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TECHNICAL REPORT

Results from the First California Health and Social Services Survey

ELAINE REARDON, CHRISTINE DEMARTINI,
JACOB KLERNAN

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1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138

1200 South Hayes Street, Arlington, VA 22202-5050

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SUMMARY

To meet the requirement for a legislatively mandated independent evaluation of the State's California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) awarded a contract to the RAND Corporation to analyze the implementation of CalWORKs and to assess the program's effect on welfare recipients' transition to work and self-sufficiency.

As part of the evaluation focusing on assessing the program's effect on welfare recipients, RAND fielded a household survey—the California Health and Social Services Survey (CHSSS)—in the six focus counties identified in the original Request for Proposals: Alameda, Butte, Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego. This document reports the results from the first wave of the two-wave survey that RAND fielded in 2000 and 2001. Because the survey includes only six counties, the results do not represent outcomes for the State as a whole; however, the six counties surveyed accounted for 58 percent of the State's welfare families in January 2000.

In this document, we provide information about the surveyed population, beginning with respondents who were on aid at the time of the survey. We discuss their knowledge of CalWORKs rules; their attitudes toward the program; the work, training, or educational activities they engage in (if any); and their outcomes while on aid, such as earnings, income, poverty, hunger, and housing. We then discuss the same outcomes for those who have left the aid rolls. Next, we describe family and child outcomes, including household characteristics, child care, health, and substance abuse among survey respondents. Finally, we briefly discuss our next step, which will be to analyze results from the second, follow-up wave of the survey conducted with the same respondents in 2001.

A few of our key findings are organized by important outcomes of interests and summarized below. Except where noted, summary findings pertain to both aided and former recipients.

Respondents' Knowledge of CalWORKs Rules and Their Attitudes Toward the Program

- We found that 51 percent of the respondents on aid understood that the 60-month or 18-24-month time limits apply to duration of CalWORKs services for adults.
- We found that 86 percent of the respondents believed that welfare provides the help families need and that they have been treated fairly. In addition, a large majority (73 percent) agreed that welfare is generally on the right track in the way that it tries to help people get off aid.

Respondents Earnings and Income; Household Poverty Rate; Food Availability; Housing; and Family and Child Well-Being

- We found that individuals on aid averaged about \$296 in earnings per month themselves and resided in households that earned \$738 a month on average. After other, non-earnings sources of income are included, household income rises to \$1,559 per month.
- We found that leavers earned \$818 per month on average and reported household earnings of \$1,660 a month. In addition, 72 percent of leavers' households also receive other government support, such as health insurance or Food Stamps, and average household income was \$2,010 per month.
- We estimate that 69 percent of aided households surveyed are in poverty, compared with 41 percent of leaver households. Regarding food availability, we asked respondents to classify their own food security status by choosing how often they or their children missed meals. Respondents chose from one of these four responses: "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Often." We found that 72 percent of aided adults reported that they never missed meals, compared with 77 percent of adult leavers. Further, 85 percent of aided children never missed meals, compared with 88 percent of children of leavers. We also found that 28 percent of aided adults reported rarely, sometimes, or often missing meals, compared with 23 percent of adult leavers. Finally, we found that 15 percent of children on aid rarely, sometimes, or often missed meals, compared with 12 percent of children of leavers.

- While there were some reports of housing instability and substandard housing, the majority of respondents, approximately 90 percent, did not report housing instability or substandard housing.
- We found that 46 percent of the sample reported having a child in child care due to their work, school, or training schedule. Seventeen percent of the respondents on aid reported having quit a job in the year prior to the survey because of child care problems. However, respondents on aid who used child care reported missing approximately one day of work in the last 30 days because of child care problems.
- We found that 43 percent of aided respondents, compared with 50 percent of leavers, lived in households in which someone, either an adult or a child, is uninsured. The lack of insurance appears to be an adult phenomenon because only 14 percent of aided respondents, compared with 12 percent of leavers, shared a household with an uninsured child.
- We found that 63 percent of the respondents reported that they do not use alcohol, and 32 percent reported drinking but no drinking problem.

Numerous important findings pertaining to other critical outcomes of interest are not mentioned in this summary for purposes of brevity. These other findings, regarding health care, substance abuse, attitudes toward welfare, and child outcomes, are described in more detail in the body of the report.