



Shelter Partnership

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What's Ahead for the LA County General Relief Program?

As of April 2011, approximately 109,000 individuals received General Relief cash assistance in LA County. General Relief (GR) is a program of last resort, which provides up to \$221 a month to indigent residents of LA County. When clients are first enrolled into the GR program, an assessment is conducted by which the client is assigned into one of three categories:

- Eligible to pursue federal disability benefits
- Employable
- Temporarily/administratively unemployable

GR Restructuring Plan

The GR Restructuring Plan (which you can read about in [this Shelter Partnership blog post](#)) took several steps to provide additional assistance to GR participants deemed employable or eligible to pursue benefits. Recently, the County noted that, thanks to the GR Restructuring Plan, "in the last seven months of 2010, almost 15,000 individuals have transitioned off of GR and into jobs or onto disability benefits."

Temporarily/Administratively Unemployable GR Participants

However, the County states that one-half of GR assistance payments are made to GR recipients who are not pursuing either employment or federal disability benefits because they have been deemed temporarily/administratively unemployable. Some of these clients may indeed be eligible to pursue federal disability benefits, which is why the GR Restructuring Plan calls for more robust initial medical and mental health assessments with wrap-around services as well as enhanced record retrieval initiatives, all of which will lend itself to more and more GR recipients becoming eligible to pursue federal disability benefits. The County has hired new contractors to carry out these initial assessments, which should mean that the number of GR participants deemed eligible to pursue federal disability benefits would gradually increase in the future.

Board Motion to Reduce Costs

In the meantime, as a result of a Board of Supervisors' [motion in April 2011](#), the County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) has been required to reduce costs in the General Relief (GR) program. The Board motion indicated that, since 2008, the number of people receiving GR assistance has increased by 73%, which translates to an annual

County cost of \$219 million. DPSS staff has identified a [menu of nine options](#) to reduce costs in the GR program. These nine options attempt to reduce costs by:

- Limiting type of assistance (Option A)
- Limiting eligibility criteria (Option A, Option C, Option D, Option I)
- Limiting duration/total amount of assistance (Option A, Option B, Option F)
- Adding incentives to enforce residency rule (Option E)
- Adding administrative staff to enhance program monitoring (Option G, Option H)

Please look at the complete [menu of options](#) and provide your feedback to the Board offices (listed below are summaries of each option). DPSS' response to the Board motion is scheduled to be on the agenda for the 6/20/11 Board of Supervisors' budget deliberations meeting.

Summaries of Cost Reduction Options

- **Option A would target a subset of GR participants who are temporarily or administratively unemployable.** This option would be directed towards GR recipients who have been deemed temporarily/administratively unemployable AND who have been receiving GR assistance for 24 months or more during the most recent 36 months. This option would be instituted in phases and Phase One would affect those who have received assistance for 34 out of the most recent 36 months. Instead of cash assistance, these participants would receive an in-kind housing voucher of \$266 and a cash payment of \$20. The housing voucher would allow these participants to access a bed in a motel or shelter for a limited time.
- **Option B would target employable GR participants** (approximately 40,000 people) and increase the progressive sanction penalty from 0/30/60 days to 30/60/90 days or 60/120/180 days. This means that if an employable GR participant refused or failed to comply with requirements, they would not receive cash assistance for the stipulated amount of days.
- **Option C** would restrict the maximum allowable property assets for GR participants to no more than \$500 of personal property including cash on hand or in bank accounts.
- **Option D would affect GR participants who self-identify as homeless** (approximately 65,000 people) and would require that all applicants/participants provide third-party verification that they have lived for at least 15 days in LA County.
- **Option E would affect GR participants living in shared housing and potentially affect GR participants who self-identify as homeless.** It would eliminate the shared housing deduction, which currently reduces the amount of cash assistance if

a GR participant is living with family or friends. The County hopes that by eliminating the deduction, more GR participants will disclose their true address, which will reduce the number self-identifying as homeless and help enforce the residency rule.

- **Option F would target employable GR participants.** Currently, employable GR participants receive a maximum of 9 months of assistance (in a 12-month period). This option would reduce the maximum to six months. However, implementation of this option would require a State legislative change.
- **Option G** would add eligibility workers to the GR program to help with administration and monitoring so that ineligible participants do not continue receiving assistance.
- **Option H would affect employable GR participants.** It would add case managers to help employable GR participants and enforce program rules.
- **Option I would target most of the administratively unemployable GR participants.** There are currently 13 criteria by which a GR participant may be deemed administratively unemployable, which is a category set-aside for individuals who are unable to work for reasons other than a disability (e.g. DV victims or battered women, aged 65 or older, aged 17 or younger, first five months of pregnancy, etc.). This option would eliminate eight of the aforementioned 13 criteria, reducing this category to approximately 2,000 individuals.