

Written Update to the Legislature on AB 1808 County Plan Addendum Strategies for Increasing the Work Participation Rate

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Contents

SECTION	PAGE
Legislative Mandate.....	1
Executive Summary.....	2
Background.....	4
AB 1808 County Plan Addendum Strategies	6
Up-front Engagement Strategies	6
Sanction Reengagement Strategies	15
Strategies to Engage Safety Net Families.....	21
Characteristics of Safety Net Families	24
Conclusion	25

Legislative Mandate

Statute enacted by Senate Bill (SB) 84 requires the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to review the county plans developed pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code Section 10534 in order to identify promising practices in the areas of up-front engagement and reengagement of sanctioned families, and to work with the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) and county welfare directors to gather information on the implementation and results of these practices, that can inform future efforts to increase participation in welfare-to-work activities.

This statute also requires CDSS, in conjunction with CWDA, to review the county plans and work with county welfare directors and the CWDA to determine what activities and strategies that counties are using to encourage participation among time-limited families, and gather information about the characteristics of the time-limited population.

CDSS is required to provide a written update to the Legislature on March 1, 2008, of the required information gathered by that date. CDSS is to submit the Final Report of the information required by this statute, to the Legislature and county welfare directors, on or before September 1, 2008.

(SB 84, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Human Services, Statutes of 2007, Chapter 177, Section 19)

Additional copies of this report can be obtained from:

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) values the importance of providing a comprehensive product that will be useful and informative to the Legislature. The information included in this written update describes the implementation and preliminary results of engagement strategies that counties had outlined in their Assembly Bill (AB) 1808 (Chapter 75, Statutes of 2006) County Plan Addendum for the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Program for up-front engagement and sanction reengagement. This written update was prepared in collaboration with the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) and also includes information regarding what activities and strategies counties are using to encourage participation by time-limited (Safety Net) families and the characteristics of Safety Net families in the CalWORKs Program. It is important to note that counties are not required to provide services to Safety Net families, but may choose to do so at their option provided that they include any such services in their CalWORKs County Plan.

Methodology

Counties were asked to identify which strategies are promising practices based upon the results they are directly observing, including information on implementation and results of any strategies to engage Safety Net families from counties who may have implemented any such strategies. CDSS believes this information will enhance the Legislature's understanding of not only who Safety Net families are, but also the successes and challenges counties face in their continuing efforts to help this population to achieve self-sufficiency. Since Safety Net families are now considered work eligible [45 CFR §261.2(n)], any efforts to engage and verify that they are meeting program participation requirements will have a positive impact on California's Work Participation Rate (WPR).

Because it is premature to report successes supported by data in this report, the results contained in this written update are preliminary results of county efforts to implement strategies contained in their County Plan Addenda. The Final Report to the Legislature, scheduled for delivery on September 1, 2008, will contain more detailed information and data regarding success of implementation of county strategies.

Up-front Engagement

Preliminary information on strategies for up-front engagement shows they are quite varied and appear to be increasing engagement which may result in an overall increase in WPR. The majority of counties have implemented strategies to encourage voluntary participation by applicants. Some counties have voluntary participation in orientation and appraisal, while others included job search and other activities. This approach seems to increase up-front participation as well as ongoing participation and has caused a decrease in up-front sanctions. Many counties have changed their prior business model by developing specialized caseworkers or units, faster referrals for services, offering bridging activities and life skills curricula, increased staff training,

and co-location of staff and services. All of these strategies are designed to lessen the amount of time between activity components and increase the level of service for CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work (WTW) recipients. Another strategy some counties implemented was to change the design of program components, such as orientation or job club, in order to make them more engaging and effective. Results are forthcoming on all of these strategies, but preliminary results show moderate increases in engagement and participation.

Sanction Reengagement

The majority of the strategies for sanction reengagement focus on intensive outreach to sanctioned individuals. The strategy most frequently mentioned was home visits. In many cases the outreach included phone calls and monthly reminders of the benefits of participation and how to cure a sanction. Some counties developed specialized caseworkers or units to manage the sanctioned caseload and perform the intensive outreach. A few counties hold sanction workshops to which they invite sanctioned individuals for the purpose of curing, while others have started to discuss curing and the benefits of participation during the individual's annual redetermination appointment with the eligibility worker. The preliminary results of these strategies are somewhat mixed, although a few counties report a reduction in their sanctioned caseload since implementing. It is difficult to engage sanctioned individuals because they are technically not aided and therefore are not required to participate. Any attempt to cure must be voluntary on the part of the sanctioned individual.

Safety Net Strategies

There are currently a limited number of counties that have implemented strategies to engage the timed-out individuals in Safety Net families since counties are not required to engage this population. As with sanctioned individuals, timed out individuals are not required to participate, again making them difficult to engage. Some counties are conducting home visits, phone calls, and letters to remind timed-out individuals of the benefits of participation and to encourage them to voluntarily participate. A few counties are conducting administrative reviews of the Safety Net caseload to determine the status of the cases. If timed-out individuals are employed, they are offered supportive services; and if not employed, the county attempts contact to encourage voluntary participation. Preliminary data suggests a slight increase in voluntary participation of timed-out individuals.

The information on the characteristics of Safety Net families included in this written update comes from administrative data collected by CDSS in 2006.

Conclusion

CDSS is in the process of reviewing data received from the counties in June 2008. To be included in a future report, this data will result in a richer assessment of the strategies to include in the Final Report.

Background

Purpose

In accordance with SB 84 (Chapter 177, Section 19, Statutes of 2007), CDSS provides this written update to inform the Legislature of the information gathered to date regarding strategies counties included in their County Plan Addenda for up-front engagement and sanction reengagement of CalWORKs clients. CDSS is also including strategies to engage time-limited families (Safety Net) by those counties which proposed such strategies. These strategies were developed and implemented by individual counties to facilitate an increase in welfare-to-work participation in the state's CalWORKs program. As required by statute, this written update also includes information on the characteristics of Safety Net families.

Federal Law

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 reauthorized the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, extending funding and authority through federal fiscal year 2010. The reauthorization included significant changes and new provisions that will impact CalWORKs and the state's ability to meet federal requirements. Although WPR requirements have not changed, the baseline to measure caseload reduction has been changed from the total CalWORKs caseload in 1995 to the total CalWORKs caseload in 2005. Also the federal regulations now define what can be counted as work activities and require that certain families with unaided adults be counted toward the WPR. This requires the state to include in California's WPR calculation 80,000 to 90,000 additional cases that were previously excluded, and decreases flexibility for the state in determining which activities are countable toward work participation requirements. The new federal provisions also require substantial new work participation verification and oversight, and impose a new penalty for states that fail to fulfill these work verification requirements.

State Law

The TANF block grant structure allows states to design their TANF programs in ways that would best serve the varying needs of the populations residing within each state, although the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act and resulting changes to the TANF program reduce states' flexibility in this regard. California has generally passed on flexibility to the counties, allowing counties to customize their WTW programs to meet the unique needs of each county. Counties are provided a single allocation to fund the administration of employment and support services to CalWORKs recipients. Due in part to this flexibility, counties across the state are pursuing a variety of strategies in an effort to increase work participation.

In 2004 in anticipation of TANF reauthorization, the state implemented changes to the CalWORKs program that strengthened work requirements and focused counties on engaging recipients in activities sooner [SB 1104 (Chapter 229, Section 17, Statutes of 2004) and SB 68 (Chapter 78, Section 33, Statutes of 2005)]. Additional reforms were implemented in 2006 through AB 1808 in response to the changes in federal

TANF rules. Many of the reforms in AB 1808 were the result of discussions in the stakeholder process. These reforms include the following:

- Requirement for counties to submit a county plan addendum detailing how the county will meet CalWORKs goals, while taking into consideration federal WPR requirements.
- Clarification of statutes regarding pass-on of a portion of penalties the state incurs to those counties that contribute to the state's failure to meet federal WPR requirements.
- Authority to establish a solely state-funded Temporary Assistance Program providing cash aid and benefits to recipients who meet the criteria to be exempt from work participation.
- Amendment to the sanction policy so that sanctions for non-compliance may be cured by recipients at any time.
- Appropriation of funding for the Pay for Performance county incentive program, which rewards counties for achieving positive outcomes on certain defined performance measures.
- Implementation of a statewide County Peer Review process providing greater awareness of performance outcomes and state leadership to identify and replicate best practices.
- Requirement to publish data reported by counties and to perform an assessment of the state's data needs as a part of a Data Master Plan that will be used to measure the success of the CalWORKs program.
- Expansion of the Homeless Assistance Program.

Many of these reform efforts have recently been implemented or are in the process of being implemented; and it will take some time before CDSS can assess outcomes and effects on the overall CalWORKs program. The focus of this written update is the AB 1808 County Plan Addendum strategies and in particular the strategies for up-front engagement, sanction reengagement, and engagement of Safety Net families.

AB 1808 enacted Welfare and Institutions Code Section 10534, which required each county to perform a comprehensive review of its existing CalWORKs Plan, and prepare and submit to CDSS a plan addendum detailing how the county will meet specified goals, taking into consideration the new work participation requirements of TANF Reauthorization. In completing their AB 1808 County Plan Addenda, counties identified strategies and/or policies that they planned to implement to improve their work participation rate (WPR). In this report, counties were not required to submit strategies for engaging Safety Net families. Each of the strategies is described separately.

AB 1808 County Plan Addendum Strategies for Increasing the Work Participation Rate

The following describes the strategies counties had proposed in their County Plan Addenda and preliminary information on implementation and results. The descriptions cover each strategy type.

Up-front Engagement Strategies

Up-front engagement is participation during the period of time after an applicant is deemed eligible for cash aid through the development of a WTW plan and is comprised of many activities and requirements. During that time, the caseworker develops an understanding of the individual's needs, wants, and possible barriers to employment. The activities during up-front engagement include orientation, appraisal, job search and job readiness, assessment, and the creation of a WTW plan. It has proven to be a challenge to immediately engage and keep individuals engaged during this time. The strategies in this section were developed by counties to increase participation and stimulate a desire by CalWORKs WTW recipients to continue to participate in the program.

The following are categories that contain summaries of similar strategies for up-front engagement. These categories were developed from the different types of strategies the counties have included in their submissions of information on implementation and results. CDSS is still in the process of analyzing all of the data received from the counties and anticipates more information in the coming months. The Final Report to the Legislature, due September 1, 2008, will include all of the information counties have submitted to the Department.

1. Voluntary Participation in Up-front Activities

Summary of Strategies

Forty counties developed and implemented strategies to encourage voluntary participation by applicants to achieve, to varying degrees, completion of up-front activities by the time the individual is determined eligible for cash aid and is enrolled as a mandatory participant in the CalWORKs WTW program.

Implementation and Results

- The majority of counties have implemented strategies to encourage voluntary participation in orientation and appraisal. Implementation of these strategies went smoothly, and the counties that had difficulty cited staffing issues as the cause, which once remedied completed implementation. Few cited a large expense in implementing this type of strategy. However, there is a slight cost associated with increased training to ensure that caseworkers properly inform applicants that these activities are voluntary prior to the approval of the

individual's cash aid and to not initiate the noncompliance process for applicants who fail to participate. A few counties have also provided staff training in motivational interviewing to help increase applicants' interest in taking advantage of these voluntary services. There were increased expenses for supportive services offered to the voluntary participants to attend the activities. However, these expenses would still be incurred once the individual is approved for cash aid and referred to the CalWORKs WTW program. While it is difficult to determine the exact impact on WPR these strategies have had, counties implementing these strategies report:

- Increased participation by individuals, up-front and long term.
- Greatly reduced no-show rate for up-front activities.
- Applicants are motivated by the opportunity to receive services faster and there are very few refusals of voluntary participation.
- A decline in up-front sanctions, since individuals often are already participating when aid is granted.
- One county with a very large WTW population piloted this strategy in some of their offices, using other offices as a control to measure the effectiveness of the strategy; they saw an increase in participation in the offices the strategy was piloted in, when compared to the control offices.

Some counties made job search and job readiness activities available to applicants. These counties reported the same cost and training issues that were associated with the voluntary orientations and appraisals and reported results similar to counties offering voluntary orientation and appraisal. One county reported that since the April 2007 implementation, 190 applicants obtained employment during a voluntary job search and 66 more obtained employment during a voluntary job skills workshop. Another county reported a seven percent increase in participants finding employment in 2007 when compared to 2006 totals.

2. Development of Specialized Units/Case Workers

Summary of Strategies

Some counties developed specialized units or caseworkers to alleviate some of the difficulty with the up-front engagement of individuals.

Implementation and Results

- One strategy is the development of an engagement team consisting of members specializing in different aspects of up-front engagement including supervisors, counselors, bilingual team members, etc., to perform case reviews and engage individuals. One county implementing this process reported a delay by labor negotiations. In another county, it was reported that the engagement unit has had the intended effect as individuals are better informed of their rights and responsibilities during the engagement process.

- Some counties implemented a strategy that included the creation of a combined eligibility and WTW worker at intake to be a single point of contact for applicants and newly-approved recipients. This single point of contact assists the recipient throughout the eligibility determination process and all up-front activities. Preliminary results suggest that this service delivery model achieves successful participant cooperation and engagement resulting in up-front successes and increased WPR.
- Some counties created a new employment worker position, focusing only on engaging the recipient in WTW activities. For one county this strategy resulted in an increase in the number of persons in qualified activities from 984 in August 2007 to 1,082 in October 2007, a nine percent increase in a three-month period.
- One county designated specific days and/or times for workers to solely focus on WTW activity enrollment and delivery and services. Preliminary results in the county implementing this strategy suggest that recipients are consistently enrolled in WTW activities.

3. Incentives for Recipients

Summary of Strategies

Thirty-one counties implemented incentives to reward recipients for completion of specific benchmarks individuals achieved as a result of their participation in the WTW program.

Implementation and Results

Some counties implementing this strategy used gift cards to reward recipients for completion of WTW activities, after maintaining full-time employment for three months, or exiting the CalWORKs program for three consecutive months due to earnings. Gift card vendors were selected based on availability of goods to assist with WTW program needs, although the purchases can't be controlled or monitored. Counties report that one result of this strategy is that individuals are more enthusiastic about attending WTW activities and convey to the recipients that their time and effort are valued.

4. Faster Referral to and Availability of Up-front Engagement Activities

Summary of Strategies

Fifty counties reported 1) increasing the frequency and availability of up-front activities so that recipients can become engaged in the activities sooner or 2) increasing the speed of the referral system to more quickly assign recipients to activities.

Implementation and Results

- To decrease the time between granting aid and WTW enrollment, one county reported that it ran ad-hoc reports twice a week to determine which recipient(s) should be enrolled in WTW activities. Recipients are contacted the same day to be scheduled for the earliest available appointment time for appraisal. As a result, this county reported attaining a 70 percent show-rate for appraisals.
- One county reported to have developed an “open entry, open exit” job readiness program allowing recipients to begin job club search on any business day. As a result, the county reports that attendance at job club has increased and recipients have reported positive feedback regarding availability of the activity. Data is still being collected.
- A county reported on the availability of bilingual General Education Development (GED), vocational English as a Second Language (ESL), and job readiness at a “one-stop” center. Between November 2006 and September 2007, there was a corresponding 15 percent increase in new recipient entry into a WTW activity within 30 days of the county’s granting of aid. Similarly, between November 2006 and September 2007, there was a corresponding 26 percent increase in entry into a WTW activity by returning recipients within 30 days of the granting of aid.
- One county reported an increase in access to job-readiness appraisal resulting in ease of session enrollment, elimination of waiting periods, and reduction of class sizes. The wait time between appraisal and job-readiness appraisal was reduced from 25 days to three days between May and October 2007.

5. Bridging Activities and Life Skills Curriculum

Summary of Strategies

A few counties developed strategies to engage recipients between WTW activities and components and help to improve their life skills to assist in employability.

Implementation and Results

- One county offered periodic two-, three-, and five-day workshops that focus on enhancing recipient job skills and readiness and on basic life skills. The county received positive feedback from recipients and reports that fewer recipients enter into noncompliance.
- One county coordinated with mental health and substance abuse contractors to develop life skills applications and intervention training for applications. The results indicate that approximately 25 percent of applicants receive training. This strategy is still in implementation stage. Results of training itself are not yet measurable.

6. Increased Case Worker Training to Identify and Help Recipients to Overcome Barriers to Participation/Employment

Summary of Strategies

Several counties reported that they have implemented increased caseworker training to address areas that might result in a barrier to recipient participation in WTW activities and employment.

Implementation and Results

- One county provided improved case management training to better prepare staff to help recipients become fully engaged in the WTW program. They scheduled trainings with outside training providers and additionally provided in-house motivational interview training. No results are available to date as this strategy is still in the training and implementation phase.
- A few counties increased staff development activities, including intensive training on customer service and WTW regulations. No results are available to date as most of the counties implementing this strategy are still in the training and implementation phase.
- One county reported cross training between eligibility and employment case workers to help eligibility workers be more attentive to the needs of and possible barriers to employment for new applicants. Staff receives laminated reference cards to assist them in their retention of learned material. No results are available to date as this strategy is still in the training and implementation phase.
- One county developed a behavioral health screening process to help case workers identify barriers to recipient employment and to make referrals to various treatment programs. The county leveraged the cost of this behavioral screening tool by using funds allocated to the county's alcohol and drug treatment programs. One hundred percent of WTW participants are screened using the new tool, resulting in a first quarter increase of 156 to 304 referrals and a second quarter increase of 98 to 283 over the first and second quarters of the prior year.
- One county trained all staff on effective methods of communication with participants. Caseworkers were instructed to focus on goals, strengths, needs, and solutions rather than strictly on consequences of failure to participate in WTW activities. County staff has been open to and favorable regarding development of engagement skills. However, it is too early to measure a direct impact on WPR.

7. Use of Performance Management Tools

Summary of Strategies

A few counties advocate the use of case management systems to produce reports with necessary information for increasing recipient participation.

Implementation and Results

- One county contracted with a service provider to implement a case management system with the goal of increasing engagement in countable activities. The system produces reports that are used by a team of key county stakeholders to assess program performance, set goals to increase engagement, and identify training needs. As a result of the use of the case management reports, the county engaged 9.8 percent of their unengaged caseload between September and December 2007.
- A county used a function of the Interim Statewide Automated Welfare System (ISAWS) automated case management system to run reports, capturing all new individuals who should be referred to WTW as well as individuals whose exemptions are ending and individuals who have reapplied for aid. Preliminary results include a reduction in number of days from cash approval to the orientation appraisal date from more than 30 days to fewer than 20 days.

8. Co-location of Staff and Services

Summary of Strategies

Some counties reported relocating workers to a common location to increase communication about and with recipients.

Implementation and Results

- Some counties report co-locating of county eligibility workers with the WTW staff and found that this strategy facilitated faster referrals and increased communication on shared recipient case files. Some counties also co-located county eligibility workers with WTW staff and behavioral health workers, which resulted in better service delivery to recipients and better opportunity for team-building.
- In one county, 79.8 percent of applicants who met with co-located staff and volunteered to hear about the benefits of employment service completed their orientation/appraisal as compared to the overall orientation/appraisal completion average of 32.6 percent.

9. Recipient Appointment Reminders

Summary of Strategies

A few counties implemented strategies to ensure recipients are reminded of required activities and to encourage recipient participation.

Implementation and Results

- One county implemented a system where case managers make two telephone contacts to remind recipients of their scheduled activities and appointments. There are no reported results.
- Some counties reported increased contact by telephone prior to orientation to establish relationship, explain offered services, and confirm that the orientation appointment is scheduled for a time convenient for the recipient. In one county, this strategy resulted in a 20 percent increase in orientation attendance in one year.
- One county reports that all recipients leave an appointment with a written reminder of their next required activity. The caseworker also makes a follow-up call to remind the recipient of the required appointment. This has resulted in increased attendance and reduced scheduling time between activities.

10. Expanded Appraisal

Summary of Strategies

Some counties include aspects of the WTW assessment during the appraisal process to expedite assessment completion and facilitate creation of the WTW plan following the components of up-front engagement.

Implementation and Results

- One county reported that during appraisal, a minimum basic assessment is performed that gives case managers the flexibility or opportunity to offer recipients access to a greater variety of WTW activities that may better meet the recipient's needs. Results have not yet been reported.
- One county conducts vocation testing during the job search/job readiness component to further reduce delays in assigning recipients to the next activity. Results have not yet been reported.
- A few counties perform California Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) testing at appraisal to identify basic math and reading skills to determine whether the recipient is best suited for job search or Adult Basic Education. Results have not yet been reported.

11. Increased Marketing

Summary of Strategies

One county used an internal marketing committee to increase communication about program services available to individuals and local employers.

Implementation and Results

- The county used annual job fairs, monthly newsletters with program highlights, success stories, and local labor market information. Alliances were formed with the local Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Connection, the Economic Development Corporation, and others. The county produced two videos to be broadcast on Comcast Spotlight. One video focused on resumé development, job searching, interviewing skills, and on-the-job training. The second video focused on benefits and tax incentives for local employers when hiring recipients. The county has seen a 50 percent increase in the number of employer recruitments during the first six months of the current fiscal year and had over 110 employers attend their last annual job fair. The county reports that costs for these services are minimal due to the collaboration with local partners.

12. Applicant and Recipient Surveys

Summary of Strategies

One county developed a survey of applicants and recipients to help the county determine the effectiveness of program components.

Implementation and Results

- The county reports the use of voluntary applicant surveys to assess whether the county's WTW orientation is effective in conveying program information. The survey results indicated that staff is conveying the program information effectively. The county is still tracking results to determine effect of these surveys on participation.
- The county reports conducting a survey of fully-participating recipients to determine their assessment of the county's services and the impact of those services on participation. Feedback indicated that there is more the county can do to assist recipients who are fully employed but are not earning enough to eliminate the necessity for cash assistance.

13. Redesign of Program Components

Summary of Strategies

Some counties examined their current design of several program components and modified them to be more effective and increase applicant/recipient ability to attend and/or have a better understanding of the WTW program.

Implementation and Results

- Two counties reported having created up-front workshops that are available voluntarily for applicants or mandatory for recipients. One county developed a two-day workshop to help identify potential barriers to employment that the applicant/recipient may have to assist caseworkers in assigning them to the most appropriate up-front activities. Another county developed a three-day program overview workshop to ensure that the individual has a complete understanding of what the program has to offer and how all of the activities they participate in will lead to self-sufficiency. Since implementation, both counties have seen an increase in up-front engagement and report that individuals are more aware of, and enthusiastic about, the WTW program.
- One county combined several up-front appointments to allow recipients to make less frequent trips to the county welfare department and accomplish more when they are there. It also lowered initial supportive service payments to recipients during the up-front engagement period. The county convened a workgroup of caseworkers to design and implement the strategy to ensure that it would be something that would work within the context of their normal business day and not be burdensome to staff. Prior to implementation, the county had a show rate at orientation of 58.4 percent; and since implementation, the county has a show rate of 76.7 percent.
- Many counties improved and updated the design of their orientations. This involved updating and improving presentation materials, hiring dynamic presenters, focusing on strength-based activities rather than just requirements, more information on WPR, a “what’s in it for me” focus, and creating a more welcoming environment. They all stated that individuals have a much better understanding of the program and seem more enthusiastic about participating. Results are forthcoming as counties had only recently implemented.

14. Community Partnerships

Summary of Strategies

A few counties reach out to local service providers they had not previously contacted to establish partnerships to better serve CalWORKs WTW recipients.

Implementation and Results

- One county is partnering with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to help leverage costs for both programs to free up resources for other services to recipients. WTW staff are co-located with WIA staff in the county's two WIA One-stops (a location that provides a variety of employment services for welfare recipients as well as the general public). This contract was effective January 1, 2008, so results are not yet available.
- One county has partnered and co-located with Mental Health Services (MHS) and Substance Abuse Services (SAS) to better serve CalWORKs WTW recipients. This provides joint case planning and management services to help ensure that recipients are engaged in employment activities and receiving the services necessary to maintain their participation. In initiating this partnership, the entities involved were able to pool their resources to lessen the overall expense to their programs. This strategy was implemented recently so results are limited; however, the county has had an increase in referrals to MHS and SAS, and of those referred they have 75 percent success rate of remaining engaged in employment activities.

Sanction Reengagement Strategies

When a mandatory participant fails to comply with program requirements and does not have good cause to do so and refuses to enter into a compliance plan, the participant is sanctioned. The adult's portion of the cash aid is subtracted from the family's monthly cash aid payment; however, the sanction period does not count against the 60-month time limit. Once sanctioned, the individual is not eligible to receive supportive services. The sanctioned individual must then contact the county and enter into and complete a curing plan to again receive their portion of the family's monthly cash aid payment.

Prior to TANF Reauthorization, sanctioned individuals were not included in the WPR calculation and therefore there was not an emphasis on contacting the sanctioned population to reengage in the CalWORKs WTW program. Now that sanctioned adults are included in the WPR calculation, counties have developed strategies to attempt to reengage sanctioned individuals. This is important since sanctioned individuals are not receiving services to move toward self-sufficiency and because it is important to engage as much of our caseload as possible in order to achieve the required participation levels in an effort to avoid penalties.

There are many reasons individuals become sanctioned. Some are willfully noncompliant, while others have severe barriers to employment (e.g., mental health disorders, substance abuse, domestic abuse, learning disabilities, no work history, etc.) that directly lead to their noncompliance with program rules. Regardless of the reason for sanction, these individuals can be very difficult to engage which is why counties developed the following types of strategies to help engage the most challenged of the "hard to serve" population.

1. Home Visits or Offsite Meetings

Summary of Strategies

Fifty-three counties conduct home visits or meetings at a neutral location to encourage sanctioned individuals to cure their sanctions.

Implementation and Results

- One county that had eligibility and employment workers conduct home visits as a team reports a 50 percent reengagement rate.
- One county had case managers conduct home visits for noncompliance. The county then contracted with a case management agency to conduct post-sanction home visits. Implementation of the noncompliance home visits prevented 37.9 percent of noncompliant individuals from progressing to sanctions. The county reports that the contracted case management agency has facilitated successfully a 20.6 percent curing of the sanctions through participation and an additional 5.7 percent curing through exemption.
- One county purchased county vehicles and cellular phones to facilitate conducting home visits. From January to November 2007, these workers conducted 137 home visits; and 52 (37.9 percent) of those home visits resulted in the sanctioned individuals' curing of their sanctions.
- One county, through home visits, decreased its sanction rate by 50 percent in one year.
- One county conducts a home visit to attempt to reengage the sanctioned individual. Depending on the result of that visit, a public health nurse and a social worker are dispatched to the home. This county resolved all of its sanctions with this approach.
- One county conducts face-to-face meetings at mutually agreed-upon public or private locations to encourage sanctioned individuals' compliance. Result data is not yet available, but it appears that both sanctioned individuals and county staff appreciate such flexibility.
- In one county, social workers visit all sanctioned or noncompliant families. The social workers report success in determining whether the sanctioned individuals are in need of specific services that would help them come back into compliance. Result data is not yet available, but the county reports that to date there is a slight improvement in participation as a result of reengaging sanctioned individuals.

- One county has expanded their outreach pilots to include home visits to determine if the sanctioned individual no longer resides at the residence on record, has no children left in the home, or the individual is currently employed. If eligibility appears to still exist for the sanctioned household, a referral to a contracted service provider is scheduled to resolve and help cure any outstanding sanctions. Result data is not yet available.
- One county conducts pre-sanction and post-sanction home visits to reengage sanctioned individuals. The county has seen little effect from the pre-sanction home visits but had some success in reengaging previously sanctioned individuals.

2. Intensive Outreach

Summary of Strategies

Forty-seven counties attempt more frequent and various types of communication with sanctioned individuals to encourage curing of sanctions.

Implementation and Results

- One county makes several phone attempts until they make contact with sanctioned individuals. Subsequently, the county schedules an appointment for the sanctioned individual to meet with a team of workers. The team includes the WTW worker, social worker, behavioral health services worker, a public health nurse, and any other representative requested by the individual to be present. The county reports that they were able to resolve 100 percent of sanctions.
- Another county reports its strategy to be calling sanctioned individuals every three months until they agree to meet. The county is predominantly rural and, therefore, it is difficult for much of the sanctioned population to come into the county welfare department's main office where employment staff are located. As a result, the county is utilizing other county facilities in rural areas to meet with sanctioned individuals to increase likelihood that the individual will attend the meeting. The county reports that it has seen its sanctioned caseload decline by 50 percent since implementation.
- A county sends a sanction information letter monthly, which explains how to cure a sanction, along with the WTW 31 (Request to Cure a Sanction) state form to all sanctioned individuals. The county has seen a reduction in sanctions, but results are not yet available.
- One county sends customized letters to the sanctioned caseload. Both the eligibility and employment workers contribute to this effort. Initial testing of the strategy has yielded a 50 percent reengagement rate of contacted sanction cases.

3. Specialized Unit/Caseworkers

Summary of Strategies

In an effort to reengage sanctioned individuals, counties created specialized staff positions to directly manage the sanctioned caseload. Some counties accomplished this by designating sanction caseworkers. Other counties created entire units or developed teams of specialized workers.

Implementation and Results

- Two counties reassigned one WTW caseworker to review all sanctioned cases to gain a thorough understanding of each, then initiated contact via mail, telephone, and/or home visit. One also held sanction curing orientations. One county reported a 25 percent reduction in its sanctioned caseload in a six-month period. However, for some counties the benefit was not great enough to continue with the practice, citing higher caseloads for nonsanction caseworkers and that after curing sanctions, many recipients returned to sanction within a few months.
- One county contracted with case management service providers to make contact with sanctioned individuals and discuss benefits of reengagement. Once the individual agrees to cure, he or she is referred to the WTW worker to create the curing plan. The contractor makes weekly contact and monitors progress for six months to ensure follow-through and assists the WTW worker to keep the individual engaged. Results are forthcoming.
- One county created 'sanction cure specialists', similar to previous strategies. However, focus is on recently sanctioned individuals as their first priority; then long-term sanctioned cases are addressed. Also, if an individual refuses intense outreach three times, the case is moved to low priority in order to ensure that staffing resources are used efficiently on individuals who are willing to reengage. Of those sanctioned individuals contacted, 23 percent have reengaged.
- One county created a specialized unit to manage sanctioned caseload. Several case managers in that unit share ideas and methods about how to engage their caseload. The unit also has a job developer to assist with finding employment for the sanctioned individual. The county reports reengagement of approximately 12.8 percent of that sanctioned caseload.
- One county is developing a multi-disciplinary team to reengage individuals. The team consists of WTW caseworkers, social workers, vocational assessment counselors, mental health counselors, and substance abuse counselors in order to provide as much support and to fit the needs of the sanctioned individual as completely as possible. By using community partners, some cost can be shared. Results are forthcoming.

4. Discuss WTW at Annual Redetermination/Reapplication

Summary of Strategies

CalWORKs recipients are required to meet with their eligibility worker for an annual redetermination meeting, regardless of case status. Recipients who leave welfare when sanctioned, yet reapply for welfare at a later date continue to be in sanctioned status if their application is subsequently approved. In both cases, individuals are required to come to the county welfare department. Therefore, counties have developed strategies to encourage the individual to voluntarily meet with employment workers to discuss curing sanctions and reengagement in the CalWORKs WTW program.

Implementation and Results

- One county has eligibility workers contact the WTW workers prior to the individual's visit to allow the WTW worker to prepare the necessary documents to begin the sanction curing process. The county has found this strategy to be effective in assisting cure of sanctions. A few counties have co-located an employment staff worker with the eligibility staff workers to meet with all sanctioned individuals who reapply or attend redetermination appointments.
- At redetermination appointments, one county has workers request that the individual voluntarily meet with their WTW worker to begin the curing process. This strategy has the added benefit of increasing communication between CalWORKs eligibility and employment staff. There has been a corresponding 39.7 percent cure rate of sanctioned individuals who received this service when attending their redetermination visits.

5. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Advocacy

Summary of Strategies

One county identified sanctioned individuals who have needs that are better addressed through the SSI programs and benefits. Individuals with these serious issues in their lives turn to CalWORKs because it is easier to become enrolled in the CalWORKs WTW program than to complete the application process and receive SSI approval. Therefore, counties have developed strategies to assist individuals who would be better served by SSI than CalWORKs WTW with the SSI application process.

Implementation and Results

- One county developed an SSI advocacy team consisting of employment services staff to assist with the application process, initial interview, home calls, verification of medical and clinical information, assistance in appointment scheduling, maintaining contact with the Social Security Administration, and tracking the application process to its completion. Results are not yet available

due to staffing issues. The county is seeking outside contracted staff to perform these duties.

6. Sanction Workshop/Orientation

Summary of Strategies

A few counties have developed workshops and orientations to help with reengagement.

Implementation and Results

- One county conducted an outreach workshop at a local family resource center offering free child care to encourage such individuals to attend and cure sanctions. The county had a 90 percent attendance rate for sanctioned individuals contacted. Of those individuals, 90 percent cured their sanctions.
- One county conducted several open house sanction orientations with the offer of incentives for attendance. Thirty-nine percent of the sanctioned individuals attending became engaged.
- One county conducts two voluntary sanction clinics per month with workers in attendance to assist individuals desiring to cure their sanctions. Over a six-month period the county held 13 clinics that 79 individuals attended and as a result 32 cured their sanctions.

7. Mentors

Summary of Strategies

One county uses successful WTW participants to mentor and encourage sanctioned individuals to cure sanctions.

Implementation and Results

The county uses experience of a prior program participant to mentor the sanctioned individual to help identify barriers and assist in reengagement in the CalWORKs program. In combination with other sanction reengagement strategies (intensive outreach, home visits, and sanction cure clinics), the county has seen a 70 percent cure rate for mentored individuals.

Strategies to Engage Safety Net Families

Once an individual has received a cumulative 60 countable months of CalWORKs cash aid, he or she is discontinued and the adult portion of the cash aid is subtracted from the family's monthly cash aid payment. These individuals are referred to as "timed-out." In California, cash aid continues under the Safety Net program for children of timed-out individuals who remain otherwise eligible for cash aid. The timed-out individuals in the Safety Net case are not required to participate since they are technically not receiving cash aid. However, Safety Net families are still eligible for the Food Stamp Program, the Medi-Cal Program, and if they are employed, child care for up to 24 months. Counties can also provide WTW services to the timed-out individual in the Safety Net case, who volunteers to participate, including supportive services at the county's option, but are not required to do so. As with sanctioned cases, Safety Net cases are now included in the WPR calculation. Fifteen counties have developed strategies to encourage timed-out individuals to voluntarily engage in the CalWORKs WTW program.

1. Outreach/Marketing to Encourage Voluntary Participation

Summary of Strategies

Counties identify Safety Net families and attempt to contact the timed-out individual to encourage his or her voluntary participation in WTW.

Implementation and Results

- Counties contact timed-out individuals by phone and discuss what services and supportive services are available to them if they volunteer to participate. One county invites them to a normal WTW orientation to meet with a caseworker to develop a voluntary WTW plan. Another county invites timed-out individuals to job club to help them find employment. One county has seen an eight percent increase in WPR for its Safety Net caseload.
- One county sends certified letters to Safety Net families inviting them to participate. A few timed-out individuals did make contact and are engaged in WTW activities. Results are still being compiled.
- One county advertised and filled on-the-job training (OJT) slots with timed-out individuals who volunteer to participate. A contract with a service provider was amended to increase the number of OJT slots to allow for timed-out individuals to participate without taking opportunities from mandatory participants. From July to December 2007, 43 timed-out individuals had been placed in OJT and 13 had attained permanent full-time positions.
- One county advertises and holds open house events for Safety Net families. At those events, they discuss program benefits and features with timed-out individuals to encourage them to voluntarily participate. Incentives are given to those who attend to encourage them to attend and remain until the end of the open house. This strategy has contributed to an increase in the county's Safety Net caseload's WPR.

2. Administrative Review of Safety Net Caseload to Ensure Delivery of Service

Summary of Strategies

One county reviews its Safety Net caseload to determine if a timed-out individual is working, attending school, or in training. If it is found that the individual is engaged in an allowable CalWORKs WTW activity, steps are taken to ensure he or she is receiving necessary supportive services to maintain participation. This also ensures that the individual's level of participation is reported correctly.

Implementation and Results

- One county reviews its "Integrated Aid Payroll Report" monthly, which allows supervisors to determine if the individual has truly timed out, if he or she is employed, how many hours employed, and if unemployed. Employed individuals are contacted and offered supportive services. Preliminary results have found that most are not employed enough hours to be considered fully participating. Results are forthcoming.
- One county does eligibility and employment reviews of Safety Net cases to determine if timed-out individuals are employed, and if so the individuals are offered supportive services. They also review all cases for individuals who are fully employed and encourage those participants to leave aid and receive job retention services to save time on their 60-month clocks. Results are forthcoming.

3. Home Visits

Summary of Strategies

Counties conduct home visits of Safety Net families to encourage voluntary participation in the CalWORKs WTW program.

Implementation and Results

- Caseworkers and social workers visit the individual's home in one county to determine what barriers may exist that keep the individual from achieving self-sufficiency while on cash aid. The timed-out individual is encouraged to volunteer so that he or she may receive the services and supportive services needed to achieve self-sufficiency. Counties have found several situations where timed-out individuals are receiving non-countable income and do not wish to engage. Results are forthcoming.

4. SSI Advocacy

Summary of Strategies

One county provides assistance to apply for SSI for individuals who have timed out, are about to time out, or are going to lose their eligibility soon and have either refused to file the appropriate paper work to be given an exemption, or their particular condition did not qualify for a CalWORKs exemption. In other cases, individuals would have been better served by receiving SSI, but due to the difficulty with applying for and being approved for SSI, those individuals turned to the CalWORKs WTW program instead.

Implementation and Results

- The county created an SSI advocate position using CalWORKs and WIA funding. The worker reaches out to Safety Net families to determine if there are any circumstances in their lives that would make them eligible for SSI; and if so, they assist the individuals through the application process. Results are forthcoming.

Characteristics of Safety Net Families

The following is administrative data compiled by CDSS. CDSS expects to receive updated information from the counties that will be included in the September 1, 2008, Final Report to the Legislature.

- Between January 2003 and December 2005, approximately 105,000 adults have reached their CalWORKs 60-month limit and were removed from aid.
- The Safety Net caseload increased from 5,340 cases in January 2003 (the first month CalWORKs adults could have reached the program's 60-month time limit) to nearly 40,000 as of December 2005.
- In general, Safety Net families have proportionally more Asian language speakers than the CalWORKs families in general. Spanish and non-English European speaking families have lower representation.
- Among Safety Net families there are more Asian and African American families and less White and Hispanic families than among all CalWORKs families.
- Safety Net families have more children, usually older children, and tend to stay on aid longer than families with aided adults.
- Safety Net families have slightly higher employment rates than other adult-aided cases with little difference in earnings.

Conclusion

In the coming months, counties will continue to develop and implement the strategies discussed in this report.

Preliminary results indicate that counties are seeing moderate increases in engagement and participation from the implementation of up-front engagement strategies. The results of the sanction reengagement strategies are somewhat mixed. While many counties report a reduction in their sanctioned caseload, the impact to WPR is difficult to estimate at this time. Preliminary data suggests a slight increase in voluntary participation of timed-out individuals in Safety Net cases. CDSS will continue to analyze the strategies presented in this report and will again survey the counties on how their strategies are assisting in the state's effort to improve the CalWORKs program for needy families. This will help to identify promising and best practices that may be implemented by other counties and lessons learned for those strategies that do not appear to be effective. A more thorough report of results of the counties' efforts at implementing the strategies contained in their county plan addenda will be submitted to the Legislature as the Final Report by September 1, 2008.