

Solano County Health & Social Services Department



Mental Health Services
Public Health Services
Substance Abuse Services
Older & Disabled Adult Services

Eligibility Services
Employment Services
Children's Services
Administrative Services

Patrick O. Duterte, Director

275 Beck Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533-6804

(707) 784-8400
FAX (707) 421-3207

July 2, 2007

The Honorable David E. Power
Presiding Judge, Solano County Superior Court
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533

Dear Judge Power:

Response to the Grand Jury Report Dated May 7, 2007

The Health and Social Services Department is in receipt of the 2006-2007 Grand Jury Report entitled "Solano County Health & Social Services Department, In-Home Supportive Services" dated May 7, 2007. The following is submitted in response to the findings and recommendations of the report.

First Finding and Recommendations

Finding 1 - During the investigation, the Grand Jury was informed there is a potential for fraud. However, the number of fraud cases prosecuted in Solano County is very low. In a caseload of approximately 2600 people, there were only six cases under investigation in 2006. There may be a number of reasons fraud cases do not get reported, including fear of losing care by recipients.

Recommendation 1a - Establish a task force to address perceived fraud concerns.

Recommendation 1b - Schedule unannounced visits by social workers to coincide when the provider is present.

Response to First Finding and Recommendations

H&SS Response to Finding 1 - Health and Social Services disagrees partially with the finding that there were only six In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) fraud cases under investigation in 2006. Although six cases were referred to the State Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud at the Department of Justice, other reports were investigated and found without substantiating evidence to warrant referral to the State for further action. Cases of overpayment and recovery were found and handled at the local level. Further, while it is possible that a recipient does not report fraud for fear of losing a provider, it is more likely that the recipient is unaware that fraud is occurring.

H&SS Response to Recommendation 1a - Health and Social Services has implemented the recommendation that a task force be established to address perceived fraud concerns. A Fraud Task Force was formed in May 2007 after the department received the Grand Jury Report. There will be an emphasis on early fraud prevention.

H&SS Response to Recommendation 1b - Health and Social Services has partially implemented the recommendations that unannounced visits should be scheduled by social workers to coincide with when the provider is present. However, several practical barriers prevent full implementation of this recommendation. Recipients and providers are not required to provide IHSS with a schedule, and such visits are time-consuming, which could further aggravate our efforts to conduct higher-priority annual reassessments in a timely manner.

Nonetheless, Health and Social Services has established protocols for a six-month pilot program to conduct unannounced visits to two groups of IHSS recipients beginning in July. We will further evaluate the costs and benefits of this program after the pilot period expires.

Second Finding and Recommendation

Finding 2 - In-home visits by social workers are not being completed as required.

Recommendation 2 - Take the steps necessary to determine the reason for the lack of compliance and correct this situation.

Response to Second Finding and Recommendation

H&SS Response to Finding 2 - Health and Social Services agrees with the finding that in-home visits by social workers are not being completed as required.

H&SS Response to Recommendation 2 - Health and Social Services has partially implemented the recommendation. Four significant factors affect the workload for IHSS social workers, leading to failure to conduct some required in-home visits:

- IHSS became a Medi-Cal Point of Sale, adding duties to social workers' workload. This means that the Share of Cost must be paid entirely before Medi-Cal is activated for that month. IHSS is now a vendor for the Share of Cost.
- The caseload of non-federally funded cases has increased due to statewide computer systems that identify more administratively-intensive clients. If Medi-Cal status comes into question, it is often a temporary situation. The social worker must research why there are Medi-Cal eligibility problems.
- On August 31, 2006 new regulations for IHSS required calculating precise amounts of time it takes for each IHSS-covered task or service.
- Finally, newly-required assessment forms which were implemented in February 2007 are more detailed and require more time to complete by social worker

The above issues are affecting counties' ability to complete required in-home visits statewide, and are being examined by State officials through the California Welfare Directors' Association. Solano County participates in the Association and its efforts to resolve these issues.

In addition, Solano County IHSS is making every effort to recruit and train employees to fill an unusually high number of vacancies. It should be noted that IHSS is a complex program with many elements and typically requires a year for new employees to fully understand the work. Therefore, even if we succeed in filling all vacancies, we should expect to see gradual improvement but not immediate relief from all staffing issues. The Department is making every effort to mitigate these problems, including bringing back retired social workers part-time, sharing workloads, and expediting the hiring process whenever possible. But there are no easy solutions. The staffing shortage is made worse by the increased duties described above, which would require a significant number of new positions and additional office space to fully comply with this recommendation.

Health and Social Services wishes to thank the Grand Jury for its evaluation of the In-Home Supportive Services program in our Older and Disabled Adult Services Division. We appreciate the Grand Jury's comments about the compassion and dedication of staff. I personally want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the In-Home Supportive Services social workers and support staff.

Sincerely,



Patrick O. Duterte
Director, Health and Social Services Department
Solano County

Cc: Donna Fields, Interim Deputy Director, Older and Disabled Adult Services
Michael Johnson, County Administrator
Board of Supervisors
Grand Jury Office