State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Services

California Department of Health Services
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Director

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TO: All County Welfare Directors
All County Administrative Officers
All County Medi-Cal Program Specialists/Liaisons
All County Health Executives
All County Mental Health Directors

Letter No.: 02-47

WORKLOAD ISSUES CURRENTLY AFFECTING STATE PROGRAMS DISABILITY AND ADULT PROGRAM DIVISION (SP-DAPD) OPERATIONS

The purpose of this letter is to provide counties with specific guidelines and reminders on ways to help SP-DAPD reduce disability case processing time. Since county processing time is included in the overall time it takes to process a Medi-Cal disability case, it is important for both County and SP-DAPD components to process cases as expeditiously as possible.

For the past three years, SP-DAPD has experienced escalating case receipts. In fiscal year 2001-02, case receipts were approximately 18 percent above the prior year. Unfortunately, staffing levels have not kept pace with case receipts. This discrepancy between receipts and staffing levels has resulted in case delays. SP-DAPD continues to work overtime to reduce the high level of pending cases. Currently, overall average case processing time (County and SP-DAPD) is approximately 114 days, which exceeds the regulatory 90-day processing time limit. To remain in compliance with the Radcliffe lawsuit, SP-DAPD continues to send the applicant a case status letter explaining why a disability decision was not rendered within the 90-day time frame.

Due to the unusually high volume of receipts, there was a temporary delay in receipting some cases onto State-Program's computer system. However, SP-DAPD has taken the necessary steps to ensure that all cases are receipted timely, although actual

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assignment to an analyst may be somewhat delayed. Cases are generally assigned to an analyst in order of receipt. Certain cases have priority in the overall disability evaluation process and are adjudicated without delay (e.g., presumptive disability, terminal illness, death, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, homeless and federal adoption cases). Federal adoptions occur when the applicant is receiving Social Security disability benefits. In this instance, SP-DAPD is mandated to adopt the federal decision. The following is a list of several reminders and general guidelines to help counties facilitate case processing:

- Ensure that all disability packets are complete before they are forwarded to SP-DAPD with special attention to having the correct name, Social Security number and Date of Birth of the applicant. If an applicant already has linkage through another program, this information should be annotated in item No. 10 or the MC 221 (Disability Determination and Transmittal Form), so SP-DAPD will not have to send a 90-day status letter to the beneficiary because Medi-Cal benefits are not compromised by a pending disability case.

- Ensure that sufficient properly signed medical releases are in file, and that names and addresses of medical sources are identified.

- If the applicant is working, complete a Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) determination prior to forwarding the packet to SP-DAPD. Include the MC 272 or a statement that the applicant's earnings are not at the SGA level.

- If the applicant is applying under the 250 Percent Working Disabled Program, clearly indicate that on the MC 221, in item No. 10.

- If the county is re-submitting a packet that was previously returned as a Z55, include a copy of the SP-1 letter with the resubmitted packet.

- If the case was previously returned as a Z56 for non-cooperation, the county should clearly note in the re-submitted packet that the applicant has been contacted and has agreed to cooperate. This annotation should be made in item No. 10 on the MC 221.

- If an applicant insists on requesting consideration of retroactivity, even though there has been no treatment during the retro months, counties should indicate in file that the applicant wished to be evaluated for retroactivity although he or she did not have treatment during that period. SP-DAPD will then not have to contact the county to ascertain treatment sources for that time period.

- Consider establishing a specialized disability section with disability technical review specialists or disability mentors.

- Review the instructions for case processing in the Medi-Cal Eligibility Procedures Manual (MEPM) in Sections 22C-4 and 22C-6 when in doubt.

- After reviewing the Quarterly Status Report (a list of closed and pending cases), if counties need to contact SP-DAPD for status on several applications, consider faxing a list of case names/Social Security numbers to the appropriate branch Operations Analyst. In Oakland, fax to Mr. Andrew Martinez, 1-800-869-0203. In Los Angeles, fax to Ms. Harriet May at 1-800-869-0188.

- For routine status inquires, counties should first contact Master Files. In Oakland call (510) 622-3756 and in Los Angeles call (213) 480-6400. If the issue is complex or further information is needed, counties may contact Mr. Martinez in Oakland at (510) 622-3787 and Ms. May in Los Angeles at (213) 480-6499 for assistance. Counties are encouraged to consolidate their calls, so that one call might address more than one question.

- Presumptive Disability (PD) requests should be faxed to Mr. Martinez and Ms. May at the above numbers. These requests may be coordinated by a liaison, as noted in MEPM 22C-3.4. Counties may also consider refresher training to staff on the PD categories and process. SP-DAPD staff may be available for refresher training in specific areas of disability case processing. Counties should contact Mr. Martinez and Ms. May for staff availability in their branches.

- Instruct applicants to cooperate with all requests from SP-DAPD (e.g. keeping scheduled appointments for consultative examinations).

During a recent meeting of the Medi-Cal Application Based on Disability committee, (which is composed of Department of Health Services (DHS), County, and SP-DAPD staff), it was brought to the committee's attention that some counties continue to use the old MC 221 form, which is obsolete (see ACWDL 00-46 for details). The new version of this form is available in the DHS warehouse and should be utilized **immediately.** Beginning **September 1, 2002,** SP-DAPD will return all disability packets that do not have the new MC 221 form attached. Another item of discussion involved disability packets being sent specifically to the Oakland branch by certified mail. Counties should **discontinue** this practice **immediately** because all disability packets are sent to a P.O. Box and not to the address of SP-DAPD. Postal employees should not be responsible for receipt of the packets, and, may not sign for them timely, which could cause significant delays in SP-DAPD receiving the packets. SP-DAPD uses a courier service

to retrieve the packets and they are held responsible if the packets are not delivered to the branches.

If you have questions or comments regarding the issues discussed in this letter, please contact Mr. Terry Durham of my staff at (916) 657-2701.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

Richard Brantingham
Acting Chief
Medi-Cal Eligibility Branch