

# Stimulus Learning Series: Benefits & Economic Mobility

*Using the American Rescue Plan to Transform Benefits Delivery*

July 9, 2021



**HARVARD** Kennedy School  
Government Performance Lab

# Transforming benefits delivery to better serve the most vulnerable

## Vulnerable families are being left behind

Families are shut out from structures that support economic mobility – especially families of color

Overrepresentation of poor families and families of color in punitive, harmful, and stigmatizing experiences

**Government safety net does not support economic advancement out of poverty**

### What benefit programs were you frequently telling us about?

*Nutrition:* SNAP, WIC

*Housing:* Vouchers, LIHEAP

*Child care:* Licensing, Subsidies

*Cash assistance:* TANF, EITC

### What you've told us...

#### Barriers to access

Systems are difficult to access & navigate, esp. for marginalized communities

#### Ineffective supports

Families have multifaceted needs, but siloed programs address each separately

Supports for self-sufficiency sharply drop off as earnings increase

In-kind benefits may not match up with what empowers a family to exit poverty

#### Inefficient systems

Distortive administrative burden – obsolete technology, federal reqs.

Outdated skills among public sector staff

# You have told us you want to make the benefits system...

## More accessible and more dignified

- 1 Customer service improvements:** “Instead of our staff being behind glass, we need them to be in schools”
- 2 Automatic eligibility determinations and enrollment across programs:** “You should not need to walk in one door for WIC and another for SNAP”

## More effective at moving families out of poverty

- 3 Care navigation, integrated services, two-gen. case mgmt:** “Addiction treatment needs to serve mom as an individual and a parent”
- 4 Developing more responsive resources:** “We want communities to co-design supports that reflect local needs”
- 5 Testing changes to reduce “benefit cliff”:** “A pay raise at work should not make you worse off”
- 6 Offering more flexible benefits, cash assistance, basic income:** “Low-income families know best what they need to rise out of poverty”

## More efficient

- 7 Data-systems integration:** “No client should ever have us ask the same question twice”
- 8 Technology modernization and automation:** “There’s only one person left who knows how to write computer code for our system”
- 9 Upskilling public agency staff:** “Our workers have become ‘data-entry specialists’ rather than ‘get out of poverty specialists’”

# Looking ahead: GPL's stimulus learning series

July 9	<b>Benefits &amp; Economic Mobility</b>
July 15	<b>Early Childhood &amp; Families</b>
TBD	<b>Behavioral Health &amp; Homelessness</b>
July 29	<b><i>Implementation deep-dive:</i> Guaranteed income programs</b>
TBD	<b>Workforce</b>
TBD	<b><i>Implementation deep-dive:</i> Using procurement to advance innovation</b>

*Please respond to our survey – it will inform upcoming learning sessions and future GPL technical assistance offerings*

*Questions? Contact Danielle at [danielle\\_cerny@hks.harvard.edu](mailto:danielle_cerny@hks.harvard.edu)*

Register for upcoming sessions at: <https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/stimulus-learning-series>