

COUNTY SPECIFIC FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR (FFY) 2009 WORK PARTICIPATION RATES (WPR's)

INTRODUCTION:

FFY 2009 is the third consecutive year that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has calculated individual counties' federal WPR's. Future years' WPR will be published by CDSS on the department's website as they become available. This background provides the reader with an understanding of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) WPR and its relationship to the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs).

BACKGROUND:

The CalWORKs Program is a "work first" welfare program that was approved by a bipartisan vote of the Legislature. The CalWORKs focuses on providing needy families with the necessary assistance and services to move them toward self-sufficiency through employment and provides a safety net for low-income children whose parents were unable to become self-sufficient before reaching the established 60-month time limit on aid. The CalWORKs' design is based on the successful outcomes found by rigorous independent evaluations and many years of experience by local program administrators. The CalWORKs also reflects the state and local flexibility envisioned in the 1996 federal welfare reform efforts.

The 1996 federal reform efforts provided states flexibility in implementing programs that would provide the assistance, including services, necessary to assist needy families in moving toward self-sufficiency. As expected, there are differences in the manner in which CalWORKs achieves its program objectives and the manner in which the federal government measures achievement across all the states and territories. These differences have become more apparent following the passage of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (TANF reauthorization) and the increased focus on the federal work participation measure. Meeting the federal WPR, while pursuing the goals of CalWORKs, presents significant challenges in the administration of the program. The major challenges are identified below:

- **MEASURING WORK PARTICIPATION:**

The federal WPR rules define who is required to participate in Welfare-To-Work (WTW) activities differently from CalWORKs. The federal work participation measure includes any work-eligible parent living with an aided child in the denominator of the calculation of the WPRs. In contrast, CalWORKs requires only non-exempt parents who are aided and living with an aided child to participate in WTW activities. The CalWORKs excludes cases with adults who have reached the TANF 60-month time limit (Safety Net cases), have been sanctioned for non-compliance with work requirements, or who are exempt from participation, as well

as those who have good cause for not participating from required WTW activities. This difference in the WPR and CalWORKs policies adds thousands of cases to the work measure denominator while very few of these cases participate sufficiently to add to the WPR numerator. It should be noted that this measure is calculated as a point-in-time measure, and as such, does not capture future or past participation by recipients. In addition, there are other methods of measuring success in the program, such as the measures developed for the Pay for Performance program, which are not considered in the federal TANF program.

- **THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION:**

Many CalWORKs families that are working part-time are not counted as participating under the federal rules. The high hourly thresholds exclude from the WPR measure thousands of cases where adults are working less than the federal definition but, nevertheless, moving toward self-sufficiency. In addition, many low-wage employees have little control over work hours and schedules that change from month to month, and sometimes week to week. As a result, some adults have jobs that do not offer enough hours to meet federal or state requirements every month. In addition, a fluctuating schedule can lead to child-care and transportation problems that impact the adult's ability to work or participate in other activities.

Over the years, CalWORKs has made great strides toward helping families achieve self-sufficiency. Close to half of the welfare families in California have left aid since 1997. More adults are working, earning more and spending a short time on aid. These positive outcomes are not part of the federal WPR measure. The FFY 2009 WPR for counties (at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/research/PG280.htm>) indicates the statewide All Families WPR increased to 29.2 percent from a FFY 2008 rate of 25.9 percent.

CalWORKs is a successful policy model for increasing work and self-sufficiency while maintaining a safety net for low-income children. The CDSS and local County Welfare Departments have made significant efforts to improve the CalWORKs program and increase the WPR in recent years and continue to strive for improvement.

COUNTY WORK PARTICIPATION RATES

DESCRIPTION:

The following four reports provide county-specific All Families and Two-Parent WPR data on a FFY basis. These reports are intended to assist counties and the state in determining the levels of work participation of cases receiving TANF assistance based upon federal program definitions and federal requirements. Note that the statewide rates provided in these reports are calculated from the county data and may differ slightly from federal statewide WPRs on other published reports due to different data sources.

Report 1 displays the annual All Families county WPRs in descending rank order with the statewide average highlighted in yellow. The adjusted WPR is also provided as the broken vertical blue marker in which the federal minimum WPR is adjusted by the federal caseload reduction credit.

Report 2 displays the monthly and annual All Families county WPRs in county order with the statewide averages calculated from the county data highlighted in yellow.

Report 3 displays the annual Two-Parent county WPRs in descending rank order with the statewide average highlighted in yellow. The adjusted WPR is also provided as the broken vertical blue marker in which the federal minimum WPR is adjusted by the federal caseload reduction credit.

Report 4 displays the monthly and annual Two-Parent county WPRs in county order with the statewide averages calculated from the county data highlighted in yellow.

UNIVERSE AND SOURCE:

An annual random sample of each county's TANF caseload is drawn from the Medi-Cal Eligibility Data Systems database on a monthly basis. Counties provide disaggregated work participation information on the sample cases. The resulting data are used by CDSS to determine monthly and annual county-specific WPRs for All Families and Two-Parent cases.

FREQUENCY:

County WPRs are updated on an annual basis.

CONTACT:

Questions regarding these charts and tables are to be directed to the CDSS Federal Data Reporting and Analysis Bureau at (916) 657- 3659.