

VDSS Research Brief: How Many Days Does it Take to Approve an Application for SNAP, Medicaid, or TANF?

- Context:** Although SNAP and TANF generally allow 30 days to approve an application (except for SNAP expedited applications), and Medicaid allows 45 days with certain exceptions, the actual time to approve may be less for a sizeable proportion of applications. On the other hand, rapid growth in caseloads over the past two years may have led to an increase in processing time, even though workers are meeting the 30- and 45- day standards for more than 90 percent of applications.
- Objective:** To calculate the average and median number of days needed to approve applications for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid, and to determine whether processing time has increased due to growth in caseloads.
- Data source:** ADAPT data downloaded from the data warehouse showing number of applications by number of days needed to approve, for each month from June 2006 through May 2010. The total number of applications for this four-year period was approximately 675,000 for SNAP, 380,000 for Medicaid, and 128,000 for TANF.
- Methods:** Calculate and graph the mean, median, 25th, and 75th percentiles for number of days to approve for each program. To avoid undue influence from outliers or data errors, approvals longer than 180 days were dropped from the analysis. These approvals accounted for less than 1/10 of 1% of approvals.
- Caveats:** (1) Denials generally take more time than approvals, so the average time needed to process all applications is greater than the time needed to process approved applications. (2) Medicaid results exclude case types that are not in ADAPT.
- Results:** For all three programs, a large proportion of applications are approved in half the allotted time or faster. There is no evidence that approvals are taking longer to process as caseloads have grown.

**Number of Days Needed to Approve Applications,
By Program, June 2006-May2010**

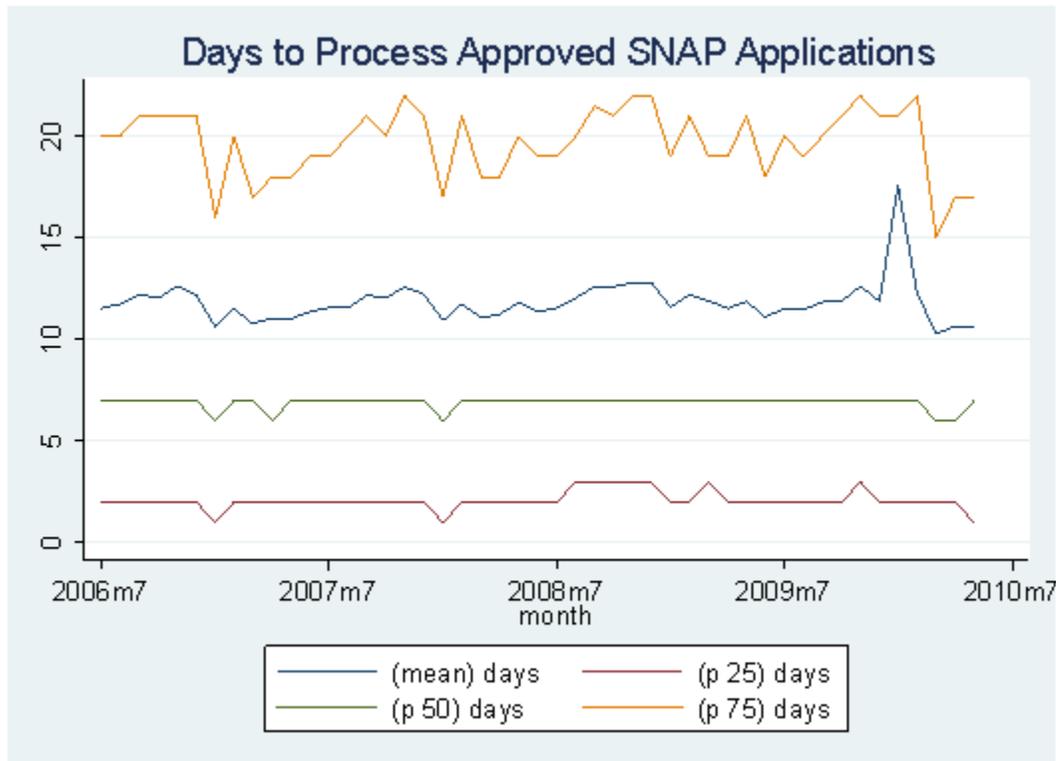
Program	Mean	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile	90th Percentile
SNAP	11.9	2	7	20	29
Medicaid	24.3	10	23	36	44
TANF	18.0	9	19	28	30

Source: ADAPT data from data warehouse.

SNAP

On average over the past four years, SNAP applications take about 12 days to approve. 25 percent of SNAP approvals are made within 2 days, and half of all SNAP approvals happen within 7 days. About 35 percent of approvals are expedited, meaning that they are subject to a 7-day deadline rather than 30 days. (This percentage has not changed much over the last seven years.)

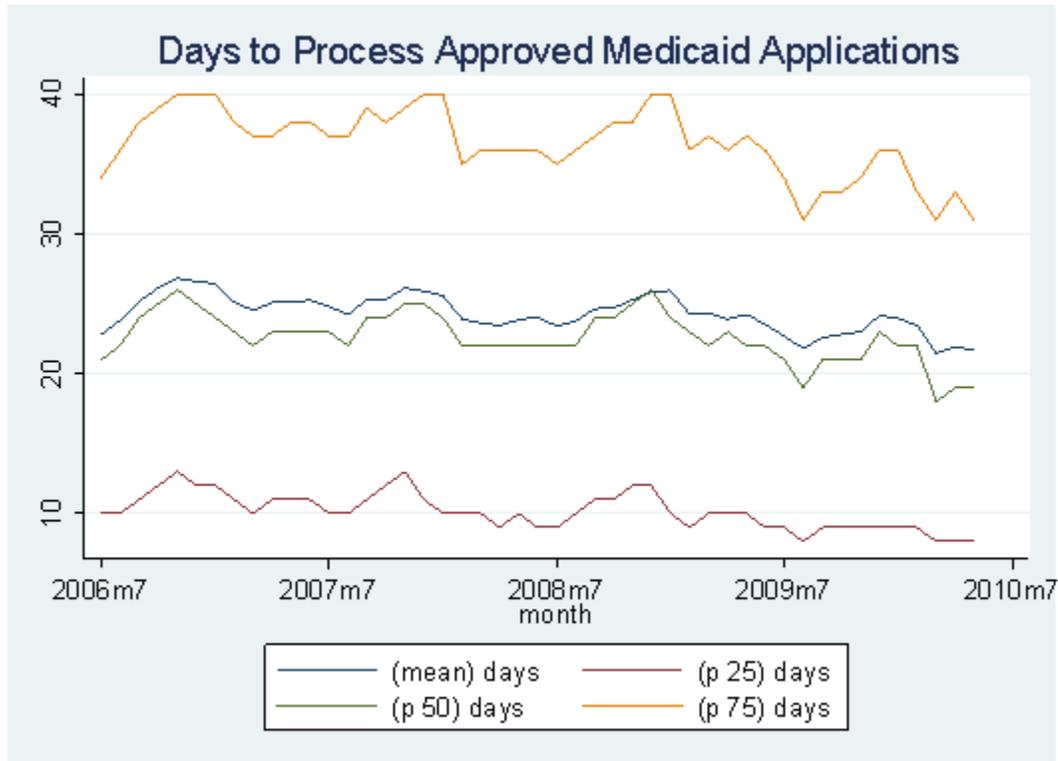
The graph shows no evidence that the time to approve SNAP applications has increased. The graph shows an upward spike in average approval time for January 2010. It is unclear whether this spike is weather related or due to some other factor. The spike appears only for SNAP, not Medicaid or TANF.



Medicaid

The average time to approve a Medicaid application (for Medicaid cases in ADAPT) is 24 days. The median time is about the same, 23 days.

The graph appears to show a slight downward trend over time, meaning it is taking slightly less time to approve Medicaid applications.



TANF

The average time to approve a TANF application is 18 days, with a median of 19 days.

The graph does not show a trend in TANF approval time.

