

AGEOPTIONS
BENEFIT ENROLLMENT CENTER

BENEFITS CONNECT

Marching into Benefits

As Spring approaches, we're keeping you informed about the latest updates to benefits. In this issue, we highlight changes to VTTC, provide lists of work and volunteer opportunities for SNAP recipients, and include a newly released toolkit from HFS.

To be added to our newsletter, share a tip and trick, or ask a question, please email Halie at halie.reyes@ageoptions.org

Nominate yourself or someone else for Counselor Spotlight using this [form](#).



Changes to VTTC Food/Cash Assistance

Beginning March 2nd, 2026, IDHS has paused cash and food assistance for Non-Citizen Victims of Trafficking, Torture, and Serious Crimes (VTTC). HelpHub News shared the following key updates:

- IDHS will issue denials for all NEW VTTC cash/food assistance applications submitted on or after 3/2/26.
- Individuals with VTTC food/cash redeterminations scheduled between 3/2/26 through 6/30/26 will have their VTTC cash/ food assistance cases terminated, even if they still meet the eligibility criteria.
- Clients must re-apply for VTTC food/cash assistance starting 7/1/26. There will be no "waitlist" for VTTC food/cash assistance.

Food Resources

- View a list of [congregate dining sites](#)
- Locate local food pantries through [Chicago Food Bank](#) or [We Got You Illinois](#)



● Opportunities to Meet SNAP Work Requirement

IDHS compiled lists of work, volunteer, and job training opportunities for those needing help to meet the SNAP work requirement. Adult education resources are also included. Find the links [here](#).

● New Wellness at Work Podcast

The Learning & Development Projects at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College developed a new podcast, Wellness at Work, to help support professionals working with vulnerable adults. Listen on [Apple](#) or [Spotify](#).

● HR 1 Phase One Stakeholder Toolkit: Update Your Address Campaign

Beginning in 2027, new federal requirements under HR 1 may require some adult Medicaid customers to report work, school, or training activities.

To support early awareness, HFS has launched Phase One of its communications strategy. They are asking community partners, providers, and advocates to share their toolkit. The Phase One toolkit focuses on encouraging customers to keep their contact information up to date in anticipation of notices to come later this year.

- [Phase One Stakeholder Toolkit](#)
- [Medicaid Federal Policy Changes Fact Sheet](#)

Resource Hub

- Visit our [ADRN Resource Guide](#) for training materials
- AgeOptions' [SNAP Work Requirement Toolkit](#) (located in the ADRN Resource Guide)
- Browse [DHS' Workers' Action Guide \(WAG\)](#) to research policy questions
- Ask your benefit related questions on [HelpHub](#) to receive a reply from an expert
- Subscribe to [Avisery's email alerts](#) to stay up to date on Medicare and Medicaid news
- Find plentiful professional tools and articles by visiting [NCOA's website](#).
- Email Halie at halie.reyes@ageoptions.org for training and technical assistance.

● Training & Events

If any of these events are in your service area, feel free to forward any materials you'd like us to share or ask to tag along!

April

4/14: Berkeley Public Library Benefits Presentation

4/23: Brunch & Benefits Advocate Sponsored Event at Glenwood-Lynwood Public Library

May

5/1: Chicago Heights Public Library Benefits Presentation

5/14: North Riverside Public Library Benefits Presentation

June

6/9: Village of Wheeling Congregate Meal Benefits Presentation

6/20: Homewood Outdoor Farmers Market

[Read more detail on our website](#)





COUNSELOR SPOTLIGHT



“Benefits counseling isn’t just forms and paperwork, It’s about empowering clients and improving their quality of life”

Enza Haas
Benefits Specialist and Advocacy
Kenneth Young Center

Q: What is your role? How long have you been a benefits counselor?

A: I started out as a Care Coordinator and have been a benefits counselor for 10 years. In my role as a SHIP coordinator, I specifically help clients with Medicare and Medicaid, but I also assess all the benefits and programs they may qualify for, assist them with applications, and follow through to make sure they get the support they need.

Q: What inspired you to become a benefits counselor?

A: I was inspired to become a benefits counselor because I’ve always wanted to help people access the support they need. Starting out as a Care Coordinator, I saw how much of a difference guidance and resources could make—especially for lower-income clients. Becoming a benefits counselor let me focus on educating and assisting people so these programs can truly impact their lives.

Q: What do you find most rewarding?

A: Knowing that the guidance I provide can truly make a difference in someone’s life. Whether it’s helping them access healthcare, food assistance, or other benefits, seeing them leave feeling supported and more confident is what makes this work meaningful.

Q: What’s one tip or piece of advice you would give to new counselors?

A: Always take the time to truly understand each client’s unique situation. Every individual has different needs, challenges, and goals, and listening carefully before recommending resources ensures you provide the most meaningful and effective support. Building trust through understanding is just as important as knowing the programs.

Q: What’s something you wish more people understood about this work or our clients?

A: A lot of our clients face real challenges, and even small support can make a big difference in their day-to-day lives.