

LINKING HOMELESS CLIENTS WITH PUBLIC BENEFITS: PILOT EVALUATION

Office of the Controller | City Performance Unit

October 2018

Purpose of the Pilot

Starting March 2018, the Human Services Agency (HSA), the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) launched a collaborative pilot to put Benefits Navigators from the Homeless Outreach Team (“HOT Navigators”) in two homeless shelters. HOT Navigators engage homeless adults about their options regarding public benefits and help those who are eligible complete applications for Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and/or County Adult Assistance Programs (CAAP).

Many of our City’s vulnerable homeless adults are eligible for public benefits, but due to a myriad of obstacles, do not apply to or receive them. While navigating the public benefits system can be daunting for all potential recipients, homeless clients face additional barriers, such as lack of sufficient documentation and difficulty attending scheduled appointments while also seeking shelter. This pilot aims to address gaps in service to homeless clients that contribute to this under-enrollment. The HOT Navigators bring deep expertise in serving people experiencing homelessness to their role conducting full-time outreach at homeless shelters, helping clients complete applications online, and conducting preliminary disability assessments for CAAP.

In addition to HOT Navigators, the pilot tested changes to public benefit business processes, such as CalFresh telephone interviews and reducing the number of in-person appointments required to enroll in CAAP.

City Performance Role

Through staff interviews and meetings with stakeholders in each collaborating department, the Controller’s Office City Performance Unit (“City Performance”) helped clarify roles, formalize processes, and create documentation and dashboards to support the pilot. City Performance worked with HSA to create tools to track and analyze key metrics on the pilot, as well as to develop standardized processes and communication pathways for the multi-department pilot staff.

Whole Person Care

This pilot supports the City’s implementation of Whole Person Care, a federal waiver program funding comprehensive services for homeless adults. Stays at shelters, as well as other support services, are claimable to Whole Person Care, but only if the clients are enrolled in Medi-Cal. Therefore, the City loses reimbursements for the estimated 34% of clients who stayed in shelters and did not have Medi-Cal.

What do each of the public benefits offer?

Medi-Cal	Provides free or low-cost health insurance with a range of health benefits and services.
CalFresh	Provides electronic monetary benefits for the purchase of groceries at many food stores.
CAAP	Provides cash assistance to low-income adults without dependent children, refugees, and adults that cannot work due to disability.

Key Pilot Results

The results through August 2018 suggest this pilot increased enrollment in public benefits. Further review is needed to identify how to apply lessons from the pilot to other settings and service models.

HOT Navigators aided 102 homeless clients to submit a total 148 applications for benefits, with a 64% approval rate across all benefits.

HOT Navigators achieved a 67% approval rate for CAAP applications. In comparison, Navigation Centers, another type of shelter model, achieved a 37% approval rate in the same time period.

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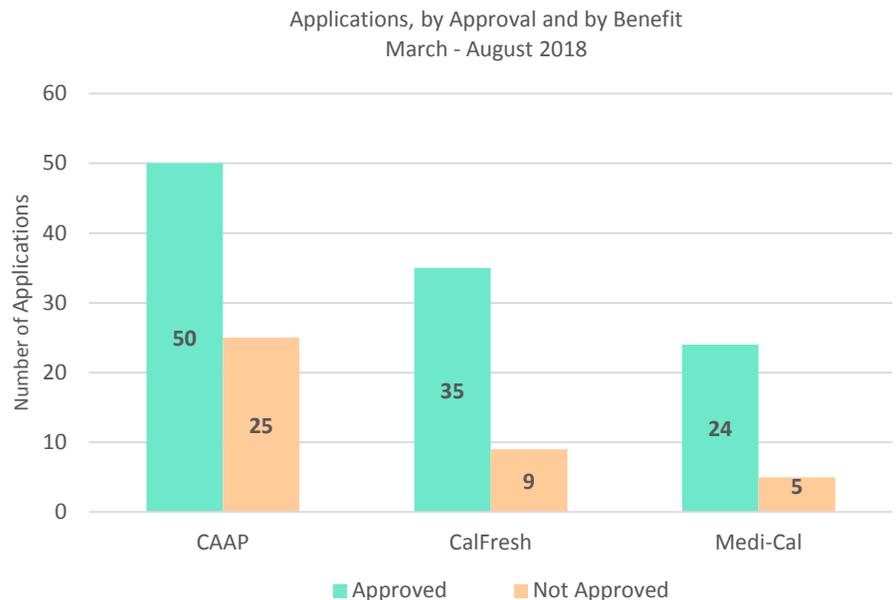
City Performance Activities

- City Performance interviewed management and pilot staff to define the key metrics that would determine the success of the pilot.
- City Performance created a SharePoint website for hosting all essential pilot process and data documents to facilitate information sharing between stakeholders of all departments.
- In collaboration with HSA Policy & Planning, City Performance created an automated data management system for tracking the key metrics. The data system has an automated report that tracks all standard applications submitted by the Navigators, and a manual tracker of the Inter-County Transfers (ICT) requested by the HOT Navigators.
- City Performance developed two Excel dashboards – one for new applications submitted and one for ICT initiations – that automatically translate the pilot data into accessible charts. The dashboards can also include data from other community-based pilots, such as Navigation Centers, allowing comparison between pilot modalities.
- City Performance designed and facilitated workshops that brought key stakeholders together to define how HOT Navigators and Eligibility Workers schedule and conduct on-demand phone interviews for CalFresh with homeless clients. The resulting processes are being tested via this pilot as HSA determines how to scale the promising practice to other community initiatives and client populations.

Opportunities

The Benefits Navigator pilot is one of a series of new initiatives aimed at supporting homeless individuals to access and retain a variety of benefits. Due to its flexible design, this pilot provides an opportunity to test many operational improvements for reaching homeless clients. For example, the new cross-benefits approach of this pilot requires intra- and inter-departmental collaboration. It provides an opportunity for HSA public benefits staff and HSH staff and contracted partners to share best practices and challenges and test new business processes in helping homeless individuals apply for and retain public benefits in the shelter environment.

As seen in the chart above, HOT Navigators in shelters supported the enrollment of homeless clients in public benefits. However, before the departments decide to expand the program, they should consider key lessons from the pilot, such as which shelter sites would be most appropriate. For example, unexpectedly, the shelter site that had a drop-in center and availability of short-term stays proved more successful at outreaching and later enrolling clients than the shelter in which only ninety-day stays were permitted. Departments should continue to examine these and other lessons from this work over time. Departments may also include a consideration of costs in future analysis to determine whether and how the pilot might be meaningfully scaled.



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