CalWORKs System Improvement Plan (Cal-SIP) Report

County: Nevada

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Executive Summary

1. Please summarize the performance measures selected for improvement.

Sanction Resolution Rate

In partnership with both internal and external collaborators, the County of Nevada Social Services has identified a specific performance measure for enhancement during the CalWORKs Outcomes and Accountability Review (Cal-OAR) Cycle spanning from July 2021 to June 2026. The chosen focus for improvement is the Sanction Resolution Rate.

Anticipating positive results, the county and Cal-OAR Team are committed to implementing and improving on technological advancements, customer incentives, and an equitable distribution of services. These strategic investments are envisioned to elevate customer service, consequently yielding improved sanction rates and outcomes for CalWORKs families in Nevada County.

The Cal-OAR Team will vigilantly monitor outcomes and data, aiming to not only enhance the Sanction Resolution Rate but also to identify and address any existing disparities. Furthermore, the team is dedicated to integrating services seamlessly to provide a comprehensive and streamlined experience for the benefit of all customers. Continuous assessment will guide the identification of additional opportunities for improvement throughout the implementation period.

2. Please provide a comprehensive list of improvement strategies identified within the Cal-SIP.

Nevada county seeks to improve their performance by implementing the following strategies:

Strategy 1: Review sanctioned caseload quarterly with the team to identify cases for possible sanction resolution. (With 3 Action Steps); Strategy 2: Improve Outreach and Engagement Efforts (With 5 Action Steps)

Nevada County will review our active and sanction caseloads quarterly and assign a worker to contact those customers in a sanction status to explain the benefits of the program and begin the re-engagement process. We will discuss our incentive policy with customers to continue to entice participation and we will use a whole person approach offering them other services and supports as necessary. We will also review our policy to determine if there are any additional incentives we can offer that may be useful in curing sanctions.

We will offer incentives to parents for attending Orientation, OCAT (Assessment Tool), and assessment sessions. Once assigned to these activities, customers are eligible for additional incentives upon participation in Job Readiness activities. Most Job Readiness activities are conducted with our contractor, Connecting Point, who also offers incentives. Since implementing our incentive policy, our attendance rate has increased by 10%.

We will also begin tracking the sanction rate among our Spanish speaking customers to ensure services are being offered and utilized equitably.

Nevada County has very strong partnerships and good processes in place to work with our customers. We are confident that by improving our Sanction Resolution Rate we will see increased positive outcomes for our customers.

Introduction

The Cal-OAR is a local, data-driven program management system that facilitates continuous improvement of county CalWORKs programs by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating outcomes and best practices. As required by Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 11523, Cal-OAR consists of three core components: performance indicators, a county CalWORKs self-assessment (Cal-CSA), and a CalWORKs system improvement plan (Cal-SIP).

The Cal-OAR continuous quality improvement (Cal-CQI) process (which includes the Cal-CSA and Cal-SIP) takes place over five-year cycles. The first Cal-OAR cycle commenced on July 1, 2021, with the implementation of Cal-OAR. The Cal-SIP is the second component of the Cal-OAR CQI process. The Cal-SIP is based on the information gathered and reported from the Cal-CSA, wherein each County Welfare Department (CWD) will develop a plan for improving their CalWORKs program. The Cal-SIP selects a measure or set of measures for focused improvements and development to improve the selected performance measures while pairing each Cal-SIP goal with an equity goal and/ or strategy.

1. Describe your approach to the Cal-SIP Report

Nevada County assembled a group of core internal staff to complete the Cal-SIP. This group consisted of a program manager, a supervisor and two lead workers; these same staff were integral to completing the Cal-CSA, or county self-assessment. Other essential staff, such as social workers and eligibility staff participated as needed. We met twice a month beginning in September of 2023, after the final CSA was accepted. The purpose of these meetings was to complete the sections together, discuss approaches and plan for improvement strategies. We utilized this time to review peer feedback and the available data that informed the SIP. These meetings were opportunities to share, discuss, redirect our approach, or affirm we were on the right path to optimize our plan and goals. Core partners were engaged through meetings as needed to gather input and collaborate on strategies as well. Nevada County also participated in the support trainings and meetings that were offered by the State leading up to the due date.

2. Briefly describe past and current system improvement efforts.

In 2020, the Eligibility and Employment Team reorganized. Prior to the reorganization we had separate supervisors overseeing each program and then it was separated again by intake and continuing cases; this includes CalWORKs, Welfare to Work, Clerical, General Assistance, Medi-Cal, and CalFresh. Management created co-supervisor teams that included intake and continuing and promoted the concept of staff having a variety of program knowledge despite their assigned team. We cross-trained staff to increase our capacity by increasing our overall knowledge and skills across all programs. In addition, in 2020, we created a Training Team so that we can provide new staff training faster and more efficiently and offer continuous training to existing staff.

Prior to the Training Team, we were dependent on a contractor to offer our desired training, and this delayed new learner training and created a longer period of time before a new staff person could process cases and assist our customers efficiently.

Nevada County continues to run a robust and successful Housing Support Program. This program provides support to families so that they can maintain or find stable housing. We recognize without basic shelter a family's ability to engage in supportive services is a significant challenge. In FY 23-24 Nevada County supported 66 families with permanent housing and 43 families with transitional housing.

In February of FY 21/22 Nevada County implemented a new Incentive Policy. This was an attempt to motivate and engage customers. Although we see a high engagement rate overall, we adjusted our policy to include new activities to incentivize, and increased incentive amounts with the goal of increasing long-term engagement, decreasing recidivism, and reducing sanctions.

In FY 20/21 Nevada County implemented its first Home Visiting Program (HVP) in partnership with our Public Health Team; we have an MOU with our Public Health Department to deliver the direct services. We believe this is a crucial service as it provides in home support to our most vulnerable families who need extra services for their children to assist with family stability. We have served a small number of customers over the life of the program to date and believe this is in part due to COVID and Good Cause. We also had a declining CalWORKs caseload at the time HVP was implemented in Nevada County. Statewide, participation in HVP has been low, although for the families we have served it has been beneficial.

3. Briefly describe the success or failure of those efforts at improving service delivery or programmatic outcomes.

Since the reorganization of our team, we have been more nimble and able to train more staff in cash aid programs allowing us increased flexibility to address our customer's needs. The incentive policy started in February of 2021, which is also when we started sanctioning people. Although our engagement rate went up, we believe it may have to do with the threat of the sanction rather than the incentive. We continue to review the effectiveness of our incentive policy. Participation in HVP is low, as it is statewide, and we know customers staying engaged with the additional support from our visiting nurse has been beneficial.

4. An overview of the CWD's organizational vision and mission (optional).

N/A

Section 1: Measures for Improvement and Strategies

Part 1: Measure and Goal Narrative

1. Describe the reason for selecting the measure or programmatic grouping of measures.

Selecting sanction resolution rate was determined using several considerations. This goal is attainable and a measure we believe we can improve with targeted strategies. Sanctions within welfare-to-work programs can have serious consequences for individuals and families, often leading to financial hardship. Many welfare-to-work programs are subject to compliance standards and regulatory requirements. A high sanction resolution rate is an indicator of a customer-centric CalWORKs 2.0 approach. Resolving sanctions promptly is essential for participants to maintain their eligibility and make progress towards self-sufficiency. The sanction resolution rate is a concrete and measurable metric. By selecting the sanction resolution rate as the goal for improvement we are prioritizing the well-being of program participants. This aligns with our mission to support families in their goals to self-sufficiency and overcoming barriers to employment.

2. Do partners and collaborators agree this is a measure or programmatic grouping of measures that should be focused on at this time?

Our partners are Connecting Point and Sierra College. Direct feedback from our partners and collaborators agreed Sanction Resolution Rate was an area of concern that should be focused on during this period using the available data. This measure will be an on-going priority for our county. Our partners did not have any additional priorities for this measure.

3. Describe any anticipated interactions with other measures.

The measures are connected, and we anticipate changes with other measures as there will be more engaged participants. We anticipate the following measures to be impacted primarily; Employment Rate: anticipated increase due to participation in WTW leading to employment, Sanction Rate: will decrease as reengagement increases, Engagement Rate: will increase as re-engagement increases: Childcare Access rate will increase as reengaging customers will need access to childcare, Ancillary Service Access Rate: there will be more participants in the program.

4. Describe how the CWD will track performance measure improvement.

(List the process for monitoring data, including frequency of review and the data sources to be reviewed - this should include the Cal-OAR Data Dashboard but may also include other ad hoc reports, surveys with internal/external partners and current or former clients, or other methods of data collection, such as focus groups)

We will use information from the Cal-OAR Data Dashboard and we have created an internal Excel tracking spreadsheet. We will review the spreadsheet quarterly to evaluate ongoing progress and update the sanction caseload. We will collaborate with our team and partners to solicit feedback for further enhancement.

Part 2: Goal-level Descriptions

Goal 1

Increase Sanction Resolution Rate to 10% from 5%. Review using Data Dashboard improving by 2.5% every 12 months within 2 years (for a total of a 5.0% improvement).

Strategy 1: Review sanctioned caseload quarterly with the team to identify cases for possible sanction resolution.

Strategy 2: Outreach and Engagement Efforts

1. Explain the reasoning or methodology which was used to determine this goal.

We employed a needs gap analysis to pinpoint measures performing below the statewide average. After identifying potential options, we concluded that sanction resolution rate is a measure where we can take actionable steps and track our progress.

2. What led the CWD to these improvement strategies?

Our peer reviews, as well as our partner meetings, helped guide our decision and our strategies for improvement. We brought our findings to the WTW team and collaboratively discussed and developed our tracking tool and customer outreach initiative.

3. Discuss any research or literature that supports the strategies chosen. Cite reference.

Per information provided from CW 2.0, sanctioning is ineffectual. "Research shows that sanctioned recipients are often those who face the most barriers to employment and do not fully understand the sanctions process due to limited education, learning disabilities, or mental health problems Rachel Kirzner, TANF Sanctions: Their Impact on Earnings, Employment, and Health (Center for Hunger-Free Communities, Drexel University, March 23, 2015) Reforming CalWORKs Sanctions Can Better Support Children and Families April 2023, By Sara Kimberlin and Monica Saucedo." Some actions we will be implementing to reduce and avoid sanctions will include re-engaging monthly calls as staff time allows, explaining the sanction process thoroughly during the intake and providing training to intake staff. We will explore the continuation of exemptions and encourage the good cause as appropriate.

4. Describe the roles of other partners and collaborators in implementing the strategies.

Connecting Point is our Employment Services/OCAT facilitator contractor and Sierra College is our local community college. We will develop a warm handoff procedure for when our partners, Connecting Point and Sierra College, encounter a participant who is currently sanctioned and expresses an interest in engaging with our program. We will also work with Connecting Point and Sierra College partners on how we can leverage our incentives policy to assist.

5. Identify any staff education and training needs, and include any technical assistance needed to implement strategy and achieve goal.

CWD will hold a refresher CW 2.0 training and highlight good cause and customer centric approaches. No technical assistance is needed currently.

6. Describe how the CWD plans to mitigate and/or address both known internal and external barriers [to achieve the goal]

One internal challenge is the increasing caseload size for the WTW social workers. We investigated additional staffing resources such as Interns, temporary staff, and an additional social worker. Our budget process is in progress, and we will know in June if we are able to add more staff resources. The proposed California Budget is also a threat to our programs and supportive services. Good cause being used liberally to re-engaged sanctioned participants has not been a focus and we will encourage using this practice. Transportation is an external barrier, and we will continue to offer virtual options to reengage in the program as appropriate, provide transportation benefits as appropriate, and we will provide additional education to customers of the public and community transportation opportunities.

7. Describe how your facility will continuously evaluate each action step taken to see if improvement is being achieved. (e.g., tracking tools, meetings, monitoring, etc.) Include who will be responsible for follow up and compliance.

A spreadsheet has been created to track the sanctioned caseload for potential sanction resolution. We will use this as a tool to make progress in our sanction resolution rate by assigning these cases to staff to reengage customers. Lead staff members will review and assign out the cases. The Cal-OAR designated staff (One Program Manager, one Supervisor, and two Leads) will meet quarterly to review progress and discuss potential need for improvements or changes. This team will discuss if our rates have increased or decreased and use a CQI tool such as a Needs-Gap Analysis to help us identify any gaps. With our goal in mind of decreasing our sanction rate by 1% a year this team will meet every 6 months to evaluate our progress.

Section 2: Peer Review

Peer county/ counties selected for collaboration and consultation:

Peer County 1: Tehama   Peer County 2: Sierra

1. Discuss how the Peer Review process impact Cal-SIP development.

The peer review process positively impacted our Cal-SIP development. It provided insightful feedback, promoted collaboration, fostered mutual learning, and ensured transparency and accountability. It strengthened our plan's quality and effectiveness. Sharing best practices and identifying effective strategies together was incredibly helpful. Nevada County also reviewed Sierra County's plans, which was facilitated by UC Davis. Although Sierra did not review our plan, we found the time together to also be beneficial.

2. Discuss steps taken to conduct peer review.

(Discuss frequency and relative timeframe for meeting with peer counties; list a few reasons why you chose to partner with your selected peer counties - geography, county size, similar organizational structure, etc.; did you meet in person or remotely?)
We determined the scope of the review, using the Peer Review Toolkit, and identified key areas to be assessed. Tehama was chosen as a partner due to its similar size and demographic. Tehama traveled to Nevada County for a day, where we reviewed each other's CSA and sharing best practices. We then spent time sharing which measure we aimed to improve and the strategies we would use to for better outcomes. This was a very useful part of the process.

3. Briefly summarize observations and action items from Peer Review process.

The suggestion of creating an Excel spreadsheet was offered and we used this as an action item to begin tracking the sanction caseload. Peer review partners provided encouraging feedback in the strategy we aimed to implement.

Section 3: Target Measure Summary

Goal 1:

Increase Sanction Resolution Rate to 10% from 5%., Review using Data Dashboard improving by 2.5% every 12 months within 2 years (for a total of a 5.0% improvement).

Performance Measure:

Sanction Resolution Rate

Baseline Result: 5%

Cal-SIP Start Time:	Progress Report #1:	Progress Report #2:	Cycle End Date:
5/1/2024	5/23/2025	6/26/2026	6/30/2026

Strategies, Action Steps, and Tracking Improvement

Strategy 1: review sanctioned caseload quarterly with the team to identify cases for possible sanction resolution.

Action Steps:
- Review CalSAWS data of sanctioned cases to identify cases for potential reengagement
- Assign out to staff to attempt to reengage customers.
- Workers can offer incentives for activity completion to encourage sanction resolution

Strategy 2: Improve outreach and engagement efforts

Action Steps:
- Review CalSAWS data to identify Spanish speaking customer population.
- Use Cal-OAR data dashboard to track sanction resolution rates.
- Lead staff will review CalSAWS data of sanctioned cases to identify cases for potential reengagement quarterly
- Lead staff will assign out 3 sanctioned cases each month from the report to designated staff
- Assigned staff will reach out via phone, email, and a letter to attempt to reengage and use incentives as appropriate.

Tracking Improvement

A spreadsheet has been created to track the sanctioned caseload for potential sanction resolution. We will use this as a tool to make progress in our sanction resolution rate by assigning these cases to staff to reengage customers. Lead staff members will review and assign out the cases. The Cal-OAR designated staff (One Program Manager, one Supervisor, and two Leads) will meet quarterly to review progress and discuss potential need for improvements or changes. This team will discuss if our rates have increased or decreased and use a CQI tool such as a Needs-Gap Analysis to help us identify any gaps. With our goal in mind of decreasing our sanction rate by 1% a year this team will meet every 6 months to evaluate our progress.