

New Medicaid Direct Certification Eligibility in DCA for SY 2023-24

Expanding the eligible programs that directly certify students' meal eligibility to include Medicaid data presents an opportunity to reach additional students. It's important to note that the process of using Medicaid data to determine students eligible for direct certification works differently than other qualifying programs. Participation in Medicaid does not confer categorical eligibility but rather uses income information from Medicaid eligibility to determine whether a student is eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Therefore, some students may qualify as Medicaid Free and some may qualify as Medicaid Reduced.

If your district uses software to manage student eligibility and/or to track meals served to students, please contact your Student Information System (SIS) or Point of Service (POS) software system(s) accordingly to confirm system functionality is able to accept the two different eligibility categories for Medicaid Free (MA Free) and Medicaid Reduced (MA Reduced), in addition to the SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, Foster Care, Migrant, Homeless, and Runaway free direct certification indicators you already use.

Some important things to note about meal eligibility based on Medicaid:

- Medicaid Reduced should never override a FREE determination whether that determination is made through an application or through a different program that has auto matched and directly certified eligibility in the DCA. Eligibility source programs that come through the DCA will be automatically evaluated and applied by the system, so you don't need to worry about those. However, you will need to manually compare the determinations made automatically in DCA as Medicaid Reduced with your Free and Reduced applications to be sure Medicaid Reduced does not override a free eligibility determined through an application or through a different program source.
- If a child is determined to be Medicaid Reduced in the DCA, the family has the option to fill out a Free or Reduced Meal Application to see if they qualify for free meals based on income or via a different categorical source program. There are variations in how the National School Lunch Program and Medicaid determine income and household size that may make a difference for some families.
- If a student is directly certified and has multiple active eligibility source programs, Medicaid Reduced is the bottom of the direct certification hierarchy, and Medicaid Free is second to the bottom in the hierarchy. SNAP direct certifications are the highest level of direct certification (top of the hierarchy).
- Both Medicaid Reduced and Medicaid Free eligibility can be extended to other students residing in the same household. School Determining Officials can manually directly certify a student in DCA as Medicaid Extended Eligible by noting the originating source ID # of individual the benefits are being extended from.
- Medicaid Free or Medicaid Reduced can ONLY be determined by the DCA system, including through potential matches and extended eligibility. Medicaid eligibility cannot be determined by household application, DPHHS letter or by calling the DPHHS. If there are any discrepancies, please report them to the OPI so we can find out where the data is not being sent correctly, or we can assist you in finding the potential match referral within the DCA. See Direct Certification Tip Sheets on the upper right quadrant of the Home page of the DCA for more information on Linking Potential Matches.
- Medicaid Reduced students are not included in the CEP ISP count for direct certification. Medicaid Free are included in the CEP ISP count. For CEP ISP determination, the DC Report provides the ability to run just the free eligibility sources; in other words, all sources except Medicaid Reduced and Medicaid Reduced-EE.
- The DCA reports provide options to adjust the parameters and narrow your results or you can export all eligibility sources to Excel and separate the Free from the Reduced using filters in Excel. The percentages in the headers of the report reflect the categories you select in your report parameters. If you plan to upload the DC Report to your district's Point of Sale or Student Information System, you may need to upload your Reduced students separately from your Free students. Your vendor will know how their system needs to handle this change.