
**Changes in the Food and Nutrition Services Caseload in
North Carolina: September 2008**

by

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This report explores changes in the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) caseload in North Carolina in September 2008. This analysis is based on data extracted from the Food Stamp Information System (FSIS). These extracts are used to construct and maintain a longitudinal file that tracks the experiences of those individuals who have participated in the FNS program in North Carolina. The analysis explores changes in the number of households participating in the program, changes in the number of case openings, information on households who are participating in the program for the first time, and changes in the number of households participating in the program in each county across the state.

The analysis uses extracts made from FSIS in early November 2008. While information is available on households participating in the program in October 2008, it does not provide a complete assessment of all households that will receive benefits in October. There are a number of households that applied for benefits in October and whose applications are still pending when the extracts were made. Information on these households will be included in subsequent reports on the FNS caseload.

Figure One illustrates the changes in the FNS caseload over time. As the figure indicates, the number of households participating in the program grew by more than 50,000 between July 2007 and September 2008. In July 2007, 400,031 households participated in the program. By September 2007, the number of households had grown by more than 7,000 to 407,038. By July 2008, the number of households grew to 435,959. Two months later, the number of households participating in the FNS program in North Carolina had grown by almost 15,000 households to 450,432.

The percentage increase in the number of households participating in the FNS program from August 2007 through September 2008 is shown in Figure Two. As the figure indicates, from September 2007 through June 2008, the rate of increase in the number of households participating in the FNS program appears to average around 0.5% each month. In February 2008, the rate of increase fell to near zero. This corresponds to the nearly flat line segment shown in Figure One for the period between January 2008 and February 2008. In July 2008, the rate of

increase grew to 1.58 %. From July 2008 through August 2008, the FNS caseload grew by 1.92%. The rate of increase fell slightly to 1.27% by September 2008.

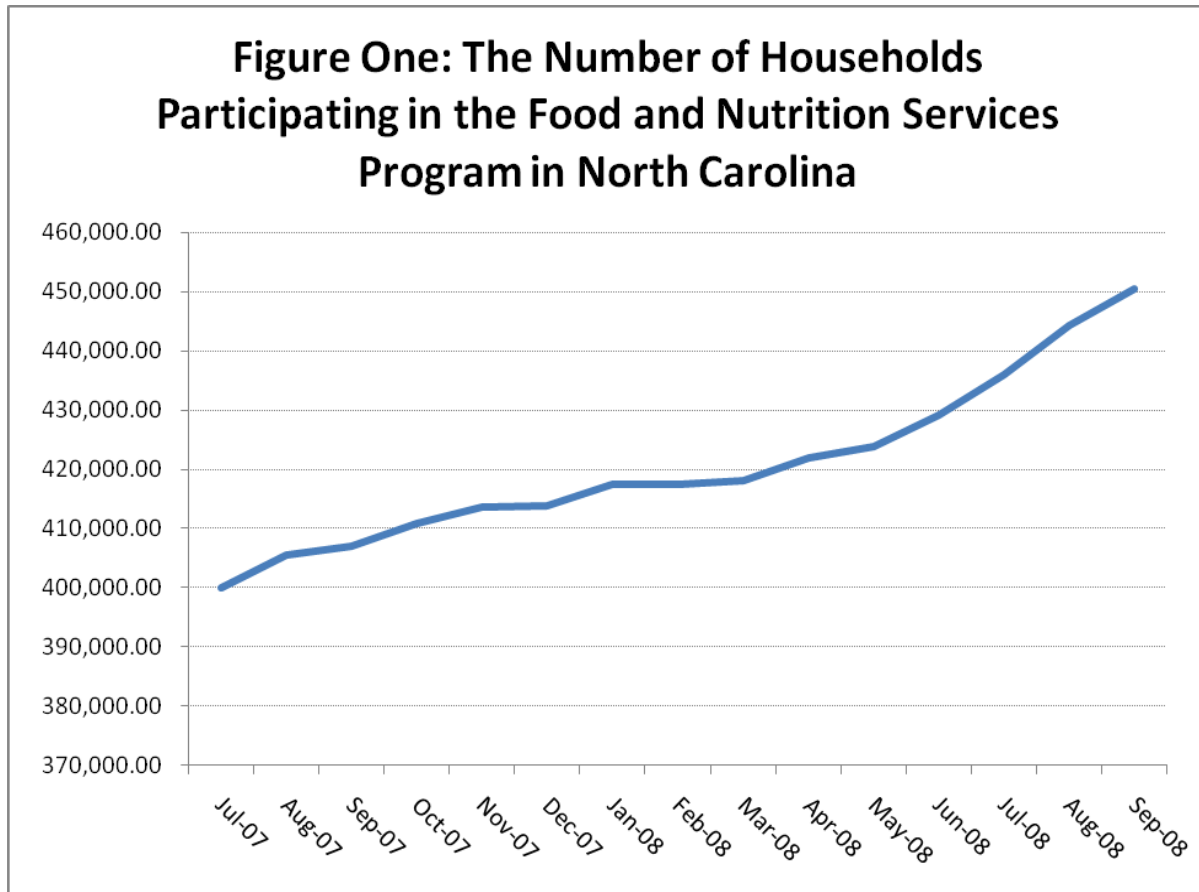


Figure Three tracks the number of cases opening in the FNS program between August 2007 and September 2008. As the figure indicates, the number of openings generally ranged between 20,000 and 25,000 per month between August 2007 and June 2008. In July 2008, the number of openings grew to 27,956. The number of openings increased to 28,736 in August 2008 before falling to 26,911 in September 2008.

Case openings are an important tool in understanding changes in the size of the caseload. The caseload in any given month is equal to the caseload from the prior month minus the number of cases that closed plus the number of cases that were opened. Case openings can be divided

Figure Two: The Percentage Increase In the Number of Households in the Food and Nutrition Services Program in North Carolina

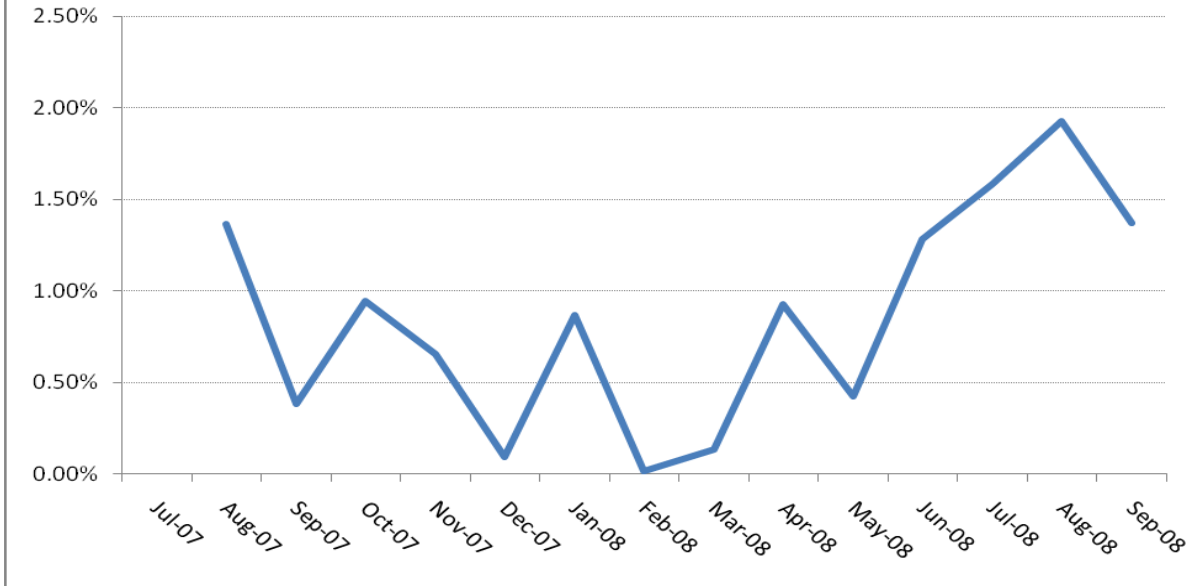
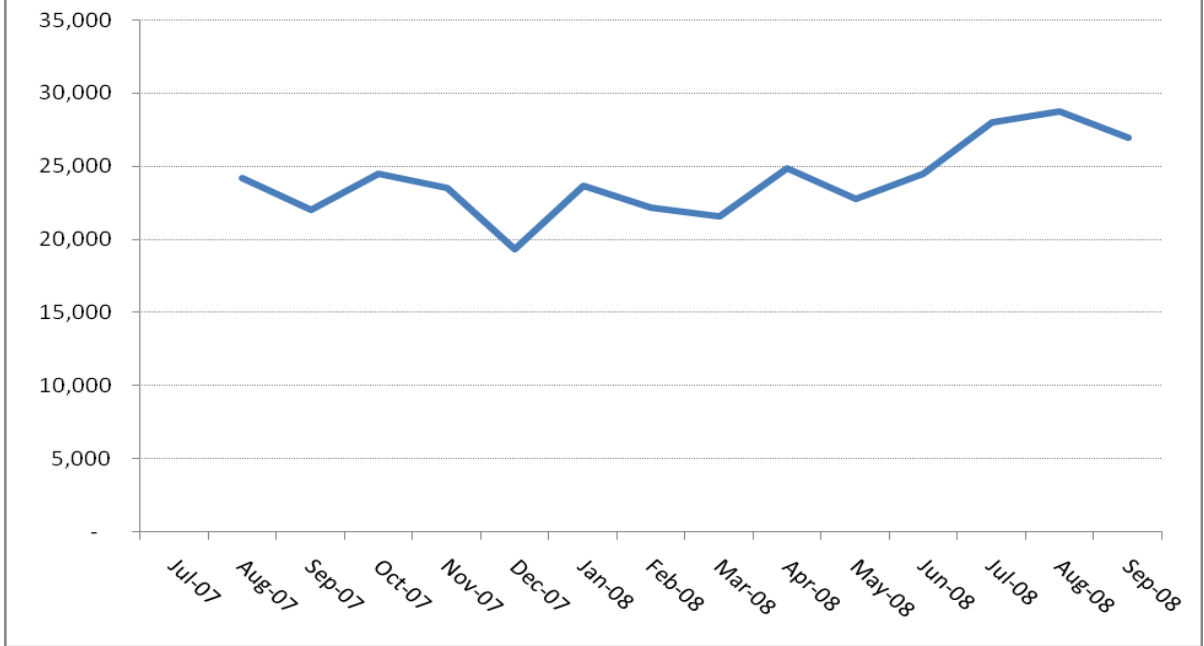


Figure Three: The Number of Case Openings in the Food and Nutrition Services Program



into cases for families who are new to the program and those who had left the program in an earlier month and who are now returning to the program. Figure Four illustrates the percentage of case openings associated with cases that are new to the program. As the figure indicates, the percentage of cases that are new to the FNS program in North Carolina generally ranged between 38% and 40% between August 2007 and July 2008. In August 2008, the percentage rose to more than 40% and climbed to near 41% in September 2008. While these changes are relatively small, they are consistent with information found in figures presented earlier. Taken together, they indicate that there was a change in the number and composition of households coming onto the FNS program in the late summer of 2008.

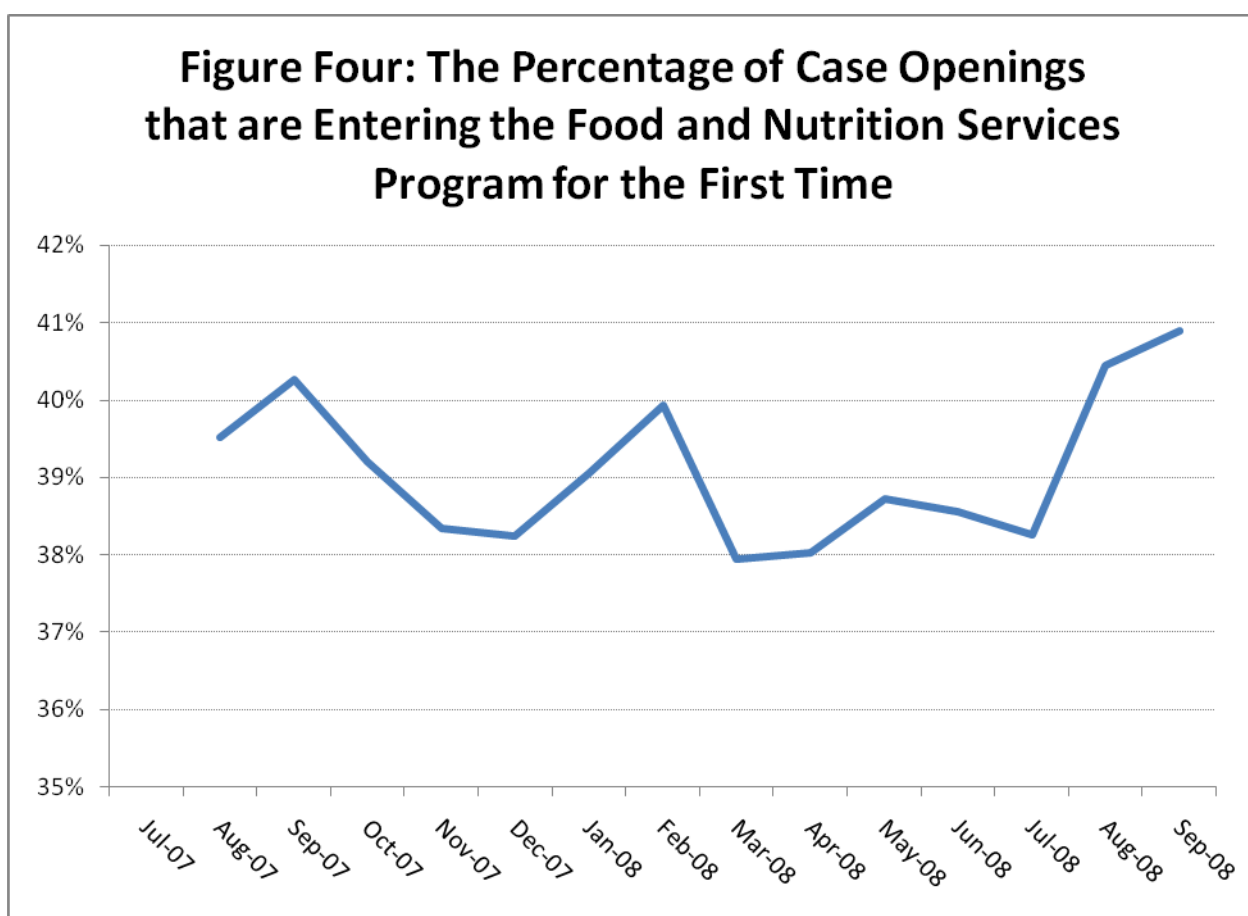


Figure Five illustrates the percentage of cases opened each month that have no income. These percentages are broken down by whether the case is being reopened or whether the case is

new to the system. As the figure indicates, around 35% to 40% of the cases reopened each month report no income. A higher percentage of the cases for households that are new to the FNS program—ranging from 44% to 48%--have no income. The figure indicates that the percentage of cases with no income—based on type of opening—varies from month to month but that there are no pronounced trends up or down suggesting the proportion of cases with no income is changing in a particular direction as a result of the economic slowdown.

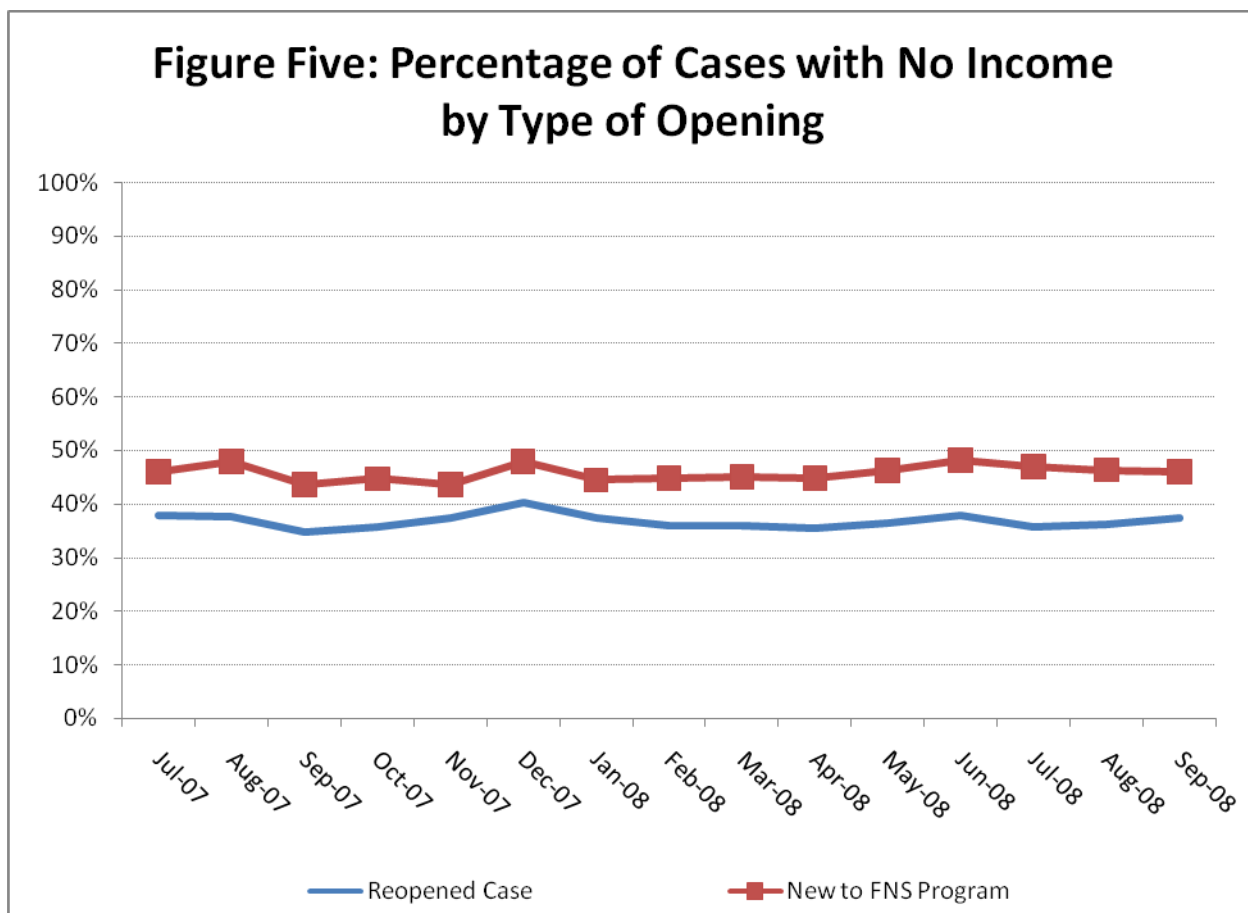
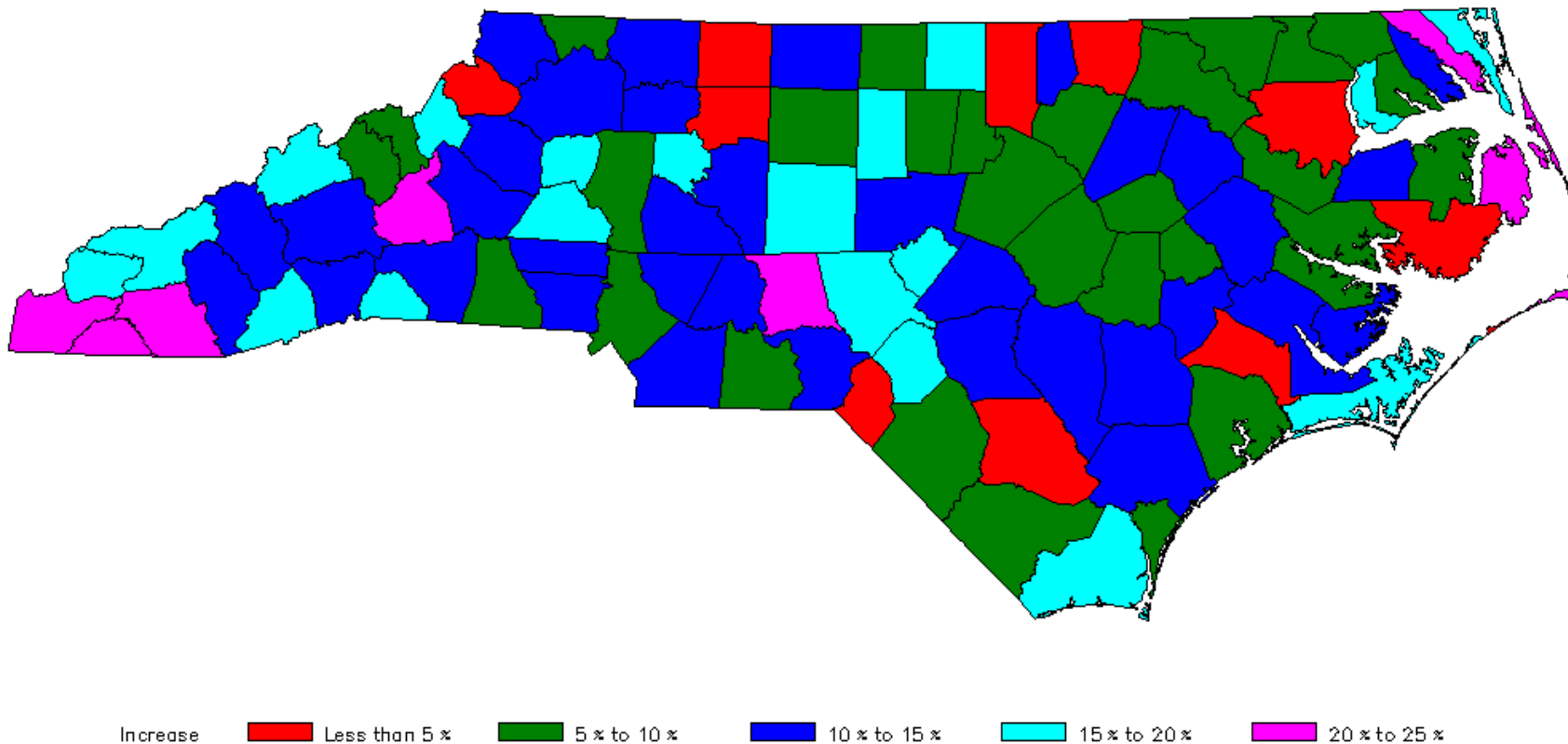


Figure Six indicates the change in the size of the FNS program caseload between September 2007 and September 2008. As the figure indicates, all 100 counties had an increase in the number of households receiving benefits. Ten counties had increases of less than 5%. According to the figure, 29 counties had an increase of 5% to 10%. More than one-third of the counties in the state—35%--had increases of 10% to 15%. Almost one in five counties—19%--had increases of 15% to 20%. Seven counties—Cherokee, Clay, Macon, McDowell, counties

Figure Six: Percentage Change in the Number of FNS Program Cases between September 2007 and September 2008



in the state—35%--had increases of 10% to 15%. Almost one in five counties—19%--had increases of 15% to 20%. Seven counties—Cherokee, Clay, Macon, McDowell, Montgomery, Camden, and Dare—had an increase in the size of their caseload of 20% to 25%. Most of the seven counties with the largest percentage increases are located in either the northeast or far west sections of the state. None are major population centers. Several—such as Clay, Macon, Cherokee, McDowell and Dare—are vacation destinations.

Summary

The analysis of participation in the FNS program in North Carolina shows that the number of households has grown over the last year. In September 2007, there were 407,038 households participating in the program. By September 2008, the number of households had grown to 450,432. The increase has not been steady. From September 2007 through June 2008, the rate of increase in the number of households ranged around 0.5% per month. In July 2008, the rate of increase jumped to 1.58%, and rose to 1.92% in August 2008. The number of case openings also remained fairly steady between September 2007 and June 2008, generally ranging between 20,000 and 25,000 per month. In July 2008, the number of openings increased to almost 28,000 households. There were an additional 28,736 openings in August 2008. Between 38% and 40% of those openings represent households that are new to the system.

Between September 2007 and September 2008, more than one-third of the counties in the state saw an increase in their caseload of 10% to 15%. Seven counties had an increase of 20% or more, while 10 counties had an increase of 5% or less.