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## **HRA DRAMATICALLY IMPROVES ACCESS TO PUBLIC BENEFITS USING THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY**

*More than one million New Yorkers manage their SNAP benefits using the ACCESS HRA app*

The NYC Human Resources Administration has optimized the way New Yorkers manage their benefits resulting in substantial improvements in access and client experience. These changes have not only made it easier for New Yorkers to apply for and maintain their benefits without having to visit an HRA office but are also enhancing agency operations by reducing foot traffic and affording staff more time to focus on clients that need additional support.

“HRA has taken unprecedented steps to use technology to improve the way New Yorkers interact with our agency,” said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**.

“With tools like the ACCESS HRA portal, the mobile app, the onsite service tools and the availability of On Demand telephone interviews, New Yorkers in need can access benefits faster and more effectively than ever before.”

The ACCESS HRA portal allows clients to apply for SNAP and Cash Assistance, and initiate Medicaid renewal. Clients can manage their cases, review their SNAP or Cash Assistance account balance, opt in to receive text messages or email alerts, request documents and track documents that have been submitted, view eligibility notices, and update their contact information as needed.

“Through these initiatives, HRA has modernized delivery of services through technology, ensuring that every New Yorker has access to the benefits they are eligible for,” said HRA Administrator Grace Bonilla. “These efforts have had an immediate positive impact and we hope we can continue using more innovative tools to improve the way we serve our clients.”

A powerful complement to the ACCESS HRA portal, the ACCESS HRA mobile app allows clients to utilize their phone or tablet to access the information available on the web portal, with the added advantage that clients can use their cameras to capture and submit images of SNAP and Cash Assistance eligibility documents to the Agency. It also allows clients to track their application and case status, check their benefits balance and recent payments, keep track of

upcoming appointments, review documents on file, and receive alerts and updates directly on their smartphone.

As part of this initiative HRA has implemented the use of on-site service tools in Agency centers, including self-serving check-in kiosks and PC banks. The check-in kiosks allow clients to identify the purpose of their visit and automatically receive a ticket to be appropriately routed within the center. At the PC banks clients can utilize ACCESS HRA with the assistance of staff and can scan required documents to apply or recertify for benefits.

Another important step to increase access to benefits and flexibility for our clients has been the implementation of On-Demand telephone interviews. An interview is required as part of the process of applying and recertifying for SNAP. In the past, clients were given a four-hour window to wait for a phone call from the center to conduct the interview. Now clients can request an interview over the phone and call in on an on-demand basis at their convenience. This service is currently available in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island, with Queens and the Bronx coming before the end of the year. In October 2015, before the implementation of the on-demand call center, only 52 percent of the completed SNAP recertification interviews were conducted via telephone. We now have 76 percent of the interviews held by phone – a 46 percent increase.

In an effort to spread the word about these latest reforms, HRA has launched a public information campaign to encourage those applying for SNAP and current recipients to use these tools. The campaign will be in subways, in ethnic print media, at 638 LinkNYC kiosks in all the five boroughs, and at neighborhood locations such as check cashing stores, bodegas, hair and nail salons, barber shops and laundromats.

In addition to all these tools for clients, the agency created the ACCESS HRA Provider Portal to give community organizations and advocates the opportunity to better assist their clients by providing them with real-time information on clients' benefits. The response has been remarkable, as of today more than 190 community organizations have signed up to utilize this tool.

These modernization efforts have had a positive impact for our clients and for Agency operations. SNAP in-center foot traffic has declined 32 percent since 2014. The percent of SNAP applications submitting online increased from 23 percent in 2013 to 78 percent in 2018 and the percent of SNAP application interviews conducted by phone increased from 29 percent in 2013 to 83 percent in 2018.

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