



ACS' Health and Human Services Glossary

Health and Human Services (HHS) is a department of the federal, state, and local governments that is responsible for administering medical, public health, and social services programs. The specific responsibilities of HHS differ by jurisdiction. Advocacy & Communication Solutions' HHS Glossary does not include all terms and does not include clinical terms. This glossary includes trending policy and advocacy issues. Use our glossary to become familiar with the most-often used terms to improve your communication and advocacy! If you have a question about a term that is not included, please [contact us!](#) Also check out ACS' glossaries for [Medicaid](#), [Workforce Development](#), [Early Care and Education](#), and [K-12 Education](#).

1. ACA (Affordable Care Act)

The comprehensive health care reform law enacted in March 2010, also sometimes referred to as "Obamacare." The law is intended to make affordable health insurance available to more people and to address potential barriers such as pre-existing conditions. The law provides consumers with subsidies that lower costs for households with incomes between 100 and 400 percent of the federal poverty level (between \$ \$20,420 and \$81,680 for a family of three for coverage year 2018, which is based on a 2017 FPL) and expands the Medicaid program, for participating states, to cover all adults with income below 138 percent of the federal poverty level (\$28,180 for a family of three in 2018). Several attempts have been made by Congress and the Trump administration to repeal or weaken the law with the most successful effort being the 2017 repeal of the individual mandate.

2. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)

Housed within the United States Department of Health and Human Services, CMS is the federal agency responsible for administering Medicare and working with states to administer the Medicaid and Children's Healthcare Insurance programs. CMS is also responsible for administering standards for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA), nursing home facilities, and clinical laboratory quality standards.

3. Child welfare

Child welfare is promoted at the federal and state level through programs and policies that protect children from abuse and neglect and provide safe, stable, and permanent living situations.

4. Children's Healthcare Insurance Program (CHIP)

Administered by CMS in partnership with states, CHIP is a program that provides matching funds to states to provide health insurance for uninsured children up to age 19 whose parents' income do not qualify for Medicaid. States have the authority to design their own eligibility requirements, including the ability to seek waivers to utilize CHIP funds to provide services to parents of children on CHIP, pregnant women, and other adults. 46 States and the District of Columbia cover children up to or above 200% of the FPL (with incomes of \$40,840 per year for a family of three in coverage year 2018), and 24 of these states offer coverage to children in families with income at 250% of the FPL or higher (\$51,050 for a family of three in 2018). Only two states (ID and ND) limit children's eligibility to below 200% FPL. Across states, the upper Medicaid/CHIP eligibility limit for children ranges from 175% FPL in North Dakota to 405% FPL (\$35,735 to \$82,701 for a family of three in 2018).

5. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Process

CQI is an organizational philosophy that focuses on quality management that builds upon traditional quality assurance methods by emphasizing the organization and systems rather than on individuals. This approach recognizes both internal and external clients and promotes the need for objective data to analyze and improve processes for the delivery of health care services.

6. Early Head Start

Created in 1994, Early Head Start is a federally funded community-based program for low-income families with pregnant women, infants and children up to age 3. Early Head Start links families and children with valuable services such as medical, mental health, nutrition, and education in a variety of settings including home-based, center-based, and home visitations.

7. Early Intervention

Early intervention refers to programs focused on providing specialized supports for the developmental, health, mental, and emotional needs of children from birth to kindergarten. Early Intervention may include speech therapy, physical therapy, or other types of services based on the needs of the child and family.

8. Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program

EHCY is part of the McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Assistance Act, which requires states to provide access to education and assistance to homeless children and youth. EHCY ensures that homeless children and youths have a right to immediately enroll regardless of documentation, to remain in their home school, access to transportation, and proper supports for academic success. School districts must identify a local liaison under the law and funds are available to local school districts on a competitive basis.

9. Foster care

Foster care describes a temporary living situation for children whose parents cannot take care of them as determined by a child welfare agency. The goal of foster care is to provide a safe, stable living environment for children. While the length of foster care depends may differ depending on families needs' and community resources, a key focus of foster care is to promote the creation of lifelong families as research shows secure attachment to at least one parenting adult plays a critical role in child development.

10. Head Start

Head Start is a federal program that promotes school readiness for children ages birth to five from low-income families through a variety of service models based upon the needs of the local community. Services may be provided in child care centers, schools, or family child care homes. Some Head Start programs also provide home-visiting programs wherein staff goes to the residence of the family to assist parents with the development of their children.

11. Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

Many health and human services are delivered in a variety of settings based upon what best meets the needs of the clients. Home-based services describe programs wherein providers may deliver services directly to families in their own residence. Community-based services typically refer to programs wherein local service agencies maintain more ownership over service design and delivery, often tailored to meet the specific needs of local communities.

12. Homelessness

An individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets, rely on temporary housing such as shelters or missions, utilize abandoned structures for shelter, or be stuck in other unstable or non-permanent housing situations.

13. Home visiting

Home visiting programs focus on linking qualified professionals with families, within the families' residences, to help strengthen the child-parent relationship and ensure that parents, particularly low-income parents, have the tools necessary to assist in the proper development of their children's education and health. Such services may be provided as early as prenatally and (in some states) for children ages up to age 5.

14. Managed Care

Managed care is a system of delivering health care to patients wherein they agree to only visit certain doctors and hospitals, and in which the cost of treatment is monitored by a managing company to ensure efficiency and realize program cost-savings.

15. Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program

MIECHV is a voluntary program for families with children ages birth to 5, which focuses on evidence-based home visitation models. MIECHV is administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration, an agency housed within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. MIECHV programs connect families with health, social service, and child development professionals to support preventive health and prenatal practices, breastfeeding, developmental milestones, and positive parenting techniques.

16. Medicaid

Medicaid is a joint state and federal program that provides assistance to 74 million low-income individuals and families who cannot afford health insurance. The program is jointly funded but managed by state governments with each state having the authority to determine eligibility for the program. Medicaid is also utilized to provide financial support for people with disabilities and elderly individuals in need of nursing home care. Medicaid also provides dental coverage for children enrolled in the program though research shows this service is underutilized by its participants due to a lack of dental providers who accept Medicaid.

17. Medicare

Medicare is a federal program that provides health coverage for individuals who are age 65 and older or those who have a severe disability, no matter their income. Medicare Part A insures for hospital care, Part B covers certain doctors' services, outpatient care, medical supplies and preventive services. Medicare Part C is the Medicare Advantage Plan that is offered by a private company (such as a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), Preferred Provider Organizations (PPO), Fee-for-Service Plans, Special Needs Plans or Medicare Medical Savings Account Plans. Medicare Part D provides prescription drug coverage.

18. Mental/behavioral health

Mental or behavioral health are terms, often used interchangeably, to characterize a person's psychological or emotional condition. Government often attempts to provide programs and supports for individuals or families afflicted with mental and behavioral health issues to promote positive mental health to help individuals realize their full potential and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

19. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Formerly known as "food stamps," SNAP is a federal nutrition assistance program for low income families and individuals that is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. SNAP benefits are provided each month on an electronic card, similar to a debit card, and can be used to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and some farmers' markets and food co-op programs.

20. SNAP Employment and Training Programs (SNAP E&T)

SNAP E&T is a federal program focused on helping SNAP participants gain the skills, training, or work experience necessary to improve their economic self-reliance. States receive federal funding to administer such programs but have considerable flexibility to determine eligibility, service offered, and service providers. In some cases, states may use "third-party reimbursement" wherein services are provided by third-party providers such as community colleges, universities, and community-based organizations.

21. Social determinants of health

A combination of social and economic conditions that influence the differences in health status between groups of people. Such determinants are linked to living and working conditions rather than individual risk factors that impact the risk for disease or injury. Identifying and addressing social determinants of health is an important aspect of shaping public policy to improve overall public health.

22. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services that provides time-limited, financial assistance for families with children. Funding is provided to states, territories, and tribes to provide assistance to families, promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. States, territories, and tribes may exercise flexibility in the administration of TANF programs, such as determining eligibility, the type and amount of payments available, and the type of services provided.

23. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

Administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, WIC is a federal assistance program focused on the health and nutrition of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and children under the age of five. Basic eligibility for the program is set at 185 percent of the federal poverty line (\$46,435 for a family of four in 2018). WIC provides a variety of services including food assistance, access to formula and breastfeeding support, nutrition education and anemia screening, and access to other healthcare and social services.