

Service Coordination Shortfall

Regional centers provide lifelong service coordination for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to help them achieve their personal goals related to developmental progress, community integration, and leading fulfilling and independent lives. Service Coordinators develop enduring relationships with the individuals and families they support, help them access services and supports, and plan for the future.

Overall effectiveness of service coordination is dependent on a robust knowledge of available community resources, developing a trusting relationship, and understanding unique hopes, dreams, needs, and dynamics of the individuals served. Large caseloads and high staff turnover diminish the success of the Service Coordinator-consumer relationship and thereby reduces access to the most appropriate and effective services. In addition, with a strong labor market, regional centers are competing with government agencies that can offer higher wages and other forms of compensation regional centers cannot.

As a condition of federal funding, the state has assured the federal government that certain caseload ratios are being met for individuals served by regional centers. The mandated caseload for the state's more than 40,000 infants and toddlers in the Early Start program is 1:62. For the approximately 130,000 individuals funded through the state's 1915(c) Medicaid Waiver, the mandated caseload ratio is also 1:62. For most others, the mandated caseload ratio is 1:66.

A fixed amount of \$17 million annually was included in the Budget beginning in 2016-17 to improve Service Coordinator caseload ratios. It was that infusion of funds that allowed an improvement in the ongoing shortfall of legally-mandated Service Coordinator positions between 2016 and 2017.



Currently, regional centers are budgeted \$41,677 per year to cover each Service Coordinator's salary and benefits. But the real cost is much higher. In 2016, policy assumptions stated that the actual cost for a Service Coordinator's salary and benefits was \$64,320. Separately, that same year, ABX2 1 gave a conservative estimate of almost 8.7% wage and benefit enhancement for regional center staff, meaning

the total real-world cost for each Service Coordinator position is nearly \$70,000. Today, this means that for each new Service Coordinator position, regional centers receive only enough funding to cover approximately 60% of the salary and benefit costs. Even with some additional funding available for Early Start positions, the gap between costs and budgeted amounts is staggering.

The number of Californians who qualify for regional center services continues to climb. Due to the unprecedented growth in the system (more than 15,000 individuals in FY 2018-19), the number of Service Coordinator positions included in each year’s state Budget continues to grow. Unfortunately, the gap between the funding needed to meet required caseload ratios and the funding provided for those new positions continues to widen. The chart below illustrates the number of new Service Coordinators each year’s Budget assumes are needed and the shortfall in funding those positions.

Fiscal Year	New Service Coordinator Positions	Difference Between Budget and Cost
2016-17	205.89	\$ 4,173,234
2017-18	224.48	\$ 5,390,326
2018-19	236.43	\$ 5,612,478
Total	666.80	\$ 15,176,038

Regional centers support people from myriad backgrounds and cultures in their communities. In an era of increased wariness related to interactions with government agencies, building rapport and trust with diverse communities takes Service Coordinators additional time. Bilingual service coordination requires more time to translate for individuals and their families. Service Coordinators often serve as the sole bridge to appropriate and culturally competent services to meet each person’s needs as identified through the Individual Program Planning process.

The Self-Determination Program (SDP) is on the horizon in California. Service Coordinators will once again be on the front lines to educate individuals and families about SDP, to help develop an individual budget through the detailed person-centered planning process and may even be chosen to meet the other functions of an Independent Facilitator. The increased responsibilities of SDP, in addition to all of the current demands of service coordination, require additional resources to relieve caseload ratios.

Serving people with complex needs requires a high level of expertise and continuity in the service coordination relationship. As caseload demographics shift to include more people with complex health, psychiatric, and behavioral needs as well as greater numbers of aging individuals and young adults with autism, Service Coordinators must have increasingly specialized knowledge to support each population.

Accessing generic resources, as mandated by state law, is time-sensitive and requires complex knowledge of the social service system to successfully guide an individual and their family through the system. Service Coordinators are typically the starting point for various community services and, unlike other agencies, regional centers assume the responsibility of helping individuals access those resources.

Service coordination is the heart of the regional center system. In order to support people with developmental disabilities and their families in the most comprehensive, individualized, and diverse manner possible, we need to fix the underlying problem of underfunding this direct service. The longer the problem persists, the further behind the state will fall between needed and available Service Coordinators statewide.