

Making Child Care Subsidy Systems Work: State Strategies to Support Subsidy Access and Retention

**Gina Adams
The Urban Institute**

**From research conducted by
Kathleen Snyder, Patti Banghart, and Gina Adams**

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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 some subsidy policies/practices that can create barriers

UI's work in this area

- 1999 UI case studies highlighting the problem
- 2005-2006 study on state/local strategies to support subsidy access, focusing on 7 Midwestern states (funded by Joyce Fndn.)
- 2006-2007 follow-up work, funded by CCB, to collect information from additional states

Research Questions for UI's Joyce/CCB Projects

- What are subsidy agencies doing to support subsidy access and retention for eligible families who want subsidies?
- 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 and keeping program costs low

How Agencies Approach Tradeoffs

- Tradeoffs not always obvious
- 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)

Linking Benefit Systems

- Link systems comprehensively
- Link systems through structural or administrative approaches
- Link systems at specific stages of the client process

Improving Customer Service

- Simplify and explain subsidy policies
- Require local agencies to address customer service
- Conduct customer service surveys
- Minimize in-person visits
- Make it easier to get in touch with staff

Simplifying Application

- Make applications easier to access
- Make applications easier to fill out and submit
- Deal with timeliness of eligibility processing

Simplifying Recertification

(Note: interacts with interim reporting)

- Longer recertification periods (12 mos.)
- Make it easier for families to remember
- Make it easier for families to get information to the agency
- Simplify what information parents have to report
- Give parents an “extra chance” through grace periods and backdating

Simplifying Interim Reporting

- Only require reporting of major changes
- Make it easier to report
- Identify alternative ways of getting the information
- Only adjust subsidies with some changes during interim period

Minimizing Inadvertent Terminations

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

Serving Special Populations

Fluctuating/Non-traditional Work Hours

- Area of great concern
- States indicated needing strategies and support

English Language Learners

- Common strategies used by most social service agencies

Concluding Thoughts

- Area of ongoing activity and concern for state administrators – talk to your peers
- Improving access is of interest to agencies despite (and sometimes because of) fiscal constraints and improper payment concerns
- Agencies seeking partners (cross system, other organizations working with parents)

Next Steps: Self Assessment

- Where do families face challenges? Why?
 - Gather data from workers and parents. Do the experiences of families match your program goals?
- What is the cause of the problem?
 - Work backwards to the source – each problem can have many causes (i.e. policy, infrastructure, implementation, etc).
- Assess solutions – What can be done that conforms with subsidy system goals?
 - Be creative, different strategies work for different systems, may be more than one solution
- Implement solutions and assess the results

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.
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- *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.