

Benefit, Employment & Support Services (BESSD) 2010-2014 Accomplishments

Improved and Expanded SNAP Services

- The DHS continues to improve its eligibility determination timeliness rates for both SNAP (formerly known as Food Stamps) and Medicaid benefits. When Governor Abercrombie first came into office, statewide processing timeliness averages for SNAP benefits were at 66%, and more than 5,000 Medicaid applications had not been reviewed in a timely manner. Today, our Medicaid processing timeliness rate approaches 100% and the statewide SNAP timeliness rate is 97.4%.
- In recognition of its improved timeliness rates, the SNAP program recently received a federal bonus award of \$724,139.
- The DHS, the DOH and the University of Hawaii Cooperative Extension Services (UH-CES), collaborated to provide guidance, training and technical assistance to community agencies participating in Farmers' Markets.
- SNAP funds were also utilized to permit the processing of EBT payments at Farmers' Markets. This option encourages SNAP participants to choose healthy foods and promotes local farmers, the economy, and protects the environment.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

- The DHS introduced and helped pass legislation in 2013 to eliminate the asset limit for the TANF program. The modification supports and encourages families on public assistance to save and explore potential asset building options that would help end their reliance on public assistance.

Homelessness

- To reduce homelessness through collaboration and innovation, the Governor's Homeless Coordinator convenes the Hawai'i Interagency Council on Homelessness (HICH) ensuring integration and coordination of services between the State, the Counties, non-profit providers and our federal partners at HUD and the VA. The HICH approach is best summarized by the phrase "all hands on deck." It recognizes that to end and prevent homelessness the approach requires a cross system, multi-dimensional, public private partnership that is as broad in scope and interrelated as the complexity of the causes of homelessness.

In September, 2012, the Council adopted its Plan to End Homelessness, modeled after the US Interagency Council on Homelessness plan. The plan and working committees are organized around the following priorities:

- Retooling the Homeless Crisis Response System;
 - Increasing Access to Stable and Affordable Housing;
 - Increasing Economic Stability and Self-sufficiency; and
 - Improving Health and Stability.
- As part of the “retooling of the response system” in February 2014 HICH hosted a public training and training of providers by Dr. Sam Tsemberis “Housing First: The Pathways Model to End Chronic Homelessness for People with Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders.” The DHS Homeless Programs Office (HPO) works closely with the Governor’s coordinator on this initiative, which is supported by a SAMHSA grant awarded to the Department of Health.
 - In 2014, the DHS was successful with its legislative budget request for \$1,500,000 for Housing First. The legislature also appropriated \$662,295 to the Hawaii Public Housing Authority, and the HPHA was able to leverage \$40,056,369 in additional federal funds that included additional funds for Section 8 vouchers.
 - During FY 2013, 13,639 individuals received Shelter and Outreach Program services through the DHS Homeless Program Office (HPO) provider network.
 - In collaboration with counties and their service providers, the HPO participates in the annual Homeless Point-in-Time Survey. State, county and county agencies use the survey day/week to help determine demographics of the State’s homeless population and to guide and better coordinate the implementation of appropriate programs and services.

School Readiness for Our Keiki

- The School Readiness program assists families in preparing their children for success in school. The Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division (BESSD) has established the School Readiness program for eligible low- to moderate- income 4 year-olds through the Preschool Open Doors Program (POD) in collaboration with the Governor’s Executive Office on Early Learning. The POD program received 1,793 applications for the 2014-15 school year - the highest number of applications in the past five years.
- The DHS continues to license Head Start Programs as childcare centers. However, in accordance with HRS 302L-1.5(e), under Act 178 of Session Laws Hawaii, 2012, functions of the Head Start Collaboration Office have been transferred from the DHS to the Executive Office of Early Learning (EOEL).