



DSHS CLIENT AND PUBLIC SURVEYS

INTRODUCTION

*Washington State
Department of Social
and Health Services*

*Surveys conducted by
the Social and
Economic Sciences
Research Center
and the Gilmore
Research Group*

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Independent research groups recently completed surveys of two major groups of Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) customers: 982 interviews with DSHS clients and 825 interviews with Washington State residents. Both groups feel that DSHS does a good job, although many respondents could offer suggestions for improvement. Recent DSHS improvement initiatives address many areas of concern.

POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

In many areas, both DSHS clients and Washington residents think that DSHS is doing very well. Most people were satisfied with the quality of services, human contact, and available information.

“I think they do a good job; I think they help people.” – Public Survey

Services Worked: Both clients and Washington residents think that DSHS helps people:

“DSHS really got me back on my feet. They taught me responsibility and how to keep a job. I am grateful.” – Client Survey

- 89% of clients say that DSHS has helped them
- 79% of clients say that DSHS does a good job
- 63% of residents say that DSHS does a good job
- Less than 10% of both groups say that DSHS does not do good work.

Human Contact: Being treated with courtesy, respect and dignity is important to DSHS clients.

“The caseworkers try very hard to help us. They are very helpful, polite and respectful but they . . . have too large a workload.” – Client Survey

- When asked for general impressions of DSHS, nearly half of the clients specifically mentioned staff courtesy and respect
- 83% of clients say they are treated with courtesy and respect
- 80% of clients say that DSHS staff listen to them
- 79% of clients say that DSHS staff understand their needs

Information: Clients are generally happy with the information provided by DSHS staff

“If I have a question, they have the answer. They are clear on what they say so I can understand it.” – Client Survey

- 80% of clients say DSHS staff explained things clearly
- 76% of clients say they knew what services are available
- 73% of clients say it is easy to get the facts they need about services

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

While most respondents were satisfied, a significant minority pointed out needs for improvement in challenging areas: child protection, distinguishing true need, and the administrative process. Many respondents linked problems to a need for better staffing.

“I’m sure it’s a big job, and people aren’t necessarily honest. I’ve heard of people abusing the system; that makes it hard for the people who need it. I don’t know how to fix it.” – Public Survey

“Their caseload is too large to do a good job.” – Public Survey

CHILD PROTECTION: How best to protect children evoked strong feelings.

“But if we’re going to take care of anyone, it’s our kids. Over the years there’s all these cases of a child being returned to a situation where he gets killed.” – Public Survey

- 20% of residents say that DSHS does not do a good job serving children and youth
- In both surveys, people who had experience with Child Protective Services were more unhappy with DSHS
- Some respondents suggest that Child Protective Services should be more aggressive; others suggest that CPS should be less aggressive.

DSHS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE:

- **DSHS Kids Come First Initiative** – DSHS Secretary Dennis Braddock’s agenda that makes the safety of children the highest priority for child protective service.
<http://www.wa.gov/dshs/geninfo/kidsfirst.html>

- **1-866-END-HARM** - A DSHS toll-free number to report suspected abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults.
<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/geninfo/endharm.html>

DISTINGUISHING TRUE NEED: Many Washington residents are concerned that some services go to the undeserving -- and that the truly needy may not be getting services.

“It seems like some people get it and don’t deserve it, and some people who need help can’t get it.” – Public Survey

- 25% of residents say that DSHS medical and special needs services are given to those who shouldn’t get them; 41% think food stamps and welfare grants are given to families who shouldn’t get them
- 25% of residents say that it is too difficult to get DSHS medical and special needs services; 17% think it is too difficult for families to get food stamps and welfare grants
- 22% of residents specifically suggest increased monitoring or changed standards for DSHS clients
- Residents mentioned some specific groups who shouldn’t get services: substance abusers, immigrants, and people who won’t work

DSHS EFFORTS: Investigate allegations of fraud.

- **Report Fraud at 1-800-562-6906** – The welfare fraud hotline to report suspected misuse of public assistance, food stamps, temporary assistance for needy families and other DSHS programs.
<http://www-app2.wa.gov/dshs/fraud/index.html>
- In 2001, DSHS investigated 19,258 public and caseworker allegations of fraud and error. Almost 45% (8,364 cases) resulted in benefit reduction, denial or termination, resulting in \$26.7 million in welfare cost avoidance during the next 23 months.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS: Both clients and residents had concerns about timeliness, excessive paperwork and coordination of services.

“More people need more help and with less bureaucracy, and immediate and timely help for people in true and dire need.” – Public Survey

“When people are in desperate need, DSHS should expedite the proceedings.” – Client Survey

- 24% of clients said it was not easy to get DSHS services
- 25% of residents say that it is too difficult to get DSHS services
- 21% of clients say they did not get services as quickly as they needed

- 19% of clients who get services from 3 or more DSHS programs say that DSHS does not make sure all their program services work well together

DSHS EFFORTS TO STREAMLINE SERVICES:

- **Online CSO** – DSHS clients can go online to apply for benefits and find information. <https://www2.wa.gov/dshs/onlinecso/>
- **No Wrong Door** – One-stop service in select locations for DSHS clients who qualify for multiple services. <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/mediareleases/2001/pr01287.shtml>

BACKGROUND

Purpose

DSHS is committed to listening to its customers and incorporating customer feedback into the strategic planning process. Both the client and the public surveys were commissioned as part of the department's continuous quality improvement initiatives. The information gathered in these surveys will assist agency leadership in charting a future course for DSHS.

The Client Survey

The Social and Economic Research Center at Washington State University telephonically interviewed 982 DSHS clients about their satisfaction with and perceptions of DSHS services. At least 100 of the clients interviewed had received services from each of the nine major DSHS programs. Clients who received services from more than one DSHS program were asked about each program. The survey was conducted from February to June 2001.

The Public Survey

The Gilmore Research Group interviewed 825 Washington State residents about their perceptions of DSHS. Telephone numbers were randomly selected in order to contact residents across the state. To insure adequate representation of households in Eastern Washington, telephone numbers were selected at a somewhat higher rate there than in Western Washington. The survey was conducted in May and June, 2001.

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