

2008-2009 GRAND JURY REPORT

Riverside County Department of Public Social Services Adult Protective Services In-Home Support Services

Background

The Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) and Adult Protective Services (APS) provide social service programs to allow Riverside County's elderly and disabled citizens to live safely while maintaining as much self-sufficiency as possible. The rights to dignity, self-determination and to live in the least restrictive environment are the hallmark values of these programs. Riverside County social workers work with their clients to identify service needs and to develop a service plan to meet those needs. One such program is In-Home Support Services (IHSS).

The IHSS budget for FY 2008-2009 is \$11,875,833. The IHSS program's goal is to enable aged, blind and/or disabled persons to remain secure in an independent living arrangement as long as possible, which represents significant cost savings versus institutionalization. Program activities include assessment, counseling and authorization for service needed by eligible recipients.

Recipients of IHSS services may also be in need of domestic care and/or personal care, which include bathing, dressing, assistance in ambulation, moving in and out of bed.

Findings

1. The aging population in Riverside County is increasing faster than the force of social workers qualified to service their needs. According to the 2000 census, 16.11 percent of the population is age 60 plus. At present there are over 15,000 clients receiving IHSS assistance in Riverside County. In an effort to handle the increasing workload, DPSS authorized APS to utilize caseworkers from Child Protective Services (CPS).
2. IHSS presently has 30 caseworkers, each with a minimum caseload of 420 clients. Their case burden increases at a five to seven percent growth rate yearly. There is no established maximum on the number of clients assigned to caseworkers.

3. In order to be approved for IHSS services, applicants must qualify for Medi-Cal. IHSS caseworkers are presently assessing 1,000 plus applicants per month. (This figure does not account for projected increases.) Of these applicants, 40 percent do not qualify and are eventually denied Medi-Cal benefits. The average assessment time by a caseworker is approximately six hours per applicant. These six man-hours times the approximately 400 Medi-Cal denials per month represent a sizeable unreimbursed county expense.
4. The submission of IHSS and Medi-Cal applications simultaneously creates an untenable situation. Many IHSS applications are not being completed within the 30-day state mandated time frame, per California-DSS-Manual-SS 30-759 Application Process. DPSS cannot approve an IHSS claim until the client has been approved for Medi-Cal. The time frame for Medi-Cal to process a claim is 45 days pursuant to Regulations Manual Medi-Cal Eligibility §50177 (1).
5. Due to a pay increase, previously established to attract more caseworkers, CPS pays caseworkers at a 5.5 percent higher rate of pay than APS. Consequently, when an opening arises, APS caseworkers are inclined to request transfer to CPS.

Recommendations

Riverside County Board of Supervisors Department of Public Social Services

1. Revise the IHSS budget plan to reflect realistic projected needs created by the increasing growth in the senior population.
2. Be proactive in convincing the state to establish a caseload standard for IHSS caseworkers. *
3. Prescreen clients for Medi-Cal eligibility before doing the IHSS assessment. *
4. Coordinate with the state to revise the application processing time for Medi-Cal and IHSS assistance to have realistically compatible deadlines. * Establish a policy whereby caseworkers invest no more than one unreimbursed hour on any application other than those that are pre-approved for Medi-Cal benefits. *

5. Standardize the salaries for DPSS caseworkers.

*The 2008-2009 Riverside County Grand Jury realizes the County Board of Supervisors must work directly with the state entities involved in implementation of the above recommendations. A copy of this report will therefore be sent to the appropriate state agencies.

Report Issued: 06/10/09
Report Public: 06/12/09
Response Due: 09/08/09