



# CAPITOL WEEKLY

Monday, November 8, 1999

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## Statewide Task Force Possible Solution to CalWORKs Mental Health Funding Issues

by Margie Gentzel

A statewide task force may offer solutions to manifold funding issues which impact the mental health component of the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Program. Over \$130 million of funding, including rollover funds, is available to fund mental health services, yet very little funding has been spent to provide mental health supportive services to CalWORKs recipients. Advocates for CalWORKs recipients estimate that .001 percent of total funds has been spent since the initial January 1, 1998 receipt of moneys that are specifically earmarked for mental health services.

The California Department of Social Services authorizes the provision of mental health supportive services to recipients of CalWORKs moneys. The Estimates Branch and Financial Planning Branch of the Department describes these services as a mandate of AB 1542, which implements the CalWORKs program: "(the legislation) mandates, to the extent that funding is available, that counties provide for the treatment of mental or emotional difficulties that may limit or impair a participant's ability to make the transition from welfare

to work or retain employment over a long period of time. Available mental health services must include assessment, case management, and treatment and rehabilitation services."

Jody Berger is a Welfare Advocate for the Legal Aid Society of San Francisco, who observes CalWORKs recipients who struggle with mental health issues, yet still must search for work to receive aid. She finds "one of the problems with CalWORKs generally is that it works on a county-by-county basis. The counties are not using the (mental health) moneys because their CalWORKs plans are still in development and not finalized." CalWORKs became state law on January 1, 1998. Moneys became available at that time to fund mental health supportive services for CalWORKs recipients.

One solution to the inertia of counties to enact the mental health component of their county CalWORKs plan is offered by Lucy Quacinella, Staff Attorney with the National Center for Youth Law: "The California Department of Social Services could convene a statewide task force to consider proposals for how counties could begin to use the mental health supportive services

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funds according to uniform protocols designed to fairly and accurately assess individual needs and to provide access to treatment services in a manner that accommodates clients' concerns over confidentiality and encourages voluntary participation. The task force should also address the unique treatment needs of women with young children, the current waiting lists for specialized women's services, and how CalWORKs funds can be used to make appropriate treatment services available to the families who need them."

The California Department of Social Services is currently holding private forums on the CalWORKs funding issues at four metropolitan sites in the state. The forums review the evaluation and referral process for mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence treatment. However, the forums are not open to members of the public, and participation is by invitation only. Participation is composed primarily of state and county employees. Lucy Quacinella, National Center for Youth Law, believes a separate, public forum is necessary to ensure representation by consumer advocates "to ensure that a consumer voice is heard among the governmental entities and providers, we propose that at least 30% of the representation be from groups representing consumers."

Jo Weber represents the California Department of Social Services in her role as Branch Chief of the Work Services and Demonstration Project. She says the state wants to include families at all meetings which review the CalWORKs process. "The state is reviewing the assessment and identification protocols through a series of forums. We are looking at barriers to creating a system that adequately provides mental health services. We are looking at the amount of services being offered to folks. Currently, we aren't seeing enough services being offered. The state will go back into counties and communities to see what we can do. There is a fear by recipients of disclosing their mental health issues. We are learning how to get these services to people in a less threatening way. We need to help families by providing these services during a difficult family time."

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program was created in response to the 1997 California Welfare to Work Act. AB 1542 (Assembly Members Ducheny and Ashburn and Senators Thompson and Maddy) served as the vehicle for California welfare reform. The reform of the California welfare system was mandated by the federal government through Public Law 104-193, which placed the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program [now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)] and federal child care funding into two block grants. The federal law required that an increasing percentage of California individuals who receive welfare must be employed or in a federally funded work program. The 1999 federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grant is \$3.7 billion, with an additional \$114 million carry-over of 1998-1999 funds. The Final Analysis of the 1999 State Budget Act lists "total expenditures of \$6 billion for CalWORKs through the Department of Social Services in 1999-00."

The current state budget authorizes total expenditures of \$57.7 million from the General Fund for mental health services for CalWORKs recipients, with an additional \$60.5 million of General Fund moneys authorized for substance abuse treatment services. A total of over \$130 million is available when rollover funds are included in the mix. Currently, a statewide monthly caseload is projected to serve 96,804 recipients for mental health services and 27,141 recipients for substance abuse services. Mental health services cover initial

assessment, case management, treatment, and rehabilitation services.

Funds were rolled over due to the abysmal provision of services to needy clients. For example, in 1997-98 \$1.8 million of the total allocation was spent on services; so counties rolled over \$25.2 million of funds into the next fiscal year budget. Counties will likely continue to roll over huge amounts of moneys that are not being spent to provide CalWORKs recipients with necessary mental health services. The state cut-off to permit counties to spend the roll over funding is June 30, 2000. Commencing July 1, 2000, any funds not spent will transfer to the California General Fund.

The California Department of Social Services estimates that 96,804 recipients are eligible to receive mental health supportive services and 27,141 recipients are eligible to receive substance abuse services. The Estimates Branch and Financial Planning Branch of the Department obtained this calculation, in their estimate, "on an epidemiological catchment area study adjusted for poverty and social security income cases, which estimated that 21 percent of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program recipients have a diagnosable mental or substance abuse use disorder."

The California Department of Social Services is currently drafting protocols for the implementation of mental health services to recipients of CalWORKs mental health supportive services. No public members who are consumers of mental health services have been invited to participate directly in the process of developing the protocols.

"This is a statewide crisis," according to Lucy Quacinella, National Center for Youth Law. "The California State Legislature made it clear that CalWORKs beneficiaries are to be provided with mental health services if needed, in order to get and keep a job. The state is not focusing on the needs of mental health clients - they are virtually being ignored."

The County of Sacramento is attempting to resolve CalWORKs recipients' access to mental health and substance abuse services. On September 1, 1999 the County presented a CalWORKs Referral Report, which offers a review of the utilization of referral activities. The County analyzed referrals received by the County Clinical Team from July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999 at three Sacramento CalWORKs sites. Of the total number of CalWORKs recipients reviewed, 17% were assessed as experiencing co-existing disorders (mental health and substance abuse issues); 16% were assessed as experiencing substance abuse disorders, and 67% were assessed as experiencing mental health disorders.

The referrals analyzed by the County Clinical Team revealed that the referral process at Sacramento County is impacted by client and staff issues. The CalWORKs Referral Report stated that clients did not self-refer due to "fear of losing CalWORKs' benefits, fear of child welfare involvement/losing their kids, (county) denial issues, and mental health stigma concerns." The report also cited County of Sacramento staff issues, including a "mistaken belief that a release was needed to make a referral for assessment and a continued discomfort raising the (health) issues with recipients."

The Department of Social Services published a report of its findings to improve the CalWORKs referral process. The report is based on a work group which shared ideas to make the services provided by the CalWORKs program more accessible for clients. The July 22, 1999 CMHDA/CADPAAC/CWDA Policy Work Group report suggests increasing identification and referral of clients with mental health, domestic violence and substance abuse issues by doing more outreach within and outside

the Department of Social Services; using current mental health, alcohol abuse and domestic violence systems for case finding; conducting frequent trainings; advising referral sources that referrals are desired; and marketing directly to CalWORKs recipients.

Advocates who represent CalWORKs clients view the appropriate receipt of mental health services as a goal which is not yet realized in California. Kevin Aslanian, Executive Director, Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations, says his clients' experience is that the "mental health services are not there. The rule is the county is supposed to assess if (mental health issues) are an impediment to employment, but the county forces people to work. Recipients can have their kids taken away because if they are determined to be mentally ill the kids may be considered (by the county) to be in danger. Then the recipient loses CalWORKs funding."

As counties complete Year Two of the CalWORKs program, staff are beginning to identify individuals who have mental health issues who have not received services. The Welfare Reform Project discusses this population in its publication, Preliminary Thoughts on Identification and Referral. This report was drafted after staff visited six counties to determine how CalWORKs programs are serving clients. The report notes that the variety in recipients and their health issues may necessitate the creation of various types of identification and referral tools: "There are subsets of this population that we are just beginning to identify. Many of the "harder-to-serve" recipients have not yet been engaged in the Welfare to Work process. Those that are coming in initially are often already employed or ready-to-be employed. Those with more significant bar-

riers may enter the system later, or their barriers are such that they will not manifest themselves immediately. We need to learn more about the entire population in order to design identification and referral procedures, as well as services, that are most accessible and appropriate. It is unrealistic to think that many individuals in this population will self-refer for (treatment) under the current set of incentives. California is not unique in its difficulties with identification and referral. This population often distrusts public systems. Many do not understand or believe the implications of the new timelines."

The solution to such lack of recipient participation in the supportive services mandated by CalWORKs programs is offered by advocates who represent CalWORKs clients: the organization of a statewide task force to hold public hearings on CalWORKs supportive services for mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence issues. Whether such a task force will convene remains to be seen. However, grave problems in providing mental health services to recipients clearly exist and are acknowledged by all interests. The issue of whether California's new welfare program will continue to move Californians off the welfare rolls onto employment rolls during changing economic times depends on the sustainability of all aspects of the new CalWORKs program. Critical program components will be addressed in future issues of Capitol Weekly. These service components include programs for legal immigrants, teenagers, emergency food assistance, and domestic violence.

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