

Text Message Reminders for Telephone Interviews

Improving telephone interview completion rates for food assistance

Agency: Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), Economic and Employment Services, Food Assistance Unit

Trial Duration: 02/01/17–04/28/17

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Context

DCF provides food assistance to low-income households through Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Telephone interviews speed the process, but if an applicant misses a telephone appointment, it can delay the process and potential benefits.

Key Finding

Although case workers and clients appreciated the text reminders, the intervention did not result in improved telephone response rates.

*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy “Pracademics” who lead trials.

Background

Kansas’ Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food benefits for low-income households. The SNAP application can be completed with a telephone interview; however, many applicants do not answer their phones, resulting in delays in processing and entitled benefits. Text-message reminders have been shown to be a valuable tool for workers to reach clients in other areas such as clinics and community supervision. The Kansas Food Assistance Program conducted a randomized controlled trial to test whether a text reminder sent before the scheduled telephone interview would improve the rate of completed interviews.

Trial Design

The Topeka and Garden City field offices randomly assigned SNAP applicants who had not completed interviews to one of two conditions: intervention applicants received a text reminder five minutes before their telephone interview (n=979) and the control condition received no text reminder (n=1223).

Results

The table shows results by site. A total of 962 texts were sent to the intervention group, reflecting a fidelity rate of 96%. Text reminders did not improve the telephone interview completion rate. Only 66% of the intervention group completed the phone interview, compared to 70% of the control group. Despite these findings, DCF staff and some intervention group participants endorsed the use of text-message reminders.

Results of Text Message Trial

	Intervention			Control		
	TO	GC	Total	TO	GC	Total
# participants	763	216	979	928	295	1223
# texts sent	763	199	962	--	--	--
# calls answered	498	145	643	666	199	865
% phone response	65	67	66	72	67	70

TO= Topeka; GC= Garden City

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