

# California Women's Mental Health Policy Council

## Position Statement: CalWORKs

The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program is California's welfare program. CalWORKs implements the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and provides cash grants and welfare-to-work services to families whose incomes are not sufficient to meet basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. The program includes time limits on the period a family can receive welfare-to-work services and time limits on the period a family can receive cash grants. Families are required to meet requirements for participation in preparation for work, and work, in order to continue to receive assistance.

CalWORKs provides for an allocation of funds for the treatment of mental health and substance abuse problems, as part of the Employment Services available to recipients of the program's services. The mental health and substance abuse services are provided to CalWORKs recipients for whom mental illness or substance abuse is (are) a barrier to getting and keeping work.

Research conducted by the California Institute for Mental Health has examined the impact of these services on CalWORKs recipients:

- Problematic alcohol and drug usage occurs in 23% of recipients; serious abuse occurs in 12% of cases.
- Mental health diagnoses occur in 38% of recipients; serious illness occurs in 19%.
- Co-occurring disorders exist in one-quarter of those with any problems.

**CalWORKs provides basic subsistence and services to women and their families, in an environment where time limits put pressure on families to solve problems quickly and successfully find employment.**

- Mental health, substance abuse, and trauma treatment services are vital services for a large number of women in the CalWORKs program. The services should be maintained, and research continued on the prevalence of these disorders, their identification and treatment, and best practices to support women in employment as rapidly as possible.
- Time spent in treatment has been treated as a 'work readiness' activity in California. Federal proposal to reauthorize TANF suggest removing this ability. It is important to preserve incentives to initiate and maintain treatment within the rigorous time frames of CalWORKs.
- Co-occurring disorders and trauma are especially frequent in this population. Continued efforts to support and streamline treatment of co-occurring disorders and trauma in a System of Care are important to success.