



HR 1: Rapid Service Improvement for SNAP Benefits

State: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Agencies: Office of Administration
Department of Human Services

Award Category: Digital Experience: Agency Program Solutions

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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



Executive Summary

Pennsylvania launched this work in response to HR1, which introduced new requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and increased operational pressure on states. The Commonwealth needed to help eligible Pennsylvanians continue to access benefits while also improving administrative accuracy. At the same time, Pennsylvania was operating with a SNAP payment error rate (PER) above the new federal threshold. PER measures how often benefits are issued in the wrong amount and directly reflects both resident experience and system performance.

HR1 was signed into law in July 2025, and Pennsylvania moved from discovery to pilot launch by October 2025, delivering and scaling solutions within a three-month window. Before this work, applicants struggled to understand their application status, submit usable documents, and verify income. As one caseworker described, “It feels like we’re flying blind... by the time an error is actually reported back to us, the employee forgot the reason they made the decision.” Pennsylvania delivered a set of digital service improvements that reduced friction and enabled earlier identification of payment error risks. The result is a shift from reactive correction to proactive error prevention.

Idea

Pennsylvania needed to respond quickly to help residents navigate new requirements from federal changes while ensuring the program could still be administered accurately and efficiently. A central challenge was the SNAP payment error rate (PER), the federal measure of how often benefits are issued in the wrong amount. Due to federal HR1 cost sharing changes, Pennsylvania needs to reduce its error rate to below 6 percent or risk paying an additional \$56 million *per month* on SNAP.

In 2025, over one third of customer service calls were related to application or case status, while missing or incomplete documentation accounted for roughly one third of rejected applications. In addition, incorrect income reporting contributed to more than 15% of SNAP payment errors. These patterns highlighted that improving accuracy required improving how information was submitted, understood, and verified across the system.

The Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA) conducted interviews and site visits with County Assistance Offices to identify high-impact pain points. This research revealed consistent points of friction across the experience.

These issues created both user confusion and operational risk. More than 2 million Pennsylvanians rely on SNAP each month to buy food, making program accuracy essential to residents’ day-to-day stability.



Applicants lacked visibility into their applications

"We have people that come into the office just to know what's happening... because they don't know what's happening."

— Office of Income Maintenance staff member

Document uploads were unreliable

"Paystubs from COMPASS are blurry, so we often just tell people to email their paystubs..."

— Office of Income Maintenance staff member

Cumbersome access

"When I forget my password or username, they make me jump through a million hoops and reset everything instead of having a security key or something like that."

— SNAP applicant

Without early intervention, errors surfaced late and were harder to resolve. Pennsylvania reframed the challenge. Improving accuracy required improving the experience itself. This approach reframes payment error reduction as a service design problem—one that can be applied across benefits programs and other states facing similar federal requirements.

Implementation

Pennsylvania delivered this work through a rapid, coordinated, multi-partner approach.

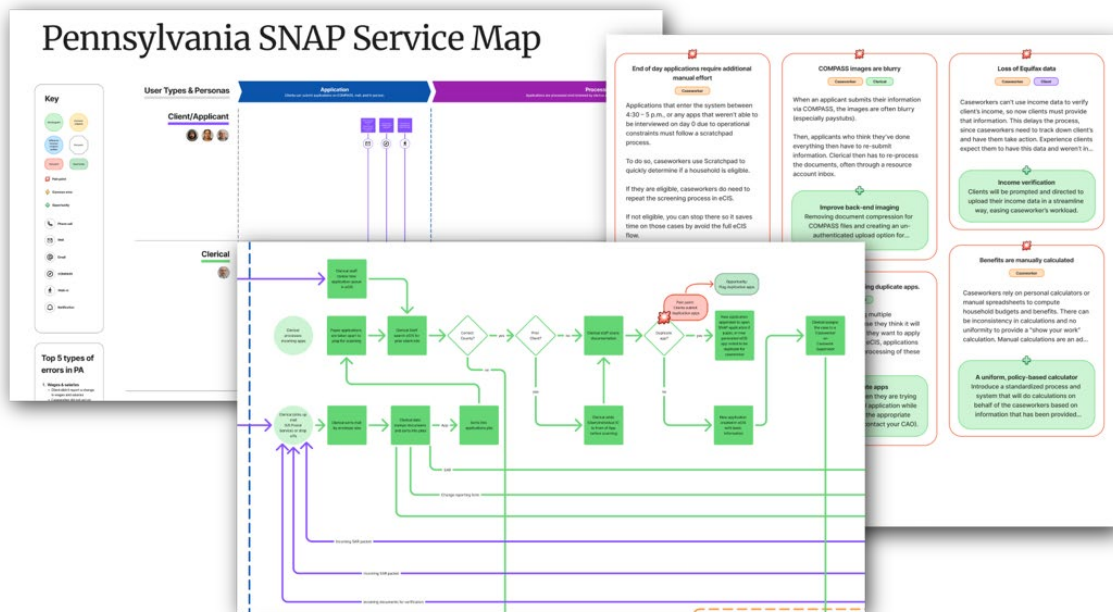
Discovery and user research identified the highest-impact pain points across the SNAP experience. These insights were translated into a set of focused workstreams, each addressing a key driver of errors, inefficiency, or user frustration. Within approximately three months, the Commonwealth moved from discovery to phased implementation.

Work was prioritized based on highest-frequency error drivers and delivered in parallel workstreams. These workstreams were intentionally aligned to the primary drivers of payment error, including income verification and document quality, to ensure that each intervention addressed a root cause rather than a surface-level symptom. Solutions were integrated into existing systems like COMPASS to support adoption, with close coordination across DHS, CODE PA, and delivery partners.

This work was delivered through close collaboration across the Commonwealth partners including Department of Human Services (DHS), CODE PA, the Health and Human Services Delivery Center, and external partners Nava, Deloitte, AWS, and Digital Public Works.

Each workstream was designed not only to address a specific failure point, but to influence user and staff behavior at scale—improving the quality of information entering the system, reducing avoidable demand, and enabling earlier, more effective decision-making.

Figure 1: SNAP Service Map



The SNAP service map was an artifact created during discovery to outline the current journey experienced by applicants and staff.

Change management was also built into implementation, not treated as a separate phase after launch. In addition to piloting and phased rollout, the team developed help desk articles, support resources, and operational guidance to help frontline staff and support teams understand the new tools and respond consistently to resident questions. This ensured that adoption was supported not only through product design, but through the day-to-day systems staff use to assist applicants and troubleshoot issues.

Together, these workstreams addressed three core needs: giving residents clearer visibility and easier self-service options, improving the quality of information entering the system, and giving staff earlier opportunities to identify and resolve risks.

Benefit Status Tracker: reducing confusion and duplicate demand

COMPASS is an online tool for Pennsylvanians to apply for health and human service programs and manage benefit information. However, not every SNAP applicant will have a COMPASS account, making tracking burdensome. The team built an unauthenticated status tracker at trackmybenefits.pa.gov that allowed users to check their application in real time without logging into COMPASS.

To enable rapid delivery and reduce barriers to use, the tracker was built outside COMPASS as a standalone service and does not require login. Status messages were co-developed with frontline

Intelligent Document Processing: improving inputs before they create errors

The system detects issues such as blurriness, missing pages, or incorrect document types. When issues are detected, users received immediate, plain language feedback prompting them to correct the problem before submission.

Consent-Based Verification: simplifying income reporting

The feature was rolled out in phases, beginning with SNAP renewals, to validate performance and refine the experience. By replacing manual uploads with structured income data, it reduced delays, improved consistency in verification, and supported more accurate eligibility determinations.

The team integrated Keystone Login, the Commonwealth's existing identity service, enabling secure, self-service password resets using one-time passcodes.

SNAP Case Checker: enabling proactive error prevention

Figure 2: trackmybenefits.pa.gov

[illegible]

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potential errors. Over time, select rules were moved earlier in the process, enabling pre-authorization correction and reducing downstream rework.

Why this approach worked

Across all workstreams, three principles drove success:

- Target the highest-frequency failure points tied to payment errors
- Integrate into existing systems and workflows to support adoption
- Deliver quickly and iterate through pilots to validate impact

During the pilot phase (October – December 2025), intelligent document processing reduced illegible submissions by 80% and saved over 700 hours of staff time, while the case checker helped prioritize more than 1,000 cases for early review.

Impact

This work has transformed how Pennsylvania delivers SNAP—moving from a reactive system that corrects errors after the fact to a proactive system that prevents them earlier. While the full impact on the payment error rate (PER) will take time to be reflected in federal reporting, early results demonstrate strong progress on the upstream conditions that drive PER. These results reflect a measurable shift from previous conditions, where a significant portion of staff time was spent responding to avoidable issues such as status inquiries, password resets, and incomplete documentation.

From reactive errors to proactive prevention

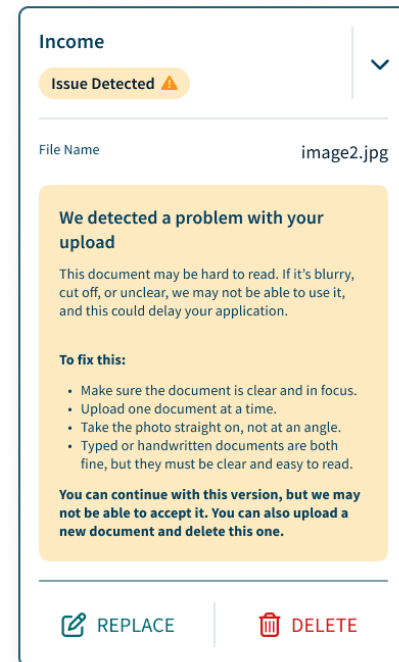
The SNAP Case Checker has shifted error management upstream:

- 15,600+ case risks resolved since launch
- 68.7% of January 2026 risks were resolved by supervisors
- High-confidence targeting (>80% validity) improves focus and efficiency

From confusion to clarity for applicants

- On average, 11,000 monthly users of the benefits status tracker since the tool launched

Figure 3: intelligent document processing



The design for an intelligent document processing card indicating that an uploaded image has been flagged as hard to read, blurry, cut off, or unclear. The user is presented with the option to replace or delete the upload.



From poor inputs to higher-quality submissions

- 380,000+ documents processed through intelligent document processing, 30 percent of which were flagged for issues that could delay a client's application

From burdensome verification to streamlined income reporting

Consent-based income verification is changing user behavior and improving accuracy:

- 4,000+ income documents submitted through consent-based verification
- 14% increase in document submission rates when consent-based verification is offered

From system friction to self-service

Where users once faced “a million hoops” to reset a password, they now have:

- 1,000+ daily password resets
- ~80% success via self-service

Prior to this work, account access issues were a significant driver of call center demand, with over 1,400-1,600 login-related calls per month to the helpline. Following the introduction of self-service password reset, helpline calls for password reset dropped to fewer than 120 per month. At the same time, a larger share of requests shifted to automated and vendor-supported channels, which handled thousands of password reset interactions. This reduced user frustration and freed staff to focus on processing benefits.

Why this matters long term

This work addresses the root causes of payment error rate, not just its symptoms. By improving how residents interact with the system and how staff process cases, Pennsylvania is building a more accurate, efficient, and resilient SNAP program.

Most importantly, it demonstrates that improving customer experience and improving administrative accuracy are not competing goals. By reducing confusion, improving inputs, and enabling earlier intervention, Pennsylvania is helping ensure that eligible residents receive the correct benefits, while reducing risk and improving efficiency across the system. Together, these solutions improve inputs, reduce friction, and enable earlier intervention across the SNAP experience.