



HRA Launches Automatic Appointment Reminder Calls for SNAP Applicants

As part of HRA's Benefits Re-engineering Initiative, the Family Independence Administration (FIA) and Management Information Systems (MIS) launched an automated phone system to call and remind people applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits of an upcoming telephone interview. These pre-recorded 'robo-calls,' similar to automatic reminders for a doctor's appointment, help make sure clients and new applicants do not miss their scheduled interviews, which could cause delays in receiving the benefits that help many New Yorkers feed their families.

Reminder calls for application and recertification appointments begin one day before the scheduled appointment, and go out at least three times in an effort to reach the intended household. In the first two days of the service, MIS made 3,372 calls. 1,652 voicemail messages were left and 1,563 households answered the calls. The calls contain a generic, pre-recorded message so as not to disclose any confidential personal information.

In June 2014, MIS is planning to release an upgraded version of the automated reminder call system. This version will include reminders not only of upcoming interviews and appointments, but also of missed appointments in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Arabic and Haitian Creole for both the SNAP and Cash Assistance (CA) Programs' customers.

New Yorkers have more options available to them than ever when applying for SNAP benefits. Online applications have been available since 2010 through ACCESS NYC, the City's online portal. New Yorkers can also apply for SNAP at self-service computer banks in HRA centers and through community-based organizations in their own neighborhoods, in addition to applying in-person. Phone interviews have been another important addition to the SNAP process, making it easier for applicants who work or care for their families to apply without having to appear at a center for an in-person interview. The addition of automatic reminder calls makes the process easier for clients to manage, reducing the chance that someone may miss an important phone call. It also helps HRA staff make the most efficient use of their time in serving clients.

As noted above, the automatic reminder call system is part of HRA's Benefits Re-engineering Initiative, which focuses on giving clients more options in how they apply and interact with programs, improving customer service, streamlining workload for staff, embracing new technology and saving taxpayer money. Other parts of the Re-engineering initiative include the self-service PC banks now available at many SNAP centers, RightFax fax machines for documents and applications also at many centers, upcoming redesign and improvement of the SNAP online application, the addition in the future of online recertification for SNAP and CA, and many other improvements that will help HRA process applications more efficiently.