



# CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

## **THE CALWORKS PROJECT** in Collaboration with **CHILDREN AND FAMILY FUTURES and** **FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS ON CALWORKS** **CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT** **January 18, 2002** **Sandra Naylor Goodwin, Ph.D.**

The California Legislature made a major contribution to the welfare reform field by its insightful inclusion of the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) and Mental Health (MH) allocations in the original CalWORKs legislation. We are the only state to have made this substantial a commitment to addressing the needs of this population. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is to be commended for its aggressive promotion of services for this population and the counties have taken advantage of flexibility to design innovative and effective programs. After almost four years of studying CalWORKs implementation in California and research from other states, we have learned a substantial amount about what has and has not been helpful for participants with AOD, MH and Domestic Violence (DV) issues and their children.

- AOD, MH, and DV issues are widely prevalent in the CalWORKs population. Roughly one-half of the participants have an AOD, MH, or DV issue serious enough to warrant services. These issues have a direct negative impact on both employability and child well-being.
- Services for these issues have been shown in research settings to improve rates of employment. And in California, recipients of these services, their providers, and their CalWORKs case workers rate the services as helpful.
- CalWORKs participants will take advantage of AOD, MH, and DV services when they are accessible and relevant. Rates of service usage and percentages of the AOD and MH allocations spent have steadily increased.
- The “work first” philosophy does not work well for those participants with serious AOD, MH, and DV issues that, combined with other challenges, require more intensive and longer-term specialized help prior to employment.
- Collaboration and the development of integrated programs are key to success in overcoming AOD/MH/DV challenges to employment.
- Counties have developed some effective ways of identifying and serving CalWORKs clients with AOD, MH, and DV issues. Best and promising practices have been established and are being shared through technical assistance.
- Counties are just beginning to address the special needs of the children in CalWORKs families. Children raised in families where the adults have AOD/MH/DV issues are at higher risk for out-of-home placement, of developing behavioral problems and lower self-esteem.
- Women convicted of drug felonies are impaired in their ability to reconstitute their lives and those of their children if they are deprived of CalWORKs assistance. Women who are in recovery need the range of supports that are available through CalWORKs.

Based on this knowledge and experience, we can now make some recommendations about changes to further enhance the program’s ability to assist participants with AOD, MH, and DV issues (1) to obtain and sustain employment leading to self-sufficiency and (2) to improve the well being of their children.

## **I. Ensure adequate funding of AOD, MH, DV programs**

### ***Background:***

It has taken time for the counties to develop and implement their special programs for CalWORKs participants with AOD and MH issues. As of the latest accounting, 84% of the AOD and 96% of the MH allocations were expended. Data from our Six County study shows the increases in the percentages of CalWORKs participants receiving AOD and MH services over time. An advantage of the discreet allocations for MH and AOD combined with the requirements for these treatment systems to work with CalWORKs to plan and develop services, yielded an enormous benefit in improved collaboration among agencies. Also, the legislature did not authorize a separate allocation for DV services for CalWORKs participants. The prevalence data indicates the vital importance of DV issues in this population. Recognizing this importance, many counties have utilized some of their single allocation to fund DV services or have utilized other funding sources. The economic challenges that most counties now face may make these voluntary uses of funds for DV services more problematic.

### ***Recommendations:***

- A. Maintain the current levels of discrete funding for specified AOD and MH allocations.
- B. Provide an additional separate allocation of funds for DV services.

## **II. Promote the broadest possible use of the specially allocated AOD and MH funds**

### ***Background:***

The CDSS has generally been supportive of counties using their AOD and MH allocations to reach as many CalWORKs participants as possible, such as the use of funds for outreach, for services for children when they constitute a barrier to the parent’s working, and for services that would not meet the more stringent “medical necessity” Medi-Cal standards. Yet there remain situations in which families in need are not getting the benefit of these specialized services. Roughly 20 percent of the CalWORKs cases have a parent who has been sanctioned and thus they are not eligible for CalWORKs services. Many of these families have AOD, MH, and/or DV issues that have contributed to their being sanctioned in the first place. Some counties have implemented effective special efforts, including AOD, MH, and DV staff, to induce these parents back into the program. These efforts warrant financial support from the AOD and MH allocations.

Also, participants who are exempt due to a medical disability are not eligible for CalWORKs AOD, MH, or DV services unless they volunteer to be part of welfare-to-work, in which case they essentially lose their exempt status. This represents a Catch 22 which can easily be remedied by allowing these exempt families to receive specialized AOD, MH, and DV services which will not only enhance child well-being but might also address the need for the exemption. Another category that qualifies for exempt status from welfare-to-work is caretakers of a child with a disability, a dependent child of the court, or a child who is at risk of placement in foster care. The same situation exists here, providing specialized AOD, MH, or DV services to the caretaker(s) in such families removes the exemption.

***Recommendations:***

- A. The Legislature should enact a law to specifically authorize the use of state CalWORKs funds, including the AOD and MH allocations, for services to attempt re-engagement with parents who have been sanctioned for non-compliance.
- B. The Legislature should enact legislation to specifically authorize the use of state CalWORKs funds, including the AOD and MH allocations, for supportive services to adults who are exempt from welfare-to-work requirements either because of a disability or because of caring for a child with a disability, a dependent child of the court, or a child at risk of placement in foster care. The participant receiving such supportive services should not be considered a part of the welfare-to-work program, nor should the 60-month time clock tick so long as the exemption is in place.

**III. Allow women convicted of drug felonies to obtain CalWORKs**

***Background:***

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, (PRWORA) any person convicted of a controlled substance-related felony is ineligible for TANF or Food Stamps unless states enact legislation explicitly permitting them to be eligible for these benefits. As of May 2000, 18 states have passed a modified version of the ban and 9 have opted out of the ban entirely. Almost half of the women in California prisons are serving time for drug-related crimes. Many women are in prison on drug convictions because of the action of their batterer. Mothers with drug felony convictions have increased difficulty in finding employment as a result of a criminal history. The denial of eligibility to women with substance abuse convictions negatively affects their children. Substance abusing mothers who are not able to access adequate treatment or gain sustainable employment have increased difficulty caring for their children, resulting in increased abuse and neglect and in more children ending up in foster care.

***Recommendation:***

- A. State law should be amended to allow individuals with prior drug felony convictions to be eligible for CalWORKs and Food Stamps, if they: 1) Have successfully completed, are participating in, or are willing to enroll in a specified drug treatment program; 2) Currently participate in a court-mandated drug treatment or diversion program; 3) Fulfilled court-imposed conditions in the disposition of their criminal case at least five years prior to the application for assistance, or 4) Are not currently using a controlled substance.

**IV. Promote special programs for the “hard-to-employ”**

***Background:***

There is a direct relationship between the number of barriers that a TANF recipient has and the likelihood that s/he will be working. Many of those with other barriers also have AOD, MH, and DV issues. A number of federal initiatives are exploring how best to address the needs of the hard-to-employ population. California supported a demonstration project (under which some creative and effective programs were begun). Some counties are undertaking such programs now, but there is no statewide initiative to address the modifications in work-first that would be most appropriate for this population.

***Recommendations:***

- A. The State should fund a demonstration project of programs for the hard-to-employ with an independent evaluation.
- B. The State should create incentives within counties for the development of integrated programs that address multiple barriers;
  - 1) Promote the identification and dissemination of information about programs that deal with multiple barriers;
  - 2) Promote cross-training at the county level among those programs and staff that focus on particular barriers to employment;
  - 3) 3) Provide financial incentives for counties that demonstrate effectiveness in obtaining employment for participants with multiple barriers.

**V. Promote special programs for the children of CalWORKs parents with AOD, MH, and DV issues**

***Background:***

Children raised in families where AOD, MH, and DV issues are present are at added risk for poor outcomes. There is evidence that children in families receiving welfare with these issues are subject to higher rates of depression, behavior problems, developmental delays, lower self-esteem, and out-of-home placement. Some counties have begun to focus on the children of the CalWORKs parents that they serve, e.g. Los Angeles mental health department requires an assessment of the status of the children as part of their adult intake. Organizing programs for children is time and resource intensive, but will result in better child outcomes.

***Recommendations:***

- A. The State should fund a demonstration project for programs for the children of CalWORKs parents receiving services for AOD, MH, or DV issues, with an independent evaluation.
- B. State policy should promote the development at the county level of programs to serve the children of parents who have AOD/MH/DV barriers: 1) Encourage the development of closer relationships and integrated programs among CalWORKs, Child Welfare, and AOD/MH/DV programs; 2) Identify and disseminate information about CalWORKs and AOD/MH/DV programs that include assessments of child well-being and services to address identified needs; 3) Encourage an intensified AOD/MH/DV program focus on parental training and services targeted to reduce the need for out-of-home placement of children of CalWORKs parents with AOD/MH/DV issues.