

Making Child Care Subsidy Systems Work: A Workshop on Strategies to Support Access and Retention of Subsidies

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Introduction

- Ensuring that eligible families who need subsidies can get and keep them is critical for CCDF goals:
 - parental choice
 - helping low-income parents work
 - supporting children's development
- Research suggests some eligible families who need *and* want help are not getting it, and shows that those that do have short spells
- Many factors responsible, including subsidy policies/practices that can create barriers to subsidy use

Overview of the Study...

1) 2005-2006 study on state/local strategies to support subsidy access

- Funded by the Joyce Foundation
- Focus on 7 Midwestern states (IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, OH, WI)
- Reviewed state policy manuals and state CCDF plans, conducted state policy survey on common policies, conducted interviews with state and local respondents on key policies/strategies
- Policy brief and in-depth report available at www.urban.org

...Overview of the Study

2) 2006-2007 CCB funded follow-up work to:

- Collected strategies from additional states (identified with CCB, regional staff, and NCCIC)
- Integrated findings with Joyce data to create topical modules

Research Questions of Joyce/CCB Projects

- What are subsidy agencies doing to support subsidy access and retention?
 - Overall, for parents with fluctuating work/non-traditional work schedules, and for English Language Learners
- What lessons have they learned?
- What tradeoffs are involved?

*NOTE: Focus on state experiences and perspectives
– does not assess impact or implementation*

Considerations in Making Policy Decisions

- CCDF administrators have to balance concerns about:
 - Parent burden
 - Staff workload/administrative costs
 - Controlling improper payments
 - Being fiscally responsible/keeping program costs low

How Agencies Approach Tradeoffs

- Tradeoffs not always obvious – some strategies are positive in multiple areas, allowing administrators to achieve multiple goals
- Different agencies/administrators weigh these considerations very differently – no “right” answer
- Occasionally have very different perspectives on how particular policies play out

Key Policy Areas

- Overarching strategies (linking systems, customer service)
- Simplifying steps in process (application, recertification, interim reporting)
- Minimizing inadvertent terminations
- Special populations (non-standard work, English Language Learners)

Link Benefit Systems

- A multi-dimensional approach to aligning systems (computer systems, policies, eligibility, recertification, reporting, etc)
- Structural/administrative approaches:
 - Link computer systems (integrated system, or allow workers to access data across systems)
 - Combine responsibilities within a single worker
- At particular steps in the client process:
 - Combined applications
 - Synchronize review dates
 - Coordinate interim reporting

Improve Customer Service...

- Simplify/explain subsidy policies/practices
- Require local agencies to address customer service
- Conduct customer service surveys
- Minimize in-person visits
 - Debate about eliminating in-person visits for initial application
 - More consensus about eliminating visits for redetermination

...Improve Customer Service

- **Make it easier to get in touch with staff**
 - **Phone systems:** State level toll-free numbers, phone call tracking system, scheduling hot line
 - **Staffing approaches:** Dedicated customer service staff, alternative access points, different models of customer service
 - **On-line options:** Put information on-line
 - **Easier to meet with staff:** Extend office hours, meet in other locations
 - **Improve data management/computer systems and technological infrastructure**

Simplify Application

- Make applications easier to access
 - Make available at alternative locations
 - Strategies listed earlier re customer service
- Make it easier to fill out/submit applications
 - Streamline the application form, link systems and forms, ease documentation requirements, provide alternative ways to submit applications
- Deal with timeliness of eligibility processing
 - Consolidated eligibility unit, "real-time" processing, presumptive eligibility (under limited circumstances)

Simplify Recertification

(Note: interacts with interim reporting)

- Longer recertification periods (12 mos.) – challenging issue, some states doing selectively
- Make it easier for families to remember (reminders to parents and providers, synchronized dates with other systems)
- Make it easier for families to get information to the agency (see customer service strategies)
- Simplify what information parents have to report (only report changes, use other data sources/systems)
- Give parents an “extra chance” through grace periods and backdating

Simplify Interim Reporting

- Only require reporting of major changes
- Only adjust subsidies with some changes during interim period
- Make it easier to report
 - Change reporting forms, call centers, on-line, etc
- Identify alternative ways of getting the information
 - Linked data systems, other data systems, employer

Minimize Inadvertent Terminations/Support Continuity

Policies to address potential subsidy loss due to changes in circumstance:

- Short gaps in employment
- Temporary increases in income
- Brief periods of ineligibility or not needing care (suspend payment)
- Continue payments when families change eligibility categories
- Delay or suspend copayment increases

Special Populations

Fluctuating/Non-traditional Work Hours (area needing more focus and support)

- Create more flexible authorization approaches
- Allow providers to bill for more/less hours
- Authorize care for more than one provider

English Language Learners

- Provide materials in other languages
- Make interpreters available in multiple ways
- Track language in computer system

Concluding Thoughts...

- Area of ongoing activity and concern for state administrators
- Improving access is of interest to agencies despite (because of?) fiscal constraints and improper payment concerns
 - Improper payment problems can flag areas where policies need to be reformed

...Concluding Thoughts...

- CCDF agencies finding partners
 - Linkages and lessons from other systems and benefit programs (Food Stamps, etc)
 - Other individuals or organizations working with parents (CCR&R, provider organizations, providers, local community service agencies, etc)

...Concluding Thoughts...

- What to do if you want to examine these issues? (*see separate handout*)
 - 1) Assess your system – Where do families face challenges? Why?
 - Gather data from wherever possible – i.e. clients, caseworkers, and administrative data (including improper payment info)
 - Examine whether your policies and practices reflect the dynamic and complex realities of low-income family's lives

...Concluding Thoughts...

2) What is the cause of the problem?

- Work backwards to the source – each problem can have many causes (i.e. policy, infrastructure, implementation, etc).

3) Assess solutions – What can be done that conforms with subsidy system goals?

- Be creative
- Different solutions will work for different systems
- May be more than one solution

4) Implement solutions and assess the results

...Concluding Thoughts

- Partnerships with research community
 - Assess impact of policies
 - Identify most promising strategies to evaluate further
 - Identify where research support needed
 - Designing effective mechanisms to gather customer service surveys

Selected Source Documents

all available at www.urban.org

- *Supporting Child Care Subsidy Access and Retention: Ideas from Seven Midwestern States.* (Policy Brief). December 2006. Snyder, Banghart, and Adams.
- *Strategies to Support Child Care Subsidy Access and Retention: Ideas from Seven Midwestern States.* (Full Report). November 2006. Snyder, Banghart, and Adams.
- *Is There a System Supporting Low-Income Working Families?* February 2006. Zedlewski, Adams, Dubay, and Kenney.
- *Child Care Subsidies and TANF: A Synthesis of Three Studies on Systems, Policies, and Parents.* March 2006. Holcomb, Adams, Snyder, Koralek, Martinson, Bernstein, and Capizzano.
- *Child Care Subsidies for TANF Families: The Nexus of Systems and Policies.* March 2006. Adams, Holcomb, Snyder, Koralek, and Capizzano.
- *Getting and Retaining Child Care Assistance: How Policy and Practice Influence Parents' Experiences.* March 2002. Adams, Snyder, and Sandfort.
- *Navigating the Child Care Subsidy System: Policies and Practices that Affect Access and Retention.* March 2002. Adams, Snyder, and Sandfort.