

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on information gathered over the course of this project, below are recommendations for DHS to improve access to SNAP:

1

## Track and improve customer service

**On all forms, notify clients of how to contact their caseworker and how to report maltreatment, if necessary**

**Improve accountability structures for CAO employees' conduct toward clients**

- Expand the after-call survey options that exist for the Customer Service Center to all calls within DHS.
- Develop a routine survey that individuals can complete following a CAO visit.
- Create a process for clients to anonymously report maltreatment that occurred during any in-person or telephone interaction.
- Publish survey results and anonymized complaints with their resolutions

**Collect and publicly publish customer service related data such as office wait times, call wait times, and disconnects**

**Re-evaluate staffing and training needs**

- Evaluate worker caseloads and time expectations, to ensure that staffing levels enable workers to accurately manage their caseload and take time to answer questions, make referrals, and provide quality service.
- Provide staff with on-going trauma-informed care training so they can recognize trauma responses in clients as well as gain skills for dealing with vicarious trauma from their daily work.
- Evaluate pay scales to retain skilled, high-performing staff.

2

## Improve systems for handling and sending documents

**Send document related alerts via text and/or email to consumers** to confirm that verification documents have been received, alert clients if documents are still needed, or provide other essential updates quickly

**Pilot mail tracking to measure mail times and/or considering utilizing a local mail service to streamline delivery (particularly in Pennsylvania's larger cities).**

**Ensure that mail dates are at least 3 weeks prior to due dates.** This includes ensuring that recertification interviews are scheduled at least three weeks from the mail date, as caseworkers currently do not call to complete this required interview if the paperwork is not received prior to the scheduled interview.

3

### **Increase Accessibility of SNAP Resources and Paperwork**

**Improve access to large-print forms and notices for individuals who indicate those needs during their application.**

**Expand language accessibility of COMPASS and the MyCOMPASS PA mobile app. Improve translation of notices and forms.**

**Form a usability testing group for SNAP applications, renewal forms, and notices.** Gather SNAP users, advocates, and DHS/CAO representatives to identify and improve confusing or unnecessarily invasive areas.

**Increase in-office access to shorter SNAP-only applications at CAOs, especially the two-page Elderly/Disabled Simplified Application.**

**Continue to provide assistance with applications and renewals over the phone.**

4

### **Improve Marketing of SNAP-related Information**

**Clarify and publicize vital information for benefit recipients,** such as how to report changes, information about appeals and reconsiderations, and ways to reach a caseworker.

**Improve marketing of services and resources already available to SNAP users** that can simplify the application and recertification processes, such as e-notices and the MyCOMPASS PA mobile app.

**Invest in the co-creation of SNAP marketing materials for specific populations:**

- **With community groups, students, and stakeholders:** promote the SNAP for college students webpage through a social media campaign.
- **With immigrant-serving organizations and community members:** produce outreach materials and a dedicated SNAP for Immigrants webpage in multiple languages, aimed at reducing stigma and dispelling rumors in immigrant communities..

DHS and Pennsylvania's officials need to improve the application process for SNAP benefits, removing barriers to enhance the lives of millions of residents. Prioritizing this issue is crucial for policymakers and enforcers.

Additional research should be conducted to determine how best to increase SNAP participation and retention of other populations that were not studied specifically in this report, including (but not limited to) immigrant populations, re-entrants (i.e., individuals who were formerly incarcerated), and people experiencing homelessness.