

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Child Care Assistance switches to debit cards and direct deposits

BISMARCK, N.D. – Beginning this week, the North Dakota Department of Human Services will use debit cards or direct deposit to pay child care providers who participate in the child care assistance program. About 3,115 regulated providers participate in the program, which helps low-income parents who work or attend school afford child care.

“We are making these changes for a variety of reasons,” said Carol Cartledge, public assistance director for the department. “The providers will receive their payments quicker, plus there will be some cost savings with the reduction of paper and postage.”

The department will pay participating licensed group providers, such as after-school programs and child care centers, by direct deposit into their bank accounts. Other smaller child care providers will receive a US Bank ReliaCard® Visa debit card for electronic payment transfers.

Participating providers will continue to submit child care expenses to the local county social service office for children enrolled in the child care assistance program. The reimbursement payments will be automatically deposited to the providers’ debit card or bank account. The department will no longer be issuing monthly paper checks to providers.

Cartledge said the debit card, which features a sunflower field in full bloom on the front, will work like any other prepaid debit card. It can be used to make purchases on-line, in grocery or retail stores, restaurants or anywhere Visa is accepted. The debit card allows for cash withdrawals at any ATM machine or bank. Some fees may apply.

Cartledge said both the debit card and direct deposit will eliminate the problem of lost checks and providers will receive a timelier payment.

In April 2010, 2,317 North Dakota families participated in the child care assistance program.

The department uses other special debit cards to distribute Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, child support payments, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits.

Child care providers with questions about their debit card account should call the ReliaCard® Visa Card Member Services toll-free at 1-866-276-5114, or on-line www.reliacard.com.

Group or day care centers with questions about direct deposit payments can call the N.D. Department of Human Services’ Child Care Assistance Program at 701-328-2332.

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