

Reimagining Family Support: Where Transforming CalWORKs Meets Linkages

April 28, 2026
3:00 – 4:15 pm
Hilton Arden Way



Presenters

- **Stuart Oppenheim**
Director Emeritus, CFPIC
- **Danna Fabella, MSW**
Senior Program Advisor, CFPIC
- **Damien Ladd**
CalWORKs Engagement Bureau, CDSS

Welcome

- Who is in the room? What programs are represented
- Have you heard of Transforming CalWORKs Initiative?

Goal

This workshop introduces the Transforming CalWORKs initiative, an effort to transform California's program that is family-centered, family-driven, and prioritizes families' voice, choice, and individual needs. Participants will gain an overview of the initiative's goals, key reforms, and what the transformation means for counties, partners, and the people they serve.

Today's Objectives

- Learn about welfare policy (ADC/AFDC/TANF) has evolved through the years
- Understand how SB 119 when implemented will Transform CalWORKs
- Understand the structure CDSS has developed in partnership with CWDA to implement in all 58 counties
- Identify ways that Linkages aligns with Transforming CalWORKs Initiative

Welfare Policy **Brief History: 1935-1976**

- In 1935, the Social Security Act established a national welfare system, marking the first significant federal involvement in public assistance
- The 1962 amendments to the Social Security Act greatly expanded the provision of social services to public welfare recipients and combined the administration of financial assistance with social services.
- Social services were separated from public assistance by the federal government in 1972. Separation mandated policy was rescinded in 1976 as part of new federal legislation; however, most states continued to separate social services from maintenance

Welfare Policy Brief History: 1997

- Two decades later, congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193), creating the TANF program
- States were authorized to use their TANF funding in any manner reasonably calculated to accomplish the purposes of TANF, to:
 - Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes;
 - Reduce dependency by promoting job preparation, work and marriage;
 - Prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies
 - Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.



Welfare Policy Brief History: 1997, Cont'd



- Many states, including California, used the flexibility included in the new TANF (CalWORKs) program to begin to once again provide supportive services to families by:
 - Establishing a robust, supportive Welfare to Work program
 - Addressing barriers to obtaining meaningful employment
 - Working with counties to establish and support the Linkages program to ensure that at-risk families in the CalWORKs program received social services

Transforming CalWORKs

- CalWORKs has continuously been evolving to provide more supportive services
 - Family Stabilization
 - Family Home Visiting
- CDSS, counties and advocates have worked together to continue to improve participant engagement strategies
- In 2025 California passed two historic pieces of legislation, SB 119 and SB 146
 - Established a set of historic reforms to the CalWORKs program
 - Center families' voice and choice,
 - Improve access to services
 - Reduce penalties and administrative burden for families and county workers.
- Taken together, these reforms will contribute to stable and meaningful long-term employment and family well-being.”

Transforming CalWORKs Initiative

GOALS

- A CalWORKs program that is family-centered, family-driven, and prioritizes families' voice, choice, and individual needs
- A more holistic approach to service delivery that creates meaningful pathways to careers that provide economic mobility and family stability
- Improved access to services and reduction of administrative burden
- A program that feels supportive, positive, and helpful to participants

ACTIVITIES

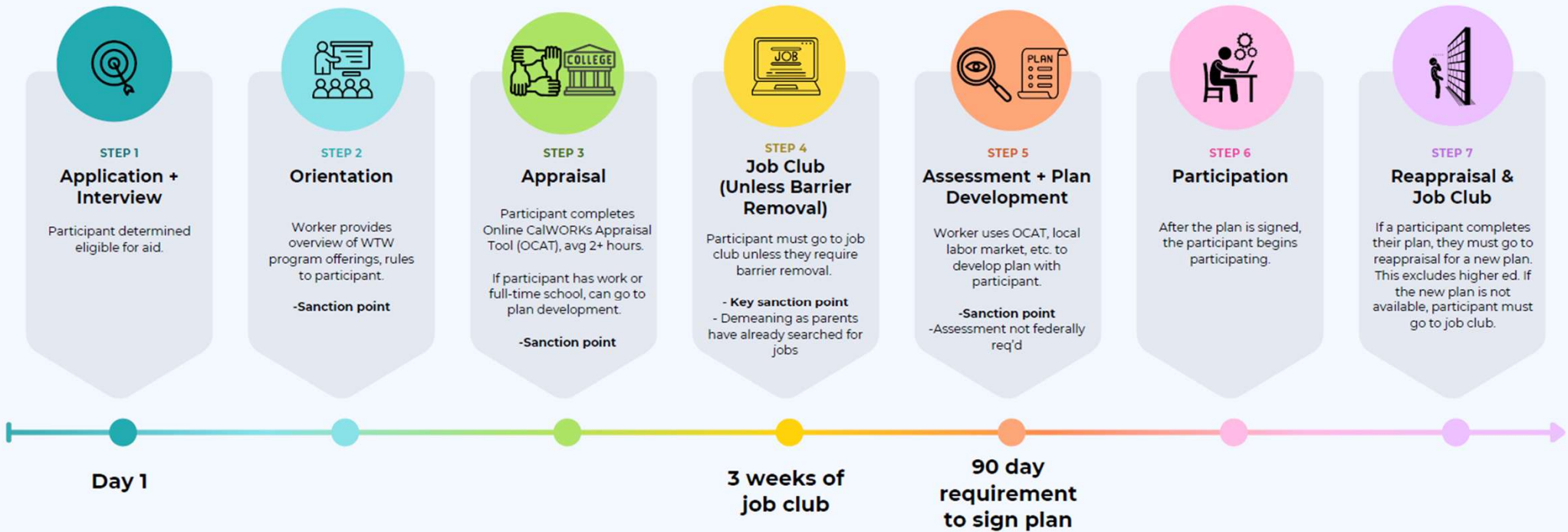
- **Information Sharing**
 - Policy guidance via ACLs, ACINs, and webinars
 - Discussion of planned practice, policy, and administrative changes in the CalWORKs Implementation Collaborative (CWIC)
- **Readiness and Capacity Building**
 - Development of workflows and tools to identify program gaps and needs
 - Exploration of implementation needs through the Transforming CalWORKs Advisory Committee (TCAC) and CalWORKs CWIC
 - Coaching and training to support integration of new policies and practices

TIMELINE

- **Senate Bill 119**
 - Signed into law July 29, 2025
 - Enacted CalWORKs reforms
- **Transforming CalWORKs Advisory Committee (TCAC)**
 - Biweekly, beginning August 2025
- **CalWORKs Implementation Collaborative (CWIC)**
 - Monthly, beginning Sept. 2025
- **Implementation by July 1, 2026, or when automated by CalSAWS***
- **Recommendations Report, Oct. 2026**

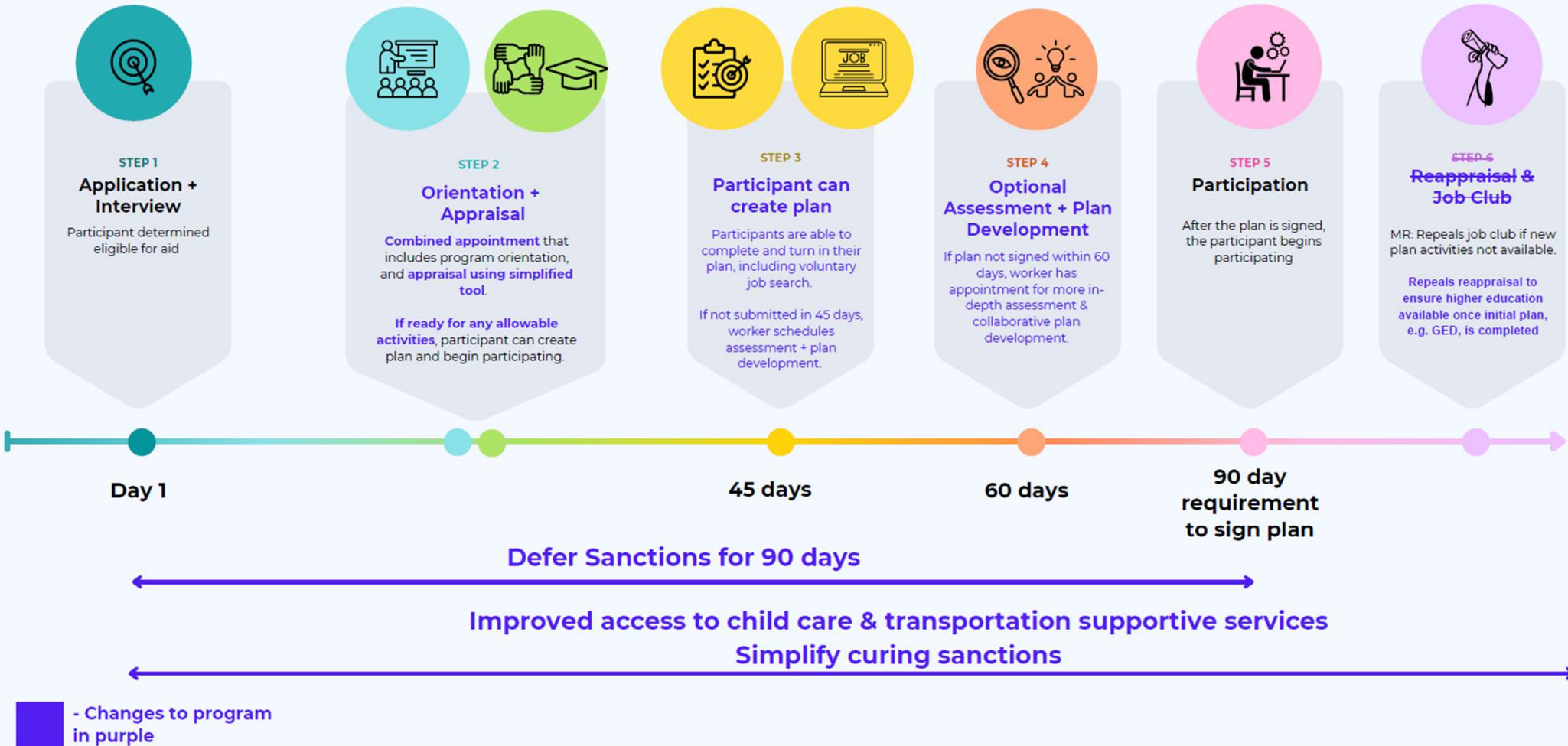
Policy	Objective
Prospective repeal of the Work Participation Rate (WPR) county penalty pass-through.	This change eliminates the pass-on of any penalties resulting from the state not achieving the federal WPR targets, effective October 1, 2025, and forward. This policy had been largely cited by counties as a barrier to full adoption of family-centered CalWORKs policies and practices.
Family-centered program flow: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - streamlined appointment and plan development - Streamlined appraisal - optional assessment 	These changes will standardize orientation statewide, and replace the Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT) with a simplified appraisal form that participants can complete independently – creating a path for participants to quickly learn what is available to them through CalWORKs. Increases self-determination - participants develop their own WTW plan and receive county support when requested. Participants who don't complete the plan within 45 days will receive an appointment to collaboratively complete the plan with the county.
Expands allowable activities, and reassesses mandatory activities	Adds new WTW activities which opens opportunities for participants to engage in education and work options that best meet their needs. Job club is optional: Participants can choose to participate in job club or pursue activities that are better aligned with their needs and goals Repeals the reappraisal requirement
Transportation supportive services: shift to advanced payment	Shifts process from reimbursement to providing transportation in advance through plan development.
90-day sanction deferral	This change allows families and county staff to engage, assess needs, develop a plan, and get supportive services in place to assist families in achieving their goals – all without the threat of a sanction.
Child care check before sanctions	This change reinforces the requirement for Stage One from Day One, by ensuring that families aren't subject to a sanction if they haven't received necessary child care.
Improve curing of sanctions	With this change, participants can cure sanctions verbally as well as in writing, which means families will have increased grants and can benefit from the program sooner.

CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Flow (Simplified) Current Law



CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Flow (Simplified)

Reimagine Coalition TBL



Transforming CalWORKs ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ROLE

- Serve as thought partners and recommenders
- Provide “check and balance” on ideas and inclusivity
- Help think through process
- Challenge assumptions
- Weigh in on implementation of reform package
- Monitor implementation process
- Assist in measuring successes, challenges, and overall impact

DELIVERABLES

- Development of Journey Map
- Policy and practice recommendations across the full spectrum of the CalWORKs program
 - Eligibility, additional WTW-related changes, etc.
- Recommendations around implementation of current reforms
 - e.g. Inform and react to new tool that will replace OCAT, etc.

CalWORKs COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION COLLABORATIVE

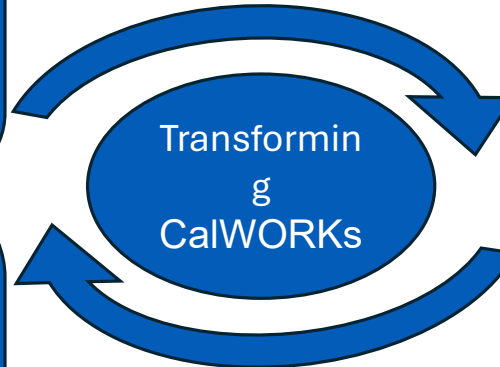
ROLE

- Act as bridge between Advisory Committee’s vision and county implementation
- Assess feasibility of recommendations
- Identify implementation considerations for implementation of new policies/practices and for any recommendations coming out of AC
- Elevate county and program participant needs
- Help to translate policy and training into county culture and practice

DELIVERABLES

- Development of **county staff journey map** (understanding data entry and opportunities for streamlining)
- Feedback on Advisory Committee recommendations
- Recommendations and input on implementation of reforms
- Propose agenda items for Advisory Committee to discuss

Vision · Recommendations
Monitoring · Assessment



Implementation · Learning
Feedback · Recommendations

A blue-tinted photograph showing several hands raised in a classroom setting. The hands are positioned at various heights, suggesting an interactive session. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a window or a wall with some papers. The word "Questions?" is overlaid in the center in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Questions?

Linkages: 1.0 to 2.0

- Focus on collaboration between CalWORKs and Child Welfare on Mutual Families
 - Family Maintenance
 - Family Reunification
- Focus on collaboration in the front end of Child Welfare and CalWORKs/Eligibility
 - Before a “CWS case”
 - To provide support and services to stabilize the family
 - Engaging the family

Discussion

- How do you see the “fit” between Linkages and Transforming CalWORKs Initiative?
- Can you see how you might develop a Linkage strategy to leverage the Transforming CalWORKs to enhance Linkages in your county?

Closing

Using your Capture Sheet, what is one thing you will take back to your Team?

Plenary Panel CA's Commitment to Families: A United Path Forward Panelists: CWDA: Diana Boyer, Roshena Dupree CDSS: Lisa Witchey, Kelly Winston Moderator: Juliet Cox, CFPIC	
Questions for Teams:	Connections for more information:
What is one thing you heard today that you can bring back to your team?	
Workshop Session A Session Name:	
Ideas We Can Use:	Connections for more information:
Regional Breakout Topic:	
Ideas We Can Use:	Connections for more information:

Thank you for attending!