



CDSS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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April 12, 2017

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-19-17

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL COUNTY CHILD CARE COORDINATORS  
ALL WELFARE TO WORK COORDINATORS

SUBJECT: CALWORKS STAGE ONE CHILD CARE BEST PRACTICES

REFERENCE: MANUAL OF POLICES AND PROCEDURES (MPP) SECTIONS 47-220, 47.260.3, 47-301. WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE 11323.4(f). EDUCATION CODE 8350 MANAGEMENT BULLETIN 17-06.

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to share examples of best practices relating to the administration of the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Stage One child care program. Over the past year, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Child Care Programs Bureau (CCPB) conducted site visits to counties across the State in an effort to observe the practices that impact CalWORKs clients as they access subsidized child care services. This ACIN outlines some of the promising practices observed during these visits and the process by which families receiving CalWORKs Stage One child care transfer seamlessly into the Stage Two program, ensuring that they experience no break in child care services. The information described in this ACIN would also be useful to share with administrators who manage the CalWORKs Stage Two and Three child care programs within the county.

**Background**

The availability of child care is essential to the success of both the CalWORKs parents and their children. The CalWORKs child care program helps families access immediate, short-term child care as the parent participates in orientation, appraisal and their welfare-to-work (WTW) activities. The program also supports parents as they transition to the stable, long-term child care necessary for the family to leave to become self-sufficient.

The CDSS Child Care Programs Bureau has been conducting site visits to counties in an effort to improve efficiency in serving CalWORKs clients. These visits have provided an opportunity to learn more about county processes and provide technical assistance to the counties and their subcontractors. This ACIN aims to communicate best practices that were observed in four specific areas:

- 1) Immediate access to child care,
- 2) Parental choice and information on the availability of child care,
- 3) Stage One application procedures, and
- 4) Transition from Stage One to Stage Two.

### **Immediate Access to Child Care**

In order to access CalWORKs services, clients are required to attend various in person orientations and activities. MPP 47-220 states that current CalWORKs recipients are eligible to receive CalWORKs child care because the participant receives CalWORKs cash assistance.

Child care is paid for every client when the following conditions are met:

- Working and/or
- Participating in a county approved WTW activity; or
- Participating in another activity approved by the county including, but not limited to, job search and assessment or participation as a volunteer.

Several counties have created innovative options to provide immediate access to child care to assist clients in participating in required CalWORKs activities. These immediate child care options include, but are not limited to:

- Referrals to “drop in” child care providers: Some counties offer access to “drop in” child care centers in or near the county office. These child care spaces are available for clients to drop their child off while they attend required activities. Counties have developed MOUs or contracts with local child care programs to facilitate this process.
- An abbreviated child care intake process to address short-term child care needs: In order to ensure a client has access to child care prior to scheduling required activities, some counties have created an abbreviated child care intake process. This abbreviated process includes a short, 1-page form that the client completes

to have immediate access to child care for a limited number of days to participate in approved activities.

### **Parental Choice and Information on the Availability of Child Care**

Parents have a variety of choices in selecting a child care provider. Licensed child care programs and child care settings exempt from licensure are valid parental choices of care for all clients in the Stage One child care program (MPP 47-260.3) and reimbursement shall be made for these eligible providers. In order for parents to make an informed decision about child care for their children, it is critical that they are aware of all of their child care options. There are a variety of ways that counties are providing information on child care while valuing the parents as decision makers in the lives of their child(ren), these include, but are not limited to:

- Connection to the Local Child Care Resource and Referral Program (R&R): In every county in California there is at least one R&R program that provides free information on choosing child care and gives referrals to child care centers, family child care homes, and other child care settings. The R&R staff are required to collocate with the county's case management offices or arrange other means of swift communication with parents and case managers (MPP 47-301.32). In order to meet this requirement, some counties have R&R staff available in the lobby of the county office. Some counties have the R&R staff participate in the CalWORKs orientation or provide a separate child care orientation. There are also counties who contract with the local R&R program to provide "enhanced referrals" to CalWORKs clients to ensure that the referred child care providers have space available. All counties provide contact information and resource materials for clients to take with them.
- Videos in the Waiting Area: Some counties play videos in the waiting room or during the child care enrollment process which explains the types of child care available, provides an overview of how the Stage One program works, and includes information on their rights and responsibilities in the program. (CDSS Community Care Licensing Division recently developed videos that provide information and resources for child care providers, families seeking child care, and families with children in care. These videos are available at no cost at: <https://cclcd.childcarevideos.org/>.)

The MPP 47-301 outlines the requirements regarding informing clients of the availability of child care subsidies, including the requirements related to informing notices.

The informing notice is required to be provided at a minimum during the following times:

- Each time the client applies for CalWORKs cash assistance and at annual redetermination;

- When the client signs an original WTW plan;
- Each time the client signs an amended WTW plan; and
- Upon the inquiry or request, whether verbally or in writing.

Former CalWORKs clients who receive child care services in Stage One are required to receive and sign the informing notice at least annually (MPP 47-301.23).

The CDSS observed a variety of best practices related to the ways that counties inform clients of the availability of child care. These include, but are not limited to:

- **The Language Used to Make the Offer:** The language used to inform the client of the Stage One child care subsidy impact how the client understands their access to child care. Intentional language may give the clients a clearer understanding of the availability of child care benefits. Examples of vague and intentional language are included below.

Vague (not recommended):

*Child care benefits are available.  
The choice of a child care provider is yours.  
Do you have someone to watch your kids?*

Intentional (recommended):

*We can help pay for your child care costs.  
Would you like help paying for child care?  
Would you like help finding a child care provider?  
Do you need child care in order to attend (name specific activity)?*

*As a person receiving CalWORKs cash aid, you can receive child care services to work, go to school or training.  
Do you have child care now? Does it meet your full child care needs for all of your children?*

*As you move through your welfare to work plan if the hours of child care you need changes you can always ask to adjust these hours to meet your full child care need.*

- **Signage and Written Materials:** Some county offices post signs and offer pamphlets that provide information on child care subsidies in waiting areas. This material may help clients understand what is available and who to contact for services. It is also important that these signs and pamphlets be available in languages appropriate for the clients.
- **A Working Understanding of Stage One Child Care benefits:** It is critical that all staff that interact with CalWORKs clients have an understanding of the support services available to clients. Because child care is a necessary supportive

service that impacts whether a client is able to obtain and maintain stable employment or participate in educational activities, it would benefit counties and clients to ensure that all eligibility and employment staff are able to articulate the benefits of the Stage One Child Care Program and how clients can initiate the enrollment process. In order to accomplish this, some counties distribute internal newsletters or memos, while others hold regular, standing staff meetings.

### **Stage One Application and Recertification Procedures**

The CDSS has identified multiple best practices that streamline and provide greater clarity and communication during Stage One enrollment and recertification. Some of these best practices are highlighted below:

- **Paperwork:** Counties may offer a variety of methods to complete necessary paperwork. This may include allowing paperwork to be mailed in, completed on site, hand delivered to a drop box at the county office, or emailed. Some counties offer an in person meeting to assist clients in completing all of the forms.
- **Joint Application Information Sessions:** Holding a joint child care orientation with the client and their license-exempt provider is an opportunity for clients and their child care providers to hear the same information about roles and responsibilities and better understand the reimbursement process for CalWORKs child care. Counties who have offered these sessions have shared that they have seen improved communication between the client and their provider as well as a better understanding of the rules that guide the program.
- **Work Number:** The Work Number is a verification of employment database that allows requestors to receive immediate confirmation of an individual's employment and salary for verification purposes. Some counties utilize Work Number for income and employment verification for child care eligibility to relieve a client from having to bring in pay stubs and other employment verification.
- **Informational Notices:** Some counties choose to send out informational notices regarding child care to both the client and their child care provider. These informational notices may cover changes regarding approved hours of care or other issues relevant to the administration of the program. Providing a copy of the child care notices to the providers may offer greater transparency and improved communication between the Stage One administrator and the client.

### **Transition from Stage One to Stage Two**

Counties are required to manage a client's transition from Stage One to Stage Two so that clients do not experience a break in their child care services as they move between the stages of CalWORKs child care services (Education Code 8350, MPP 47-301.5). A client's child care continues in Stage One until child care is provided in Stages Two, unless the family is otherwise ineligible. Practices that improve the transfer process between Stages One and Two include, but are not limited to:

- Ongoing communication between Stage One and Stage Two program administrators: Some counties have chosen to have ongoing regular meetings between the Stage One and Stage Two program administrators. These meetings offer the opportunity to discuss current issues and proposed resolutions. Counties who have these meetings have shared that meeting agendas may include data and caseload numbers, former cash-aid recipients, and discussions of local issues and changing policies that would impact client access to child care services.
- Confirmation of transfer before Stage One is discontinued: While MPP 47-301.5 identifies that counties are required to manage a client's transition from Stage One to Stage Two in order to provide uninterrupted child care services, it does not specify how to ensure that clients are enrolled by the Stage Two contractor prior to terminating the client from Stage One child care. Some counties work with their Stage Two administrators to identify, on a regular basis, clients who are ready to transfer out of Stage One and confirm their transition into Stage Two before sending a Notice of Action terminating them from the Stage One child care program.
- Transferring the Data Elements: Current statutory authority found in Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 11323.4 (f) not only permits, but requires county welfare departments and child care contractors to share data for the administration of the three stages of CalWORKs child care (MPP 47-301.4). It is the responsibility of the Stage One administrator to provide supporting documentation to the Stage Two contractor. Some counties have chosen to use existing technology to share this data by allowing the Stage Two administrator access to their State Automated Welfare (SAWs) database. This access may be limited to a few critical screens that allow the Stage Two administrator to identify relevant data elements, or full access in order to ensure a thorough data exchange between the agencies administering Stages One and Two. In addition to the 9 data elements outlined in Management Bulletin to be provided by the county to the Stage Two administrator, counties may choose to transfer additional data such

as the WTW plan and the last date that the client received cash aid. Families that are former CalWORKs cash aid recipients that meet eligibility requirements are eligible to receive child care services in Stage One and/or Two for 24 months after the parent is no longer receiving cash aid. Counties who have ongoing information sharing regarding former cash aid recipients ensure that all eligible clients receive child care assistance.

- Definition of Stable: A family is transferred from Stage One to Stage 2 when the county determines that the family is “stable.” Each county may determine and update their definition of stable to meet the needs of the clients in their county. Some counties have revised their definitions to ensure a seamless transfer process. Former CalWORKs clients shall receive child care in Stage One when child care services are not available in Stages Two or Three. MPP 47-220.332. The CDSS encourages counties to allow eligible families who have barriers transferring to Stage Two child care to continue to be served in Stage One.

The CDSS is committed to working in partnership with stakeholders to further identify ways to strengthen the CalWORKs Child Care program.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact the Child Care Programs Bureau at (916) 657-2144

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By:***

KIM JOHNSON, Chief  
Child Care and Refugee Programs Branch

c: CWDA