

Improving Client Communications

Applying Best Practices and Client Feedback to
Colorado Benefit Management System Notices



Prepared for

Colorado Department of Health Care
Policy and Financing

Spring 2016

MAXIMUS | Center for Health Literacy

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2016, the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (the Department) partnered with the MAXIMUS Center for Health Literacy (CHL) to improve eligibility communications for clients seeking or receiving medical, food, and cash assistance benefits. By improving these communications, the Department hopes clients can better access eligibility information, take required actions to maintain eligibility, and manage their benefits.

Our project focused on three major steps—notice development, client testing, and best practices. We recommend further improvements to communications based on all three.

Notice development: Three sample notices—one Notice of Action (NOA) and two Redetermination, Recertification and Renewal (RRR) notices— were developed based on:

- Existing notices
- Industry best practices for readability and usability
- Experience gathered from revising similar notices for other states
- A comprehensive legal review

Client testing: The revised notices were tested in eight locations across Colorado through a series of interviews. Participants included a mix of clients receiving medical, food, or cash assistance and a mix of demographics including both Spanish speakers and people with disabilities. Testing results showed:

- Most participants thought the notices looked easy to read. They liked the section divisions, headings, bold, shading, and simple icons to highlight key messages.
- Most participants understood the purpose of the notices and could find key information.
- Participants did have difficulty comprehending some key messages within the notices, especially in the NOA. Participants were confused by Marketplace concepts and terms, multiple program contact information, and exact next steps.
- Many participants reacted negatively to the length of the notices.

After testing, we revised the notices further based on testing results. Stakeholder feedback—gathered as part of the overall effort—was also incorporated into the revision.

Best practices: Best practices were developed for use in revising future eligibility communications. Best practices highlight key recommendations for content organization, formatting, and language, as well as provide recommendations related specifically to eligibility communications.

Next steps: Further improving client communications is a crucial to the Department’s mission of improving health care access and outcomes for all Coloradans. To support this, we recommend the Department:

1. Implement content organization, formatting, and language recommendations from the sample notices (See Section 3)
2. Reduce notice length by separating out educational, privacy, and legal information (See Section 4.7: Detailed Results)

3. Continue to provide alternative and accessible communication formats and look for new ways to further reach people with disabilities (See Section 4.7: People with Disabilities)
4. Raise awareness of new online communication tools while continuing to offer other offline channels (See Section 4.7: Communication Preferences)
5. Implement system changes to simplify processes and allow for individually-tailored communications (See Section 4.7: Systems)
6. Use best practices and lessons learned during this revision and testing effort to improve other eligibility communications (See Section 6)
7. Test the notices again after any significant changes