



The Honorable Kevin Lundberg, Chair
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
200 East Colfax, Room 271
Denver, CO 80203

December 28, 2015

Dear Senator Lundberg:

Attached please find the annual Aid to the Needy Disabled pilot program legislative report from the Department of Human Services. SB 14-012 amended section 26-2-119 (6) C.R.S. (2015) to require the Department to create a pilot program and report to the Committee on its progress on November 1, 2015 and 2016. My apologies for this late submission as some of the information took longer to compile than anticipated.

The Aid to the Needy Disabled (AND) program was established as an "interim assistance program" for qualifying people awaiting a federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit. The AND program serves individuals who are poor, disabled, unable to work, and awaiting SSI, and who are ineligible for other state assistance programs. The AND Pilot is a 2-year pilot intended to reduce the amount of time participants spend awaiting SSI benefits by assisting them in preparing their SSI applications. The attached report addresses the statutory reporting requirements.

If you require further information or have additional questions, please contact the Department's Legislative Liaison, Lauren Lambert Schreier, lauren.schreier@state.co.us or 303-866-3019.

Sincerely,

Reggie Bicha
Executive Director

cc: Senator Larry Crowder, Vice-Chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Senator Irene Aguilar, Member, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Senator Beth Martinez Humenik, Member, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Senator Linda Newell, Member, Senate Health and Human Services Committee
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Henry Sobanet, Director, Office of State Planning and Budgeting
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Aid to the Needy Disabled -State Only Pilot Status Report

Background:

The Aid to the Needy Disabled (AND) program is an “interim assistance program” for qualifying people awaiting approval of a federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit. The AND program serves individuals who are poor, disabled, unable to work and awaiting SSI.

During the 2014 Legislative Session, SB14-012 authorized the Aid to the Needy Disabled Pilot Program. It reaffirmed the legislature’s commitment to placing a high priority on caring for Colorado’s vulnerable populations by increasing the monthly AND benefit and creating a 2-year AND Pilot program to help participants apply for SSI benefits.

Section 26-2-119 (6) (a) C.R.S. (2015) states: The federal supplemental security income application assistance pilot program is created in the state department and referred to in this section as the “pilot program”. The purpose of the pilot program is to increase the federal income assistance reimbursement rate for the program for aid to the needy disabled and to evaluate best practices for ensuring that accurate and complete applications for federal supplemental security income and social security disability insurance benefits are submitted by persons applying for or receiving aid to the needy disabled in Colorado.

The Department is required to submit a report to the legislature by November 1, 2015 and 2016 regarding the implementation of the AND Pilot Program and the outcomes achieved. Statute indicates the report must include the number of applicants assisted, process and strategies used to assist, average time to complete applications, whether SSI was approved and state received reimbursement, and best practices.

November 2015 Interim Report:

The two sections in this report are the Vendor section and Department section. The vendor section highlights the vendor process and current status while the Department section responds to the statutory and policy questions.

Vendor Status

Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) published an open, competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) in the fall of 2014. CDHS received one proposal submitted by Colorado Disability Benefits Support Program (DBS). DBS was subsequently awarded the contract to implement the Aid to the Needy Disabled (AND) Pilot in Arapahoe, Jefferson, and El Paso counties.

Counties refer to DBS adult financial programs applicants who may qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for SSI application assistance.



Process & Strategies Used

DBS staff is certified in the “SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery” (SOAR) model. SOAR is a national program designed to increase access to the disability income benefit programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for eligible adults. The SSI/SSDI application process requires detailed documentation of mental and physical health issues on up to 14 different SSA forms. The applicant must record up to 15 years of work history and two years of medical treatment history. DBS staff work alongside the individual to ensure the required forms and information are thorough and complete using specific workflow procedures. Application development includes meetings with the applicant, appropriate family members, and service providers. DBS staff interacts directly with SSA and DDS to make sure those agencies have the information needed to process the application efficiently and make the correct determination. Throughout, DBS monitors the status of the case and serves as the point of contact for questions and follow-up. This is especially important when the client is homeless or without a phone. DBS staff works to ensure that individuals attend required medical exams and accompanies the applicant to SSA appointments.

Screening and Assessment

DBS staff screen referrals for appropriateness, and then complete assessments of all appropriate referrals. Then, when indicated, the staff will help the applicant compile information necessary for building a comprehensive application.

(If a person referred to the pilot is assessed as unlikely eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), DBS staff will inform the customer of the factors contributing to “unlikely” eligibility and provide information on how the person can submit a SSA disability application independently. These clients are often connected with resources and medical providers to help strengthen their application. DBS staff also helps them establish a protective filing date and an appointment for their SSI or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) application.)

To date, DBS has received 268 referrals from the three pilot counties: The initial plan anticipated 150 referrals. Of the total referrals 28 SSI/SSDI applications have been submitted. 51 referrals are in the screening process, 13 are in the process of developing the SSI application, 26 are considered unlikely SSI eligible due to lack of medical evidence, 36 already have SSI pending or are working with a navigator and 38 were either denied AND and unresponsive or withdrew.

In the initial phase of the project, it was challenging to identify appropriate referrals. Appropriate applicants are likely be eligible for SSI benefits but have not begun the SSI application process. More recently, the rate of referrals to the program has increased.

Average Time to Complete Applications, Approval Rate, and Interim Assistance Reimbursement

The vendor reports the following:

- It takes an average of 30 hours to develop and submit each application.
- The average number of days between AND application and SSI/DI application submittal for the AND Pilot is 49.
- The average number of days from AND application until SSA decision is 118 days.

The vendor reports 28 applications submitted to date: Nine have been approved and placed into pay status by SSA; 4 have been denied; and 15 are pending decision.



The Department will collect data and report on the cases approved for benefits and the number and amount of Interim Assistance Reimbursements (IARs).

What's Working

In the early implementation, the vendor identified several promising practices. These can be divided into four main areas: process for application development; collaboration with the counties; client services; and community networking/education.

Process for Application Development – The outreach and access model utilized along with regular contact with AND clients has improved the quality of applications developed and submitted to SSA. Essential elements include screening and assessment which is important to avoid wasting time on developing applications with no chance of being approved; SSA 1696 representation; client-centered service delivery; and routinely applying for both SSI and SSDI (not just one or the other).

County Collaboration

- **Training and Orientation** – In order to ensure a successful referral process, intake workers and line supervisors, as well as managers, receive training and orientation from the vendor and state staff about the pilot and referral procedures.
- **Visibility of AND Pilot and Vendor Staff** – County staff include the vendor in ongoing intake unit staff meetings. This offers an opportunity to troubleshoot issues and refine processes. It also fosters collaboration between county workers and vendor staff for the benefit of the client.
- **Identify County Contacts** – Counties identify a staff contact with decision making authority who is directly involved with the processing of AND applications and who is committed to the goals of the pilot. This person, as well as management, is trained and oriented about the program and attends monthly pilot meetings. Counties provide contact information for all staff involved in making referrals to the program.
- **Sharing of Client Information** – County and vendor staff access to CBMS to determine client's SSI/DI application status and AND discharge status improves communication during the screening, application development and filing of the benefits application.
- **Equipment/Work Space** – Counties provide work space for the DBS staff that is conducive to conducting private interviews with clients. DBS staff has access to a secure internet connection, a printer, copier and scanner. DBS staff is provided a desk phone.

Client Services - Vendor staff meet clients in their home, hospital, shelter, etc. DBS staff work to ensure client understanding of the application process and requirements; they assist the client in navigating government agencies and health care providers, including navigating the requirements for AND. DBS staff also assists appropriate pilot referrals who are later discharged in establishing a protective filing date and setting up an appointment for their SSI/DI application. These clients are often connected with resources and medical providers to help strengthen their application.

Networking:

Community Service Providers & Government Agencies – Education about the pilot to providers and agencies who assist or refer clients for AND assistance will continue to be important. The goal is to



dispel the misconception that AND applicants must apply for SSI prior to applying for AND, which disqualifies them from pilot assistance.

The pilot program is still in the first year of implementation and only one vendor applied for the pilot program. The pilot took longer than expected to get up and running but, the number of applications submitted for SSI benefits has caught up to the number originally anticipated.

In the second year of the pilot, the Department will be conducting further analysis on the candidates that are being screened out of the pilot by the vendor to determine if they are getting approved for SSI benefits on their own and if so, in what time frame.

The Department will continue to operate under existing statute. Any recommendations for statutory changes will be included in the 2016 report. The final report, due November 1, 2016, will include data on the number of applicants assisted, strategies implemented, duration of application process, and identify potential changes to program rule or statute.

