

OVERVIEW: RESTRUCTURING HUMAN SERVICES

The components described below are included in forthcoming legislation developed through a negotiated effort among Colorado Counties, Inc. (CCI), Colorado Human Services Directors Association (CHSDA), the Governor’s Office, state agencies, and advocacy organizations in response to growing funding challenges and sweeping federal changes, including H.R. 1. Grounded in a people-first approach, this proposal advances a deliberate, collaborative path to improve coordination and performance while minimizing disruption and supporting cost avoidance.

DESIGNING A COHORT MODEL

The bill directs the state and counties to design a cohort-based model for collaboratively administering public assistance programs, consisting of no more than 12 groups of counties. The goal is to build on existing county collaboration to improve consistency, efficiency, and service delivery while maintaining a strong county role.

Transition Planning and Stakeholder Input

The cohort model will be developed through an implementation work group that includes state agencies, counties, providers, and community stakeholders. The process requires broad engagement across urban, suburban, and rural communities to ensure the final model reflects regional differences and on-the-ground realities across the state.

Third-Party Consultant

The bill requires the state, in consultation with counties, to engage a third-party consultant to support the design of the cohort model and facilitate collaboration among counties, state agencies, and stakeholders, and to facilitate the development of the transition plan. The consultant will provide model options, operational analysis, and best practices to help develop a practical, locally informed approach.

Timeline

Work on the cohort model begins by July 1, 2026 with the formation of the implementation work group and engagement process. A transition plan must be

developed and submitted by January 1, 2027, with implementation of the new model beginning July 1, 2028.

Shared Work and Services

Cohorts are designed to allow counties to share workload across geographic boundaries through a coordinated, shared workflow, including the ability to distribute eligibility and case processing work across counties. This approach formalizes and expands on collaboration that already exists in some regions, while the state maintains oversight to ensure compliance with state and federal requirements. Additionally, the bill allows counties to coordinate certain administrative functions as shared services at the cohort level, including a call center, quality assurance, and security administration. This approach reduces duplication, leverages specialized expertise, and promotes more consistent and secure service delivery across counties.

Technology and Readiness

Implementation of the cohort model is dependent on technology and system improvements that support cross-county work sharing. The bill requires the state to ensure counties have adequate time, training, and support before the model goes live.

Oversight and Accountability

The state will retain supervisory authority over each county within a cohort to ensure compliance with state and federal requirements and consistent program administration. County roles and responsibilities within a cohort will be defined through future performance-based contracts developed in coordination with the state.

Regional State Support

The bill directs the state to employ up to 12 geographically dispersed regional managers to support cohort operations. These managers are responsible for providing guidance, direction, and technical assistance to ensure consistent, effective, and compliant delivery of public assistance programs.

Protections for Counties

The bill clarifies that counties are not financially or legally responsible for the performance of other counties within a cohort. This ensures collaboration can occur without shifting liability between counties.

CENTRALIZING FRAUD SERVICES

The bill centralizes fraud investigations related to eligibility across the state's major public assistance programs, including Medicaid, SNAP, childcare assistance (CCCAP), TANF, and adult financial programs. Instead of each county independently handling fraud cases, these functions are carried out through a single, statewide unit within the centralized services model. This creates a more uniform approach to identifying and investigating potential fraud across programs. The change is intended to improve consistency and efficiency in how fraud is addressed statewide.

CREATING A POLICY ALIGNMENT TEAM

The bill creates a state cross-departmental policy alignment team made up of senior staff from the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, and the Department of Early Childhood. The team is responsible for aligning policies across major public assistance programs to improve coordination, especially for individuals and families who interact with multiple systems. It will review existing policies, analyze impacts on funding and service delivery, and develop standardized, evidence-based guidance to promote consistency across programs and counties. The team also plays a coordinating role on major policy changes, implementation guidance, and budget requests across departments. While it does not replace formal rulemaking authority, it adds an ongoing structure for cross-agency alignment and strategic decision-making.

BUILDING A CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

The bill establishes a statewide continuous quality improvement (CQI) process to regularly review how public assistance programs are being administered across counties. This process focuses on analyzing performance data, error rates, and inconsistencies in eligibility determinations to identify root causes of issues. State departments will work collaboratively with counties to use this information to improve accuracy, consistency, and overall program performance. The bill also requires annual

reporting to the Joint Budget Committee on the outcomes of the CQI process and any improvements achieved. Overall, CQI creates an ongoing feedback loop to support better decision-making and continuous improvement across the system.

IMPROVING DATA TRANSPARENCY

The bill requires the state to publicly report monthly performance data across major public assistance programs, including Medicaid, SNAP, child care assistance, TANF, and adult financial programs. The reporting will include key metrics such as application timeliness, caseloads, eligibility outcomes, call center performance, and appeals. Data will be published at both the county and statewide level, creating greater visibility into how programs are performing across Colorado. Counties will be responsible for providing the underlying data, with support from state departments for implementation and reporting. The goal is to improve transparency, support better decision-making, and provide a clearer picture of program performance for policymakers and the public.

ESTABLISHING A PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The bill creates a unified statewide performance and accountability framework for public assistance programs. It establishes clear expectations for both state agencies and counties through performance-based contracts that include measurable outcomes, monitoring, and corrective action processes when needed. To ensure fairness and consistency, the bill also aligns quality assurance reviews and management evaluations across programs so that performance is measured the same way statewide. The framework is designed to support continuous improvement by pairing standardized evaluation tools with regular performance monitoring and data-driven feedback. Importantly, the structure applies to both counties and state departments, reinforcing shared responsibility for program performance and outcomes.