

## County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency Increasing the Work Participation Rate in the CalWORKs Program Road Map to Action

The Health & Human Services Agency is embarking on an effort to revitalize its CalWORKs welfare-to-work program given new requirements under TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). After 10 years, TANF, originally passed in 1996, was reauthorized in early 2006 with new, rigorous work participation requirements that went into effect almost immediately, October 1, 2006. HHSA convened a “tiger team” of community members and advocates, educational and private sector partners, contracted service providers, and Agency executives and staff. Between late August and early October, the team examined the research, discussed best practices and devised strategies to improve Work Participation Rates, which we call the “Road Map to Action.”

### What is the Problem?

Welfare-to-work has been a great success. San Diego County has reduced its CalWORKs caseload dramatically (62%), from 63,000 to 24,000. With a unique partnership of public, non-profit and private providers, San Diego has realized strong performance in terms of its welfare-to-work participants finding jobs and successfully exiting cash aid. However, ten years later, localities face greater challenges getting the remaining caseload to work and meeting the same, aggressive federal TANF targets:

- 50% of All-Parent families (both one- and two- parent families combined) must participate at least 30 hours per week)
- 90% of Two-Parent families are required to participate 35 hours per week (55 hours if they receive federally-funded child care)

More individuals are considered “work eligible” than ever before, including clients who are the hardest to serve—“sanctioned” clients who have had their cash assistance reduced for not complying with program requirements, “safety net” cases in which the family has timed out of CalWORKs, and two-parent families. A caseload reduction credit will be much less now that the baseline is 2005, compared to 1995 when we enjoyed significant reductions. Penalties will be imposed for not meeting these goals—a 5% reduction in the State grant in the 1<sup>st</sup> year; a 2% additional reduction each subsequent year, up to a 21% reduction. California will pass 50% of the penalties to the counties.

### What Does the Road Map to Action Call For?

A 3-pronged strategy to increase the Work Participation Rate: 1) Screenings; 2) Support Services; 3) County-Employer Agreement as to “Work Ready.” Highlights are:

- **Pilot an expansion of our current diversion program** to keep clients out of the welfare system if they only need short time assistance.
- **Adopt a new behavioral health screening tool** to ensure clients with barriers get referred quickly and are connected to work activities that count toward the WPR.
- **Launch mentoring programs**, including a senior mentor program, to provide role models for families and connect them to supports in the community.
- **Contact every client who has been sanctioned** for failing to comply with program requirements so that the case can be closed, the client informed as to how to come into compliance and/or a home visit conducted.
- **Adopt a Workforce Readiness Certificate**, with the San Diego Workforce Partnership and local employers, that clarifies and defines the life management and other basic skills clients need to have before they are “work ready.”
- **Develop tools, opportunities and pathways** for clients to become “work ready”—including a milestones tool that Employment Case Managers can use in working with clients, and enhancing the existing WEX (Work Experience) program.

## Who Helped Us Design the Road Map to Action?

About 25 representatives from community groups and advocates, educational institutions, the private sector, county departments and HHSA executives and community advisory board members played a vital role in helping us design the Road Map to Action. In addition, a work group of about 25 HHSA managers and staff conducted research, shared program expertise and advised in the design of the Road Map.

## A Map of the Road Map



14

## Timeline

Because the new TANF requirements went into effect October 1, 2006, the Road Map needs to be implemented as soon as possible. Some key actions were identified for immediate implementation (FY 2006-07); most of the other actions will be piloted this year, and then implemented the following fiscal year (FY 2007-08). A few items will take longer to implemented, and are slated to be designed or piloted in FY 2006-07 and then implemented in FY 2008-09.