

FACT SHEET

Department of
SOCIAL SERVICES



CalWORKs PROGRAM

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program is California's version of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. CalWORKs provides temporary cash assistance to meet basic family needs. It also provides education, employment, and training programs to assist the family's move toward self-sufficiency. Components of CalWORKs include time limits on eligibility, work requirements, supportive services to encourage program participation, and parental responsibility.

ELIGIBILITY

Families must meet income and asset tests and children must be deprived of parental support and care due to the incapacity, death, absence of a parent, or unemployment of the principal wage earner. Also, persons fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody, or confinement after conviction of a felony are not eligible for CalWORKs.

TIME LIMITS

State law provides for a cumulative 48-month lifetime limit on cash aid for adults. Children of adults who exhaust the 48-month time limit may continue to receive cash aid, if otherwise eligible, up to age 18.

WORK REQUIREMENTS

CalWORKs provides a wide array of services and supports for families to enter and remain in the workforce. Parents and caretaker adults, unless exempt from work requirements, are required to participate in Welfare to Work (WTW) activities as a condition of receiving aid.

WTW activities include unsubsidized and subsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, grant based on-the-job training, work study, self-employment, community service, adult basic education, job skills training, vocational education, job search/job readiness assistance, mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, domestic abuse services, and other activities necessary to assist recipients in obtaining employment.

An adult in a one-parent assistance unit (AU) is required to participate in WTW activities for an average of 30 hours per week each month or 20 hours per week each month if he or she has a child under the age of 6. In a two-parent AU, one or both adults must participate in WTW activities for a combined total of an average of 35 hours per week.

Adults may receive a total of 24 months of flexible CalWORKs services and activities to address any barriers to employment. These 24 months need not be consecutive and can be used at any time during the adult's 48 months of eligibility. Once the 24 months have been exhausted, adults must meet the federal work participation rate (WPR) requirements, unless they are exempted or receive an extension.

CalWORKs has a "universal engagement" requirement to ensure recipients are participating in appropriate WTW activities as soon as possible. Counties are required to develop WTW plans with a recipient within 90 days from the date an individual begins receiving cash aid.

PARTICIPATION RATES

State work participation requirements are designed to assist in meeting federal work participation rates in order for California to avoid fiscal penalties. Federal work participation rates are as follows:

50 percent of all families with work-eligible adults (both one- and two-parent) must be working or in a countable work activity for 30 hours per week.

90 percent of families with two work-eligible adults must be working or in a work activity for a combined total of 35 hours each week.

The federal government can assess penalties on the state for not achieving work participation rates. In California, counties that do not achieve the federal participation rates will share in any such fiscal penalties.

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Supportive services, including child care, transportation, ancillary expenses, and personal counseling are available for families participating in WTW activities. If needed supportive services are not available, the recipient has good cause for not participating.

There are special supportive services and intensive case management services also available for pregnant and parenting teens. These services are provided through the Cal-Learn Program, which is designed to encourage pregnant and parenting teens to return to and/or stay in school. Cal-Learn teens can get bonuses or be sanctioned four times a year depending on the teen's grades. An additional bonus is given to each teen upon earning a high school diploma or equivalent. Participation in Cal-Learn is mandatory for pregnant or parenting teens ages 18 and under and voluntary for specified 19 year olds.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

CalWORKs encourages parental responsibility by requiring parents to immunize their aided child(ren) under the age of six, and cooperate with the child support enforcement process. Failure to meet these requirements results in a reduction of the adult's portion of the grant. If children age 16 and older do not attend school and are deemed a chronic truant, this may result in a reduction of the child's portion of the grant unless certain conditions apply.

BENEFIT LEVELS

Grant levels are set by the state and amounts vary according to family size, exempt status, and geographic location. Families in high cost-of-living areas

(Region 1) receive slightly more money than families in other areas (Region 2). A family in which all adults are disabled or otherwise exempt from work requirements is eligible for the higher exempt grant amount. A non-exempt family of three with no other income, living in Region 1 currently receives a monthly grant of \$714 while the same family living in Region 2 receives \$680. If that family were exempt, they would receive \$799 in Region 1 and \$762 in Region 2.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The CalWORKs Program is administered by county welfare departments under supervision of the CDSS. Although eligibility requirements and grant levels are uniform throughout the state, counties are given considerable latitude to design WTW programs that will work best for their diverse populations, size, and culture. Each county must have a CalWORKs county plan describing specific program outcomes and how those outcomes would be achieved in their county.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

AB 1542 (Ducheny, Chapter 270, Statutes of 1997), Welfare to Work Act of 1997, established the CalWORKs Program in California. AB 1542 eliminated the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program and replaced them with the CalWORKs program.