



Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee

LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
Tom Sykes

506 16th Avenue SE
Olympia, WA 98501-2323
Campus Mail: PO Box 40910

(360) 786-5171
FAX 786-5180
TDD 1-800-635-9993

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E-Mail: neff_ba@leg.wa.gov
Internet: <http://www.jlarc.leg.wa.gov>

Division of Developmental Disabilities Management Audit Report 99-3

The Division of Developmental Disabilities is generally complying with legislative intent and is making a concerted effort to plan and forecast its capabilities to meet its clients' current and future needs. However, the Division should use ranges in projecting resources to address unmet needs, link estimates of needed resources to performance outcomes for service delivery, strengthen its quality assurance process, and communicate its coordination efforts to staff responsible for case management.

Mandate

The Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1998 directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to complete a management audit of the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Management Audit

A management audit is an independent, objective examination of management functions of a public agency to determine if the functions are discharged efficiently and appropriately. Management audits focus on a narrower range of audit questions than performance audits, which examine program outcomes.

Program Background

The Division is responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Services are provided in both institutional and community settings based on individual preferences, capabilities, and needs. The Division serves its clients through six regional offices, five institutions, and 23 outstations. The Stakeholders Work

Group offers the Division's various stakeholders a forum to work together.

For the 1997-99 Biennium, the Division's budget is \$854,287,000. As of June 1998, the Division's caseload was 27,233. In fiscal year 1998, the Division had a total of 3,448 full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff positions.

Legislative Budget Provisos

Our analysis of a sample of five recent budget provisos indicates that the Division has implemented the provisos according to legislative intent. The Division provided JLARC with documentation that identified the assumptions made and the specific processes undertaken to implement these provisos. The documentation showed systematic tracking of the resulting programs.

We found that the implementation of one proviso relating to the Employment and Day Program has been slow. According to Division officials, the slow implementation is due to inadequate FTE levels and the need to find additional providers.

Planning and Forecasting

The Division has a plan to close the gap between the number of clients currently served and current and future needs of those underserved or unserved. The plan is the result of significant efforts to consult with its major stakeholders and use research to forecast the Division's capability to meet client needs.

The Division's estimates are based on research, but need to be adjusted to minimize error in projections. Furthermore, the Division has not yet linked its estimates of needed resources to performance indicators showing anticipated outcomes of services delivered to developmentally disabled clients.

Case Management

Case managers are responsible for assessing client needs and options, as well as managing their caseload. Based on its studies, the Division contends that it cannot adequately serve existing clientele with the current number of case managers. Our survey and interviews of field staff and stakeholders support the Division's contention. The studies, however, do not indicate to what extent qualitative changes will occur with incremental reductions in the case manager-to-client ratio.

Although Division officials cite lack of

resources and heavy caseloads as the cause for many of the Division's shortcomings, the Division could improve its management practices relating to quality assurance. Strengthening the current quality assurance process by developing a quality assurance manual and designating key staff to be responsible and accountable for the overall process are examples of improvements the Division could make without necessarily incurring additional costs.

Coordination efforts between field-level staff of the Division of Developmental Disabilities and other DSHS divisions are largely dependent upon the initiative and success of individual case managers or regional staff. Although central office staff and DSHS management do attempt to coordinate services, they may have little impact on the effectiveness of that coordination at the case management level. The Division's broader coordination efforts with other state and county entities need improvement as well.

Communication with Stakeholders

Communication with legislators, legislative staff, and program stakeholders has improved over time, but the Division still faces the challenge of effectively communicating its plans for meeting the needs and demands of often opposing stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. The Division of Developmental Disabilities should reflect an array of variable possibilities ranging from high to low when projecting needs for case managers to fully manage Division caseloads and for funds to meet unmet needs of clients.
2. The Division of Developmental Disabilities should link estimates of resources needed to performance measures indicating varying levels of service and quality of outcomes anticipated with changes in funding or staffing.
3. The Division of Developmental Disabilities should strengthen its quality assurance process by developing a quality assurance manual and designating key staff to be responsible and accountable for the overall process.
4. The Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) should increase efforts of coordination between divisions and among other entities outside of DSHS to improve coordination at the case management level. This can be done by sharing current best practices and by considering systemic changes for more coordinated service delivery.