

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESPONSE TO
GRAND JURY REPORT NO. 1207:
In-Home Supportive Services, Home Alone**

The In-Home Supportive Services Program (IHSS) is a State and federally mandated and publicly funded home care program that provides assistance to those eligible aged, blind and disabled individuals who are unable to remain safely in their own homes without this assistance. IHSS is an alternative to out-of-home care. This program is administered at the local level by the County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD). Because the services provided under this program are mandated by the State and federal governments, Contra Costa County has very little flexibility in the levels or methods of service provision. The County will provide this report and responses to our State and federal representatives so that they may consider legislative changes that would allow the necessary flexibility to implement recommendations in this report.

FINDINGS

1. The program lacks data on outcomes, such as reducing nursing home admissions, making it difficult to measure success in the provision of services and in identifying cost savings.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

The In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Program collects data through the State's Case Management and Information Payroll System (CMIPS I). The collection of data on outcomes and identification of cost savings would be beneficial to the program. However, the County has very little input into the program since IHSS is an entitlement program, and outcomes such as reducing nursing home admissions are not tracked. The current long term care system is fragmented and is not a performance based model that can effectively track cost savings. However, as both federal health care reform and State efforts in managed care for this population of clients are implemented, we anticipate performance and outcome measurements will begin being collected and reported.

2. It is unclear what steps the County's IHSS program might take to adjust its operations, caseloads, staffing, procedures, and payments to providers to reflect proposed funding cuts.

Response: The respondent disagrees with the finding.

Operational adjustments to the IHSS Program are dictated by funding adjustments and regulation changes by the Federal and State governments. The County operates this program under clear direction from these entities regarding staffing levels and types, procedures and payments to providers. There are no State or federally mandated caseload standards.

3. Social workers have large caseloads, diminishing their ability to monitor changes in client needs and making any needed adjustments to care plans.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

Each of the three Public Integrity/Quality Assurance staff persons is expected to monitor services to approximately 2,300 clients each month, decreasing IHSS' ability to identify and deal with fraud.

4. Manual signature verification is time-consuming and may not be cost-effective.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding

5. Fraud prevention and detection could be improved by maintaining client photos, establishing a complaint hotline and increasing unannounced visits to the home during authorized service hours.

Response: The respondent disagrees with the finding.

Although there is no evidence that fraud prevention and detection would be improved by maintaining client photos, targeted, unannounced visits by Quality Assurance staff are already taking place within the program as one mechanism to monitor for potential fraud. There is no funding for creating or maintaining client photos or creating/maintaining a compliant hotline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. EHSD should consider developing, tracking and annual reporting of quantitative outcome objectives that address service delivery and cost savings, which result from diverting clients from more costly institutional care.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. The IHSS Program is a State and federal entitlement program, is not performance based and does not track outcomes.

2. IHSS should consider developing contingency plans that spell out how it will adjust to proposed State funding reductions.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Once the State budget is enacted, IHSS services will be provided to eligible residents, based on the level of funding available and the guidance provided by the State.

3. IHSS should consider decreasing social worker caseloads by recruiting, training and placing volunteers who could relieve social work staff of paperwork, record review, phone follow-up with clients and other administrative tasks.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Funding is not available through the IHSS Program for such activities. The activities involved – recruitment, training, supervising, etc. – requires County staff time and costs. While there may be some cost savings through the use of volunteers, it would be outweighed by the unfunded cost of providing the necessary oversight.

4. IHSS should consider having social workers make more of their regular home visits unannounced and provide reports of these visits to supplement the efforts of the Program Integrity/Quality Assurance staff.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Social workers already have very high caseloads (300 cases per worker). Making regular unannounced visits may not prove cost effective considering the possibilities of the client not being available. Targeted unannounced visits by the Quality Assurance staff already occur.

5. IHSS should consider the costs and benefits of automating signature verification functions.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Signature verification would require a functional interface with the Case Management Information Payrolling System (CMIPS). Currently, no such interface is available to accomplish this function. The development and/or study to determine the feasibility for such a system would be cost prohibitive, especially since the State legislature is currently developing the proposal to move provision of this program to the State rather than at the County level.

6. EHSD should consider identifying funds to cover incremental costs to use the existing Information and Assistance Program hotline to handle complaints.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The Information and Assistance (I&A) Unit is designed to serve clients over the age of 60. There is no funding source available to serve clients under the age of 60. In addition, it is not a hotline/complaint line, it provides information and referral assistance only.

7. IHSS should consider maintaining photos of clients for use during home visits to monitor for possible identity theft and to find or identify a client should the need arise.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Maintaining photos of clients is not dictated in current State and federal regulations. There is no funding available for the creation and maintenance of this type of photographic record.