

NEWS

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First-of-its-kind County welfare call center unveiled

It might look like a call center. But the San Bernardino County Transitional Assistance Department's newly opened, first-of-its kind Customer Service Center in San Bernardino represents a revolution in government services that will link more people to the benefits they need and inject more cash into the local economy.

Modeled after a private-sector technical support or other customer service call center, TAD's Customer Service Center is staffed by 110 workers and uses the latest call-center technology and business practices to handle incoming calls from the county's continuing CalWORKs, CalFresh and Medi-Cal caseloads. This frees up the workers at "traditional" TAD offices to concentrate on the people who walk in their doors, and ensures that callers are served quickly and efficiently.

Aid recipients in San Bernardino County receive more than \$837 million in state and federal dollars each year, and spend those imported dollars at businesses within the county. However, federal studies show that only about half of those who are eligible for assistance actually apply for and receive it. Full participation could create almost \$300 million in additional annual economic activity in San Bernardino County from the CalFresh program alone. The TAD Customer Service Center helps maximize the dollars that end up in the hands of local consumers.

Until the center opened, many if not most callers were sent to an eligibility worker's voicemail because workers were busy with clients who had stopped by their offices. Now, all calls are answered by a live human being, and the vast majority of calls are answered within 40 seconds. Workers at the center have electronic access to all case files and can also communicate with clients online in live chat sessions. There is no center exactly like it anywhere else in the state.

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And something else that's amazing about TAD's Customer Service Center is that it was leased, designed, equipped, and staffed with state funds that the county would have received anyway due to the rise in aid caseloads. Instead of using the funding to open additional traditional TAD work areas – where callers would most likely be sent to voicemail – the funding was used to create and operate the call center.

The sole purpose of the center is improved customer service.