

Express Lane Update: April 2009

Express Lane Eligibility: Louisiana Moves Forward

Louisiana is in the vanguard of states moving ahead with implementing [Express Lane Eligibility](#) (ELE) as a result of the recent passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CHIPRA 2009), which makes ELE a state option.

Background:

Louisiana began its streamlining efforts with a bold and successful retention program, initiated in 2001, which has used information submitted to Food Stamps and TANF to renew coverage for Medicaid and CHIP (LaCHIP) through *ex parte* means. In 2007, the state took streamlining beyond retention, passing legislation to allow Medicaid and LaCHIP to rely on an income finding by another program agency to make an initial eligibility determination, although the state law was contingent upon federal authorizing legislation. With the passage of CHIPRA 2009, Louisiana was given the green light to move ahead with its ELE program.

Laying the groundwork:

Two years ago, Louisiana began laying the groundwork and developing plans for its anticipated ELE program. The effort was driven by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH), but it has also involved discussions with other key stakeholders, including officials from the Louisiana Department of Social Services, the Department of Revenue, the Department of Education, and parish (county) school systems.

Determining which programs to use for Express Lane Eligibility purposes:

In assessing which programs would provide the best platform for ELE, DHH sought to ensure that the process would result in enrollment of the state's most vulnerable children, which it defined as those below 133 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). It also sought to build ELE using only those programs whose eligibility decisions met a high standard of reliability. Given those criteria, DHH intends to deploy its initial ELE effort using Food Stamps and Child Care Assistance findings, as well as leveraging State Income Tax data for "leads."

How Louisiana's ELE program will work:

1. The state will conduct a data match with the Express Lane agency to identify children receiving benefits from that agency who do not receive Medicaid or LaCHIP and who have no record of insurance coverage as verified through a Third Party Liability contractor.
2. DHH will then mail a notice to the identified family informing them that their children are income-eligible for health coverage and urging them to call to activate their eligibility. A phone number provided on the notice will connect the family with an eligibility worker who can answer questions and confirm the income reported by the Express Lane agency.
3. Following the telephone contact, DHH will determine eligibility, relying on the income as assessed by the ELE agency and the conversation with the parent. DHH hopes to complete the eligibility process without obtaining a signed application, if federal approval allows them to do so.
4. Louisiana operates a Medicaid-expansion program (through CHIP) to 200 percent of FPL and thus should not be required to perform screen-and-enroll procedures as part of its ELE process.

How technology will facilitate Express Lane Eligibility:

Louisiana will facilitate its ELE effort by performing data matches to identify uninsured children in Food Stamps and Child Care Assistance programs. At this time, the state is not choosing to fully automate this ELE procedure for new enrollment. Its experience with the *ex parter* renewal process, which has been done manually up until now, has not been overly burdensome, and DHH believes that the manual process allows them to assist potential new enrollees more effectively.

In the case of renewal, the systems will be programmed to identify children with active Food Stamp cases and proceed through their renewal administratively, without employee intervention. Correspondence will be generated automatically and the electronic eligibility case record will contain automated entries documenting the annual review of eligibility, along with electronic copies of correspondence mailed to the household.

Next steps for Louisiana:

The very first step that the state will take is to fully automate the renewal process for children with an active Food Stamp case. These families will receive an automatically generated letter to call and report changes. Their eligibility will automatically be extended for 12 months unless they call the toll-free number to report changes.

Louisiana is waiting for federal guidance on CHIPRA 2009 before it deploys its ELE procedure for new applications. The state is exploring additional opportunities beyond Food Stamps and Child Care Assistance for this process, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).
