

# **Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program Policy Manual**

## **Chapter 4. Application, Eligibility Determination & Documentation**

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## **Chapter 4. Application, Eligibility Determination & Documentation**

REVISED 03/31/2025

### **I. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

Individuals have the right to apply for and, if eligible, receive assistance in the State of North Carolina. Individuals wanting to apply for Subsidized Child Care Assistance (SCCA) must apply at their local Department of Social Services (DSS) or Local Purchasing Agency (LPA). This chapter provides an overview of the application process as well as guidelines for implementing a Plan of Care.

### **II. INITIAL GUIDED INTERVIEW**

Subsidized Child Care Assistance may be provided to individuals demonstrating a need for child care and who have been determined eligible for assistance. The eligibility requirements below must be discussed with the applicant/recipient during the initial interview and all requirements must be met to authorize child care assistance. The guided interview recommendations include asking the applicant the following information:

- Household Composition
- Address confirmed
- Residency/Living Arrangement
- Is an authorized representative needed
- Need for Care
- Verification needed to support need for care for example: Employment details/Education details
- Income – Earned and Unearned
- Resources
- Expenses
- Child care worker should ask questions about developmental delays and special needs; this includes whether referral information is needed.
- Child care worker should discuss with applicant if joint custody is in place if both parents are not in the home.
- Child care worker should review the 30-day processing time for application
- Child care worker should review the applicant's rights and responsibilities and have the document signed by the applicant at that time.
- Child care worker should explain how the parent fee is assessed and payment requirements
- Child care worker should discuss choosing a provider

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- Child care worker should discuss signing the voucher and voucher timelines
- Child care worker should review all documentation with applicant and request signatures at that time
- Voter Registration
- Developmental Screening
- Child care worker should explain certification period timeline

### **III. REASON CHILD CARE IS NEEDED**

The local DSS/LPA must determine the reason SCCA is needed. To qualify for child care services, the applicant/recipient must need care for one of the following reasons:

- To maintain employment or a WFES referral to seek employment.
- To support Child Protective Services (CPS).
- To attend school or job-training activities that lead to employment.
- To meet the developmental needs of children.
- To support child welfare services (CWS); or
- Other reasons as approved by the local Smart Start partnership if Smart Start funds are used.

The provision of Subsidized Child Care Assistance for reasons other than those listed below may occur if other funds are available to the agency such as Smart Start. Subsidized Child Care Assistance provided with Smart Start funds for reasons other than those described in this manual must be included in the local partnership's Smart Start Plan and approved by the North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC). Smart Start funds can provide services for preschool age children only.

### **IV. INCOME ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

The applicant/recipient applying for Subsidized Child Care Assistance must meet current income eligibility requirements to be approved for assistance unless the assistance is available without regard to income. At the time of application and recertification, the applicant/recipient must attest that their assets are not more than one (\$1,000,000) million dollars. If assets exceed \$1,000,000, they are ineligible for Subsidized Child Care Assistance. The asset limit is waived for the applicant/recipient receiving care for CPS/CWS.

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### **A. Parental Fees**

A parental fee is based on the applicant/recipient's gross monthly countable income, not on the type of child care arrangement. If there are multiple children in care, the parental fee is assessed to the child receiving the greatest number of hours of care. Usually this is the youngest child receiving care. The Intake Application, Signature and Statement of Understanding form must be signed and dated. Telephonic signatures are acceptable **if** the agency has the software to record them.

1. If the applicant/recipient is eligible for SCCA, the applicant/recipient may be required to pay a parental fee, i.e., a portion of the cost of care. The parental fee is assessed based upon the applicant/recipient's income.
2. Child care workers must explain that the parental fee is based on the applicant/recipient's gross monthly countable income. If there are multiple children in need of care the fee is assessed to the child receiving the greatest number of hours of care. In most instances, this is usually the youngest child receiving care.

Refer to Chapter 8 for additional information Parental Fees.

### **V. WHO CAN APPLY FOR SCCA**

Any of the following individuals may apply for Subsidized Child Care Assistance:

- A parent or responsible adult needing SCCA. The parent or responsible adult is the applicant/recipient and is referred to as the person or persons with whom the child lives and who has primary responsibility for the care and the well-being of the child.
- An applicant/recipient needing child care assistance must apply with their local DSS/LPA.
- An Authorized representative (A/R) for the applicant/recipient can be requested if the applicant/recipient is incompetent or incapacitated. Authorized representatives who apply for Subsidized Child Care

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Assistance for the applicant/recipient have the same responsibility as applicant/recipient to provide accurate and complete information to the DSS/LPA.

- Staff designated by the DSS/LPA director if the child is in custody of the Department of Social Services. Designated agency staff should only sign the application DCDEE-0456 or the printed application from NC FAST if the child/ren are in the custody of the county (foster care). For CPS and CWS with a referral, the parent/responsible adult must sign the application DCDEE-0456, Recipient Responsibilities and Voucher. The parent/responsible adult will sign the application DCDEE-0456, Recipient Responsibilities, and Voucher when the child is not in DSS custody.
- Anyone other than that child's parent (s) or legal custodian (s) who is providing full time care for a child who is not in the custody of a North Carolina County Department of Social Services.
- Federal Land Trust Residents. Applicants/recipients referred by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians for Subsidized Child Care Assistance to support Child Protective Services (CPS), Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Foster Care. The application will be made in the applicant/recipient's county of residence with the appropriate referral.
- Vulnerable Populations. Vulnerable Populations include families experiencing homelessness and children with special needs according to McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Living Situation: If a client is homeless, select Lacks Fixed Nighttime Address, Hotel/Motel, or Place Not Designated for Sleeping as the client's living situation.

Refer to Attachment 1 Living Arrangement Fact Sheet & the SCCA – Homeless Living Arrangements Job Aid for more information on homeless selections.

## **VI. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **A. Form Requirements**

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All individuals who request Subsidized Child Care Assistance must be allowed to sign an application unless the county does not have sufficient funding to serve additional applicants/recipients. When either funds or child care spaces are not available and services cannot be provided immediately, counties are required to establish and maintain a waiting list.

A formal request for Subsidized Child Care Assistance must be initiated by completing the application in NC FAST by the designated staff person. All applications for Subsidized Child Care Assistance will be processed through NC FAST.

The recipient will be required to sign the last page of the Intake Application that is generated in NC FAST. The NCFast-20009 Recipient Responsibilities must be signed by the applicant/recipient.

When the parent or responsible adult of a child ages 0-5 years applies or recertifies for SCCA, the child care worker will provide the recipient with resources about developmental screenings. If the eligibility determination does not occur during an office visit, the child care worker will mail developmental screening information to the recipient. Once the developmental screening information is shared with the parent or responsible adult, the child care worker must document this information in the case narrative. The information that must be shared with recipients is the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) brochure, Look What I Can Do handout, and the Benefits of Developmental Monitoring and Screening for Young Children handout.

If services are needed to support CPS and CWS with a referral, the parent/responsible adult must sign the application, Recipient Responsibilities and Voucher. Depending on the reason for CWS, it may be the responsible adult (ex. pending adoption) or parent (ex. domestic abuse situations) that must sign.

For foster care, the agency designee must complete and sign the application. Designated agency staff should only sign if the child/ren is in custody of the county.

Refer to Chapter 9: Attachment 5 Child Care Voucher Procedures Timeline Chart & the SCCA - CPS, CWS, and Foster Care Referrals Job Aid for

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more information regarding the application process.

The DCDEE-0456 Application for Child Care Services will only be used in two circumstances. One is when the recipient mails a printed DCDEE- 0456 to the local DSS/LPA to apply for Subsidized Child Care Assistance. The other circumstance is when child care is needed for a child in foster care.

A referral from the DSS/LPA must be made in foster care cases. When a referral for SCCA is received from a DSS worker for a child in foster care, the paper version of the DCDEE- 0456 may be completed and signed by the DSS designee. The DSS designee may either complete and sign the DCDEE-0456 or the Intake Application from NC FAST.

### **VII. RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS**

An applicant/recipient requesting Subsidized Child Care Assistance must be a resident of North Carolina and must apply for assistance in the county in which they reside, and that county is responsible for payment. There is no requirement for duration of residency. The residency requirement does not apply to some situations, such as protective services cases under the terms of interstate compacts or in response to court orders. When a child is in the custody of a Department of Social Services and lives with a relative or responsible adult in another state, it may be necessary to provide child care subsidy to a provider in another state. See Chapter 15, Approval and Enrollment Procedures for Licensed Facilities for more information.

### **VIII. CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS**

To align with the provisions in the Childcare and Development Fund Act of 2014, only the citizenship and immigration status of the child, who is the primary beneficiary of the CCDF benefit, should be considered. The citizenship and immigration status of the parent should not impact the child's eligibility for assistance. One of the following citizenship criteria must be met:

- Child is a U.S. Citizen; or
- Child is a legal U.S. Non-Citizen (residing in U.S. legally).  
Examples of a child who is a legal U.S. Non-Citizen shall include but is not limited to:

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- Refugee
- US Citizen/Naturalized Citizen
- US Non-Citizen National
- Documented Alien

In NC FAST, citizenship status shall only be selected when registering a new recipient. Child care workers shall not change the citizenship status of an existing recipient. Changing the status could affect the recipient's eligibility for other programs. Citizenship status should only be changed if documentation is provided by the recipient.

Subsidized Child Care Assistance may be provided to ***non- citizens who are legal residents*** if the other eligibility criteria are met. ***Non-citizen families who are not legal residents*** (including the child and the parents) may receive services in the following instances if all other eligibility criteria are met.

1. If the child needs child care to support child protective services or the child is receiving foster care services; or
2. If the child needs child care to support his/her developmental needs.

### A. Citizenship Requirements and Verification

Only the citizenship and immigration status of the child, who is the primary beneficiary of the CCDF benefit, should be considered. If residency is questionable, verification may be obtained or requested to determine residency status. A birth certificate or hospital/physician record is acceptable verification of the child's citizenship status.

The burden of proof regarding documentation of legal status or residency rests with the applicant. The Division does not require workers determining child care eligibility to report any citizenship or residency information to Immigration and Naturalization Service. The applicant/recipient's statement regarding citizenship or residency is accepted unless there is a reason to question the individual's legal status.

For additional information regarding the type of documentation that may be used to document legal status, refer to Section 111 in the [Work First Manual](#). If the applicant is a recipient of Work First Family Assistance benefits,



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citizenship and residency were established at the time of application for Work First Family Assistance benefits.

### **IX. AGE REQUIREMENTS**

Child care assistance may be provided to children **through age 17**.

However, requests for assistance for children ages 13 through 17 must be carefully evaluated to determine the need for care. Some examples of instances in which assistance for teenagers may be provided include the following: the teen has a special need; is under court-ordered supervision; is receiving child protective services or foster care services; or the child would be left in an unsafe situation if care is not provided.

A child meets the age requirement if they are:

- i. Birth through 12; or
- ii. 13 through 17, when one of the following situations is documented in the case record.
  - a) Child has a special need or circumstance which could include a documented medical situation.
  - b) Child is under court-ordered supervision.
  - c) Child is receiving child protective services or foster care services.
  - d) Child would be left in an unsafe situation if care were not provided. For example, a single parent works second, or third shift and the child would be home alone at night.

A child may be eligible for Adult and Family Services once they reach their eighteenth birthday. When a child becomes eligible for kindergarten services in public school (turns age five (5) on or before August 31 of that school year), child care services may only be provided during those days and hours that the regular school program is not in operation.

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However, there may be case-specific situations when it is in the best interest of the child to delay entry into the public-school system. An example may be when the child just meets the cutoff date to be eligible for public school but is small or immature for their age or has some other developmental delays and the child would benefit from continuing to receive preschool care for an additional year. The reason for the child not enrolling in public school must be documented in the record. In any case, child care may not be provided for more than one (1) year past the date the child is eligible to begin kindergarten.

A school-age child is defined as a child who will reach the age of five (5) on or before August 31 of that school year and is enrolled in a public or private school during the school year in accordance with the rules of the educational institution where the child is enrolled.

If the child's birthday is:

- First day of the month - the child is considered their new age for the entire month.
- Any other day - the child is considered their new age starting on the first of the following month.

### A. Specific age groups with NC FAST

#### 1. Child Turns Five Years Old

When a child turns five, a task is sent the month prior to a child turning five years old, requesting that the case owner determine if the child is attending school. The recipient may need a change to hours of care.

#### 2. Child Turns Six Years Old

When a child turns 6, a task is sent the month prior to a child turning six years old, requesting that the case owner determine if the child is attending school. The service changes from 0-5 Years to School Age. The recipient may also need a change to hours of care and/or a change to the provider.

#### 3. Child Turns 13 Years Old

When a child turns 13, SCCA benefits will continue through the end of the current certification period. **Do not** terminate services at the time of a child's 13th birthday or during the month that they turn 13 years of age.

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However, if the child turns 13 on the 1st day of their new certification period, end date services on the last day of the prior month. The case worker receives a task the month prior to a child turning 13 years old, requesting a review of the evidence to determine if the child has special circumstances that make them eligible for continued benefits, such as court-ordered supervision or mental incapacity. If the child has special circumstances, add Exemption Evidence.

NC FAST will automatically terminate care on the last day of the certification period after a child turns 13 years of age. No action is required in NC FAST to make this termination occur. Child care workers need to ensure that the child's parent/responsible adult understands that services will terminate at the end of the certification period and not during the birthday month.

If a applicant/recipient receives Graduated Phase Out at the end of their certification period and a child turns 13 during the Graduated Phase Out, Subsidized Child Care Assistance for the 13-year-old child must continue until the end of the Graduated Phase Out. If the applicant/recipient becomes income eligible during the Graduated Phase Out, the 13-year-old cannot be recertified past the end date of the Graduated Phase Out.

## **X. VOTER REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT**

The purpose of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) is to make more opportunities available for individuals to vote. The NVRA requires individuals, who are U.S. citizens, and at least 16 years of age, be offered the opportunity to register to vote or update a voter registration record at any application for service, recertification, or renewal, or when reporting a change to their address when related to an existing application. Voter registration does not need to be offered for applications, recertifications, renewals or change of address for child only cases where a child is in foster care.

Voter registration services must be offered when an NVRA covered transaction (at application, recertification, or change of address) is received via telephone, mail communication, email, fax, or in-person.

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Therefore, at any time a person seeks services at an agency that offers public assistance, disability services, or unemployment services, the person must be offered voter registration services.

The written protocol and NC FAST documentation must always remain current. County DSS agencies must report a change in county NVRA point of contact to the NC DSS Civil Rights/NVRA Coordinator.

### **NVRA CONTACTS FOR ASSISTANCE**

State Board of Elections (SBE) – [nvra@ncsbe.gov](mailto:nvra@ncsbe.gov)

DHHS NVRA Coordinator – [NVRA@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:NVRA@dhhs.nc.gov)

The child care worker must ensure that NVRA requirements were documented by the SCCA worker in the narrative as required and DCDEE staff must see that the most recent date NVRA evidence was updated at a later date than that of the documentation date. The consultant can view the history to see if there was an update at the time of the SCCA worker's narrative.

Refer to section XIV. Narratives and Documentation and DCDEE-0473 SCCA Sample Narrative and Documentation Form for additional information regarding documentation.

## **XI. ESTABLISHING THE INITIAL ELIGIBILITY PERIOD**

### **A. Standard Eligibility Period**

Once deemed eligible, the applicant/recipient must receive a continuous 12-month eligibility period. The 12-month period of eligibility start date begins on the date the application was received by the agency. The application must be date stamped as verification of the date received. The certification period will end on the last day of the last month of the eligibility period regardless of weekends and holidays.

When an application is received by an agency on a weekend day, holiday, or after established business hours in which an agency is closed for business, the child care worker will enter the next business day as the date an agency received the application.

For example, if an application is emailed on Saturday, October 21, 2023,

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the date received by an agency is Monday, October 23, 2023. If an application is left in an agency's drop box on July 4, 2024, the date received will be the **next business day an agency is open**, July 5, 2024.

See examples in the chart on the next page.

<b>Application Submission Method</b>	<b>Actual Date Received in Agency</b>	<b>Next Business Day used as Application Date</b>
Email	Friday 11/17/2023 @ 9:58pm	Monday 11/20/2023
Fax	Saturday 11/18/2023	Monday 11/20/2023
Mail	Tuesday 12/26/2023 *Agency is closed for Christmas Holiday 12/25/23-12/27/23	Thursday 12/28/2023

If the DSS/LPA operates on the weekend and applications are submitted during an agency's weekend operating hours, the date used as the application date will be the same date the application is received by an agency. For Example:

<b>Application Submission Method</b>	<b>Actual Date Received in Agency</b>	<b>Application Date</b>
Email, Fax, or Mail	Saturday 11/21/2023 @ 9:58 am	Saturday 11/21/2023

### B. Application Processing Timeline

The DSS/LPA has 30 calendar days from the date the signed application is received by an agency to determine eligibility. If eligibility is not determined within 30 calendar days, the application is denied. Failure by the applicant/recipient to provide the required information to determine eligibility within 30 calendar days is an allowable reason for the application to be denied. However, a signed application must not be denied for failure to provide verification prior to the 30 calendar days. If the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day falls on a weekend day, holiday, or agency closure, the worker must process the signed

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application on the last business day prior to the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day.

If a client submits a signed application but does not have a need for care but states they will have a need for care and verification within the 30 calendar days, the child care worker must wait for the 30 calendar days from the date received before denying the application.

NOTE: All signed applications must be disposed of within 30 days of the date the application was received in the agency.

### **C. Notifying the Applicant at Initial Application**

The applicant/recipient must be notified of any eligibility decision within 30 calendar days after the date of application. A copy of the child care application or intake application serves as notice.

Be sure to document the case narrative thoroughly. The worker may also refer the applicant to the Work First Program if the applicant is seeking a job.

## **XII. APPLICATION PROCESS**

For a child to receive Subsidized Child Care Assistance, an application must be completed with the local DSS/LPA. The application is necessary to gather accurate and complete information used in deeming an applicant/recipient eligible for services. There must be a determination that the income unit is correct, there is an established need for care, the countable income is verified and computed correctly, and that the parental fee is correct.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility for additional information regarding the Income Unit and Countable Income.

Types of SCCA applications include:

- A new application from applicant face to face interactions,
- Mailed, faxed, or emailed applications to be processed,
- CPS, CWS, & Foster Care

When an applicant has been determined eligible for Food and Nutrition

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Services (FNS), they are deemed income eligible for Subsidized Child Care Assistance. Some of the information needed for the initial interview can be found in NC FAST. This includes members of the income unit, child's age, race, citizenship status, and income. Using the information from NC FAST as the first step of the interview process will help streamline the application process. For applicants/recipients that state they are self-employed or receive child support, do not deem these income types from FNS.

Refer to Chapter 7: Family Definition and Determining Income Eligibility & DCDEE-0474 SCCA Verification of Child Support for more information about child support.

Social Security Numbers (SSN) are **NOT** required to determine eligibility for Subsidized Child Care Assistance and eligibility cannot be denied due to the failure of the applicant to provide a Social Security Number. If applicants choose to provide a Social Security Number, it must be made clear that providing the Social Security Number remains optional and services will not be denied if the Social Security Number is not provided. The child care worker must inform the applicant that the Social Security Number may be used to assemble research data (that do not identify individuals), perform person searches in the NC FAST system or verify income.

Refer to DCDEE-0466 SCCA Request for Information as an optional form that may be used when additional information is needed to process an application.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility for additional information regarding Social Security Numbers and Online Verification (OVS).

### **A. Application Submission**

The electronic application is completed in NC FAST by the worker. Exceptions to this are only when foster care referrals are received by the worker and when an applicant/recipient completes a mail-in application. In these cases, the SCCA Application (DCDEE-0456) is utilized and subsequently entered in NC FAST.

Applicants/recipients may submit a SCCA application by mail, fax, or

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email, or in person. Applicants/recipients may also complete a face-to-face application with a worker at the local DSS/LPA.

### 1. Mailed Applications

When an application is submitted by mail, the date the agency receives the application will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

### 2. Faxed or Emailed Applications

When an application is submitted by fax or email and the documents are legible, the application shall be accepted. The date the agency receives the application by fax or email will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated.

If a faxed or emailed application is not legible, the county worker must contact the applicant and request that the application be resubmitted in a legible format. The date the application is resubmitted and legible will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date regardless of when the application was signed and dated. If a faxed or emailed application is not accepted via fax or email, the county worker must document the reason for declining the application and notify the applicant.

### 3. Face-to-Face Application

When an application is completed during a face-to-face appointment, the date of the face-to-face appointment will be the first day of the certification period and the date entered in NC FAST as the application date.

**NOTE:** In all situations, except for face-to-face applications, applications shall not be keyed in NC FAST until a signed paper application is received in the agency. Applications and recertifications



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must be date-stamped. If the email is available (either from the worker's history or applicant's), this can also be used as verification of date of receipt.

While completing the Application for Subsidized Child Care Assistance in NC FAST, child care workers must ask why Subsidized Child Care Assistance is needed, including specific information regarding the days and hours the care is needed. Determine the family unit, calculate income, and parent fees correctly, and obtain verification of income.

Processing an SCCA application includes evidence management, verifications, eligibility checks, activating evidence, and authorization or denial of benefits. An authorized application creates a case that must be activated. Active cases must be followed by voucher processing.

Children authorized for payment must be determined eligible by the DSS/LPA for the entire period for which the provider is paid. Recipient files may be checked to determine that proper documents are located there, with proper signatures and due dates.

The current Child Care Voucher (DCDEE-0446) must be on file for each child enrolled and authorized for payment. The applicant/recipient must sign the printed voucher with a wet or typed signature. Vouchers will no longer be on paper when sent to the provider but will be sent via the NC FAST Provider Portal for provider to accept or reject. Vouchers are maintained electronically.

### **B. Signature on Application**

The signature on an application can be:

#### **1. Wet signature**

A wet signature is acceptable with or without chain of custody.

#### **2. Telephonic signatures**

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A telephonic signature is acceptable if the agency has the software to record them. A Telephonic signature is a type of electronic signature software that uses an individual's verbal attestation in place of an ink signature.

**In the event a worker completes a telephone interview, a wet signature, telephonic, or typed signature (with the chain of custody), on the application is required.**

### 3. Typed signatures

A typed signature is acceptable with chain of custody in a communication by the client that the county can consider the typed signature their signature. Examples include:

- The original communication from applicant/recipient from their personal or business email address with the document attached (photo of document acceptable).
- A typed signature is equivalent to a handwritten (wet), signature only they are created in a digital environment.

If an applicant/recipient submits a typed signature, the worker must:

- Document in the case notes that it is a typed signature and record chain of custody.
- Provide verification from the applicant that shows their intent to communicate electronically and for the county to accept their typed signature.

Documents that may have a typed signature include:

- SCCA Application,
- SCCA Recertification
- Recipient Rights and Responsibilities
- Voucher

If the DSS/LPA does not have an email (chain of custody) and there was a typed signature, without documentation, then it is a financial

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error that will result in a county responsible overpayment.

### **C. Applications When There is More Than One Case**

A recipient can submit one (1) application for all children in the household. Through NC FAST, there can be one (1) application for a applicant/recipient that has more than one (1) case.

If a recipient applies for services for his/her own child in addition to a child whom they are the nonparent caretaker, there will be one (1) application and two (2) cases. The exception to this would be for foster children who are in the legal custody of DSS. In these situations, the foster care social worker is required to apply for child care services.

When a recipient applies for SCCA for his or her own child and has unofficial or undocumented responsibility of another child, who is not in the legal custody of DSS, both children can be placed on one application for both cases.

NC FAST will create one or more cases based on who should be included in the income unit. If there is more than one income unit, then there will be multiple cases created from one application. Documentation of the recipient's case file must provide adequate information regarding eligibility and the Plan of Care.

### **D. Applications for Applicants/Recipients Experiencing Homelessness**

Section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Act defines the following homeless children and youths as:

Homeless children and youths mean individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term includes—

1. Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional

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shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals.

2. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
4. Migratory children (as defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended), who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described in this definition.

Applicants/recipients experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness must be prioritized in accordance with the General Provisions for subsidized child care. The length of the child care authorization shall be 12- months and recertification will be completed at the end of the 12- months. The local DSS/LPA has the option to add to their 4% set aside for Applicants/recipients experiencing homelessness and children with special needs. Refer to Chapter 2: Funding for Subsidized Child Care Services for more information.

If no appropriate openings are available, the applicant/recipient may be placed on a separate waiting list. If the DSS/LPA contacts DCDEE and requests transfer of funds from the 4% set aside to non-smart start, then these vulnerable populations cannot be added to the waiting list. Funds for these populations must be fully expended before adding them to the waiting list.

The local DSS/LPA must provide child care assistance to applicants/recipients if they are considered homeless and have a valid need for child care. Every recipient must have a need to be evaluated for SCCA. This includes employment, job search, education and/or training, developmental needs, CPS, and CWS. Note, job search is not considered an acceptable need for new applications unless the client is an active Work First recipient with a referral.

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Applicants/recipients experiencing homelessness and seeking Subsidized Child Care Assistance through this program must comply with the financial and service need requirements of the income eligibility requirement of the SCCA Program. If a recipient meets the criteria of homelessness at the time of initial application or recertification, this information must be entered into NC FAST per the SCCA – Homeless Living Arrangements job aid.

### **E. Living Arrangements**

When determining whether applicants/recipients are experiencing homelessness when they apply for child care assistance, the child care worker will ask the applicant/recipient if their current address is a fixed, regular and/or adequate nighttime address. Below is a list of suggested questions to assist the child care worker in determining if the applicant/recipient is in a homeless living arrangement.

1. Can you tell me about where you and your family are currently living?
2. Is this the location where you sleep most nights?
3. How long have you been living at your current location?
4. What led you to live at this location?
5. Would you describe your current living arrangement as temporary or permanent?
6. How long do you expect to be able to live at your current location?
7. Are you currently looking for a more permanent place to live?
8. Where do you receive your mail?
9. Do you feel safe in the place where you are living?

When an applicant/recipient comes in to apply/recertify for child care assistance, and it is stated that the applicant/recipient lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime address, the worker will select the appropriate living arrangement in NC FAST indicating where their applicant/recipient resides.

Refer to Attachment 1 Living Arrangement Sheet for additional information regarding Living Arrangements.

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### **F. Grace Period for applicants/recipients experiencing homelessness**

If a applicant/recipient experiencing homelessness applies and does not have all supporting documentation at the time of application submission, and the applicant's reported information meets all eligibility criteria, a 30-day grace period is given and child care services can begin immediately.

The application is entered into NC FAST and approved. The recipient will then have 30 days to provide all needed documentation to support their eligibility for child care services. Failure to submit required documentation within 30 days will result in termination. If the recipient provides the required documentation within 30 days and is found eligible for child care services, a parent fee is then established based on the documentation provided. This is not considered an increase in parent fee during the 12-month certification period because the income is being assessed at initial eligibility determination. If the application has already been approved and child care services have started, the parent fee will be assessed after a 10-day notice and effective the first of the next month.

If it is determined that the applicant is not eligible for child care services once all required documentation has been submitted, the child care case must be terminated with a 10-day notice provided to the recipient and the child care provider.

A 10-day notice must also be provided if a recipient does not provide the required documentation to support his or her eligibility for child care services by the end of the 30-day time period. If either of these situations occur, the child care provider shall be paid for services provided based on the start date on the voucher through the last day of the 10-day notice.

Any payment made to the child care provider prior to the final eligibility decision shall not be considered an error or an improper payment and shall not be recouped from the provider.

Refer to the Homeless Living Arrangements Job Aid.

### **G. Applications for Federal Land Trust**

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During the application process for Federal Land trust, the child care worker will select yes or no in NC FAST if the applicant/recipient states they live on a tribal reservation.

### **H. Applications for Foster Care**

When Subsidized Child Care Assistance is needed for a foster parent, the child care worker must have a written referral from the foster care social worker to support the need for care, indicating whether placement of the child is in a licensed foster home or in the home of a relative. A referral for foster care is required at application and recertification even if the placement remains the same.

When the need for care supports employment whether there are one or two foster parents in the licensed foster home, employment information, including name of employer and days and hours of employment, must be verified for each foster parent and the information must be included on the referral from the foster care social worker.

The DSS designee must complete and sign the paper version of (DCDEE-0456) or the printed application signature page from NC FAST. Children in foster care are the case head in their own case and the staff designated by DSS will sign the voucher. With sibling groups, the youngest child will be case head. When entering in NC FAST, enter the youngest child first. If the family is divided, each child will be his own case head.

The guided interview includes questions about the referral, and the answers are mapped (transferred) to create Program Referral evidence on the application. The worker must start the application from the child's Person Page as the child is the case head on an SCCA application. If there are multiple foster children in a household, enter the youngest child first. Foster care applications are child-only except in the case of sibling groups.

If there is a sibling group placed in the same foster care home, the case head on that application is the youngest foster child, and that child's address must be the address of the DSS.

If there is a sibling group placed in the same foster care home, and one

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of the children is placed with a new foster parent outside of the sibling group, that child must be the case head on their own case.

The worker will maintain their cases individually even if they later rejoin the sibling group.

### **1. Foster Care Referrals & Evidence**

The worker must record referrals as Program Referral evidence on the Evidence Dashboard. Foster Care Program Referral evidence requires verification such as the written referral, signed by the foster care worker or their supervisor. Program Referral evidence ensures NC FAST applies foster care status to policy rules on the application and case.

When a case due for recertification contains Program Referral evidence, both a new Foster Care referral and SCCA – Program Referral evidence is required. The worker must update the Program Referral evidence with information from the new referral and then keep the new referral on file. This involves ending the current program referral evidence and creating new Program Referral evidence. The child care worker must record the need type and schedule of care in the Plan of Care evidence and the Plan of Care start date must be the start date of the new certification period. The completed Foster Care Referral functions as verification of the selected need type; no additional verifications evidence, such as paid employment, earned income or student evidence, are required.

Workers can continue to use the same Plan of Care evidence that was used when the case began unless changes need to be made. Document thoroughly that a new referral was obtained and the dates on the referral must line up with the recertification date.

### **2. Foster Child Transition to a New Living Situation**

If a foster child receives SCCA based on a foster parent's need type of education or employment and their living arrangement changes within a 12-month certification period, the worker will



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reassess the need for care of the new foster family (or relative or caregiver):

If the new foster family has a need for care, review the new Program Referral for changes to the case and update Plan of Care evidence as needed. SCCA coverage will continue through the end of the certification period.

If the new foster family does not have a need, the child care worker must confirm with the new foster family as to whether they would like to continue services. If the new foster family declines child care, the Plan of Care evidence must be end-dated and the case will remain open through the end of the certification period.

If the new foster family does not decline child care, the worker must allow services to continue through the end of the certification period. This information must be clearly documented in the case notes.

If a child is no longer in foster care and is not under the legal custody of the County DSS, SCCA services must continue through the end of the certification period. The child care worker must end-date Program Referral evidence to ensure the correct fund source is used.

The address must be updated in NC FAST to reflect the new custodial family's address. If the custodial family's address is located in a county different from the county that had custody of the child, the case must be transferred to the custodial family's county of residence. The transferring county must document the SCCA case thoroughly.

At the end of the certification period, the foster care subsidy case must be closed, and the foster family has the choice to apply for services. The recertification packet may be submitted and used as a new application document. The new application must include the custodial adult or adoptive parent as the case

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head. The custodial adult or adoptive parent must meet all initial income and need eligibility requirements at that time. If the custodial adult or adoptive parent applies by the end of the child's 12-month eligibility period and is approved, the custodial adult or adoptive parent must not be placed on a waiting list.

### **3. Foster Care Outside the County**

When a child in foster care resides outside the county which has custody, the county Department of Social Services that has custody of the child has responsibility for payment. In some situations, the county which has custody of the child may have a conflict of interest, for example, the child is related to a staff member of the initiating DSS/LPA. In these situations, another county Department of Social Services may manage the child's foster care case, such as conducting visits with the child. Additionally, the county which manages and conducts the child's foster care will be responsible for payment of the SCCA case, even if custody remains with the initiating county. When a child is in the custody of a Department of Social Services and lives with a relative or responsible adult in another state, it may be necessary to provide child care subsidy to a provider in another state. See Chapter 15, Approval and Enrollment Procedures for Licensed Facilities for more information.

### **4. Foster Care Need Type**

NC FAST follows policy in determining requirements and benefits for children in foster care:

- i. Foster care is not a need type in Plan of Care evidence.
- ii. Foster parents must have a need for child care (such as employment or education) that has been verified by the foster care worker.
- iii. Because a foster parent is not included on the application for foster care, the system cannot track the 20-month time limit when the Education need type is selected.

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If the need type is Education in a foster care case, select Developmental Needs as the need type and keep track of the 20-month time clock outside of NC FAST.

Each responsible adult in the household can receive 20 months of SCCA to support education for foster care cases.

Refer to Chapter 5: Establishing Need and a Plan of Care & DCDEE-0465 Sample Foster Care, CPS, CWS Referral for additional information regarding FC.

NOTE: DCDEE-0465 is optional and may be used as a guide. Use of DCDEE-0465 does not eliminate the requirement for workers to enter and complete referral evidence in NCFast.

### **XIII. AUTHORIZING CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE**

#### **A. Determining a Plan of Care**

When an applicant/recipient has been determined to meet all eligibility criteria, the child care worker must then work with the applicant/recipient to determine what type of child care arrangement best meets the needs of the child and family. The circumstances that justify the need for child care assistance and the Plan of Care must be documented in the case record.

**NOTE:** Every child in the same assistance unit must have the same need type in their Plan of Care.

Refer to Chapter 5 Establishing Need and Plan of Care for additional information regarding Plan of Care.

#### **B. Issuing the Child Care Voucher**

The Child Care Voucher (DCDEE-0446), which authorizes eligibility for Subsidized Child Care Assistance, must be issued to the applicant/recipient for each child in need of assistance. The DSS/LPA must discuss the recipient choice when selecting a child care facility. Explain the difference between regulated and unregulated child care arrangements.

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Refer to Chapter 9 Voucher Procedures for additional information regarding Vouchers.

### **XIV. NARRATIVES AND DOCUMENTATION**

Childcare workers must use narratives (case notes) in NC FAST to document the verification of requirements, such as verifying income through pay stubs. Narratives must include details of follow-up actions on incomplete application information and the outcomes of those actions. The case notes must describe conversations and actions taken on a case, including eligibility determinations, the Plan of Care, reasons for needing care, and income details. Information from the application does not need to be repeated in the narrative, but the specific circumstances creating the need for care must be thoroughly explained in the case notes.

#### **A. Narrative Use**

1. Child care workers use narratives to record the recipients' initial office visits, dates and circumstances for applications and recertifications, to record reported changes and actions taken on the case, and to document any communications with recipients such as emails and telephone calls.
2. The narrative must support key details like the need for care, the Plan of Care, special needs of the child, and eligibility for supplemental payments or care for a child aged 13 years or older.
3. The narrative must include the date information was received and the initials of the person entering it. When entered into NC FAST, the system automatically records the worker's identity.

The following guidelines are best practices when documenting in the case narrative/notes:

- Be factual.
- Refrain from giving opinions or subjective evaluation of the

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facts.

- Be clear, concrete, and complete.
- Avoid irrelevant details.
- Base any impression on observable and specific facts.
- Support the eligibility decision.

### **B. Handling Telephone Interviews**

1. For telephone interviews, child care workers must not finalize NC FAST applications, nor issue vouchers, until a signed application is received. Refer to section XII. B. for application signature requirements.
2. For initial applications, child care workers must not enter into NC FAST until the signed application is on file.

### **C. County-Specific Documentation Systems**

Counties may use their local documentation systems (e.g., Northwoods) as directed by their agency director, but any documents not available in NC FAST that are required for audits must be uploaded to NC FAST before the audit begins. DCDEE permits agencies to submit missing information that could reduce potential errors during audits, as long as it is readily available.

### **D. The following documentation must be provided in the narrative:**

1. Document circumstances to justify the need for child care services and the Plan of Care. Include days, hours, and level of care.
  - i. If the need for care is employment, document the place of employment and work schedule.
    - a) When there are two responsible adults, the place of employment and work schedule must be included for both responsible adults. This also applies if there are two foster parents.
    - b) Document travel time to and from the child care facility and work that is included in the Plan of Care.

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**ii.** If the need for care is education, document the education or training program and class schedule.

- a) Document the education/training scheduled hours and whether the classes are in-person, online or self-paced.
- b) Document travel time to and from the child care facility and school (this includes traveling between the child care facility and home for online courses).
- c) Document the appropriate study time needed and included in the Plan of Care.

**iii.** Describe the basis on which developmental needs or delays or risks of delays were determined.

- a) If the child has special needs, the worker must document how special needs were verified: IEP, IFSP, 504 Plan, PCP.
- b) Document whether part-time or full-time care is approved to support the child's developmental or special needs and the care hours and travel time included in the Plan of Care.

**iv.** CPS/CWS

- a) Document that a referral was received for a need type of CPS.
- b) If the need type is CWS, document the basis to support the need. This may include documentation that a referral was received or a description of the circumstances that justify eligibility, such as in a crisis.

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- c) Document the hours approved to support the CPS or CWS need for care, including travel time.

**v. Work First Employment Services, including seeking employment.**

- a) Document that a referral and Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA) was received from the Work First Employment Services worker to justify the need for child care.
- b) Document the hours and level of care approved to support Work First activities, including travel time.

**vi. Document hours and level of care.**

- a) Document the approved level of care and circumstances that justify the level of care (i.e. total employment hours or total school and study hours), including travel and any extenuating circumstances.
- b) Document the days and hours approved in the Plan of Care.
- c) Document why Schedule Varies was used, if applicable.
- d) Document why authorized hours are different than requested hours, if applicable.

**2. Document when a typed signature is used.**

- i.** If a typed signature is used, a chain of custody must be included. (Refer to Chapter 4. XII.A. Application Submission regarding chain of custody).

**3. Document Applicant/Recipient statement of available income, including a statement of no income.**

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- i.** Document the source and type of income.
  - ii.** Document frequency and amount of income.
  - iii.** Document how income was verified.
  - iv.** If income outside of the base period or an alternative method of averaging income was used, explain the method used and why.
4. Explain any unusual circumstances, including but not limited to: third (3rd) shift work and first (1st) shift care, joint/split custody, or care for a child over the age of 12.
5. Document that Developmental Screenings handouts were given if there are children ages 0-5 in the home.
6. Document that Voter Registration was offered at a covered transaction.
7. Record the basis for denial, reduction, or termination of services.

Document in the record each time there has been contact through phone calls, interviews, items requested, received, or sent. Include purpose of contact and results.

- i.** Document changes, i.e., change in schedule or type of child care arrangement, employers, or shifts.
- ii.** Workers must document if /when they requested information and if they followed-up on incomplete or missing information and the outcome.

### **E. Other supportive documentation, if applicable, must include:**

1. Written documentation of information verified from the WFFA/FNS tab on the evidence from the integrated case.
2. Written referral from the foster care worker to support the need for care



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indicating placement of the child in a licensed foster home or with an adult other than their parents.

3. Information about the payment of a special needs supplemental rate that is not included on the Child with Special Needs Additional Expense Documentation form (DCDEE-0454A).

Refer to Chapter 5 Establishing Need and Plan of Care for additional information regarding Work First.

**NOTE:** If an applicant/recipient request copies of their records, the DSS/LPA may share copies of the record. Copies include the application, voucher, Child Care Action Notices, etc. However, information in the record from third party sources should not be provided as copies to the applicant/recipient but they should have access to view them.

Refer to DCDEE-0473 SCCA Sample Narrative and Documentation Form and the Job Aid – SCCA – Narratives in NC FAST for additional information regarding Documentation.

## **XV. RECERTIFICATIONS**

### **A. Recertification Application Submission**

If an applicant/recipient submits a signed recertification document (NCF20106) after the last day of the certification period and during the suspended month (the month after the certification period ends) the recertification form can be used to enter a new application. The original case must be closed before entering the new application. The following steps must be completed:

1. An application guided interview must be completed to capture all necessary information to initiate a new application.
2. The child care worker must key a new application in NC FAST. The certification period begins on the date the signed recertification document is received in the agency.

**NOTE:** If the county is on a waiting list, the recertification document will be used as a screening tool for placement. When the applicant/recipient is

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to be served from the waiting list, normal application procedures will be followed at that time. A new application must be completed and signed and the application date will be the date the new application is received in the agency. Counties must notify applicants/recipients that they have been screened and added or not added to the waiting list in this situation.

DCDEE-0468 – Sample Waiting List Notice is an optional notice template that may be used to notify applicants/recipients.

Refer to Chapter 7 Family Definition and Determining Eligibility, Chapter 11 Responding to Eligibility Changes and Recertification and Chapter 7 Attachment 3: Application, Recertification & Base Periods Guide for additional information regarding Recertification & Base Periods.

## **XVI. TERMINATION OF SCCA**

Termination notices are only sent when certain situations occur.

Refer to Chapter 11 Responding to Eligibility Changes and Recertification for more information regarding Termination of SCCA.

## **XVII. PREVENTION OF OVERPAYMENTS AND FRAUDULENT MISREPRESENTATION**

The key to preventing fraudulent misrepresentation and inadvertent errors is skillful interviewing during the initial application, during reviews and when changes in the applicant/recipient's situation occur. Therefore, the child care worker must ask the applicant/recipient specific questions, evaluate their reaction, and document the responses. The questions are to be phrased in an understandable way and the applicant/recipient must be given ample time to respond in their own words.

***At recipient application and review, the child care worker must:***

1. Explain to the applicant/recipient, before the Application for Child Care Services is completed in NC FAST, their obligation to give accurate and complete information regarding the need for Subsidized Child Care Assistance and the applicant/recipient circumstances.

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- 2.** Ask if they have been disqualified from receiving Subsidized Child Care Assistance in any county.
- 3.** Read, discuss, and explain the information on the Recipient Responsibilities for Subsidized Child Care Assistance NCFAS-20009 and the Application for Child Care Assistance that addresses rights and responsibilities, hearings and appeals, and sanctions. Obtain their signature and file the original documents in the applicant/recipient's child care case record and give a copy to the applicant/recipient.
- 4.** Other preventative measures include establishing intra-agency communication among the various units in the DSS/LPA by developing a systematic way to report changes and exchange information. To obtain prompt and accurate information needed to determine eligibility, it is important to establish a good working relationship with other agencies, employers, and institutions as well.

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For additional information on policy discussed in this chapter please refer to:

### **SCCA Manual:**

Refer to Chapter 5: Establishing Need and a Plan of Care

Refer to Chapter 7: Family Definition and Determining Income Eligibility

Refer to Chapter 8: Parental Fees

Refer to Chapter 9: Parental/Recipient Choice and Voucher Procedures

Refer to Chapter 10: Local Options and Waiting List Policies

Refer to Chapter 11: Responding to Eligibility Changes and Recertification

### **Attachments**

Attachment 1 Living Arrangement Fact Sheet

### **NC FAST Job Aids:**

SCCA- Action and Termination Notices Reference Guide

SCCA- Add Client to Case

SCCA- Age Change

SCCA- Alien Evidence: Temporary Process Change

SCCA- Application to Case - Guided Interview

SCCA- Application to Case Check list

SCCA- Applications for Work First Recipients

SCCA- Cancelled, Reissued, Rejected, and Voided Vouchers

SCCA- CPS, CWS & Foster Care Referrals

SCCA- Creating Vouchers

SCCA- Decision Details Reference Guide

SCCA- Documented Alien Evidence

SCCA- Eligibility Decision Results Reference Guide

SCCA- Employment, Self-Employment, and Income Evidence

SCCA- Evidence Reference Guide

SCCA- Exemption Evidence

SCCA- Foster Care

SCCA- Homeless Living Arrangements

SCCA- Joint Custody

SCCA- Managing Evidence for Military Applicants

SCCA- Narratives in NC FAST

SCCA- Overpayments and Underpayments Verification Worksheet

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SCCA- Overpayments and Recoupments: Receive, Allocate, and Reverse  
Payments

SCCA- Plan of Care Evidence

SCCA- Provider Sanctions Fraudulent Misrepresentation

SCCA- Special Need Supplemental Payment Evidence

SCCA- Special Needs Evidence

SCCA- Split Parent Fee

SCCA- Task Reference Guide

SCCA- Unearned Income Evidence

SCCA- Using FNS Evidence as Verified SCCA Evidence

SCCA- Voucher Reference Guide,

SCCA- Voucher Tasks and timeline Reference Guide

SCCA- Waiting List Configuration

SCCA- LPA Fund Manager: Funding approval process for Out of County  
Children