



The Navajo Nation Office of the Controller

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25% of applicants to the Navajo CARES Hardship Assistance Program at risk of being excluded because of missing records, information

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation Office of the Controller reports 30,000 applicants for the Navajo CARES Act Hardship Assistance Program may potentially be excluded due to missing records.

At the conclusion of the application period Nov. 30, the Controller's Office collected applications for 295,000 members. Of these applicants, nearly 73,000 members or 25% of the total number of applications received had problems, many did not have matching Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB) records in the vital records database which is managed by the Navajo Office of Vital Records and Identification.

Pearline Kirk, Controller of the Navajo Nation, explained it was also discovered that thousands of additional applications contained errors when matching name, date of birth or address.

"As a result, nearly 25% of applicants were not initially eligible for payment due to the lack of a valid record in the database," she said.

In order to ensure the maximum number of individuals receive assistance, the Controller's Office got to work attempting to validate 73,000 applicants and verifying their CIB. The validation attempts occurred in one or two ways. One way was by manually searching for their hard copy CIB within the Office of Vital Records. The second attempt involved reaching out to the applicant directly to obtain a copy of their CIB by phone, email, text messaging or automated outreach, such as through an automated text or automated voice call.

The Controller's Office had less than 30 days to attempt validation and staff worked around the clock contacting more than 2,400 applicants per day. Unfortunately, many of the applicants could not be contacted or chose not to respond for whatever reason.

"In many instances, this time to attempt validation was less based on the date in which an application was submitted," said Kirk. "The Controller's Office has made numerous failed attempts to reach certain applicants based on the contact information provided on their application. We have used various means to get the word out including social media, print media, radio and press releases."

As of Dec. 21, nearly 43,000 of the 73,000 records that initially contained exceptions were resolved. This leaves nearly 30,000 applicants that still need to be validated and are at risk of not being eligible for the hardship assistance payment based on the inability to validate their enrollment.

“The current deadline for the Controller’s Office to validate eligibility is December 30. However, with the U.S. Congress voting on an additional stimulus bill, there is a chance that this deadline is extended. Regardless, this process must be completed prior to distribution in order to provide enough time for the records to be gathered for final review by our office,” said Kirk. “The additional work to verify information using outdated data from the Office of Vital Records has caused a significant burden on an already condensed process because staff at the Controller’s Office have to divert their time to clean up and add records to the database.”

There is also some misconception the Controller’s Office determined the eligibility requirements but this was the responsibility of the leadership of the Navajo Nation that determined this process.

The Office of the Controller was designated to carry out the expenditure plan. This criterion requires an applicant to be an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation evidenced by their CIB, which includes validation of their date of birth and they must demonstrate a financial hardship. There are no supporting documents required at the time of application submission, like photo identification or a birth record but the information is cross-referenced with the Navajo Nation Office of Vital Records’ database which was outdated.

It was determined the Office of Vital Records would be involved in this process to help facilitate the speed and efficiency of applications because they manage data for all enrolled members. This data would be used as a source of truth to electronically validate the applicant’s information.

Unfortunately, the program experienced problems with verification of information with the vital records database.

“The vital records database was incomplete, at best, but we did the best we could to work with it,” said Kirk. “When complete, the Controller’s Office will have added nearly 80,000 new records to the database and cleaned up or corrected over 100,000 other records. Our efforts will leave the Navajo Nation with a census record that is more complete than ever before, thus affording the Navajo Nation multiple benefits beyond the Hardship Assistance Program.”

The hardship funds are federal funds subject to the requirements established by the CARES Act and they are provided through the U.S. Treasury. To avoid the risk of paying any of the funds back to the federal government, the establishment of a hardship program with eligibility criteria and an application process is required. This process is similar to other federal assistance programs like general welfare or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

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