

Seasonal Child Care Subsidy Program FAQ

In spring 2011, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) made changes to both the policy and service delivery model for the Seasonal Child Care subsidy program (SCC). These changes were made in an effort to reduce program administrative costs and preserve limited funding for services to eligible families. During the transition, DEL and DSHS identified several programmatic areas that are being reviewed for improvement. This document will answer some frequently asked questions about the program changes and will outline the steps that DEL and DSHS are taking to improve program administration.

Why was SCC program administration transferred to DSHS?

SCC has historically been administered by the state through contracts with community-based organizations. The contractors were located within geographic regions where there is high agriculturally related employment. The contractors provided outreach to families, assisted families with completing applications, and determined program eligibility. At the beginning of 2011, DEL was faced with the task of reducing SCC program costs. To preserve direct services to children and families, DEL decided to transfer program administration to DSHS – this decision resulted in a net savings of more than \$1 million.

What policy changes were made to SCC?

Family eligibility rules were changed to comply with state and federal laws and to allow more flexibility for families. The primary eligibility rule changes are outlined below:

- Cooperation with Support Enforcement - ESSB 5921, passed during the 2011 legislative session, requires that both Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and SCC program participants cooperate with support enforcement unless the family has a “good cause” exception.
- Enforcement of Federal Citizenship and Immigration Rules – Federal law requires that children receiving a federally funded child care subsidy legally reside in the United States. This is a federal requirement that applies only to the child receiving the child care subsidy – the status of parents and other siblings is not considered when determining a child’s eligibility.
- Verification and Determination of Income – DEL changed the income verification policy to align with the WCCC income verification rules and to allow more flexibility for families. Previously, income was determined by averaging the family’s income over a 12-month period, which required pay stubs from the previous year. Now, families have the option of providing just three months of pay stubs, the previous year’s W2 or obtaining an employer’s statement.

What steps did DSHS take to prepare and train staff on SCC?

DSHS has skilled workers who are well qualified to determine child care eligibility for SCC. All eligibility workers have been required to have training that includes a review of SCC eligibility policies and processes. In addition, DSHS is in the process of developing cultural competency training for field staff and managers that will be completed by the end of October to help ensure high-quality customer service. DSHS also has a significant number of Spanish speaking bilingual workers and has contracts with language interpreters to accommodate the needs of limited English proficient clients.

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Have there been any challenges with program administration?

There have been two challenges in this new program administration:

- When DSHS began administering SCC, all child care staff were trained on the eligibility process. After the training, an error was discovered in the policy manual, which stated that a family was ineligible for SCC if they had received TANF during the previous 12 months – a remnant of an outdated emergency WAC. This policy error resulted in the inappropriate denial of some applications. The policy manual has now been updated and applications are being correctly processed.
- There also was DSHS child care worker and local seasonal employer confusion regarding the employment and income verification. Some employers created an income verification template that included all of their employees and a salary range. When determining the income, the child care workers used the high end of the salary range instead of an average, which resulted in many families being determined ineligible based on salary.

Given these two issues, DSHS staff conducted a review and analysis of all SCC child care applications that were denied between July 1, 2011 and August 9, 2011. There were 475 applications reviewed and 313 applications were appropriately denied. Of the remaining cases, 70 are pending additional information, 27 were approved, 22 were duplicate applications, eight cases were closed and letters were sent asking for additional information, and one case is being re-reviewed.

What outreach have DEL and DSHS conducted around these changes?

The program administration for SCC is now modeled after its partner program, WCCC. Families now follow the same application process for both programs. DEL and DSHS have worked together to bring awareness to families and providers about the SCC rule changes and to provide additional opportunities for families to apply for child care subsidies. DEL and DSHS met with providers on June 30 and August 15 in Mount Vernon and on August 17 in Wenatchee to discuss program changes, clarify implementation issues and better understand the concerns of both providers and families. DSHS has also deployed the Mobile community services office (CSO) to provide additional outreach and face-to-face interaction with potential clients in Mount Vernon, Kennewick, Pasco, Wenatchee, Mattawa, Sunnyside, Oroville, and Moses Lake. The Mobile CSO is staffed with bilingual workers who are able to provide one-on-one application assistance. Media outreach and use of social media has helped ensure widespread awareness of these opportunities for application assistance.

Are there plans to do additional outreach and to use community partners to increase program awareness?

DSHS currently has a contract with WithinReach, which does Basic Food outreach for the agency. DSHS has recently completed contract negotiations with WithinReach to expand its current contract to include outreach for SCC. This includes ensuring that culturally appropriate outreach and application assistance is provided to families and moving to performance-based contracting. The contract began on September 9, 2011.

Who should be contacted for more information?

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