

Supporting Families After Welfare Reform (ACF Audio Conference Summary)

Date: March 30, 2000

Speaker: - Vicki Grant, Deputy Director of the Supporting Families Initiative for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- (Staff from the Health Care Financing Administration and Department of Agriculture were also on hand to answer any questions on Medicaid and Food Stamps)

Purpose:

This audio conference was coordinated by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) as part of its Family Independence Forum series available to ACF Regional offices and State social service offices. The Supporting Families After Welfare Reform program is a new \$6.8 million initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The purpose of the program is to help States and large counties address problems in eligibility processes that make it difficult for low-income families (particularly families moving from Welfare to Work) to access and retain Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), or Food Stamps. The program includes technical assistance for States and counties developing and using eligibility and enrollment data to improve their systems; workshops on the barriers in State and local eligibility and enrollment processes; and resources to implement proposed solutions. This new initiative will provide technical assistance and grants for up to twenty-two States and large counties to improve their enrollment and redetermination processes for Medicaid, SCHIP, and Food Stamps.

Highlights:

Even as States and Counties have expanded health care and food programs to support low-income families and to help families move from welfare to work, national Medicaid and Food Stamp caseloads have declined significantly. Many State and Federal policymakers attribute declines to the complexity of welfare reform for both implementers and low-income families. Families leaving cash assistance for work and families who were never on welfare may not know that they are eligible for Food Stamps and health insurance. State managers are struggling to implement programs for working families with information systems designed to support cash assistance.

Under the Supporting Families program, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will provide funding for assistance to sixteen States or counties to diagnose and solve problems in eligibility systems for Medicaid and SCHIP, while funding from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture will provide assistance to six States or counties to diagnose and solve problems in eligibility systems for Food Stamps, Medicaid, and SCHIP.

The Supporting Families program is flexible based on the specific needs of applicants. It offers two tracks: Phase I-Problem Diagnosis and Phase II-Implementation. States and counties can apply for technical assistance to analyze their data and identify enrollment barriers. They can then apply for a grant to implement system improvements. As another option, if they already have a well-supported plan of action, States and counties can apply immediately for a phase II implementation grant. States and counties have the option of working only on health programs (Medicaid and SCHIP) or on both health programs and Food Stamps.

To receive technical assistance or a grant under Phase I-Problem Diagnosis, States or counties need to demonstrate a strong commitment and ability to solve problems in their Medicaid, SCHIP, and Food Stamp enrollment processes. To receive a Phase II-Implementation grant, States and Counties need to be fully committed to a sound plan of action. This program is designed to work with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Covering Kids coalitions in each State, and a strong partnership with the Covering Kids grantee must be demonstrated. For more information on Covering Kids, visit the web site <http://www.coveringkids.org>.

Two other components discussed on the call included a mention about a literature review just completed by the Foundation on current State initiatives and a future Promising Practices page of its web site. The State initiatives information can be viewed on the Foundation's web page at <http://www.rwjf.org/main.html>.

As an example of a variation of the Supporting Families Program, Kathy Brady of Monmouth County, New Jersey shared highlights of current initiatives underway in her county designed with the goal of improving Medicaid involvement. Monmouth County began an initiative similar to Phase I-Problem Diagnosis, Option Three (performance measure reports, training, and intensive consulting focused on Medicaid and SCHIP) of the Supporting Families Program in January of this year. She explained that Monmouth's initiatives included three parts: customer service training, an analysis of work processes (workflow), and the design of a tracking tool for staff to use for case management.

Grant applications will be due May 1, 2000. For more specific information, contact Vicki Grant at (803) 779-2607 or via e-mail at vicki@coveringkids.org.