

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES**

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March 29, 2023

TO: REGIONAL CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: REGIONAL CENTER EMPLOYEE TUITION REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

In June 2022, the State's Budget Trailer Bill for developmental services, SB 188 (Chapter 49, Statutes of 2022), added Welfare and Institutions Code section 4699.4 which requires the Department of Developmental Services (Department) to establish, and regional centers to administer, a tuition reimbursement program for regional center employees who seek a degree or certification in a health or human services-related field. The purpose of this guidance is to provide information on the implementation of the tuition reimbursement program including eligibility requirements and terms of the program.

The tuition reimbursement program is meant to enhance regional center services received by consumers by increasing subject matter expertise and career advancement options and improving employee retention rates at regional centers. Qualifying regional center employees are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 annually for up to three years and may maintain eligibility if they are hired at a different regional center from where they originally established eligibility.

**Eligibility Requirements**

- **Who Is Eligible:** Regional center employees in good standing, including newly hired employees currently enrolled in an accredited degree or certification program.
- **Eligible Academic Programs:** The program shall be from an accredited institution in a health or human services-related field or a degree or certificate that the regional center determines will support or expand their employee's current employment and career advancement options at the regional center.
- **Concurrent Regional Center Work Requirements:** At minimum, participants shall be active part-time employees and meet the regional center's employee performance standards.
- **Postgraduation Regional Center Work Requirements:** In exchange for tuition reimbursement, the employee shall be required to work at the regional center for no less than one year for each year of tuition reimbursement following completion of their degree or certification. The regional center providing the tuition

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reimbursement shall notify the Department within 30 days of a participant requesting completing this work requirement at a different regional center. The participant's new regional center is responsible for subsequent reporting to the Department.

### **Terms of the Program**

- At minimum, participants shall maintain a passing score and/or be in good academic standing in the degree or certification program for continued eligibility and receipt of reimbursement payments.
- In exchange for tuition reimbursement, participants shall be required to work at the regional center for no less than one year for each year of tuition reimbursement following completion of their degree or certification.
- Participants who do not complete the concurrent or postgraduation work requirements may incur repayment or partial repayment of the tuition reimbursed.

### **Reporting**

Regional centers will be required to submit quarterly reports on both applicants and participants to include demographics, regional center position, degree and field sought, and the length of time they have been employed after completing the degree or certification program. A link to the quarterly reporting platform will be forthcoming to regional center primary and secondary tuition reimbursement program contacts.

### **Review and Approval Process**

Each regional center shall develop a process for the review and approval of employee eligibility and the degree or certification programs in which applicants may be enrolled. The process shall identify how the eligibility requirements and terms of the program, listed above, will be verified. Within 60 days of the date of this correspondence, please submit to [Workforce@dds.ca.gov](mailto:Workforce@dds.ca.gov), the following:

- a) Copy of the regional center's process;
- b) Brief description of how the program requirements and process will be communicated to employees; and,
- c) Contact information for the primary and secondary points of contact for the program.

Tuition reimbursements for a three-year period are effective July 1, 2022. Regional centers will issue reimbursement payments to participants no less than quarterly.

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If you are a regional center employee or prospective employee and are interested in the program, please reach out to the regional center with your questions. For other questions, please email [Workforce@dds.ca.gov](mailto:Workforce@dds.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Original Signed by:*

VICKI L. SMITH, Ph.D.  
Deputy Director  
Policy and Program Development Division

cc: Regional Center Administrators  
Regional Center Directors of Consumer Services  
Regional Center Community Services Directors  
Association of Regional Center Agencies  
Nancy Bargmann, Department of Developmental Services  
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