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


