



Legislative Report

MnCHOICES Benchmarks

Annual data report

Disability Services Division

November 2022

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I. Executive summary

This is the third report issued by the Department of Human Services (DHS) in accordance with Minnesota Laws 2019, First Special Session, article 5, section 47 and Minnesota Statutes section 256B.0911, subdivision 5(c) requiring DHS to work with lead agencies to develop a set of measurable benchmarks relating to the long-term care consultation (LTCC) assessment and eligibility process. DHS issued the [first report](#) in February 2020 and the [second report](#) in February 2021.

This third report serves as the annual data report and summarizes the process DHS used to develop a set of measurable benchmarks for lead agencies (counties, tribal nations and managed-care organizations) responsible for conducting LTCC services. The report provides an update on the status of the benchmarks project and provides annual data on each performance measure. It also includes conclusions about next steps and plans for ongoing reporting of data.

MnCHOICES benchmark project background

DHS began working with the DHS Office of Continuous Improvement in July 2019 on a collaborative project with county representatives. The goal of the project was to identify potential opportunities for performance measures (benchmarks), collect data and complete an initial analysis of data.

DHS worked collaboratively with lead agencies to determine which measures they found most useful, their preferred method of tracking data and other related items. DHS and lead agencies mutually agreed on the following six measures:

1. Number of people assessed
2. Average minimum/maximum time from in-person assessment to final paperwork mailed to person
3. Number of times the initial assessment and eligibility determination process exceeds 60 days
4. Time it takes to do an in-person interview
 - a. Initial assessment
 - b. Reassessment
5. Number of people with multiple assessments during a calendar year
6. Number of days waiting on financial eligibility determination

Current status

Data collection on all six of the measures has continued since the report submitted in February 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to the MnCHOICES benchmarks project and the data collected. Regulatory flexibilities were put in place to give counties the ability to meet the needs of the people in their communities and maintain safety while balancing shifting priorities. This had an effect on how counties completed assessment and eligibility work, therefore influencing the benchmark data.

At the time of this report, DHS and MNIT are working with a vendor, FEI Systems, on the MnCHOICES Revision project. This project started because the current version of MnCHOICES will lose vendor support for software critical to the application. However, it has provided an opportunity to address other technology and business needs, including more efficient assessment and support planning processes for lead agencies.

Data

Data on 2021 measures are broken down into quarters based on calendar year.

- Quarter four: October 2020 through December 2020
- Quarter one: January 2021 through March 2021
- Quarter two: April 2021 through June 2021
- Quarter three: July 2021 through September 2021

In some cases, additional county-level data is provided to illustrate the wide range among counties throughout the state. However, no individual county names are listed.

Conclusions

The MnCHOICES benchmark project has provided many learning opportunities for DHS and county partners. The process map created as a first step in the project is a valuable tool, providing a deeper understanding of the assessment and eligibility process, identifying approximately 50 steps from start to finish. DHS used the process map to kick off the partnership with the vendor working on the MnCHOICES Revision project. DHS remains committed to identifying further efficiencies in the assessment and eligibility process, and working with lead agency partners to assist with further improvements at an agency level.

Due to the timing of the launch of the revised MnCHOICES system (which will bring additional efficiencies), as well as the impacts of COVID-19 on assessment and eligibility policies and procedures, it is recommended that the benchmarks project be put on hold until after the launch of the revised system. The timeline for resuming the process to set benchmark data must also account for time for lead agencies to get accustomed to the new system. DHS will continue to collect data during this provisional time; however as it is not an accurate reflection of normal policy and lead agency workflow; it should not be used as a standard or point of reference against which efficiency measures should be compared.

II. Legislation

Minnesota Statutes section 256B.0911, subdivision 5 (c) requires the Department of Human Services to submit a report to the legislature:

(c) The commissioner shall work with lead agencies responsible for conducting long-term consultation services to develop a set of measurable benchmarks sufficient to demonstrate quarterly improvement in the average time per assessment and other mutually agreed upon measures of increasing efficiency. The commissioner shall collect data on these benchmarks and provide to the lead agencies and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over human services an annual trend analysis of the data in order to demonstrate the commissioner's compliance with the requirements of this subdivision.

III. Introduction

This report provides annual data on a set of measurable benchmarks intended to create efficiencies in county functions related to the MnCHOICES assessment and eligibility process.

The report includes the following four sections:

- MnCHOICES benchmark project background: Overview of the project to identify opportunities for process efficiencies (benchmarks), implement a data-collection method and complete analysis of data.
- Current status: Summary of the six performance measures and update on COVID-19 related effects on measures.
- Annual data report: Provides the data collected from October 2020–September 2021.
- Conclusion: Next steps for benchmarks project and ongoing reporting of data.

IV. MnCHOICES benchmark project background

Minnesota Statutes section 256B.0911, subdivision 5 (c) requires DHS to work with lead agencies responsible for conducting LTCC services to develop a set of measurable benchmarks sufficient to demonstrate quarterly improvement in the average time per assessment and other mutually agreed upon measures of increasing efficiency. At the time this law was enacted, DHS did not have the necessary data to set a baseline and measure appropriate benchmarks. DHS determined the first step in this process was to collaborate with lead agencies to obtain this preliminary data.

DHS began working with the DHS Office of Continuous Improvement in July 2019 to complete this work. The objective of the project was to identify performance measures (benchmarks), then collect and complete an initial analysis of data. This project focused on establishing performance measures, but was not intended to implement process efficiencies. In order to determine the areas for improvement, DHS and the Office of Continuous Improvement:

- Worked with a group of 11 assessors across the state to complete an end-to-end process flow of the assessment and eligibility process.
- Identified potential performance measures and rated the potential measures based on key criteria. This process was based on the results based accountability framework and helped DHS and project partners identify which performance measures were the strongest indicators of performance and the most realistic to capture.
- Sent a survey to all lead agency supervisors to gather their feedback on areas that were selected for ongoing measurement and provide priority ranking for additional measurements.

Based on survey response, the team selected six areas for benchmark measurement. The measures are outlined below, along with the goal or purpose of each.

Table 1: Performance measures and goals/purpose

Measure	Goal/Purpose
1. Number of people assessed using MnCHOICES.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This data is important to collect to have an understanding of the overall volume of MnCHOICES assessments completed and the number of people who have participated in a MnCHOICES assessment.
2. Average minimum/maximum time from in-person assessment to final paperwork mailed to person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data will help determine if people are receiving timely access as required by state statute and policy.

Measure	Goal/Purpose
<p>3. Number of times the initial assessment and eligibility determination process exceeds 60 days.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to inform future policy decisions, it is important to know how often the initial assessment and eligibility determination process exceeds the maximum allotted 60 days. • Data will help identify specific situations that take longer and determine what could potentially reduce barriers.
<p>4. Time it takes to do an in-person interview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Initial assessment Reassessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking this measure statewide for every assessment will provide more reliable, concrete data to inform decision making at a local, policy and legislative level. • Previously, this data was available through anecdotal reporting only.
<p>5. Number of people with multiple assessments during a calendar year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to reduce unnecessary assessments as well as inform future policy decisions, it is important to have data on the number of people with multiple assessments during a calendar year. • Data will allow DHS to identify individual lead agencies where unnecessary multiple assessments are occurring and offer technical assistance to those agencies.
<p>6. Number of days waiting on financial eligibility determination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment and eligibility process involves more than just the MnCHOICES assessment; it also relies on financial eligibility being determined timely; this measure shows the number of days it takes to determine health care eligibility.

VI. Current Status

After reaching agreement on the six performance measures, DHS’s next step was to implement a data collection method. The data sources used for the benchmark measures include:

- MnCHOICES Assessment
- MnCHOICES Support Plan
- Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS)
- MAXIS: a computer system used by state and county workers to determine eligibility for public assistance and health care

Table 2: Performance measures and data sources

Number	Measure	Data source(s)
1.	Number of people assessed using MnCHOICES.	MnCHOICES Assessment
2.	Average minimum/maximum time from in-person assessment to final paperwork mailed to person.	MnCHOICES Assessment MnCHOICES Support Plan
3.	Number of times the assessment and eligibility determination process exceeds 60 days.	MMIS
4.	Time it takes to do an in-person interview c. Initial assessment d. Reassessment	MnCHOICES Assessment
5.	Number of people with multiple assessments during a calendar year*.	MnCHOICES Assessment MMIS
6.	Number of days waiting on financial eligibility determination.	MAXIS

*Measure five can only be analyzed on an annual basis. In order to know the number of people who had multiple assessments within a calendar year, the full year of data must be available. For reporting purposes, CY2020 data has been included in this report.

Lead agency process mapping

Minnesota Session Laws, 2021, 1st Special Session Law Chapter 7, Sec. 7 included an appropriation for the commissioner of human services to review lead agency policies and business practices and to identify potential efficiencies in long-term care consultation services and to make recommendations to lead agencies based on the review. It also requires DHS to produce a guide documenting the process for determining medical assistance eligibility and authorization of long-term services and supports and to ensure that the guide is available in accessible formats and in multiple languages.

Because the LTSS assessment and eligibility process is delegated to counties and Tribal nations, it is implemented in various ways depending on each individual county's or Tribal nation's processes. These differences in agency practices create variations in determining eligibility, length of time to complete the processes, and inconsistent experiences for the people asking for help. This project will identify opportunities for efficiencies and streamlining at the lead agency level and identify best practices that can be shared across the state.

DHS completed a Request for Proposal (RFP) to obtain a qualified vendor that will complete the process improvement reviews. DHS expects to publish the results in the second quarter of CY2023.

COVID-19 impacts to project

The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to the MnCHOICES benchmarks project and the data collected. On March 20, 2020, the governor announced Executive Order 20-12, [Preserving Access to Human Services Programs During the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency](#). Regulatory flexibilities were put in place, including the ability for initial assessments and reassessments to be done on the phone or by other electronic communication instead of in-person. Because measure four was implemented on March 16, 2020, data collected on this measure now reflects the time it takes to do either a phone/video interview or an in-person interview.

Second, due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were additional demands on county and tribal nations to ensure the health, safety and well-being of their residents. Therefore, shifting priorities within counties and tribal nations affected some of the other measures. For example, some counties redeployed staff to help with their pandemic response. This potentially had a negative effect on the remaining timeline measures as counties were working with reduced staff capacity.

In addition, there are differences in some of the data points from CY2019 through the first three quarters of 2021 that likely are a result of COVID-19 but it is not possible to correlate direct causation. One example is the total number of initial assessments. When comparing the first three quarters of 2019 to the first three quarters of 2020, there is a decrease of 11%. From 2020 to 2021, initial assessments decreased an additional 3.4%. Because there has not been significant variation from year to year prior to COVID-19, it is plausible to conclude that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the number of people reaching out for initial assessments.

MnCHOICES revision project

The current version of MnCHOICES will lose vendor support for software critical to the application (Microsoft Silverlight). Updating the application to address that loss provides an opportunity to address other technology and business needs. DHS and the Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) team selected a vendor, FEI Systems, to

collaborate on the MnCHOICES Revision project and provide a “software as a service” platform for the MnCHOICES application. The contract was executed on Sept. 14, 2020 and work began with FEI Systems on Sept. 21, 2020. This move to a vendor-hosted platform eliminated the need for DHS to maintain a custom-built application for MnCHOICES. This will increase stability and intuitive navigation of the application. The goal of the revision includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- Greater support for person-centered assessment and practice
- Elimination of duplicate/repetitive questions
- More efficient intake process
- Access to information (reports)
- Need for reassessment workflow support
- Business content management capability
- Versioning ability
- Improved application response times
- Onboarding Managed Care Organizations- increasing consistency with all users using the same tool

DHS has continued our fast-paced requirements sessions with FEI Systems to sort and gather the needed details to complete the build of the new MnCHOICES application. The work kicked off with a walkthrough of the process map created for the benchmarks project, with specific attention to the pain points identified by the lead agency participants that were unique to the MnCHOICES process. DHS began User Acceptance Testing (UAT) in summer 2021. We plan to include external partners in testing and input of the new application during UAT. Following UAT, we will continue launch preparations by addressing critical defects (or address the results of user acceptance testing) and ensuring the system meets the needs and expectations of DHS, lead agencies, and the people we serve. The revised MnCHOICES launch date is April 2023.

VII. Annual data report

The quarterly breakdowns depicted in the charts below include the following months:

- Quarter four: October 2020 through December 2020
- Quarter one: January 2021 through March 2021
- Quarter two: April 2021 through June 2021
- Quarter three: July 2021 through September 2021

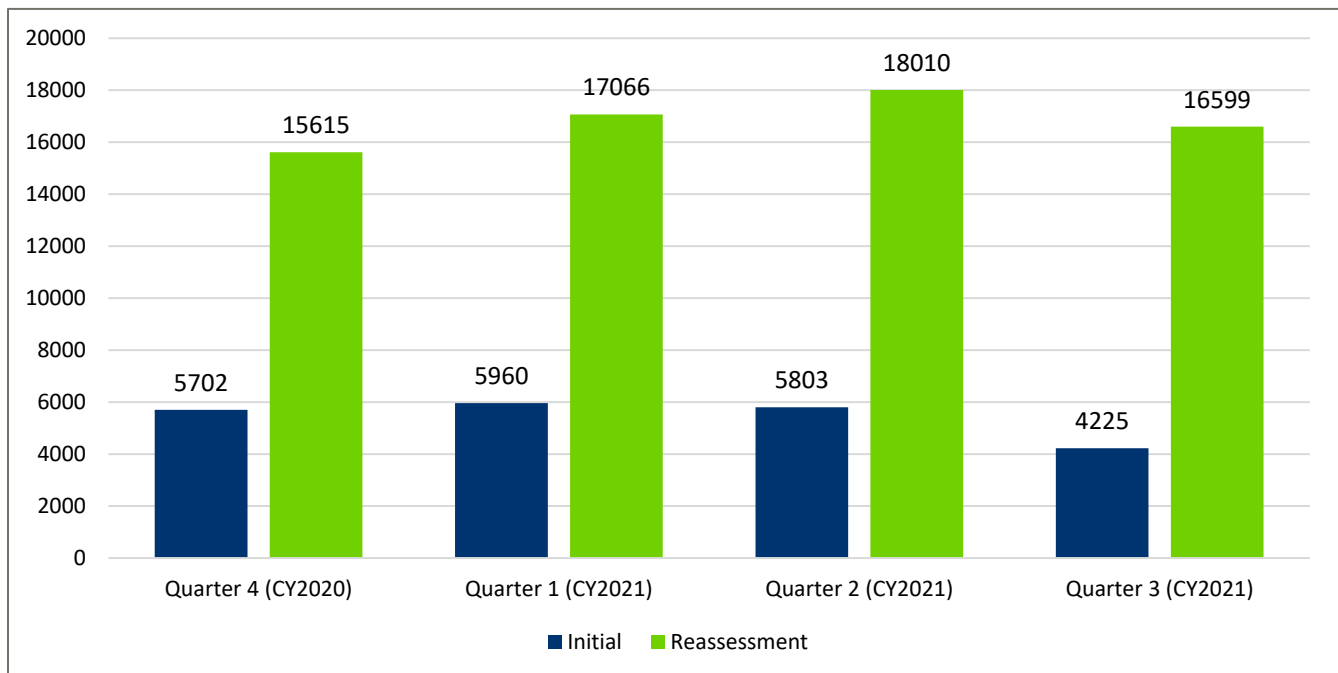
An important caveat for quarter three data; in order to prepare and produce this annual data report, data must be gathered in October. Because assessments are viable for up to sixty days following the in-person interview, there are instances where assessments are not complete and closed in the MnCHOICES assessment and therefore not reflected in the total numbers. Quarter three data should not be considered final for this current report, but will be updated with final data in the succeeding report.

Measure five can only be analyzed on an annual basis. In order to know the number of people who had multiple assessments within a calendar year, the full year of data must be available. CY2020 data is used in this report to allow for a full year of data to be analyzed.

In some cases, additional county-level data is provided to illustrate the wide range among counties throughout the state. In these visualizations, the county names are pseudonymized so the specific agency is not named. The intention for including these additional data visualizations is to help display the wide variation throughout the state, not to identify individual county practices.

1. Number of people assessed using MnCHOICES

Figure 1: Number of people assessed using MnCHOICES



*Quarter 3 data is from July 2021-September 2021. Data for this report was compiled in October 2021. Therefore, assessments completed later in the quarter may not be reflected if they were not yet complete and closed in the MnCHOICES assessment application at the time of the data extract.

Figure one shows the number of people assessed using MnCHOICES. In the first three quarters of calendar year 2021, there were 15,988 initial assessments completed statewide. Compared to 2020 data for the same period, initial assessments have decreased approximately 3.4% in the first three quarters of calendar year 2020. This could be partially attributed to assessments completed later in quarter three that were not yet closed and complete in the MnCHOICES system by the end of the reporting period. This follows a decrease of 11% from the first three quarters of 2019 to 2020 (using final data one year out from that reporting period). COVID-19 related affects should be considered as a probable reason for the significant decrease in initial assessments.

There is wide variation in the number of initial assessments and reassessments counties across the state perform on a quarterly basis. This variation is important to note as county procedures and practices may vary depending on the agency size and structure. The chart below illustrates the range of assessments completed in the three highest and three lowest volume counties in CY2021 quarter 1:

Figure 2: Variation between high volume and low volume counties in initial and reassessments

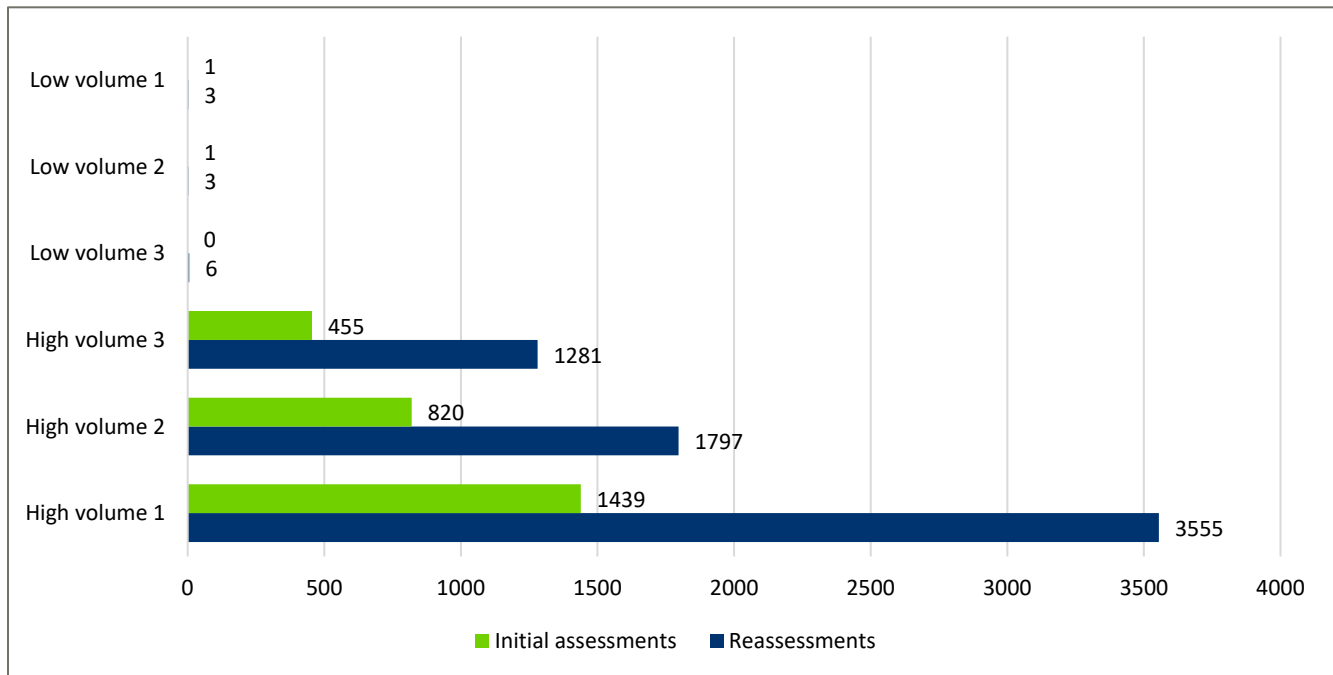
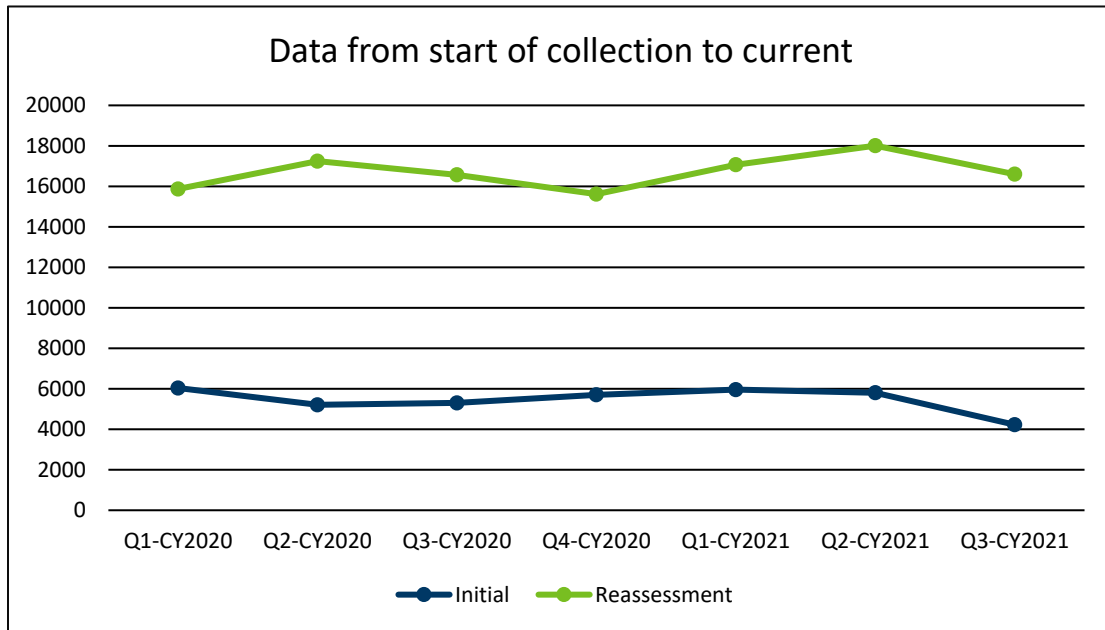
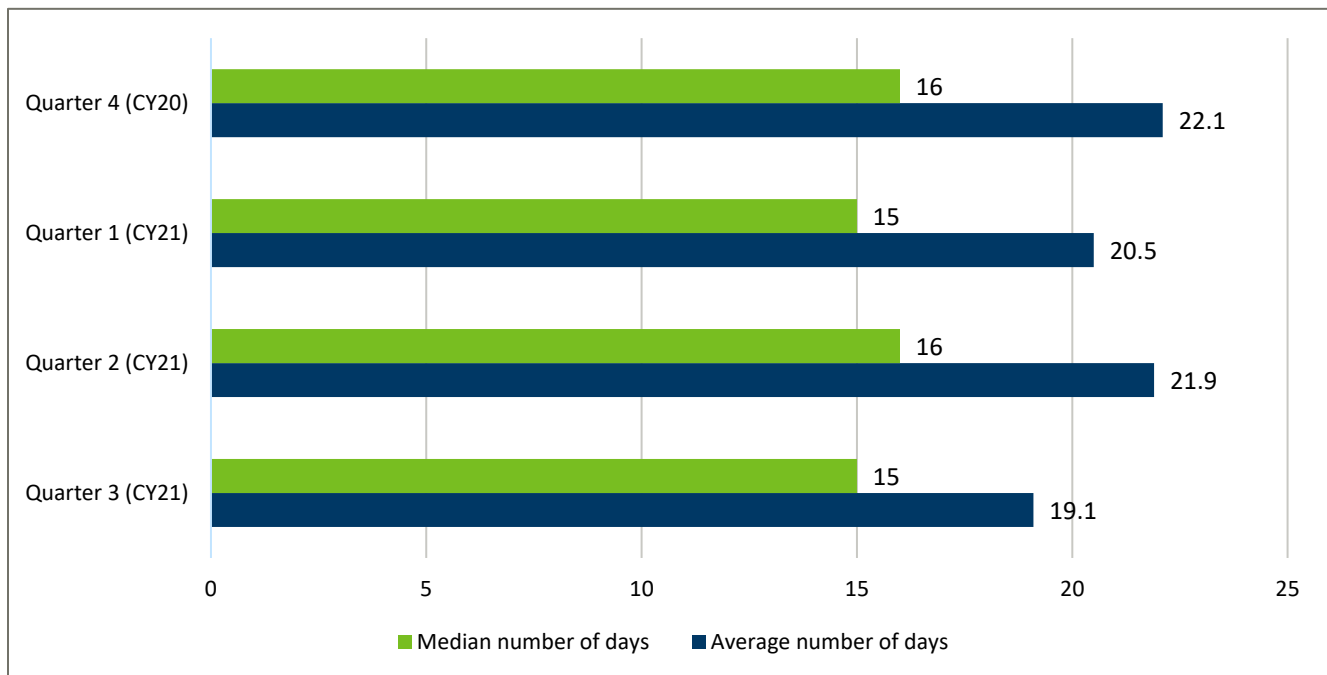


Figure 3: Data from beginning of data collection to present: Number of people assessed using MnCHOICES



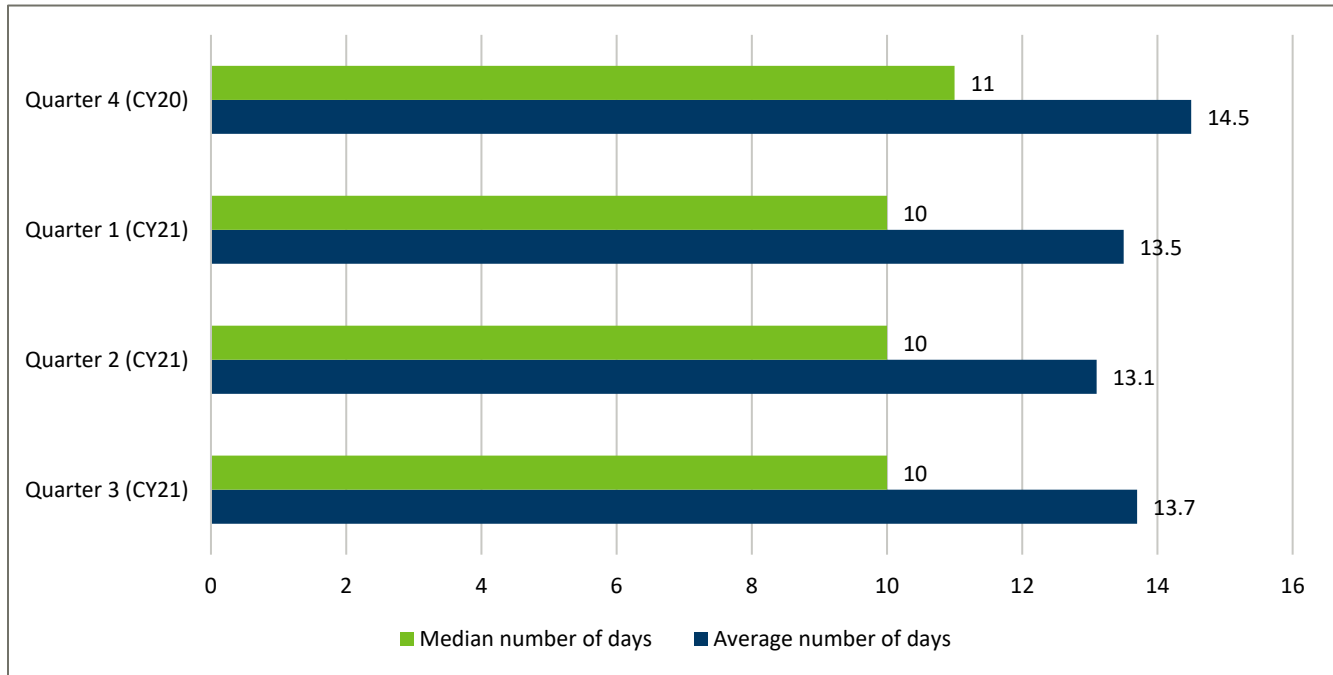
2. Average minimum/maximum time from in-person assessment to final paperwork mailed to person

Figure 4: Median and average number of days from assessment to final paperwork mailed for initial assessments



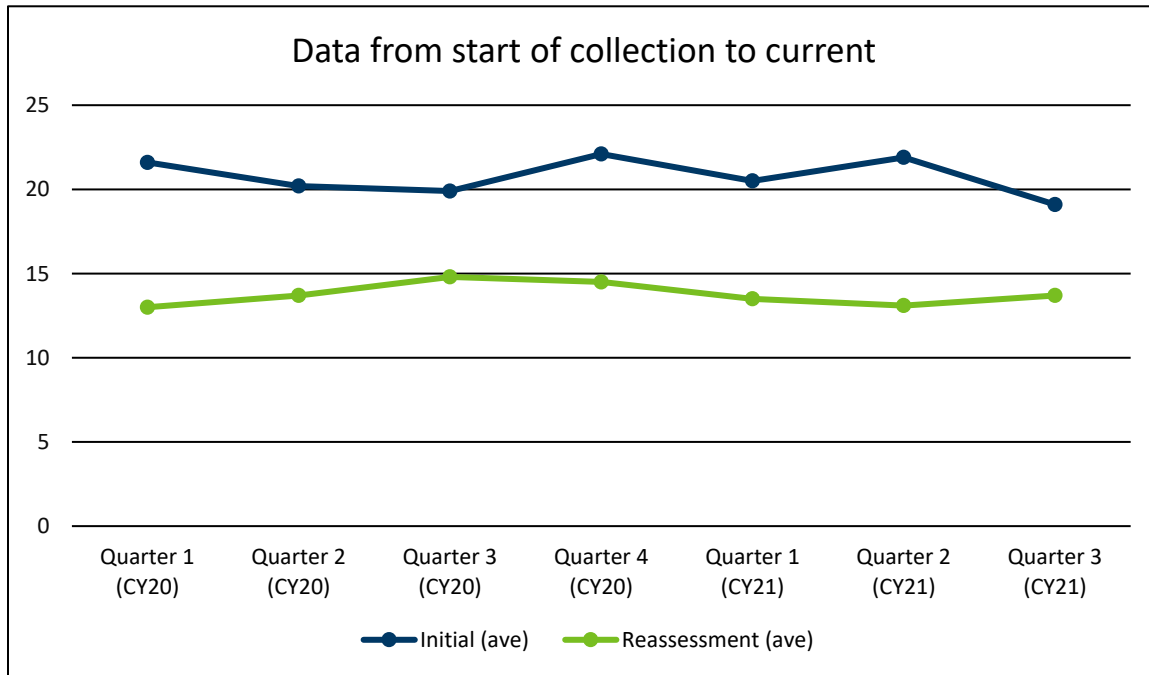
* Dates over 426 days were removed for purposes of data analysis. The final paperwork is only valid for one year; if the final paperwork was not sent within the year, the assessment and corresponding documents are no longer valid. Lead agencies have a span of 60 days prior to the end of the validation period to complete the updated assessment.

Figure 5: Median and average number of days from assessment to final paperwork mailed for reassessments



* Dates over 426 days were removed for purposes of data analysis. The final paperwork is only valid for one year; if the final paperwork was not sent within the year, the assessment and corresponding documents are no longer valid. Lead agencies have a span of 60 days prior to the end of the validation period to complete the updated assessment.

Figure 6: Data from beginning of data collection to present: Average number of days from assessment to final paperwork mailed



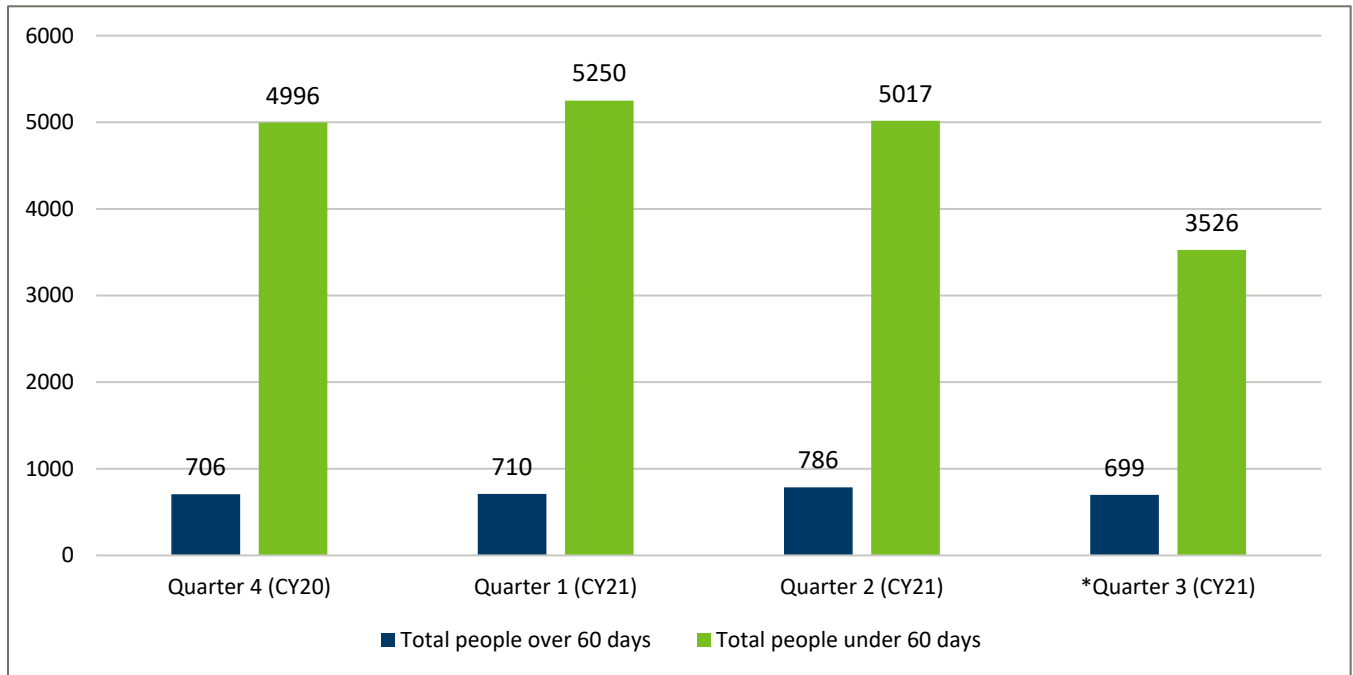
For this measure, the final paperwork is defined as the person’s Community Support Plan (CSP). This document is a written summary completed for everyone who has an assessment, regardless of whether the person is eligible for Minnesota Health Care Programs (MHCP) or chooses to receive publicly funded home and community-based services or state plan services. This document provides a summary of what the assessor discovered through the assessment process and identifies next steps based on the person’s needs.

In the first three quarters of 2020, the time from initial assessment to the final paperwork (CSP) mailed averaged 20.5 days. The median number of days was 14.6. In the same time in 2021, the initial assessment timeline again averaged 20.5. The median number of days was 15.3. For reassessments, in the first three quarters of 2020 the average was 13.8 days, while the median number of days was 11. In 2021, these numbers were comparable at 13.4 and 10 days. Minnesota state law allows for 60 days from the time of the assessment to the time the Coordinated Services and Supports Plan (CSSP) is provided to the person (a CSSP is only completed if the person is eligible for and chooses to receive publicly funded home and community-based services and/or state plan services).

3. Number of times the initial assessment and eligibility determination process exceeds 60 days

In 2013, the Minnesota Legislature authorized a way for lead agencies to update and reestablish a person’s program eligibility when there is a delay in accessing programs because the person’s administrative eligibility determination(s) are pending. The law also allows an eligibility update to extend the time an agency can determine a person’s program eligibility without another in-person assessment. The chart below illustrates the number of people where the initial eligibility determination took over 60 days and the number of people where the initial determination took under 60 days.

Figure 7: Total number of people where the assessment and eligibility process took over 60 days or under 60 days



*Quarter 3 data is from July 2020-September 2020. Data for this report was compiled in October 2020. Therefore, assessments completed later in the quarter may not be reflected if they were not yet complete and closed in the MnCHOICES assessment application.

The charts below illustrate the percent of assessments over and under 60 days, by quarter. On average, 15% of people had their eligibility determination take over 60 days.

Figure 8: Percentage of people where the assessment and eligibility process took over 60 days or under 60 days

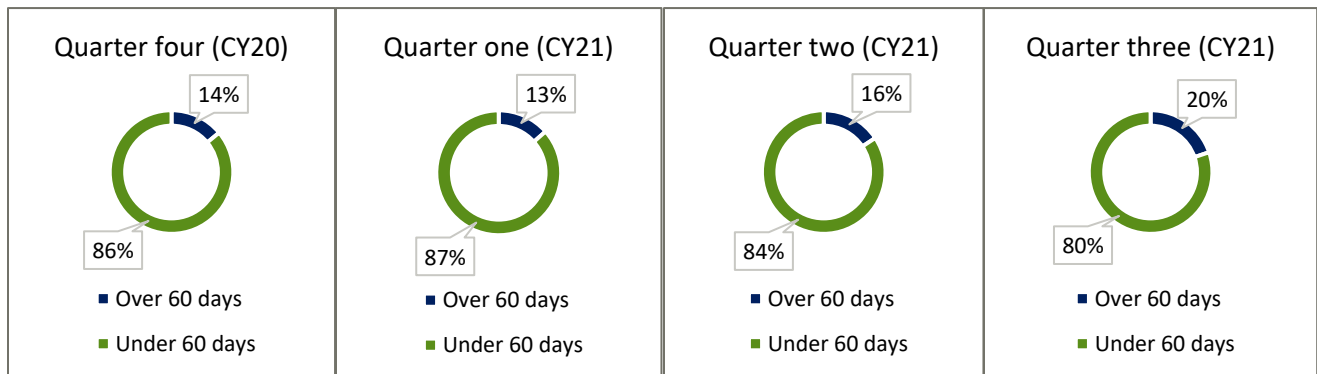
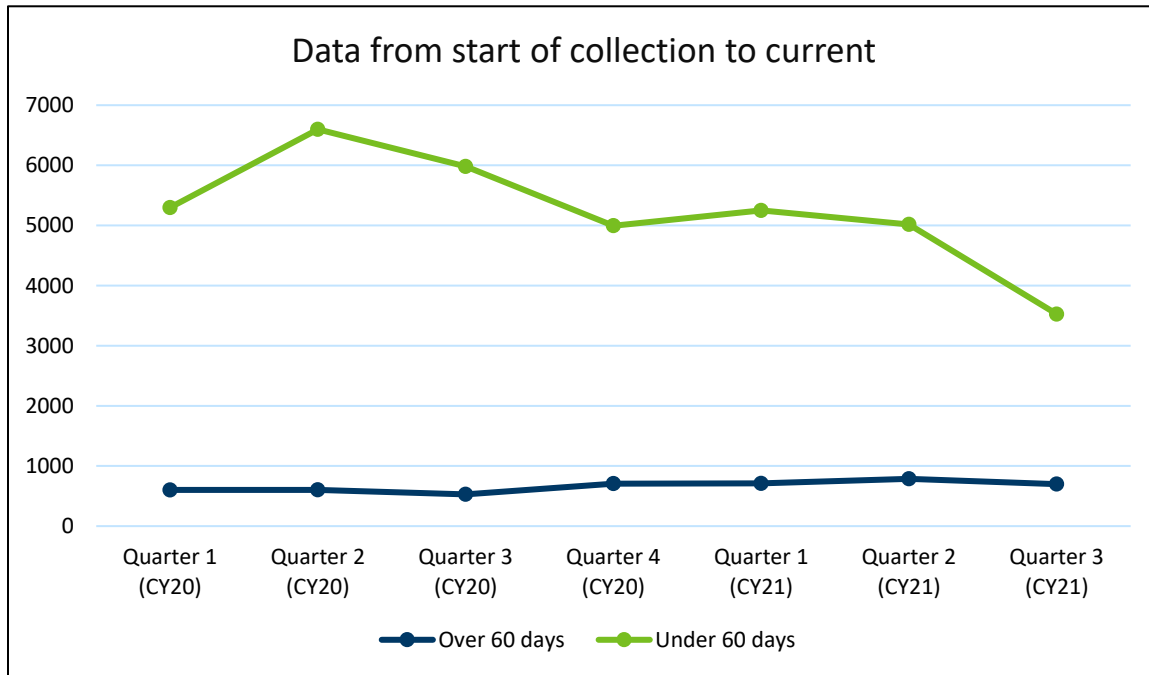
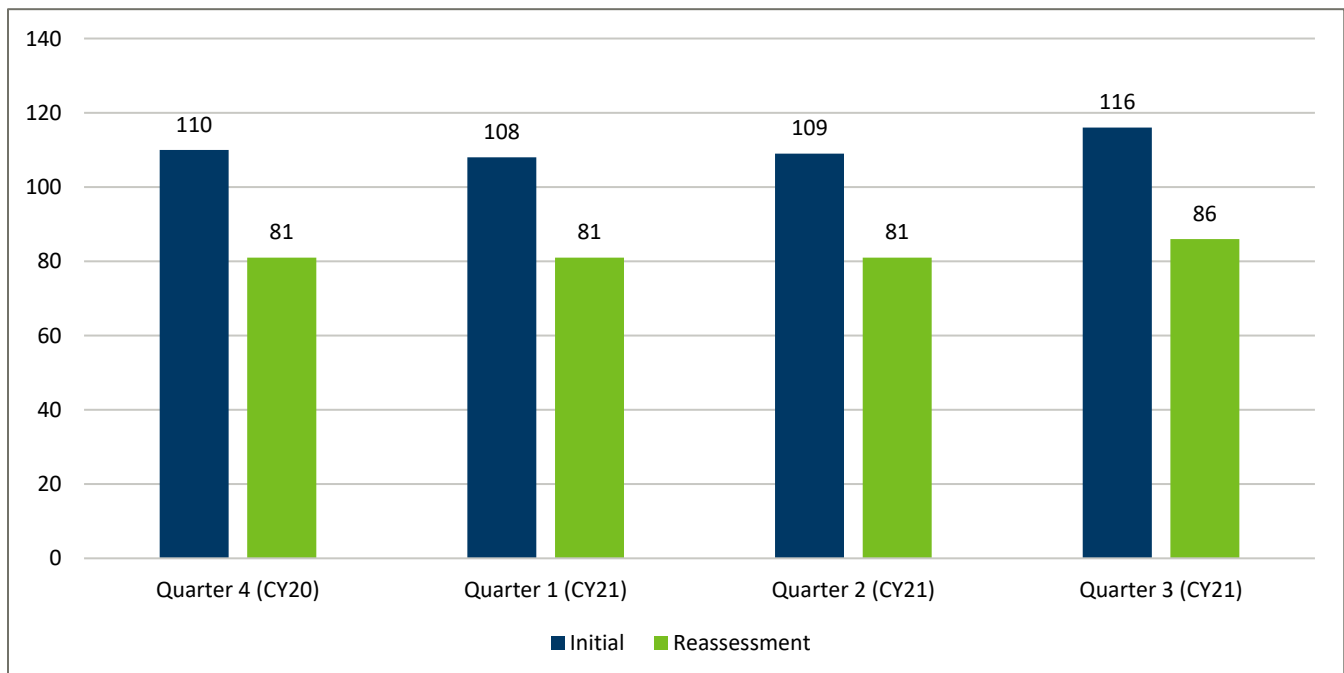


Figure 9: Data from beginning of data collection to present; total number of people where the assessment and eligibility process took over 60 days or under 60 days



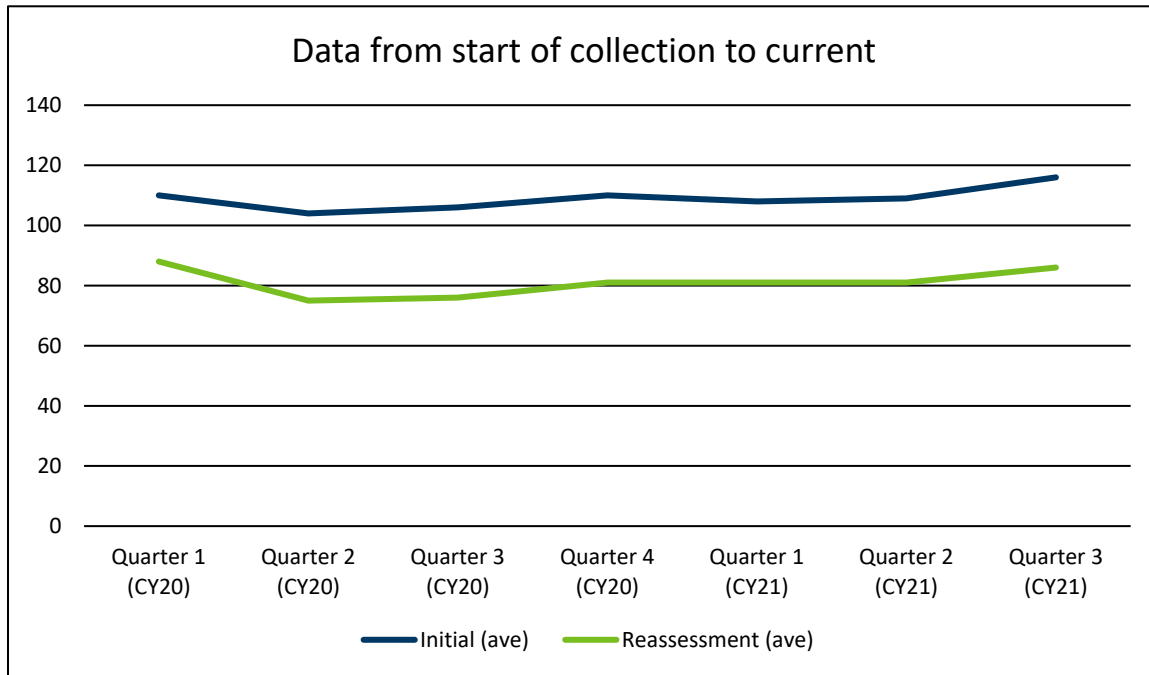
4. Time it takes to do an in-person interview

Figure 10: Average time spent in the assessment interview for initial assessments and reassessments



***A COVID-19 related policy allowing assessments to be completed remotely was implemented on March 20, 2020. Therefore, the data above is reflective of phone/video based assessments or in-person assessments.*

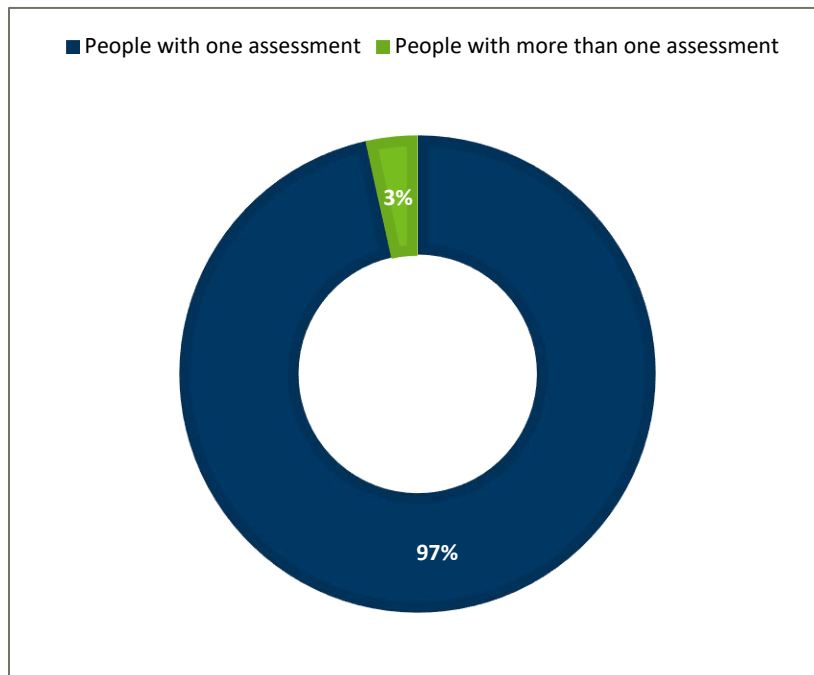
Figure 11: Data from beginning of data collection to present; average time spent in the assessment interview for initial assessments and reassessments



Overall, in the first three quarters of 2021, initial assessment interviews took an average of 111 minutes, compared to 107 minutes in 2020. Reassessment interviews took an average of 83 minutes, compared to 80 minutes in 2020. The MnCHOICES assessment is a comprehensive, holistic assessment that incorporates state and federal requirements for person-centered planning. The assessment is tailored to the person being interviewed and the person drives the time it takes. Considering the comprehensive nature and taking into account individual peoples’ needs, DHS considers this as appropriate amount of time for the assessment interview. Although Minnesota Statutes section 256B.0911, subdivision 5 (c) requires DHS work to achieve “quarterly improvement in the average time per assessment,” we feel the assessment is taking the right amount of time on average. There is, however, room for improvement and efficiencies in other areas relating to assessment and eligibility determinations. DHS will continue to work with counties and tribal nations to make progress in these other identified areas.

5. Number of people with multiple assessments during a calendar year

Figure 12: Percent of people with multiple assessments in CY2020



In CY2020, 87,546 people had a MnCHOICES assessment. Of those people, 3051 people had more than one assessment in the calendar year. A “multiple assessment” is defined as when a person has an additional assessment in the calendar year in addition to their scheduled annual reassessment. This typically occurs for one of three reasons:

1. The person experiences a significant, potentially long-term change in need for services and supports before the anticipated annual reassessment. Potential reasons include an emerging need or risk, a major health event or a worsening health condition.
2. The person turns 65 years old and is on a Brain Injury (BI), Community Alternative Care (CAC) or Community Access for Disability Inclusion (CADI) waiver.
3. The person experiences an institutional stay such as a nursing facility or an intensive residential treatment service (IRTS).

Across the state, there is variation among counties where multiple assessments were completed for a person in CY2020. The chart below shows the top and bottom three counties based on a percentage of their total people assessed.

Figure 13: High volume and low volume counties: percent of people with multiple assessments in CY2020

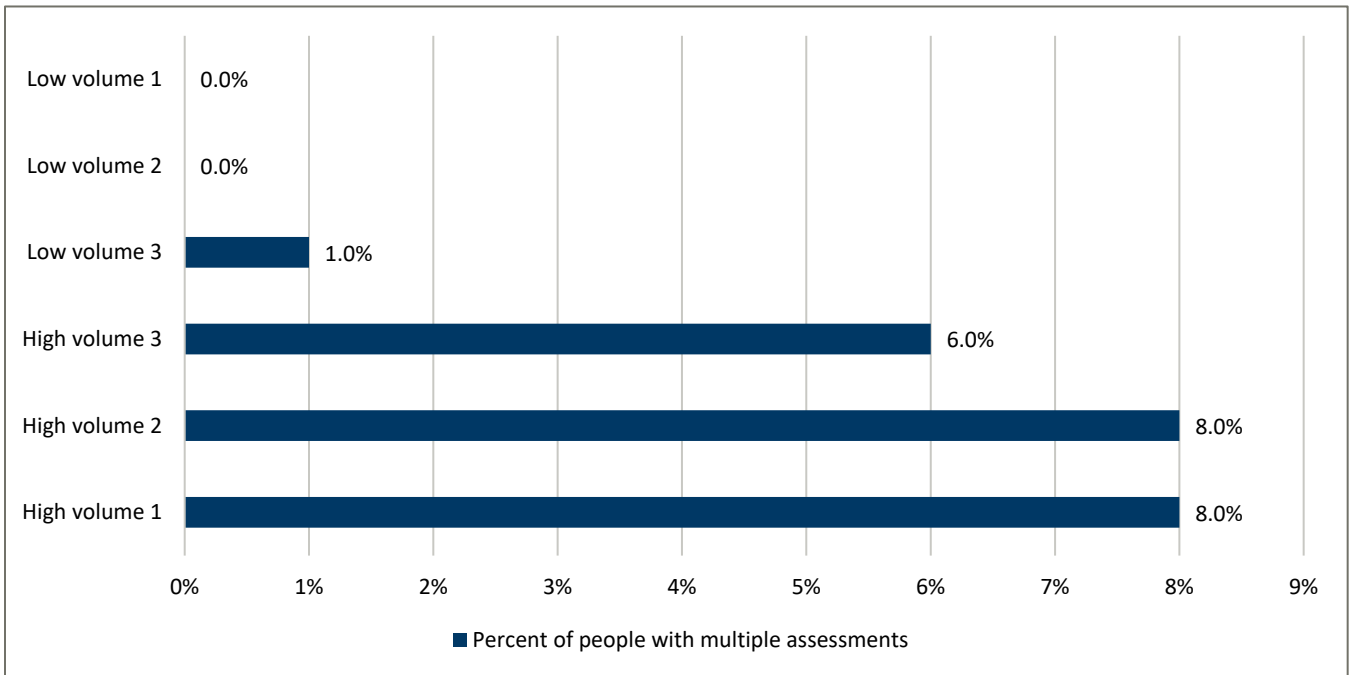
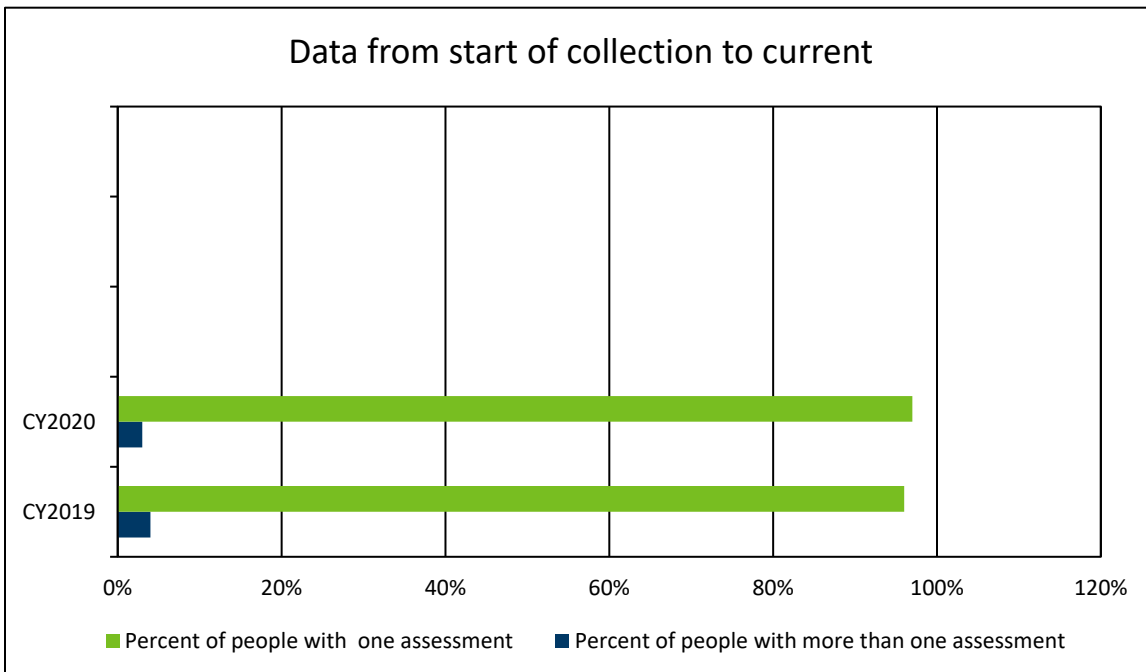
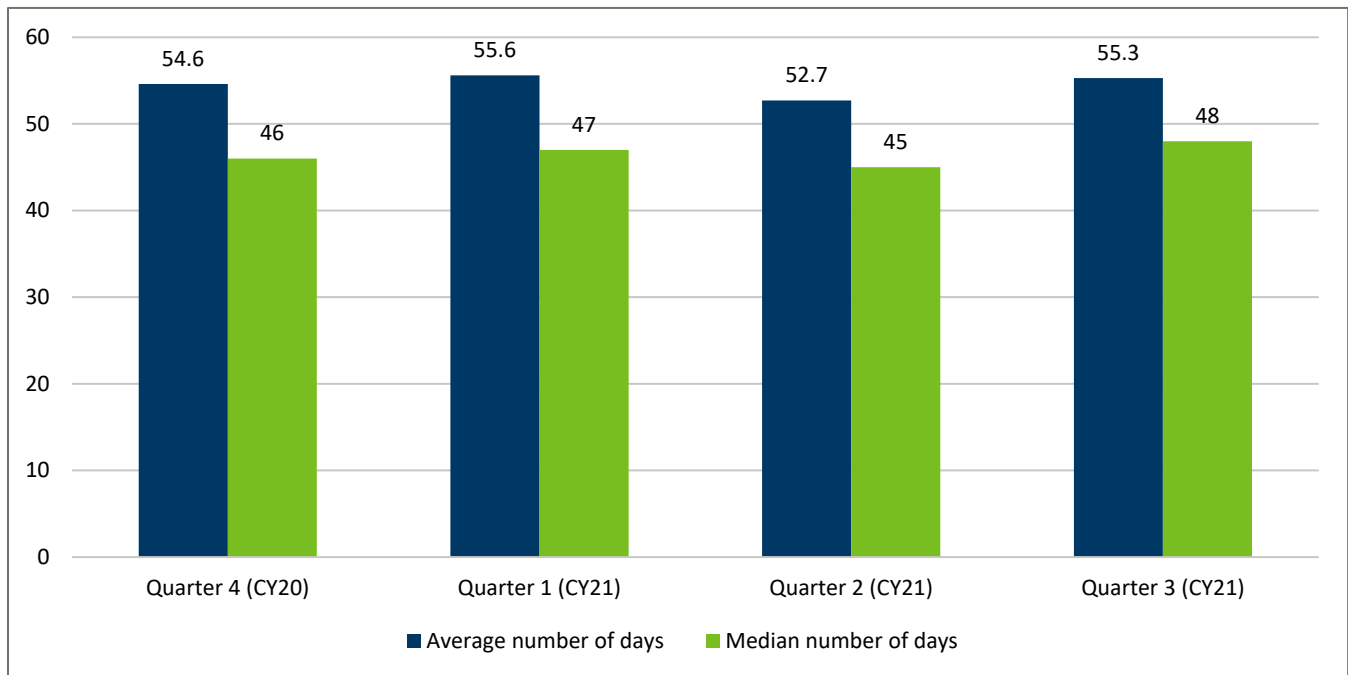


Figure 14: Data from beginning of data collection to present; percent of people with multiple assessments



6. Number of days waiting on financial eligibility determination

Figure 15: Average number of days and median number of days waiting on financial eligibility determination

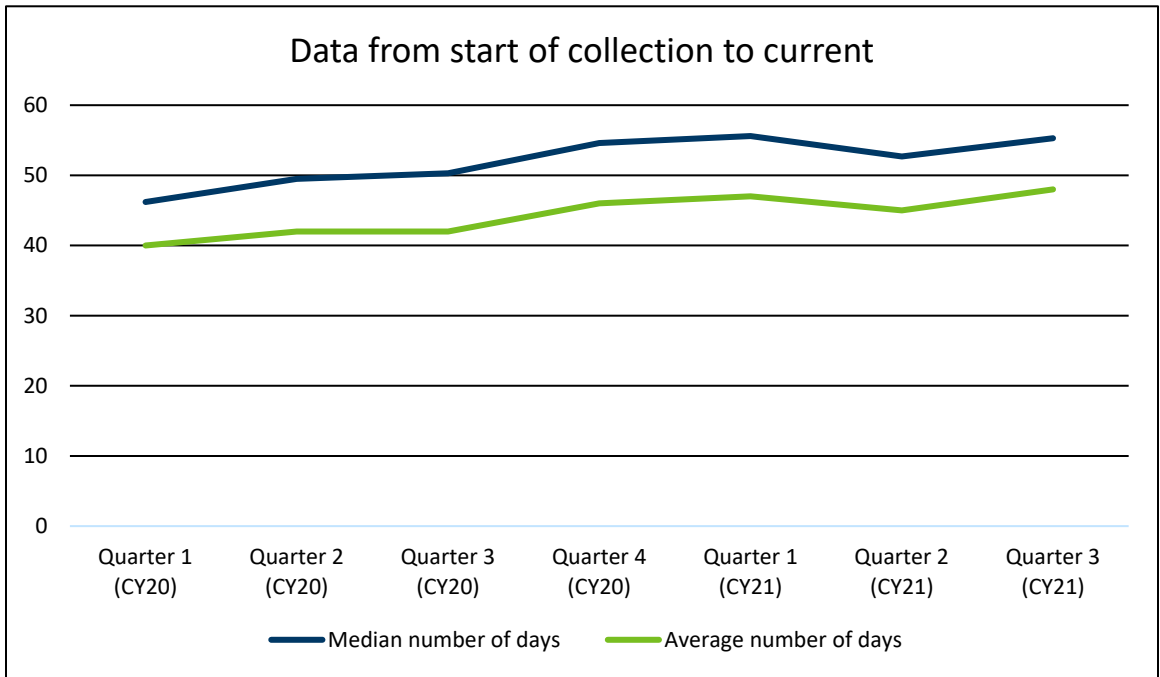


**This measure depicts the Medical Assistance (MA) application to MA approval dates for waiver recipients.*

The MnCHOICES assessment determines if a person meets *functional* eligibility for publically funded programs. Needs identified during the assessment interview are entered into the MnCHOICES application. Rules are run in the system to determine if the person meets different levels of eligibility. Besides being functionally eligible, there are two other eligibility factors that must be met; the person must be certified disabled and must meet financial eligibility requirements.

In order to be eligible for a Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver program, the person has to be approved for a certain type of Medical Assistance. Determining financial eligibility is a task that is typically handled by an economic assistance or financial assistance department at the lead agency that is the person's county of financial responsibility. There is a variation among lead agencies in how long this process takes on average.

Figure 16: Start of data collection to current; average number of days waiting on financial eligibility determination



VIII. Conclusion

The MnCHOICES benchmarks project has provided an opportunity for DHS to examine the end-to-end process for determining LTSS eligibility for Minnesotans. Valuable work has been completed, including the creation of a process map showing approximately 50 steps from start to finish. Many of these steps are outside of the MnCHOICES in-person assessment interview process. These supporting activities have always been a part of the LTSS assessment and eligibility process, even with the use of legacy assessment tools. In addition, the process mapping activity also found many variations in county processes that add to the number of steps and time involved in determining eligibility for long-term services and supports.

Further efficiencies are attainable at the local level to assure effective workflows and improve assessment quality. DHS issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to obtain a qualified vendor that will complete process improvement reviews with a group of lead agencies. The goals of this project include identifying opportunities for efficiencies and streamlining at the lead agency level and finding best practices that can be shared across the state.

Because of the impact of COVID-19, the data collected for the performance measures is no longer an accurate reflection of lead agency workflow and timeliness. Regulatory flexibilities have been put in place at both the state and federal level to allow Minnesota's lead agencies to continue to provide essential programs and services to people who receive services safely and without undue delay during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the waivers and modifications will stay in effect for an extended time, at least 60 days after the end of the federal public health emergency. This timeline will likely coincide with the upcoming launch of the revised MnCHOICES system. The launch of the revised MnCHOICES will result in a learning curve requiring additional training and testing by lead agencies. It is critical that lead agencies are given suitable time to transition to the new system before benchmark measures are set.

Due to the COVID-19-related effects, and the timing of the revised MnCHOICES, DHS recommends that the benchmarks project be ended. After launching the revised system and giving lead agencies time to become accustomed to the system, DHS could resume data collection to set appropriate benchmarks.