



Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council

Public Benefits Accessibility Project Final Phase 1 Report **Qualitative** and **Quantitative** Data Analysis Combined

The goal of the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council's (CPRAC) Public Benefits Accessibility Project is to better understand administrative burdens and other access barriers to OTDA SNAP, Public Assistance (PA) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit programs through data obtained via the Public Benefits Survey and the April 2024 public hearing. These data and testimonies help provide important insights into some of the experiences of people who sought public benefits through OTDA.

The Public Benefits Accessibility Project *Final Phase 1 Report* combines two previously-released reports, the **Phase 1 Quantitative Report** (released August 7, 2024) which analyzed client responses to multiple-choice and other quantitative questions asked in the survey, and the **Phase 1 Qualitative Report** (released November 19, 2024) which provided content analysis of open-ended client responses to the survey and testimony offered at the public hearing. In addition, **Part 3**, beginning on page 12, presents the most recent observations, comparing select quantitative data to qualitative data, and next steps. The online survey questions and public hearing feedback requests are provided in **Appendix A** and selected client statements from the Phase 1 Qualitative Report are provided in **Appendix B**.

Interpretation Caveats

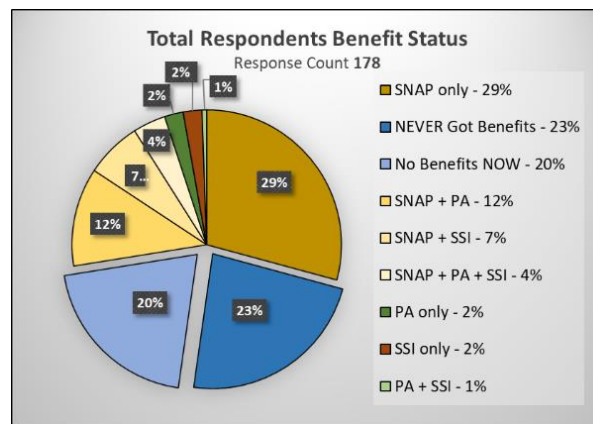
The number of responses received in Phase 1 (via 178 total respondents to the Public Benefits Survey from April-May 2024, plus 34 verbal or written statements offered via the Public Hearing) was small relative to the number of NYS households receiving the most common benefit, SNAP (over 1.7 million). The online data collection method ensured convenience and safeguarded anonymity to foster candid feedback but meant that respondents needed to be both literate and computer-literate.

Additional data collection is necessary to increase our sample size and to reach the broadest mix of individuals who seek support and qualify for our programs. Thus, these results are *useful* but must be *interpreted with caution*. The responses are likely NOT representative of *all people in need*, nor do they represent *all* public benefit applicants and/or recipients in NYS.

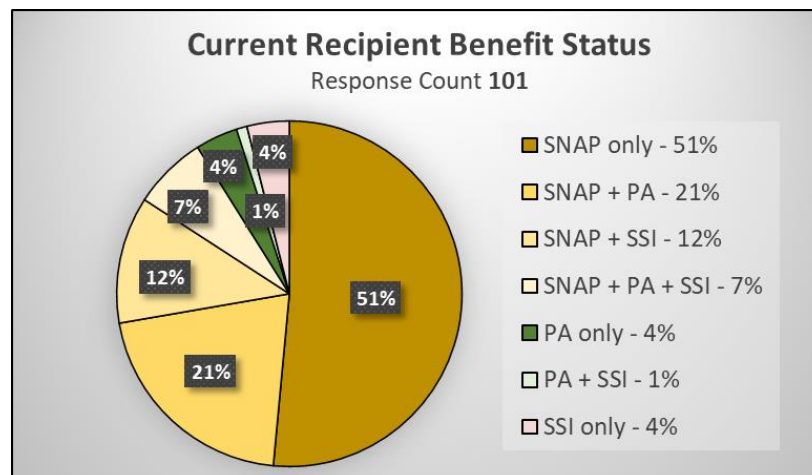
Part 1 – Quantitative Data Summary

Sample Size:

- Of the **178 surveys** collected, a substantial portion, **43% of respondents** (blue segments on pie chart) either “**never received**” benefits (23%) or were “**not currently receiving**” benefits (20%), for a subtotal of **77 people**.



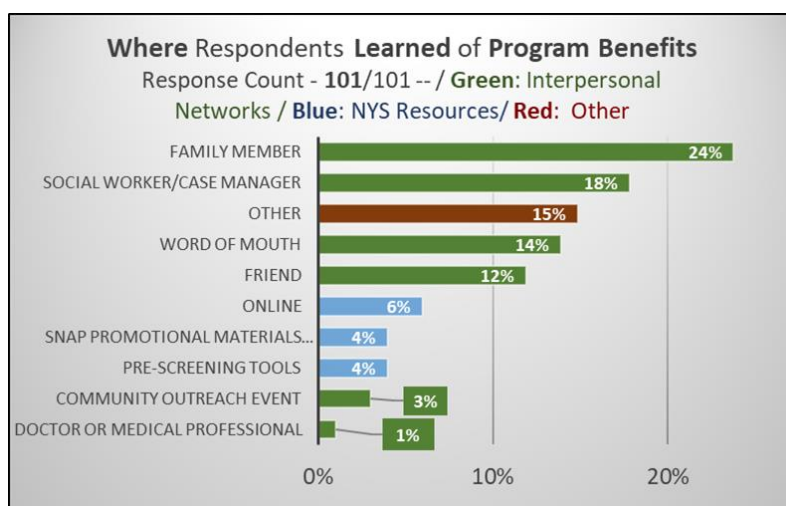
- Regardless of whether these were current recipients or not, the utility of this framework includes collecting experiential insight from the broadest possible target population.
- Non-recipient responses (people who “never received benefits”) and responses by those who received benefits “in the past” (but not while taking the survey) were limited to open-ended, “*In your own words...*” questions.
- The total count of respondents “**currently receiving benefits**” was **101**. The remainder of the charts and bulleted information in this section (Part 1) will focus on this subset of responses.



- Of these, the **largest portion**, or **82%** of the total sample, were **SNAP related**: “SNAP only” (51%), followed by SNAP + PA (21%), and SNAP + SSI (12%).

Program Awareness:

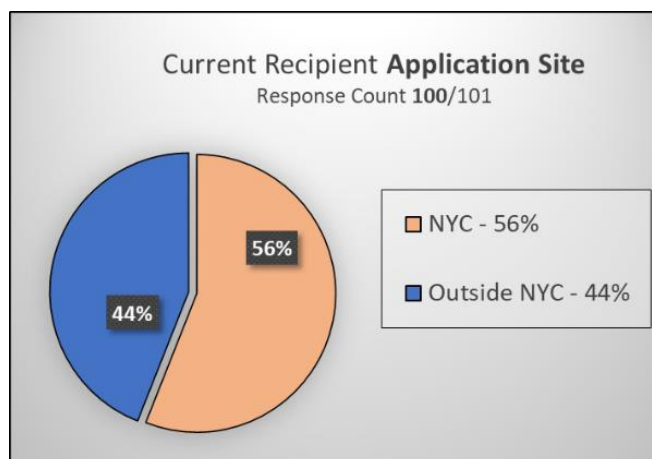
- Although responses were generated using an online survey, when asked where respondents learned of OTDA benefit programs, the majority (**68%**) relied on **interpersonal networks** (green bars on chart), including learning from a “family member” (**24%**), “social worker/case worker” (**18%**), “word of mouth” (**14%**), and a “friend” (**12%**).
- A smaller portion, **14%** of respondents, chose **NYS resources** including online searches (6%), promotional materials (4%) and pre-screening tools (4%).



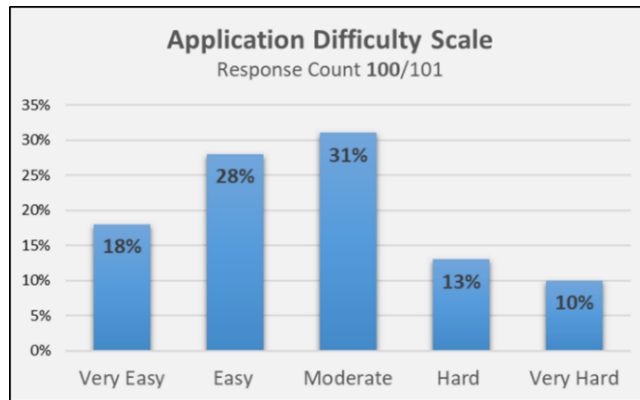
- This result, and others, highlight the on-going importance of **direct interpersonal outreach** in providing support for our target population.

Application Measures:

- Of the 101 total respondents, **56%** applied for *any or all* benefits in **NYC**, while **44%** said they did so “**outside of NYC.**” (1 person did not identify their location.)



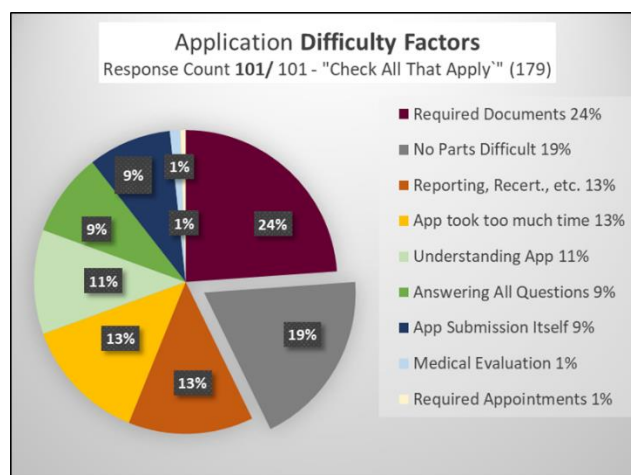
- Of the total respondents that applied for SNAP, PA, &/or SSI benefits, **46%** indicated that, *overall*, the **application** was either “**very easy**” or “**easy**”. This result may be influenced by the fact these survey respondents had a computer literacy advantage.



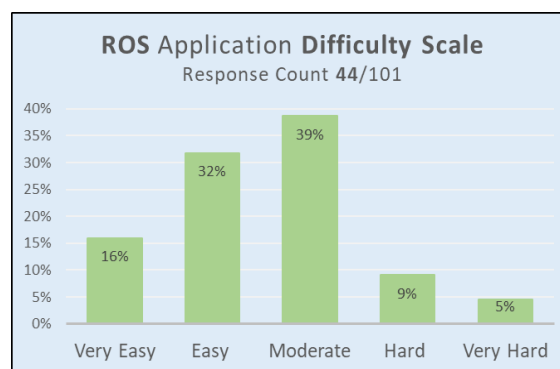
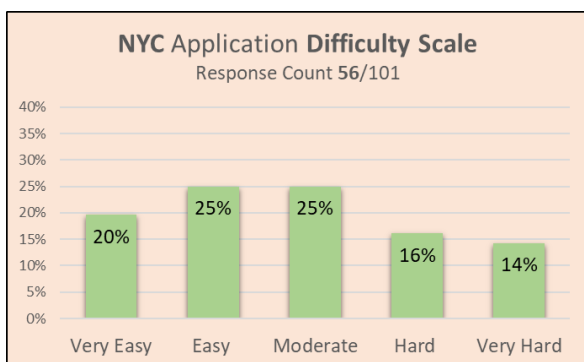
- When asked to choose among commonly identified barriers or “Difficulty Factors” (if any) to the application completion process, **19%** responded that they had **“no difficulty”**. Please note that the “Difficulty Factors” question allowed respondents to choose more than one option, so the response count (179) is higher than the sample size (101).

Application Difficulty Factors		
Response Count: 179/101 - "Check All That Apply" (179)		
43	Required Documents 24%	24%
33	No Parts Difficult 19%	19%
24	Reporting, Recert., etc. 13%	13%
24	App took too much time 13%	13%
20	Understanding App 11%	11%
16	Answering All Questions 9%	9%
16	App Submission Itself 9%	9%
2	Medical Evaluation 1%	1%
1	Required Appointments 1%	1%
179		101%

- Among the difficulty factors chosen by those applying for any or all benefits, the *highest portion* (24%) was regarding **“required documents.”** Other factors were **varied**, but **fairly evenly spread**, as shown on the pie chart below.



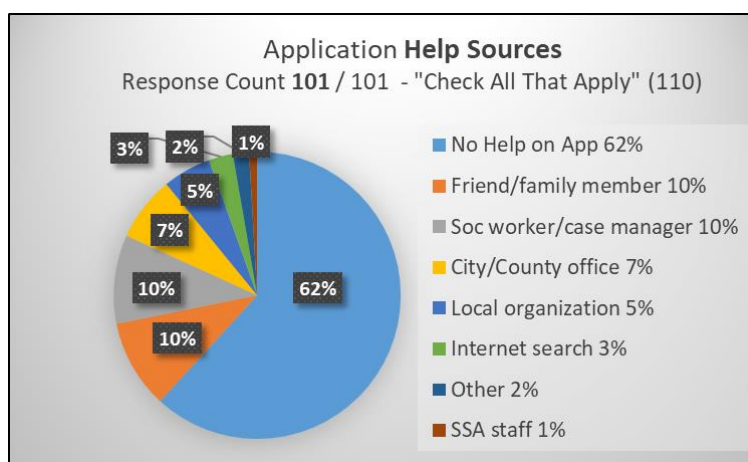
- When divided into “New York City” and “Outside New York City” (or “Rest of State,” ROS) these results suggest that responders in **NYC** had a harder time (**30%**) on the applications than those in **ROS** (**14%**). This can be seen most clearly in the *combining* the “hard” and “very hard” response tallies on the Application Difficulty Scales, respectively.



- Respondents were also asked if they received assistance filling out their application, and if so, what the source of this support was. **62%** of those “did not get help” on their application.

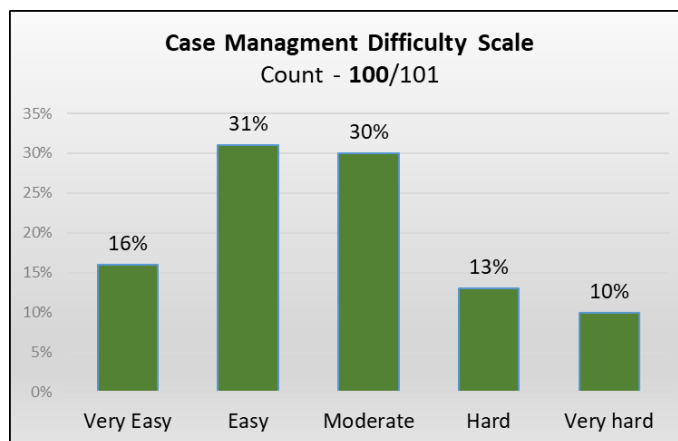
Application Help Sources	
Response Count: 101/101 - "Check All That Apply" (110)	
68 No Help on App 62%	62%
11 Friend/family member 10%	10%
11 Social worker/case manager 10%	10%
8 City/County office 7%	7%
6 Local organization 5%	5%
3 Internet search 3%	3%
2 Other 2%	2%
1 SSA staff 1%	1%
110	100%

- Again, because the sample size is low at this point in the data collection, interpretation caution is required. Also recall that the majority of respondents were SNAP recipients, so these figures may largely reflect SNAP application processes.

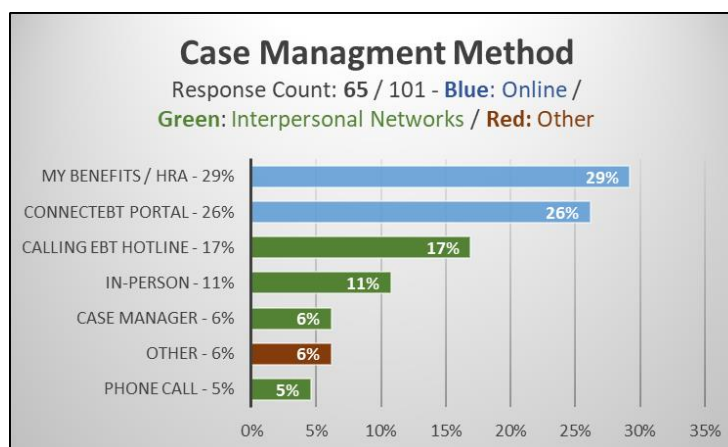


Case Management:

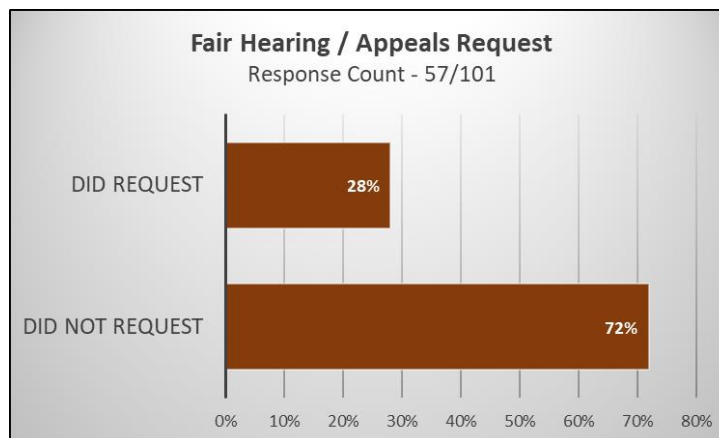
- Respondents were also asked to provide feedback on their case management experience *after* they became public benefit recipients. *Nearly half*, or 47%, responded that managing their case was either **very easy** (16%) or **easy** (31%).
- Slightly less than one-third of these recipients reported that their case management experience was **moderately difficult** (30%), with the remaining 23% reporting a case management experience that was “**hard**” (13%) or “**very hard**” (10%).



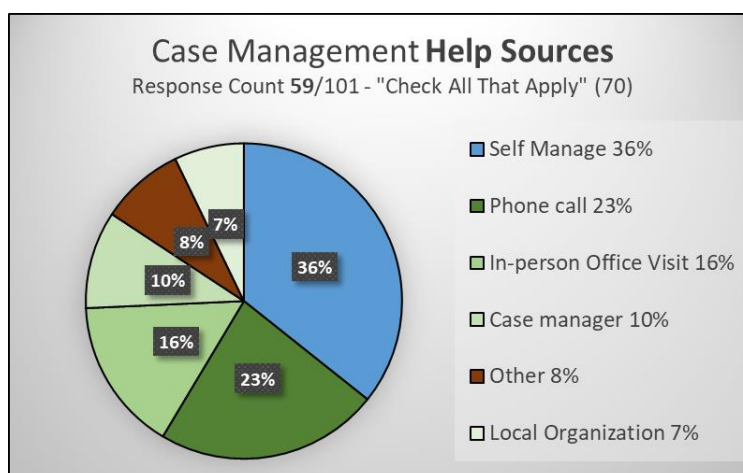
- When asked to choose which method recipients used to manage their case (including recertifying as required, reporting changes in circumstance, etc.) over half, or **55%**, reported using *on-line services* (see blue bars on chart) such as “**My Benefits / Access HRA**” (29%) or the **Connect EBT portal** (26%).
- A fairly large portion, or **39%**, of these recipients sought assistance via direct verbal communication, or *interpersonal networks*, when managing their cases (see green bars on chart), including calling an EBT hotline (17%), making an In-person office visit (11%), contact with their case manager (6%), or making a phone call (5%).
- A majority, or **55%**, indicated they manage their cases using online tools provided by OTDA (such as MYBENEFITS or CONNECTEBT Portal) or local districts of Social Services (such as ACCESS HRA).



- Regarding “**fair hearing**” or “**appeal**” requests, **28%** respondents reported making request, while **72%** responded that they did NOT make such a request. Please note, however, that only 57 of the 101 respondents chose to answer this question.



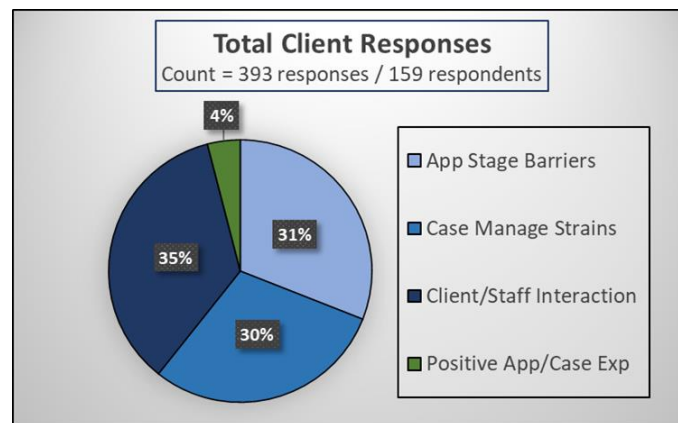
- For this measure, and others, *two important aspects of survey research observations* must be noted. First, respondents had the option of submitting the survey without answering all the questions. There are many reasons why an individual may choose to skip a question, including confusion in choosing among response options, discomfort with choosing a response, running out of time, becoming distracted, etc.
- Secondly, while the survey guaranteed anonymity, recipients may feel reluctant to submit responses that present a risk to the public benefit programs they depend upon. This means that, survey results with large “No Answer” percentages *remain informative*, nonetheless.
- Recipients were also asked to identify which sources they relied on when seeking help in managing their case. Of the options provided, the *largest portion* of respondents (**36%**) were able to “**self-manage**” their cases.
- However, **55%** of other responses, (taken collectively; see green segments in pie chart below), showed that recipients relied on *interpersonal assistance*, including **23%** who made **phone calls**, **15%** who made **in-person office visits**, **10%** who contacted **case managers**, and **7%** who sought help at a **local organization**.



Part 2 – Qualitative Data Summary

Sample Size:

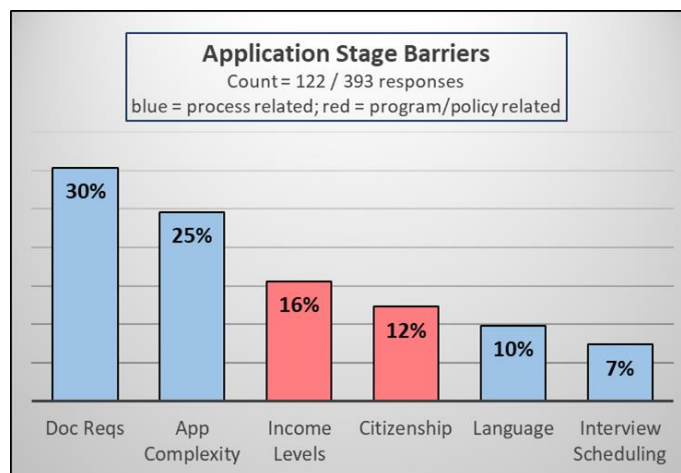
- As seen in the client “counts” underneath the chart titles below, of the **159** respondents recorded thus far, a total of **393** qualitative responses were categorized. The open-ended question format allowed respondents to include as many types of experiences as they wished to describe, in the time and space made available to them, as follows:
 - 34** via public hearing or written statements (including emailed and handwritten)
 - 125** via public benefits survey
- Among these 393 responses, **4%** reported **positive experiences** in seeking support from OTDA programs; of these, **2%** regarded the application process, and **2%** regarded their case management experience.
- The **blue** segments in the chart below show that the majority, or **96%** or 378 of the 393 qualitative responses fell into 3 main categories:
 - 31%** (122) regarding the **application stage**,
 - 30%** (117) regarding the **case management stage**, and
 - 35%** (138) regarding **direct client/staff interactions** that may have occurred at any point in the applicant/recipient experience.
- Appendix B provides a selection of actual client statements that illustrate the type of responses that were included in each of these 3 main response areas.



Application Stage Barriers:

- Of the **393** responses received from **159** respondents who described their experiences during the application process, 122 responses or **31%** of these addressed barriers faced at the application stage.
- Within those 122 responses that focused on application stage barriers,

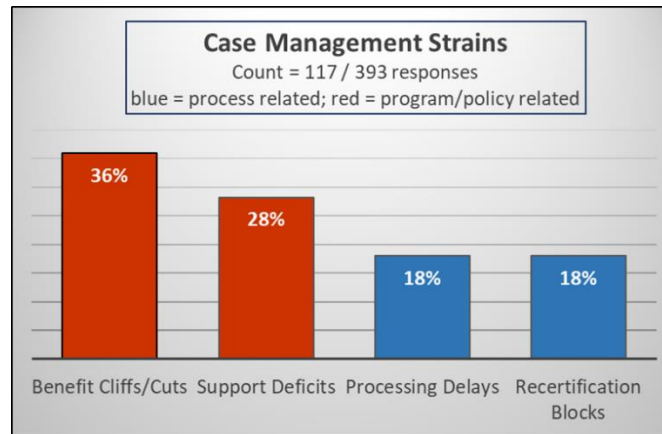
- **28%** identified **applicant eligibility criteria** (as seen in red) that caused them to not submit an application,
 - of which, **16%** had **income levels** that exceeded the amount allowable to receive benefits, and **12%** were prevented from doing so due to their **citizenship status**.
- The remainder of the 122 responses that focused on application stage barriers addressed administrative burdens and fell into 4 main categories (as seen in blue):
 - **30%** regarding **documentation requirements**;
 - **25%** in the overall **complexity** and **length** of the **application** itself;
 - **10%** on **language difficulties**, including unclear English language jargon and/or directions on the application form(s); and
 - **7%** regarding difficulty and/or confusion in **scheduling interviews**, and/or not being contacted for an interview when the applicant expected it.



Case Management Strains:

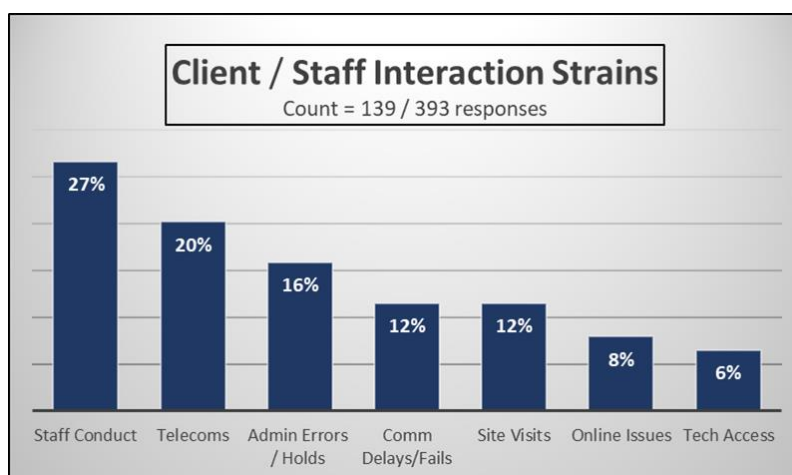
- Of the **393** responses received from **159** respondents, 117 responses or **30%** of all responses addressed challenges related to their experiences managing their public benefits cases, which often involved situational stress.
 - Among the 117 responses that focused on case management challenges, more than 60% (**64%**) discussed challenges related to program or policy features, such as the value of benefits or program eligibility criteria (as seen in yellow):
 - **28%** described **stressful benefit deficiency** situations in which the amount of support received were not enough to cover their family's living costs; and
 - **36%** involved **benefit cliff factors**, with confusion and/or pressures imposed by how changes in circumstances affect reciprocity status.
 - The remainder of the 117 responses (**36%**) focused on administrative burdens and fell into 2 main categories (as seen in blue):

- **18%** involved **processing delays** and/or disruptions in receiving benefits once the application was successfully submitted; and
- **18%** involved confusion, delays, misinformation, disruptions, lack of follow-up and/or recourse opportunities in the recipient **recertification** process.



Client / Staff Interaction Strains:

- Finally, the largest portion, 139 responses or **35%** of the **393** responses received from **159** respondents expressed frustrations related to their **direct interaction** with **government staff**, which were often described as strained. These interactions generally fell into the below categories, and may have occurred at *any point* in the application/recipient experience, as follows:
 - **27%** involved **staff conduct**, such as an overall insensitivity, or disrespectful behaviors, exhibited by staff members toward the applicants and/or recipients;
 - **20%** involved **poor** treatment of clients during **telecommunication exchanges**;
 - **16%** involved perceived **administrative errors**, such as caseworkers unable to access documentation clients had submitted online, or errors made by staff;
 - **12%** of respondents reported additional **communication failures**, such as receiving hard copy notices too late in the application and/or recertification process;
 - **12%** of respondents reported unpleasant experiences during **in-person visits** at district offices, such as excessive wait times and limited hours of operation;
 - **8%** of respondents experienced difficulty using online services;
 - **6%** of respondents identified barriers that involved not having access to the web, a smart phone, or other commonly used digital technology.



- The **structural strains** described by respondents, involving barriers/burdens in the application and/or case management process, **would likely also be experienced by caseworkers and telecommunication staff who interact with these respondents.**
- Qualitative statements made regarding negative customer service experiences appeared in *both* the CPRAC *Public Benefits* surveys and *Public Hearing* testimonies and were closely aligned in substance.
- These statements reflect problems that are typical of understaffing, and “worker burnout,” and which have been well documented elsewhere in public sector studies.^{1 2}
- In other words, negative experiences in the application and case management stages may be the result of staff stressors that manifest in *client/staff relations* in the form of communication failures, perceived disrespect, frustrating treatment patterns, cultural competency issues, and other factors.

¹ Ratcliff, M. (2024). Social Workers, Burnout, and Self-Care: A Public Health Issue. *Delaware Journal of Public Health*, 10(1), 26–29. <https://doi.org/10.32481/djph.2024.03.05>

² Soskis, B., & Tomasko, L. (2023, March 3). *Addressing Burnout Is Critical to the Social Sector’s Success*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/addressing-burnout-critical-social-sectors-success>

Part 3 – New Observations, Conclusions, and Next Steps

New Observations

This section presents observations from ongoing analyses of respondents who answered multiple-choice questions **and** provided open-ended responses during Phase 1. While the sample size of respondents who provided both quantitative **and** related qualitative responses is too small to generate reliable numerical statements, this additional analysis of Phase 1 survey responses allows us to see how combining related quantitative and qualitative responses can lead to additional insights that inform and help measure efforts to improve the experiences of people who seek public benefits through OTDA. These combined, comparative analyses will use the larger number of responses that will be available once Phase 2 concludes at the end of 2024.

Section 3a: Application Difficulty Factors by Responder/Response Type

- First, to understand more about the challenges that people may have faced in the application process, we looked at the respondents who answered this quantitative question, reported on page 5:
- “On a scale of 1 to 5, what was it like for you to fill out the _____ application?”
We then investigated the qualitative descriptions these respondents provided about the application process, where applicable. In particular, we compared the qualitative responses provided by those who reported that their application process was “1 – Very Easy”, “2 – Easy”, and “3 – Moderate” to the qualitative responses provided by those who reported their application process was “4 – Hard” and “5 – Very Hard.”
- Several responses expressed difficulties that had to do with processing procedures and/or requirements, while others gave details about challenging staff interactions.
- Examples of the kinds of qualitative statements received from respondents who rated the difficulty of their application process, AND provided qualitative statements, AND mentioned the application process in that qualitative statement:
 - Respondent #33 (SNAP only), who rated their application process as “**Very Easy**” noted: “[Translated from Spanish] *I had no problem with my application, and if I find out of a friend who wants to apply for the benefits, I will send them directly to the office where I received the assistance complete the form.*”
 - Respondent #10 (SNAP only), who rated their application process as “**Moderate**” noted: “*The application is a little long but doable.*”
 - Respondent #150 (SNAP + SSI), who rated their application process as “**Hard/Very Hard**” noted: “*I was discouraged by all of this. I need help so I asked a family member. ... Every agent I speak to is very rude and upsetting.*”

Section 3b: Benefit Level Change Comprehension

- Changes in benefit levels are likely to affect New Yorkers' experience of programs, including whether they feel the benefits provide sufficient support. For this reason, the following quantitative question was also included in our survey:
 - *"Have your PA benefit levels been consistent or have you experienced changes in benefit levels?"*
- To understand how respondents to that question experienced that change or consistency, we investigated their responses to this follow-up quantitative question:
 - *"If you experienced changes in your _____ benefit levels (including losing your benefits altogether), did you understand what those changes were based on?"*
- We then investigated the qualitative descriptions these respondents provided to understand if they reported confusion, disappointment, surprise, or other similar sentiments related to their change in benefits.
- Examples of the kinds of qualitative statements received from respondents who indicated their benefits changed, AND noted they did not understand that change, AND expressed qualitative sentiments related to that change in their responses to open-ended questions:
 - Respondent #8 (**SNAP + PA**), who indicated they "did NOT understand why my benefits changed" noted: *"Honestly, the hardest part about it is when you get a job that's remotely a dollar above, you're taken off in a spur of the moment with children when you already couldn't afford anything while you was on the Public Assistance and SNAP."*
 - Respondent #12 (**SSI** only), who indicated they "understood why my benefits changed" noted: *"...If you earn a little more money, they deduct benefits, and the reality is that you need to earn more money because help is not enough."*
 - Respondent #68 (**SNAP** only), who indicated they "did NOT understand why my benefits changed" noted: *"...I applied online for SNAP and our family qualified. When it was time to recert, the local DSS worker called me and said I did not qualify by a lot. I knew that my income had not changed that much and was worried that they would consider my case as fraud. Fortunately, the local caseworker was willing to listen as I explained how we had initially qualified..."*

Section 3c: Customer Service Experience

- We also sought to understand how respondents felt about customer service provided by the government. To that end, we included questions about respondents' experiences of both the *application process*, reported on page 5, and the *case management* process, reported on page 7, as well as if and where they got help with either process:
 - *"If you got help filling out your _____ application, where did you get that help?"* AND *"How do you get help managing your _____ case or ask questions about your benefits?"*

- Among the respondents who answered these questions, we reviewed those who reported that they got help filling out their application or managing their benefits cases at a city or county office. To understand the reported quality of their application and/or case management experience, we cross-checked those respondents' answers to these quantitative questions:
 - *"If you got help filling out your _____ application from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?"*
 - *"If you got help managing your _____ case from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?"*
- We then investigated the qualitative responses these respondents provided to understand if and how they described their interactions with staff at City or County offices.
- Examples of the kinds of qualitative responses received from respondents who indicated they got help from a City or County office either applying for benefits or managing their case, AND who answered the question about the helpfulness of that assistance, AND who described that experience in response to open-ended questions:
 - Respondent #44 (**SNAP + SSI**), who indicated that the help they received related to their application was "Helpful and welcoming" noted: *"Yes, it would be great if you had social service to help old school clients or senior citizens that don't understand online application like me."*
 - Respondent #12 (**SSI** only), who indicated that the help they received related to their application was "Not helpful, not welcoming" noted: *"Most people don't even know what they can apply for, the information one has from other people is scarce and confusing and talking to the SSA office is scary since one doesn't speak English and they don't speak Spanish."*
 - Respondent #8 (**SNAP + PA**), who indicated that the help they received related to the management of their case was "not helpful, not welcoming" noted: *"...Help shouldn't be this hard, this scary and degrading..."*
 - Respondent #25 (**SNAP + SSI**), who indicated that the help they received related to the management of their case was "Helpful and welcoming" noted: *"Everything is great except the staff almost never answers the phone when you called at the HRA offices. ... Please answer the phone when people are trying to call about their cases because sometimes you can't make it in person especially when the kids have a break from school, and you have nobody to watch them."*
 - Respondent #23 (**SNAP + PA**), who indicated that the help they received related to the management of their case was "not helpful, not welcoming" noted: *"If I have a question about my case, I have to go to the city office because it's pointless calling them. They have not enough agents answer the phones. If I go to the city office for maintaining cases, I'm sure that it's going to be a min 3-4 hour event. It's a lot of people in the waiting line but just a few people who service them."*

Conclusions

Quantitative Results

- Response counts *so far* were *normally distributed*, with a *variety* and *evenly spread set of experiences* recorded for each of the questions asked.
- Although some respondents reported that they made good use of **online tools** in applying for and managing public benefits, a large portion respondents indicate they rely on direct **interpersonal networks** within their communities to get the support they need, including learning more about public benefits, getting help with their application process, and managing their cases.

Qualitative Results

- In addition to several main incidences of *structural strain* (ie., application process barriers and case management burdens) a significant number of respondents reported additional challenges related to their direct interaction with government staff. These challenges include communication failures, perceived disrespect, frustrating treatment patterns, cultural competency issues, submission delays, etc.
- Improvements in application processing and case management procedures will likely begin to alleviate the challenging interactions our clients have described having with case workers and other staff members.
- Overall, continued attention to *client statements* and experiences will allow us to *target specific improvements* needed in three key interactive areas, including:
 1. Streamlining and improving efficiency and simplicity of the application process, including through use of plainer language, fewer application requirements where possible, and making those requirements clearer and more understandable;
 2. Making it easier for New Yorkers to manage their benefits, including through strengthened customer service and more effective communication regarding case management requirements and/or changes to existing benefits;
 3. Identifying and recognizing factors faced by both staff and clients that could contribute to process challenges for all and considering steps to alleviate those challenges through increased support for district staffing levels and human resource development.
- If enhancement initiatives in these areas are collectively addressed, using measureable outcomes, we will very likely see a greater, positive, and long term impact on the delivery of critical family support programs to our clients.

Next Steps

Phase 2 data collection will close at the end of December 2024. So far, over 1000 people have responded to the survey, building on the 178 respondents from Phase 1. In 2025, OTDA will issue additional findings and discuss next steps with CPRAC members about how to best use the findings to improve New Yorkers' experience of public benefits and services.

CPRAC Sources on Administrative Burden

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Appendix A – survey questions and testimony prompts

What follows is an excerpt of the questions asked in Phase 1 of the Public Benefits Survey. For illustrative purposes, we are including all questions for each public benefit program as well as the questions presented to those respondents who report they are not currently receiving benefits. The specific questions asked of each respondent were dependent on which program(s) they reported receiving. Respondents who report receiving more than one of these programs were asked questions related to those programs but with questions ordered slightly differently than the illustration below.

Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council Public Benefits Survey

We would like to ask a few questions about how these New York State public benefits programs have worked for you:

- SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; formerly known as “food stamps”);
- PA (Public Assistance; can also refer to Temporary Assistance or Cash Assistance. This also includes homeless shelter, utility and/or rental assistance through the program);
- SSI (Supplemental Security Income)

The survey should take a few minutes, depending on how many benefits you are receiving. If you do not have time to complete the entire survey, please scroll to the bottom and click "Submit" so that we can record the questions you answered. Your responses to this survey are voluntary and your identity will remain anonymous.

Thank you for giving us your feedback.

What Benefits Are you Receiving?

Based on your answer to the following question, we will ask a few questions about applying for and managing each benefit. If you are not receiving SNAP, PA, and/or SSI right now, but have applied for or received them in New York State in the past, you can share about your experience in the comment boxes. If you have never received SNAP, PA, or SSI in New York State, you can share why you didn't apply or why you did not receive any of these programs.

1. Are you currently or have you ever received SNAP, PA, and/or SSI as a New York State resident? If you have never received SNAP, PA or SSI as a New York State resident, please select the last option.

- Currently receiving SNAP only
- Currently receiving PA only
- Currently receiving SSI only
- Currently receiving SNAP and PA
- Currently receiving SNAP and SSI
- Currently receiving PA and SSI
- Currently receiving SNAP, PA, and SSI
- Not receiving SNAP, PA, or SSI currently, but received in the past

- Never received SNAP, PA, or SSI (did not apply or applied and found ineligible)

SNAP Application and Management

2. Where did you learn about SNAP?
 - Family member
 - Friend
 - Social worker/case manager
 - Word of mouth
 - SNAP promotional materials (TV, subway, flyer, pamphlet, social media post)
 - Outreach at event or from a community agency
 - Pre-screening tools
 - Online
 - Other
3. Did you apply for SNAP in New York City or outside of New York City?
 - New York City
 - Outside of New York City
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very hard,” what was it like for you to fill out the SNAP application form?
 - 1 – Very Easy
 - 2 – Easy
 - 3 – Moderate
 - 4 – Hard
 - 5 – Very Hard
5. What was the hardest part of the SNAP application? Check all that apply.
 - Understanding the application – language confusing or difficult to understand
 - Understanding next steps – including period reporting, recertifying, etc.
 - Gathering all required documents
 - Answering all questions
 - Submitting the application
 - Application took too much time
 - No parts of the application process were particularly hard
6. If you got help filling out your SNAP application, where did you get help? Check all that apply.
 - City or County office
 - Local organization
 - Social worker/case manager
 - Friend or family member
 - Internet search
 - Other
 - I did not get help filling out the application
7. If you got help filling out your SNAP application from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?
 - Helpful and welcoming
 - Neutral

- Not helpful, not welcoming
 - I did not get help from a City or County office
8. In your own words: was there anything else about applying for SNAP that was a problem, or slowed you down, in getting it done? What changes would make it easier for you? If you learned a close friend was applying for SNAP, what advice would you give them? Any additional comments about the application? Please explain as best as you can.
9. Once you were in the SNAP program and receiving SNAP benefits, how hard was it to manage your case on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very hard”?
- 1 – Very Easy
 - 2 – Easy
 - 3 – Moderate
 - 4 – Hard
 - 5 – Very hard
10. How are you checking your SNAP balance and managing your SNAP case (including recertifying as required, reporting changes in circumstance, etc.)?
- In person at a City or County office
 - Phone calling a City or County office
 - MyBenefits or AccessHRA
 - The EBT card portal- CONNECTEBT
 - By calling the EBT hotline
 - Social worker/case manager
 - Other
11. Have your SNAP benefit levels been consistent or have you experienced changes in benefit levels?
- Consistent benefit levels
 - Changing benefit levels
12. If you experienced changes in SNAP benefit levels (including losing your benefits altogether), did you understand what those changes were based on?
- I understood why my benefits changed
 - I did not understand why my benefits changed
 - I did not experience changes in benefit levels
 - 14. Have you ever requested a fair hearing related to your SNAP case?
 - I requested a fair hearing
 - I did not request a fair hearing
13. How do you get help managing your SNAP case or ask questions about your benefits? Check all that apply.
- In person from a City or County office
 - Phone calling a City or County office
 - Phone calling OTDA
 - Local organization
 - Social worker/case manager
 - Other

- I manage my case myself

14. If you got help managing your SNAP case from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?

- Helpful and welcoming
- Neutral
- Not helpful, not welcoming
- I did not get help from a City or County office

15. In your own words: What is the hardest part of maintaining your SNAP benefits? If you learned a close friend was having difficulty managing their SNAP benefits, what advice would you give them? What changes would make it easier for you? Any additional comments about maintaining SNAP benefits?

PA Application and Management

2. Where did you learn about PA?
 - ☐ Family member
 - ☐ Friend
 - ☐ Social worker/case manager
 - ☐ Word of mouth
 - ☐ Pre-screening tools
 - ☐ Online
 - ☐ Other
3. Did you apply for PA in New York City or outside of New York City?
 - ☐ New York City
 - ☐ Outside of New York City
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very hard,” what was it like for you to fill out the PA application form?
 - ☐ 1 – Very Easy
 - ☐ 2 – Easy
 - ☐ 3 – Moderate
 - ☐ 4 – Hard
 - ☐ 5 – Very Hard
5. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “I fully understood” and 5 being “did not understand at all,” did you feel you understood the requirements when signing the PA application?
 - ☐ 1 – I fully understood
 - ☐ 2 – Mostly understood
 - ☐ 3 – Partially understood
 - ☐ 4 – Some confusion
 - ☐ 5 – Did not understand at all
6. What was the hardest part of the PA application? Check all that apply.
 - ☐ Understanding the application – language confusing or difficult to understand
 - ☐ Understanding next steps – including appointments, such as child support, employment and training, or drug and alcohol assessment
 - ☐ Gathering all required documents
 - ☐ Answering all questions
 - ☐ Getting to required appointments after applying Submitting the application
 - ☐ Application took too much time
 - ☐ No parts of the application process were particularly hard
7. If you got help filling out your PA application, where did you get help? Check all that apply.
 - ☐ City or County office Local organization
 - ☐ Social worker/case manager Friend or family member Internet search
 - ☐ Other
 - ☐ I did not get help filling out the application

8. If you got help filling out your PA application from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?
- ☐ Helpful and welcoming
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Not helpful, not welcoming
 - ☐ I did not get help from a City or County office
9. In your own words: What is the hardest part of maintaining your PA benefits? If you learned a close friend was having difficulty managing their PA benefits, what advice would you give them? What changes would make it easier for you? Any additional comments about maintaining PA benefits?
10. Once you were in the PA program and receiving PA benefits, how hard was it to manage your case on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very hard”?
- ☐ 1 – Very Easy
 - ☐ 2 – Easy
 - ☐ 3 – Moderate
 - ☐ 4 – Hard
 - ☐ 5 – Very hard
11. How are you managing your PA case (including recertifying as required, reporting changes in circumstance, etc.)?
- ☐ In person at a City or County office
 - ☐ Phone calling a City or County office
 - ☐ MyBenefits or AccessHRA
 - ☐ The EBT card portal- CONNECTEBT
 - ☐ Phone calling the EBT hotline
 - ☐ Social worker/case manager
 - ☐ Other
12. Have your PA benefit levels been consistent or have you experienced changes in benefit levels?
- ☐ Consistent benefit levels
 - ☐ Changing benefit levels
13. If you experienced changes in PA benefit levels (including losing your benefits altogether), did you understand what those changes were based on?
- ☐ I understood why my benefits changed
 - ☐ I did not understand why my benefits changed
 - ☐ I did not experience changes in benefit levels
14. Have you ever requested a fair hearing related to your PA case?
- ☐ I requested a fair hearing
 - ☐ I did not request a fair hearing
15. How do you get help managing your PA case or ask questions about your benefits? Check all that apply.
- ☐ In person from a City or County office
 - ☐ Phone calling a City or County office

- Phone calling OTDA
- Local organization
- Social worker/case manager
- Other
- I manage my case myself

16. If you got help managing your PA case from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?

- Helpful and welcoming
- Neutral
- Not helpful, not welcoming
- I did not get help from a City or County office

17. In your own words: What is the hardest part of maintaining your PA benefits? If you learned a close friend was having difficulty managing their PA benefits, what advice would you give them? What changes would make it easier for you? Any additional comments about maintaining PA benefits?

SSI Application and Management

2. Where did you learn about SSI?
 - ☐ Family member
 - ☐ Friend
 - ☐ Social worker/case manager
 - ☐ Word of mouth
 - ☐ Doctor or medical professional
 - ☐ Pre-screening tools
 - ☐ Online
 - ☐ Other
3. Did you apply for SSI in New York City or outside of New York City?
 - ☐ New York City
 - ☐ Outside of New York City
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very hard,” what was it like for you to fill out the SSI application form?
 - ☐ 1 – Very Easy
 - ☐ 2 – Easy
 - ☐ 3 – Moderate
 - ☐ 4 – Hard
 - ☐ 5 – Very Hard
5. What was the hardest part of the SSI application? Check all that apply.
 - ☐ Understanding the application – language confusing or difficult to understand
 - ☐ Gathering all required documents
 - ☐ Answering all questions
 - ☐ Going through medical evaluation
 - ☐ Submitting the application
 - ☐ Application took too much time
 - ☐ No parts of the application process were particularly hard
6. If you got help filling out your SSI application, where did you get help? Check all that apply.
 - ☐ City or County office
 - ☐ SSA staff
 - ☐ Local organization
 - ☐ Social worker/case manager
 - ☐ Friend or family member
 - ☐ Internet search
 - ☐ Other
 - ☐ I did not get help filling out the application
7. If you got help filling out your SSI application from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?
 - ☐ Helpful and welcoming
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Not helpful, not welcoming
 - ☐ I did not get help from a City or County office

8. If you lived alone when you applied or when your SSI application was approved, did you realize that a SNAP case would automatically be opened for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I did not live alone when I applied for SSI or when my application was approved

9. If you lived alone when your application for SSI was approved, did you receive a notice in the mail that a SNAP case was also opened for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I did not live alone when my SSI application was approved

10. In your own words: was there anything else about applying for SSI that was a problem, or slowed you down, in getting it done? What changes would make it easier for you? If you learned a close friend was applying for SSI, what advice would you give them? Any additional comments about the application? Please explain as best as you can.

11. Once you were in the SSI program and receiving SSI benefits, how hard was it to manage your case on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very easy” and 5 being “very hard”?

- ☐ 1 – Very Easy
- ☐ 2 – Easy
- ☐ 3 – Moderate
- ☐ 4 – Hard
- ☐ 5 – Very hard

12. How are you managing your SSI case (including recertifying as required, reporting changes in circumstance, etc.)?

- ☐ In person at a City or County office
- ☐ In person at SSA office
- ☐ Phone calling a City or County office
- ☐ Phone calling an SSA office
- ☐ MyBenefits or AccessHRA
- ☐ Social worker/case manager
- ☐ Other

13. Have your SSI benefit levels been consistent or did you experience changes in benefit levels?

- ☐ Consistent benefit levels
- ☐ Changing benefit levels

14. If you experienced changes in SSI benefit levels (including losing your benefits altogether), did you understand what those changes were based on?

- ☐ I understood why my benefits changed
- ☐ I did not understand why my benefits changed
- ☐ I did not experience changes in benefit levels

15. Have you ever requested a review or appeal related to your SSI case?

- I requested a review or appeal related to my case
- I did not request a review or appeal related to my case

16. How do you get help managing your SSI case or ask questions about your benefits? Check all that apply.

- In person at a City or County office
- In person at SSA office
- Phone calling a City or County office
- Phone calling SSA office
- Phone calling OTDA Local organization
- Social worker/case manager
- Other
- I manage my case myself

17. If you got help managing your SSI case from a City or County office, how did you feel about the customer service?

- Helpful and welcoming
- Neutral
- Not helpful, not welcoming
- I did not get help from a City or County office

18. In your own words: What is the hardest part of maintaining your SSI benefits? If you learned a close friend was having difficulty managing their SSI benefits, what advice would you give them? What changes would make it easier for you? Any additional comments about maintaining SSI benefits?

Not receiving SNAP, PA, or SSI currently, but received in the past

2. In your own words: Was there anything else about applying for benefits that was a problem, or slowed you down, in getting it done? What changes would make it easier for you? If you learned a close friend was applying for benefits, what advice would you give them? Any additional comments about the application? Please explain as best as you can.

3. In your own words: What was the hardest part of maintaining your benefits? If you learned a close friend was having difficulty managing their benefits, what advice would you give them? What changes would have made it easier for you? Any additional comments about maintaining benefits?

Never Received SNAP, PA, or SSI

2. If you have not received these benefits, please describe why. If you applied, were you found ineligible or have you not applied? If you were found ineligible, did you understand why?

Public Hearing Prompts

Public hearing testimony respondents were asked to provide input as follows:

“The public hearing will provide an opportunity for CPRAC to hear directly from New Yorkers about their experiences. ...[and] will focus on “administrative burdens” [clients] face when applying for and receiving Public Assistance (also known as Cash Assistance or Temporary Assistance), food assistance (SNAP), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), including but not limited to:

- *Challenges completing application forms,*
- *Understanding requirements related to each program,*
- *Managing benefits once receiving them,*
- *Getting help with these processes.”*

To that end, during the public hearing, the audience responded to the following prompts:

- *Describe the challenges you faced applying for benefits.*
- *What is the hardest part of maintaining your benefits?*
- *Are there certain experiences/processes that you found helpful?*
- *What changes would make it easier for you to access benefits?*
- *What would make the experience simpler and more respectful?*

Appendix B – Selected Client Statements

A small number of responses (15 responses or 4% of responses) highlighted the neutral or positive experiences that clients had navigating processes to apply for and receive SNAP, PA and/or SSI benefits. In this context, an experience was considered “neutral” or “positive” if there were no explicit challenges reported.

Positive or Neutral:

ID 33. “[Translated from Spanish] I had **no problem with my application** and if I find out of a friend who wants to apply for the benefits, I will **send them directly to the office** where I received the assistance [to] complete the form.”

ID 38. “It’s easy to manage my case **because I always respond right away** to any notices I receive and submit documents when requested.”

ID 177. “applying **online is the best its so convenient**. the 30 day wait for approval of emergency food stamps **kinda defeats the purpose**.”

However, the overwhelming majority of responses (96%) highlighted the challenges or “administrative burdens” that clients faced when navigating SNAP, PA and/or SSI processes. These responses are categorized by their focus on challenges related to three main government interaction stages, 1. application processing, 2. case management, and 3. direct governmental interaction, which may occur at any time, related to either application, case management, and/or other processes. These accounts illustrate the types of accessibility issues and administrative burdens reported by clients, as expressed *in their own words*:

Application Processing:

Application Complexity:

ID #52. “The process requires **way too much time**, assumes literacy, and you might not even get approved. **The constraints are too specific and too much jargon for the layperson to understand**.”

ID #159. “**The application itself is complicated and there is no guidance offered to successfully do it on my own**. The Dept of Social Services should make it easier to aid applicants. Trying to reach them by phone takes HOURS on hold. It is very discouraging.”

Documentation:

ID #38. “Having to submit all the documents. I don’t live near transportation and **had to travel to town to apply** for the benefits.”

ID #40. “I had to **send them more documents again** if they never received them on time.”

ID #139. “**Submitting documents were not clearly defined**. Some of the requested documents do not make sense from anyone other than the head of household. Applying in person was a disaster with customer service being non-existent, but online was much easier and simpler.”

Other Application Processing:

ID #87. *"You can apply online, and they have a mandatory phone interview. If you do not make the one they schedule for you, **it is impossible to get ahold of anyone at the office for scheduling. They also do not enter the information correctly and then you get mail saying that you never had an interview, and no one will help you via phone look into it.**"*

ID #111. *"**I wasn't sure if I was eligible** because I have roommates and didn't understand what household meant. **When applying I first got denied because I was working a gig job at restaurant and wasn't paid on a bi-weekly basis, and they were confused by that.** I had to call and wait on hold for 4+ hours during my workday to talk to somebody. I would tell my friend to apply with a caseworker or someone friendly that you already know who might help you understand what they are asking for."*

ID #137. *I could not work and do schooling full time so for the benefit of my family I had to quit school. When I started working part time, I reached back out to my SNAP caseworker who then informed me **now that I was working, I still wouldn't be eligible for benefits because we were just barely over the income threshold to be eligible.**"*

Case Management:

Process Delays:

ID #119. *"The places **never calling back**...You send the same paperwork to snap and heap but they make you send it separately. **Seems like the whole program is to deter us from trying to get help.**"*

ID #110. *"**The emergency option takes too long.** I was given a list of food pantries but some of these places are not even open. It took around 30 to 40 days to receive the benefits."*

ID #7. *"I would tell a close friend be **prepared to be frustrated and wait.**"*

Support Deficit:

ID #169. *"The worst thing managing is my Snap benefits and with **3 person family CAN NOT survive a month with the money we get. Towards the end of the month, I go without eating so I know my wife and daughter will eat**"*

ID #102. *"**Benefit income quantities and benefit amounts do not reflect current day prices**"*

ID #136. *"**Outdated income standards, unrealistic amounts on which to live**"*

Benefit Cliffs/Cuts:

ID #8. *"Honestly, the hardest part about it is **when you get a job that's remotely a dollar above, you're taken off in a spur of the moment** with children when you already couldn't afford anything while you was on the public assistance. ... Help shouldn't be this hard this scary and degrading."*

ID #21. *"The problem with the system is that it does not allow you to get on your feet before they cut it off."*

ID #136. *"Making slightly 'too much' income where I was no longer eligible for benefits but not yet making enough to have food-security and housing security, **perpetually stuck in too much and not enough.**"*

Other Case Management:

ID #23. *"If I have a question about my case, I have to go to the city office because **it's pointless calling them. They have not enough agents answer the phones.** If I go to the city office for maintaining cases, I'm sure that it's going to be a min 3-4 hour event. **It's a lot of people in the waiting line but just a few people who service them.**"*

ID #25. *"Please answer the phone when people are trying to call about their cases because **sometimes you can't make it in person especially when the kids have a break from school, and you have nobody to watch them.**"*

Direct Governmental Interaction:

Staff Conduct:

ID #11. *"**It would feel so unwelcoming and burdening that I would rather close my case.**"*

ID #143. *"The issue is only accessing help through the center in person. **They're rude and judgmental and will have people wait more than 4 hours just to answer a question. They don't answer the phone when you call.**"*

ID #136. *"Long wait, no answer on phone, lack of accessibility...disrespect and dehumanizing treatment."*

Administrative Error:

ID #24. *"...**workers on several occasions lost my paperwork or failed to pass it along to the right person which resulted in me being denied several times.** I would always encourage others to get proof that they turned things in."*

ID #43. *"When you recertify and submit all your documents and the worker puts the year 2020 not 2024 and did not correct their mistake and now **you have to keep going to the office to correct their mistake** "*

ID #68. *"I was able to apply for SNAP because a Medicaid facilitated enroller showed me that our family qualified using a line on our taxes "'gross income after farm loss'". I applied online for SNAP and our family qualified. When it was time to recert, **the local DSS worker called me and said I did not qualify by a lot.** I knew that my income had not changed that much and was worried that they would consider my case as fraud. Fortunately, the local caseworker was willing to listen as I explained how we had initially qualified. She said she was at her job 13 years and had never heard of using the gross income after farm loss line on a tax filing. Neither had her supervisor, but they followed up with the state office and **found that I did indeed qualify.** Because I live in a rural county, I think this qualification could apply to others and I am concerned that the local DSS did not know about it."*

Other Governmental Interaction:

ID #129. ***"It is hard when you work during the same hours offices are open so unable to make it in person, yet the phones are never answered."***

In addition to the feedback that fit into one of these three stages of government interaction (application, case management, direct), there were other responses that reported experiencing a confluence of issues across multiple stages. For example, one response pointed to what they believed was the misalignment between government websites, call centers, local offices, and the advice provided by staff, which compounded the burdens faced by the client when applying for or maintaining benefits, as they felt they were being bounced between resources but unable to get the help they needed. This also included reports of submitting documents online that call center or office employees could not see or access, and/or receiving incorrect information from these sources about their application, documents, case, or general next steps:

ID #18. ***"The amount of paperwork that has to be submitted that for some reason that never gets to the caseworker"***

ID #21. ***"When I first started getting benefits you had to only go in person, over time they have moved a lot of it over the internet. The problem they are still have is they are **not getting all the people documents when you send it in.** They need to work on the system."***

ID #80. ***"Online application allows you to submit documents, but they never make it to your case worker."***

ID #158. ***"Submitting Documents, when submitting the application, I upload documentation and it says received but they never receive them electronically."***

Due to the number and variety of burdens reported by clients related to their application, case management, or direct interactions with government generally, several respondents emphasized that they found the processes were much easier when receiving assistance from nonprofit organizations – and recommended doing so instead of seeking help from government:

ID #113. ***"I was originally rejected and had to seek assistance through a CBO in order to receive benefits. There was no one for me to speak with as I found out by checking online. I knew I had no money and needed to eat so I sought help. I would tell my friend to **let an organization help them do not try to submit the paperwork on your own** it will just prolong the process."***

ID #159. ***"If i had to give advice to a friend, it would be to **not attempt it on their own.** Seek help from an organization like I did."***

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