



Promising Practices

Public policies should recognize the importance of providing a safety net for children and families, including public assistance for low-income families, high quality affordable child care and affordable housing.

Findings from the first few years of California's welfare reform (CalWORKs) indicate that people with fewer skills are more likely to cycle in and out of welfare.

- Provide education and job training, which are essential for a welfare client to find a job with a career opportunity.
- Offer additional support services such as job retention services, subsidized child care, and health insurance coverage are important to help a former welfare client keep his or her job.

Child care assistance for low and moderate income families is a vital public need. Many low and moderate income families are not served by federal child care funds. Some states provide state government funded child care assistance for these low and moderate income families. The limit of income to be eligible for state-subsidized child care in 2000 is \$54,779 (75% of the county's median income of \$73,039).⁶ This limit is set too low for many families in Contra Costa County. ■ Adjust the subsidized child care eligibility limit to better reflect the cost of living in Contra Costa County, thereby helping many families better meet their basic needs. ■ Make similar eligibility requirement adjustments to other programs such as Section 8 housing, Head Start, and free and reduced cost meals.

Several states and localities offer government financed health insurance coverage for low and moderate income families who are not eligible for Medicaid and do not have employer sponsored health insurance. ■ State and local government should consider extending child care and health care and other support services to low and moderate income families as well as CalWORKs recipients who are transitioning off welfare. An unknown number of families who "time-out" of CalWORKs find jobs that do not pay enough for them to be self-sufficient. ■ Create new safety net programs to help these families leave this support network, and assist these families and children in obtaining their basic needs.

The Food Stamp Program, school food programs and WIC all support children and families with nutrition assistance before children enter school, during the school year, and during the summer. A large percentage of those eligible, however, do not receive this support. Many of these programs require significant documentation, and the stigma of receiving assistance sometimes prevents families from getting the help they need. ■ Collaborative efforts are needed to enroll more families and ensure that needy children don't go hungry. ■ Schools, child care centers and homes should ensure that children get nutritious meals by participating in these federal food assistance programs.

Affordable housing is a persistent and increasing need. ■ Many local jurisdictions have established housing trust funds to provide low-interest down payments for first-time homeowners, emergency assistance for renters, assistance with a security deposit for the first month's rent, rehabilitation assistance and assistance to the homeless in attaining stable housing. ■ Focus on securing stable housing, providing temporary housing for those in transition, and insuring that every child has a place to live.

⁶Before 1998, California families were eligible to enroll in subsidized child care services if their income did not exceed 84 percent of the State Median Income (SMI), and could retain their subsidy until their income rose above 100 percent of SMI. A change made as part of California's welfare reform law lowered the income eligibility ceiling to 75 percent of SMI.

