than 40 case workers.

3. **Iterative Conversion Runs:**

Our project team mastered the process of converting cases from the legacy system to Ohio Benefits by adopting an iterative process that enabled multiple mock runs and dry runs. These efforts started seven months prior to the Pilot Conversion and nine months prior to Statewide Conversion. These early runs provided precise sets of fallouts, and the team identified a targeted action plan that ODJFS and case workers could use to perform data cleanup activities in the legacy system prior to the final conversion run. This practice resulted in us being able to convert more than 99% of cases successfully from the legacy system.

4. **Phased Rollout Approach:**

The rollout of the solution was completed in phases (as outlined in the roadmap section above). First, we piloted the intake of new applicants in five counties to see how well they worked in practice. After that, we piloted the conversion of existing applicants in those five counties to ensure a smooth transition for those already in the system. Based on the success of the pilots, we expanded the intake of new applicants statewide, rolling out the solution across all counties. Finally, we expanded the conversion of existing applicants statewide, ensuring that everyone was in the same system.

5. **Virtual Boots on Ground Support:**

Moving to Ohio Benefits was a big change for county case workers accustomed to processing Child Care on the legacy system. With Pandemic Health Emergency restrictions limiting in person support, project leadership planned for a dedicated virtual helpline that provided high-touch virtual support for case workers to get questions answered quickly. This helpline was staffed with the same business analysts and testers that designed and tested the system, providing deep system expertise.



IMPACT



What Did the Project Make Better?

By integrating Child Care into Ohio Benefits, Ohio created a seamless experience for Ohioans that achieved multiple positive outcomes for Ohio families and for case workers.

✓ Digital Communication Channel
Providing a single Self-Service Portal for accessing multiple benefits, making it easier for parents and guardians to apply for and manage benefits. Statistics showed 95% of the people receiving Medicaid or SNAP benefits were also receiving Child Care benefits.

✓ Increasing Accessibility of Benefits
Increasing accessibility of benefits by providing a Self-Service Portal that accepts applications 24/7, can automatically adapt to provide a mobile-friendly experience in three different languages (English, Spanish and Somali).

✓ Easier Pre-screening for Families
Benefitting Ohioans by providing more clarity into application and screening process with pre-screening tools which reside within the same Self-Service portal.

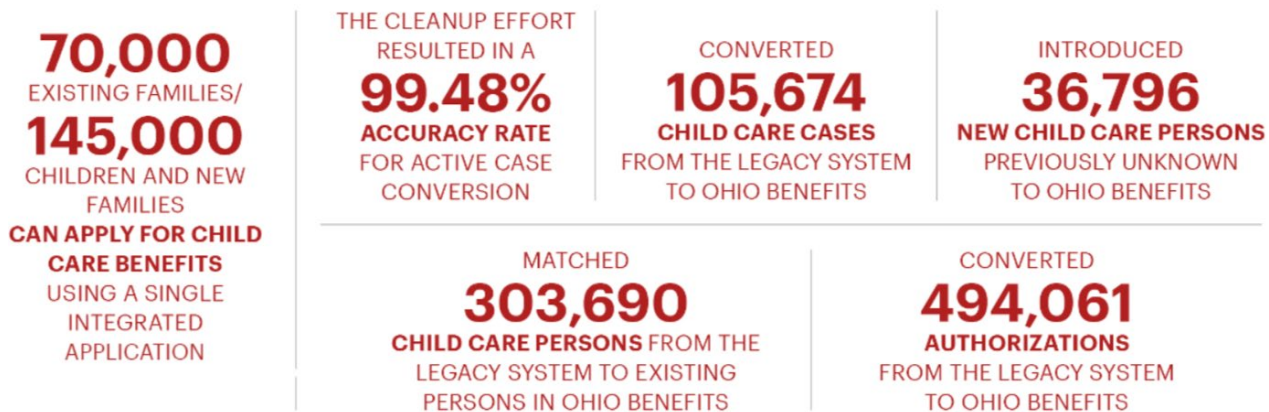
✓ Increasing Operational Effectiveness
Increasing operational effectiveness for the counties by having the county caseworkers work in one less system as they administered Medicaid, SNAP, Cash Assistance and Child Care benefits.

✓ Reduction in IT Spend
Aligning with the state's Enterprise IT plan by extending Child Care benefits through Ohio Benefits helped reduce IT spend by \$40M yearly.

✓ Streamlined Case Processing
Streamlined case processing by reducing the need to be trained on and work within multiple systems to administer benefits. This created an opportunity to have 'super case workers' that can really get to know the family they are serving across all their public assistance needs.

How Do We Know?

This project has been a great success, and we are proud to have successfully streamlined access to Child Care benefits in Ohio.



What Now?

The integration of the Child Care Benefits Program into Ohio's main benefits system, Ohio Benefits, represents a critical step forward in the modernization and streamlining of social service delivery in the state. By implementing standardized business processes and simplifying the application and management of benefits, Ohio has made it easier for residents to access critical support services while reducing the workload for case workers.

The project demonstrated how successful collaboration and best practices enable streamlining benefits access. The Ohio Benefits Program continues to build on this collaboration model and has added regular county visits as a go forward practice to ensure that Ohio Benefits meets the needs of Ohioans and its case workers.