



## Master Plan for Developmental Services:

### Workgroup 3 Service Coordinator Focus Group

Workgroup 3 organized a focus group on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, to get their opinions on the challenges they face. The purpose of this focus group was to get their input to help workgroup 3 think about some of the recommendations we need to develop. The key themes and suggestions from the focus group include the challenges and needed improvements in staffing, training, workload, and support for Service Coordinators (SCs) at Regional Centers (RCs). Here's a summary of the main points:

#### 1. Recruitment and Retention Challenges

- Pay Discrepancies: SCs face salary variations, with entry-level pay as low as \$22, despite RCs receiving uniform funding. This creates inequity and leads to high turnover.
- High Turnover & Administrative Burden: Excessive paperwork, frequent system changes, and case management processes discourage SCs. The need for waivers and exception processes also adds to the workload, contributing to burnout.

#### 2. Role Misalignment and Job Expectations

- Discrepancy Between Job Expectations and Reality: SCs initially expected their jobs to be about advocacy and client interaction but find their roles filled with bureaucratic tasks. The job title and description don't fully represent the responsibilities.
- Overextended Roles: SCs feel they play roles beyond coordination, including crisis intervention, legal advocacy, and case management.

#### 3. Workload Impact on Service Delivery

- Heavy Paperwork and Bureaucracy: SCs feel their work is more administrative than service-oriented. IPP (Individual Program Plan) paperwork is long, making it hard to focus on clients' needs.
- Limited Time with Clients: Due to high caseloads, SCs often don't have the time to provide thorough, personalized support, impacting relationships and family satisfaction.
- Enhanced and Specialized Caseloads: One strategy to address high caseloads is more utilization and hiring for enhanced caseloads (smaller caseloads focused on individuals with low service utilization) and specialized caseloads (caseloads focused on specific populations with specific needs).

#### 4. Staffing and Caseload Issues

- Outdated Caseload Formula: The existing caseload formula has not been updated since the 90s, leading to inflated caseloads and inadequate staffing. Some SCs carry

90+ cases, with additional load from vacancies.

- Data Manipulation: RCs reportedly use deceptive data (e.g., mean vs. median caseloads) to request waivers, masking true caseload numbers.

- High Caseload Consequences: High caseloads reduce SCs' ability to provide timely, personalized support to clients, especially in complex cases like the Self-Determination Program (SDP).

## 5. Need for Specialized Training

- Job-Specific Training: SCs require training in the CA developmental disability system, policy processes, crisis intervention, and various support services. Current training is inadequate, leading to high attrition.

- On-the-Job Learning: Many SCs note that most of the job requirements are learned over time due to the complexity of tasks, which aren't captured in any standard training or formal educational programs.

## 6. Desired Incentives and Benefits

- Flexible and Supportive Work Environment: SCs advocate for flexible schedules, telework options, and a 4-day workweek, which could include a 4-10 work schedule) to improve work-life balance and retention and make them more available to clients.

- Recognition and Growth Opportunities: Suggestions include formal recognition programs, loan forgiveness for tenure, tuition reimbursement, and monetary retention bonuses for long-term service.

- Healthcare and Pension: Dependent healthcare and CalPERS retirement benefits are desirable to improve retention and not offered consistently across RCs.

## 7. Proposed Changes to Improve Service Quality

- Smaller Caseloads: Smaller caseloads would enable SCs to focus on supporting families and providing thorough follow-ups.

- Redefining SC Responsibilities: Assigning specialized staff for certain tasks (e.g., legal support, benefits planning, crisis intervention) and refining the SC role could help focus their work on meaningful client interactions.

- Flexible Service Delivery Options: Remote meetings and streamlined processes, including authorizations for services and exemptions for processes, would reduce time and administrative burdens, allowing SCs to focus on clients' needs.

In sum, these notes highlight significant challenges in staffing, workload, and role expectations at Regional Centers and offer concrete ideas for improving pay equity, training, benefits, and workload management. Overall, the SCs expressed that they entered and stay in this field out of their commitment to people with developmental disabilities and their genuine desire to make lives better for the people they serve.