



CDSS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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EDMUND G. BROWN JR.  
GOVERNOR

April 17, 2015

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 15-43

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CALWORKS PROGRAM SPECIALISTS  
ALL COUNTY WELFARE-TO-WORK COORDINATORS  
ALL COUNTY REFUGEE COORDINATORS  
ALL COUNTY CONSORTIA PROJECT MANAGERS

SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO KIDS  
(CalWORKs) WELFARE TO WORK (WTW) APPRAISAL AND THE  
ONLINE CALWORKS APPRAISAL TOOL (OCAT)

REFERENCES: ASSEMBLY BILL (AB) 74 (CHAPTER 21, STATUTES OF 2013);  
SENATE BILL (SB) 1041 (CHAPTER 47, STATUTES OF 2012); MANUAL  
OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES SECTIONS 42-722.32, 23- 400.211,  
AND 23-400.212; ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) 15-09

The purpose of this letter is to inform County Welfare Departments (CWDs) of the release of the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) and to provide instructions on its use and the overall changes to the Welfare to Work (WTW) appraisal. As described in ACL 15-09, AB 74 altered the engagement process of appraisal, job search, and assessment, also known as the WTW flow, including the requirement for a standardized appraisal tool. This tool shall be used for all new appraisals beginning once county staff has been trained in its use.

**OCAT Release, Regional Training, and Implementation**

The OCAT will be available for use beginning April 2015. Between the months of April and June 2015, all 58 CWDs will be required to attend a regional training on how to use the new tool. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will issue further guidance regarding the scheduling of these regional trainings under separate cover.

These regional trainings will be ‘Train-the-Trainer’ sessions. CWDs will have a specified number of slots available to them. The training sessions are designed to

<u>REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State Law Change
<input type="checkbox"/> Federal Law or Regulation Change
<input type="checkbox"/> Court Order
<input type="checkbox"/> Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
<input type="checkbox"/> Initiated by CDSS

provide attendees with the information and resources necessary in order to train their staff and implement the OCAT in their county. The CDSS highly recommends that county staff who attend the OCAT regional training be primarily responsible for coordinating and implementing OCAT training and onboarding.

OCAT regional trainings will include information on tool use, interview skills, rapport building techniques, and methods for handling sensitive topics with clients who have experienced trauma. Each CWD will be expected to have all its potential users trained and utilizing OCAT with new WTW participants within 90 days of attending a regional training. The CWD staff conducting appraisals must receive proper training and resources in OCAT use prior to utilizing the tool with CalWORKs clients. This is to ensure that WTW participants receive the greatest benefit from the tool. By October 1, 2015, all CWDs are expected to have OCAT fully implemented within their county.

### **The OCAT Appraisal**

The OCAT is designed for use during the WTW participant's initial appraisal. As described in ACL 15-09, the WTW appraisal is intended to evaluate a client's employment and education history, and identify any barriers to self-sufficiency that can be addressed through WTW activities and supportive services.

If more than one adult in an assistance unit is required to participate in WTW, the CWD shall conduct an individual private OCAT appraisal for each participating adult. While this may require additional appraisal time, depending on prior county policies, many of the topics in OCAT are inappropriate to discuss if the client is not alone. A client may opt out of any portion of the OCAT appraisal, except the collection of demographic information, but more accurate and complete results are generated when as many sections are completed as possible.

Included in the OCAT appraisal is a learning needs section. This section is identical to the current WTW Learning Needs Screening (WTW 18). Offering and conducting a separate screening with the WTW 18 is not required or necessary if the client is offered and/or completes the screening in OCAT.

The OCAT will generate a summary of the client's appraisal and a set of recommendations and supportive service needs for the client. The recommendations may include evaluation for family stabilization, Self-Initiated Programs, WTW exemptions, job search, and/or an assessment for education/training. These recommendations are to be used to determine the next best step for the client in the WTW process, as described in ACL 15-09. In the case of possible exemptions or family stabilization referrals, these recommendations from OCAT must be evaluated immediately to determine if an exemption from WTW is necessary or if family stabilization services are needed.

As a client progresses through his or her WTW activities, counties may find it useful to update the client's OCAT appraisal to reflect new skills or job experiences, or identify potential new barriers and needs. However, a new OCAT appraisal for clients that complete some or all of the activities in their WTW plan is not required. A new WTW plan may be developed based on the client's current status and the original information collected during his or her initial OCAT appraisal.

### **Clients with Language Barriers**

For clients with language barriers, such as limited English proficiency, the complete OCAT appraisal may not be appropriate. At this time, OCAT is only available in English. Clients with limited English proficiency or requiring English as a Second Language services should be immediately referred to evaluation for services to address those barriers. Assistance by a translator may be used to complete the demographic, job history, and education history sections of the tool. However, translation may not be appropriate for sensitive sections of the tool, such as mental health or domestic abuse. In those instances, clients must be referred directly to the appropriate evaluations rather than using OCAT for screening if the county has a reasonable belief that the evaluation is necessary.

As stated in Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Section 42-722.32, a client cannot be given a learning disabilities screening and/or evaluation in a language other than the client's primary language. The WTW Learning Needs Screening (WTW 18) is the only learning disabilities screening tool that can be used for CaWORKs WTW participants, and it cannot be translated or used with an interpreter, as it has only been validated for use in English. Since the OCAT learning needs screening is the same as the WTW 18, the OCAT learning needs screening shall not be used in any language other than English, as the WTW 18 is only valid for use in English. Counties cannot use a learning needs screening tool that is not validated for use in a participant's primary language. Further information on learning disabilities screenings and evaluations will be released under separate cover.

### **Clients with a Break in Aid**

If a client has a break in aid for an extended period of time, his or her circumstances may have changed since his or her initial OCAT appraisal. If the county believes that the client's circumstances have changed significantly since conducting the initial OCAT appraisal, the CWD may conduct a new OCAT appraisal. At a minimum, a new OCAT appraisal must be given if a client returns from a break in aid that exceeds six months.

### **Existing Clients and OCAT**

While counties transition into using OCAT, many current clients will not have been appraised using OCAT. CWDs may conduct OCAT appraisals with these clients if doing so will assist in identifying barriers that were not previously identified or if there is

evidence that past WTW activities completed by the client were not beneficial in moving them toward self-sufficiency.

### **OCAT Rights and Privacy Form (WTW 47)**

At the beginning of an OCAT appraisal, the client is to be given a copy of the WTW 47 (3/15) (*Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool Rights and Privacy* form). The worker must review the form with the client prior to conducting the OCAT appraisal. The worker is to discuss with the client the purpose and benefits of conducting the OCAT appraisal. The worker is to review with the client what subjects will be discussed during the appraisal and that everything discussed during the appraisal will be kept confidential, unless the worker suspects that elder and/or child abuse is occurring.

The WTW 47 is a required form with no substitutes permitted. Required forms may not be modified or restructured by CWDs. However, overprinting or reformatting under the conditions outlined in MPP Operations Manual Section 23- 400.211, Overprinting Required Forms, and Section 23-400.212, Electronic Data Processing Modifications, is permitted.

This form is intended to ensure all clients understand the purpose of the OCAT appraisal and their rights to privacy. It is not intended nor required to be automated by the Statewide Automated Welfare Systems (SAWS). In the event that a client does not wish to sign the form, the case worker will note that the form was provided in the client's case file and continue with the appraisal. No further action is necessary.

### **County Business Practices and Tool Support**

During the OCAT pilot period of 2014, several promising practices were identified on how to conduct interviews using a web-based tool. Examples include filling in a client's demographic information prior to the appraisal appointment, taking breaks, or providing water or other refreshments during the appraisal. CWDs are encouraged to submit promising practices to the CDSS CalWORKs WTW Best Practices Website at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/calworks/PG1933.htm>.

When administering OCAT, CWDs are reminded that any reasonable accommodations necessary for the client to participate in the OCAT appraisal are to be provided according to the client's needs.

CWDs are also reminded that supportive services must be provided for all required CalWORKs activities. This includes child care and transportation services to attend an appraisal appointment. As county staff becomes accustomed to OCAT, appraisals may take over an hour, and services must be planned accordingly.

The OCAT is designed to work on modern internet browsers, and does not support legacy versions, such as Internet Explorer version 8 (IE8). Counties that still use legacy

browsers, such as IE8, for web applications are strongly encouraged to update their systems prior to OCAT implementation.

### **OCAT and the SAWS**

At this time, there is no communication between OCAT and the SAWS, and many data points collected as part of the CalWORKs intake process must be entered a second time into OCAT. CDSS understands that this increases workload for WTW caseworkers, and results in a longer appraisal process. Some OCAT pilot counties found it beneficial, when time permitted to input client demographic information into OCAT prior to the client's scheduled OCAT appraisal appointment. CDSS recommends that CWDs consider this as a business practice option in order to streamline the OCAT appraisal experience.

Communication with SAWS is a long-term goal for OCAT, and CDSS is working with vendors and consortia staff to resolve this issue. Further information on the OCAT interface and integration with SAWS will be released under separate cover as it becomes available.

### **Claiming Instructions**

While OCAT is a new tool, CWDs are instructed to continue to claim WTW appraisal activities in their current manner under PC 620 – WTW Pre-Assessment. The program code description change is forthcoming.

### **Camera Ready Copies and Translations**

For camera-ready copies of the WTW 47 in English, contact the CDSS Forms Management Unit at [fmudss@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fmudss@dss.ca.gov). If your office has internet access you may obtain these forms from the CDSS webpage at: [http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/FormsandPu\\_271.htm](http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/FormsandPu_271.htm).

When all translations are completed per MPP Section 21-115.2, including Spanish forms, they are posted on an on-going basis on the CDSS webpage. Copies of the translated forms can be obtained at: [http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/FormsandPu\\_274.htm](http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/FormsandPu_274.htm).

For questions on translated materials, please contact CDSS Language Services at (916) 651-8876. Until translations are available, clients who have elected to receive materials in languages other than English should be provided the English version of the form or notice along with the GEN 1365 (*Notice of Language Services*) and a local contact number.

CWDs shall ensure that effective bilingual services are provided. This requirement may be met through utilization of paid interpreters, qualified bilingual employees, and

qualified employees of other agencies or community resources. These services shall be provided free of charge to the client. In the event that CDSS does not provide translations of a form, it is the CWD's responsibility to provide the translation if a client requests it. More information regarding translations can be found in MPP Section 21-115.

If you have questions, please contact your CDSS CalWORKs Employment Bureau County Consultant or call the Employment Bureau at (916) 654-2137.

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By:***

TODD R. BLAND  
Deputy Director  
Welfare to Work Division

Attachment

cc: CWDA

## ONLINE CALWORKS APPRAISAL TOOL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY

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This is an overview of the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) process.

Your case worker will ask you a series of questions about your strengths, interests, and educational background. This will help identify any factors in your life that might make it hard for you to focus on work or a work related activity.

The goal of Welfare-to-Work is to get you the skills and help you need so you can find a job and become self-sufficient.

The interview will take about an hour to an hour and a half to complete. The questions will help your case worker figure out what services and activities you need at this point in time.

You will be asked questions on the following topics:

- General information, including who lives with you
- Work history
- Education history
- Physical, mental, and emotional health of you and your family
- Transportation and housing concerns
- Domestic abuse and safety concerns
- Substance or alcohol use concerns

Keep in mind during the interview:

- Some questions may seem uncomfortable, but they are being asked to better understand what help you may need to get a job.
- Everything discussed during the interview is confidential. This means that your case worker will keep everything you talk about private. The only time your case worker will not keep the interview private is if your answers sound like abuse or neglect of an elderly person or a child is occurring. Your case worker is required to report suspected elder and child abuse for investigation.
- People with disabilities have the right to get any special help they may need. If you need special help during this interview, please tell your case worker.
- The interview contains many personal questions, which are needed to figure out the next step in the process for you. You will not be penalized if you do not want to answer.

Please let your case worker know if, at any point in the process, you have any questions about what is being asked, or about the OCAT process.

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### **PARTICIPANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

**I have read this form or have had it read to me.**

**I understand the following:**

- **Why we are doing this interview.**
- **The information I provide will be kept confidential unless there is suspected elder or child abuse.**

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(Participant's Signature)

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(Date)