

Scope of Study

COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES

AREA OF FOCUS

The study will examine how community action agencies (CAAs) assist clients in accessing state government services. In particular, the study will evaluate the role of CAAs in supporting state agencies in expediting eligibility determinations for select social service programs. The study will also examine if there is any duplication of effort between CAAs and state agencies and assess possible cost-savings opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Community action agencies are federally designated anti-poverty agencies that were created under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Their primary mission is to enable families living in poverty to achieve greater economic security. Each state has CAAs. Currently, there are 12 CAAs statewide in Connecticut that operate under a tripartite board structure. To ensure balanced representation, at least one-third of board members must be from the low-income community, one-third are public officials, and up to one-third can be from the private sector. Connecticut's 12 CAAs are also members of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), an umbrella agency that promotes coordinated training and technical assistance, public policy advocacy, and programmatic and operational accountability.

Connecticut CAAs are funded by federal, state, and local governments as well as private sources. In CY 2009, revenues received by CAAs and CAFCA totaled about \$281 million, with 76 percent coming from the federal government and 18 percent from state sources. They served over 387,000 people, 65 percent of whom had incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty income line.¹ Collectively, CAAs employ over 3,000 people.²

Because every CAA is an independent entity that is responsive to the individual needs of its community where it operates, each provides a different mix of programs and services. A common service, though, offered by CAAs is holistic case management services, including the use of a universal intake and pre-assessment form for multiple social service programs. Community action agency involvement in determining program eligibility varies and is regulated under federal and state law. For example, final eligibility determination for almost all Department of Social Services (DSS) programs is made by DSS.

Since 2004, DSS has promoted an initiative known as the Human Service Infrastructure (HSI). Its purpose is to provide a coordinated statewide social service system that would: better use existing staffing and financial resources; serve clients more efficiently; allow identification of barriers and gaps in services; and track outcomes. A critical element of HSI is the state's partnership with community action agencies.

¹ Connecticut Association for Community Action, *Empowering People and Building Communities*, 2010 Annual Report of the Connecticut Community Action Network, 2010

² Connecticut Association for Community Action, *CAFCA's Leadership Briefing 2011-2012*. January 2011

AREAS OF ANALYSIS

- 1) Evaluate the roles, responsibilities, and service activities of the CAAs and associated state agencies for selected programs and describe possible overlaps.
- 2) Identify federal and state statutory authority as well as any state labor contract prohibitions related to use of CAAs in program eligibility determination and application assistance process.
- 3) Review all the contractual terms and conditions the state has with CAAs, including prohibitions or limitations placed on their authority, as well as report on any contract performance and other accountability measures.
- 4) Assess how the Human Services Infrastructure has been implemented and to what extent any changes in the role of CAAs would affect its goals and purposes.
- 5) Examine the available level of staff resources of CAAs and what, if any, impact existing levels have on their ability to perform any additional activities.
- 6) Identify how DSS caseloads and resources may be affected by potentially expanding the role of CAAs.
- 7) Describe technology infrastructure capabilities of both DSS and CAAs as they relate to program application and eligibility determination.
- 8) Review and compare the role of CAAs in other states.