

July 28, 2020

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-57-20**

This All-County Information Notice (ACIN) reminds County Welfare Departments (CWDs) of current rules and guidance regarding timely access and issuance of CalWORKs Homeless Assistance benefits during the statewide outbreak of COVID-19 (or novel coronavirus) and extends temporary flexibilities during this pandemic.



KIM JOHNSON  
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
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GAVIN NEWSOM  
GOVERNOR

July 28, 2020

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-57-20

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CALWORKS PROGRAM SPECIALISTS  
ALL CALFRESH PROGRAM SPECIALISTS  
ALL COUNTY REFUGEE PROGRAM COORDINATORS  
ALL CONSORTIA PROJECT MANAGERS

SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO  
KIDS (CALWORKS): ISSUANCE OF HOMELESS ASSISTANCE  
(HA) BENEFITS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)  
PANDEMIC

REFERENCE: [ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER \(ACWDL\) DATED MARCH 31, 2020; ACWDL DATED JUNE 16, 2020; ACWDL DATED MARCH 13, 2020; ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-17-08; WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(WIC\) SECTION 11450; MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES \(MPP\) SECTION 44-211.5; EXECUTIVE ORDER \(EO\) N-59-20; EO N-71-20](#)

The purpose of this All-County Information Notice (ACIN) is to remind County Welfare Departments (CWDs) of current rules regarding the timely access and issuance of CalWORKs Homeless Assistance (HA) benefits to families in the CalWORKs program, and to extend administrative flexibilities during the outbreak of COVID-19.

**Timely access and issuance of CalWORKs HA benefits**

In order to adhere to the public health guidance related to COVID-19 and the physical distancing guidelines issued by the California Department of Public Health, many county offices have closed or reduced their hours of operation to help minimize the spread of

COVID-19. The CDSS reminds counties that despite any changes in county office practices or hours of operation, families must maintain the ability to apply for HA benefits during normal business hours and receive those benefits timely. Please see pages 8-9 of the [ACWDL issued on March 13, 2020](#), and [ACIN I-17-08](#) for guidance regarding what procedures CWDs must follow to ensure that families can apply for benefits, including HA, when county offices are closed during regular business hours.

The timeframe to issue HA benefits must also still be met, as required by law. The payment for temporary HA shall be approved and issued or denied within the same working day in which the Assistance Unit (AU) requests HA (MPP section 44-211.523). This means that the family requesting temporary HA must have these benefits issued and available to them on the same day that their application is approved. For permanent HA, the county has one working day to issue or deny payment from the time the recipient provides the information as specified in MPP section 44-211.537.

If counties are not able to accept HA applications during normal business hours or meet the required timeframes to issue HA under their current COVID-19 county practices, they must immediately implement changes in these county practices to ensure these legal timeframes are met.

### **Administrative Flexibilities**

The [ACWDL issued March 31, 2020](#), provided interim guidance regarding existing policies and flexibilities available in the CalWORKs HA program to support counties in issuing HA benefits timely while promoting physical distancing. While the ACWDL stated that these flexibilities expired on June 30, 2020, some of these flexibilities are in fact permitted under current HA guidance and can be implemented on an ongoing basis. Others are time-limited and in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be extended consistent with CalWORKs program extensions, as described in the [ACWDL issued June 16, 2020](#) and further extended by [Executive Order \(EO\) N-71-20](#). The list below identifies each administrative flexibility described in the ACWDL issued March 31, 2020, along with the allowable timeframe for each:

#### *Flexibilities Under Existing Law That are Not Time Limited*

1. Families may receive their HA benefits in one lump sum payment of 16 days any time a family's homelessness is a **direct and primary result of** a state or federally declared natural disaster pursuant to WIC section 11450(f)(3)(A)(v). Counties are strongly encouraged to issue all 16 days of HA benefits at once to families whose homelessness is a direct and primary result of COVID-19.
2. Counties may accept sworn statements from clients as verification that HA benefits were appropriately spent, or counties may grant good cause for not

providing paper verifications, such as motel receipts or daily permanent housing searches. Counties are strongly encouraged to accept sworn statements as a valid form of verification to avoid in-person contact during the outbreak of COVID-19.

3. As a reminder, HA applications are not required to be made in person or to include a face-to-face interview. Counties always have the discretion to complete the CW 42 on behalf of the family and electronic signatures on the CW 42 are always an allowable option.

#### *Time-Limited Flexibilities Authorized by Executive Order*

4. [EO N-59-20](#) waived the signature requirement for CalWORKs applicants for [60 days past June 15](#). [EO N-71-20](#) further extended this waiver until the order is modified or rescinded, or until the state of emergency is terminated, whichever occurs first. The EO states that for this period, the county can accept oral affirmation of belief if the CWD is unable to accept, or the applicant is unable to provide, a physical or electronic signature. This waiver also applies to CalWORKs HA; therefore, counties may record a verbal attestation over the phone or document this attestation in the case notes when the applicant is unable to provide a valid physical or electronic signature on the CW 42. This flexibility is allowable only for the period of time covered by EO N-59-20 or EO N-71-20, whichever is longer, and is not typically allowable under existing law.

#### **Issuance of HA payments**

CDSS also reminds counties that current law requires that CalWORKs HA payments must be issued to clients in the manner that the client requests. MPP section 44-211.516 states that the county shall comply with an AU's written request (question 7 on the CW 42) regarding how the family wants to receive their HA payments. The AU may request that the payment go directly to the AU or the providers of temporary shelter, permanent housing or utilities. Please note, the [ACWDL issued on March 31, 2020](#), incorrectly referred to HA benefits as 16 nights of "motel vouchers." This is an inaccurate description, except in the limited circumstances when HA benefits are to be issued as a voucher in cases of mismanagement or when requested by the AU (MPP section 44-211.517).

Counties are reminded that in the event of a finding of mismanagement, clients are still entitled to their remaining days of HA benefits. In these circumstances, counties should consider issuing benefits directly on an EBT card if it is not possible to issue a vendor/voucher payment within the required timeframes due to office closures or changes in business practices as a result of COVID-19.

**Access to Mail**

Lastly, counties are reminded that families without a mailing address who list the county office as their official mailing address for the purpose of their benefits need to continue to have timely access to their mail, despite office closures or reduced hours. All clients, including those without residential mailing addresses, must receive their issuance of HA benefits within the legal timeframes, as explained above. For eligible applicants who do not yet have an EBT card, counties must ensure these families can pick up their card and receive their HA benefits on the day they apply.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the Housing and Homelessness Branch at (916) 651-5155 or at [housing@dss.ca.gov](mailto:housing@dss.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By***

Corrin Buchanan, Assistant Director of Housing and Homelessness