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Caseload Management Strategies

The Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) conducted a literature review of effective strategies for managing large caseloads. The purpose of this review is to provide rehabilitation professionals with resources and information that will help them manage large caseloads. There is limited information available that is specific to VR, so this review includes strategies that have proven effective in other human service fields such as social work and health care.

Following is a summary of the effective strategies. The complete reference list follows and includes scholarly articles and general information available online. We encourage readers to examine the source articles for in-depth information. Several of the source articles and research include helpful information about caseload management generally, the benefits of organizations maintaining manageable caseload sizes for staff, and how to avoid burnout. In addition, several articles indicate that maintaining a manageable caseload size is a critical factor in staff retention and reducing the turnover rate.

Summary of Effective Strategies for Managing Large Caseloads

I. From Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga's webcast on *Effective VR Caseload Management*:

- A. Utilize time management principles that include:
 1. Create a system that works for you and adhere to it;
 2. Analyze how much time is required in each task;
 3. Budget/allow for the unexpected;
 4. Assess the uncontrollable;
 5. Delegate and minimize the involvement of routine and repetitive tasks;
 6. Consolidate similar tasks like email;
 7. Use prime time for work;
 8. Avoid procrastination and identify time wasters; and provide a healthy reward for yourself for reaching your goals and completing your tasks;
 9. Use a calendar such as Outlook;
 10. Be sure and schedule time without interruptions to catch-up; and
 11. Allow for five minutes of quiet meditation per day.

B. Reduce the possibility of burnout by:

1. Leaving the client and the case at the office;
2. Trying not to take things personally;
3. Doing your best in every situation;
4. Asking for clarification of work roles and realistic goals; seeking advice from supervisors and co-workers;
5. Avoiding drama and gossip;
6. Being positive and grateful;
7. Learning stress management techniques;
8. Learning meditation techniques;
9. Using vacation time for vacation;
10. Creating a clean and calm office environment;
11. Eating lunch away from the computer screen; and
12. Creating diversions from stressful aspects of the job that cannot be changed.

II. From *How to Manage Caseloads in Social Work*:

- A. Have fixed schedule productivity. If you work from 8-5, do not work beyond that. This forces you to prioritize work and can help avoid burnout;
- B. Schedule your day. Decide in advance what you need to get done today. Make a list and avoid distractions;
- C. Schedule 5-10 minute breaks between tasks. Get up and walk, if possible, to increase blood circulation and health;
- D. Decide what you need to do, should do, and can do. Be realistic;
- E. Turn on your email only at fixed times during the day to avoid distractions;
- F. Schedule meetings at the beginning or the end of the day if possible to reduce interruptions in work flow;
- G. Say no to new projects or work when you are struggling to keep up with your caseload;
- H. Use the two-minute rule from David Allen. If something takes less than two minutes to complete, rather than slotting it on your to-do list, just do it;
- I. Clear things in batches, like handling emails, calls, case notes, all at once rather than as they arise;
- J. Write great ideas down somewhere rather than trying to remember them later;
- K. Remove distractions like the Internet when trying to focus;
- L. Ban yourself from distracting websites like Facebook or Instagram until after work;

- M. Put your phone in a place out of your reach; and
- N. Listen to classical music, which helps concentration and focus.

III. From Casey Family Program: *Backlog Reduction: Effective Strategies for Managing the Crisis*:

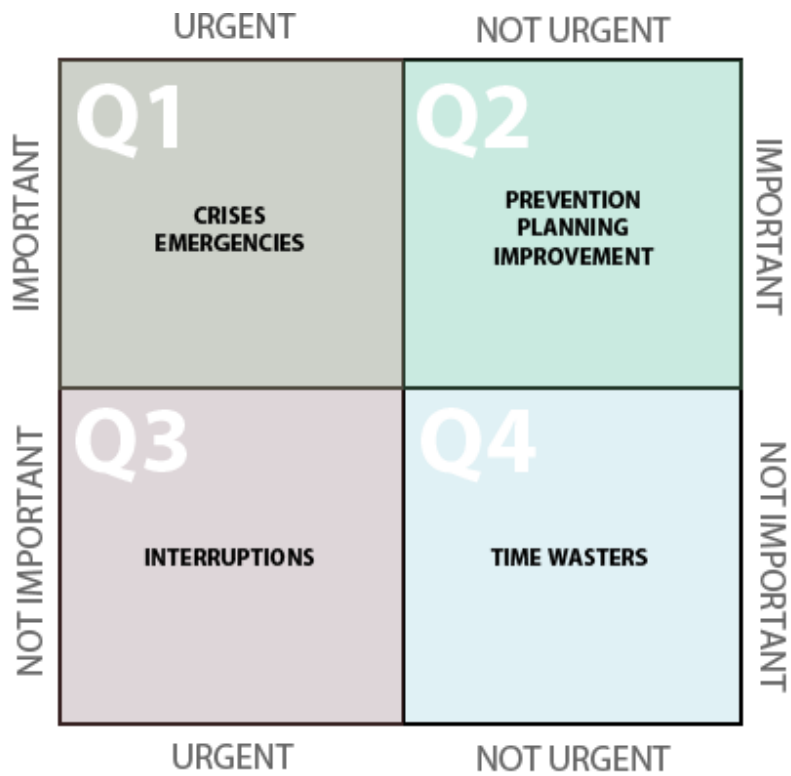
This research and strategy brief identifies steps that organizations can take to help staff reduce the backlog of high caseloads. These steps and strategies are as follows:

- A. Specific leadership strategies include:
 - 1. Clear leadership ownership and personal investment in reducing the backlog
 - 2. Messaging to create unity and clarity of message toward shared goals
 - 3. “All hands on deck” efforts to generate commitment and energy throughout every level and unit of the organization
- B. Strategies to increase workforce supply include:
 - 1. New staff positions
 - 2. Targeted staff redeployments
 - 3. Paid overtime
 - 4. Expedited hiring and on-boarding processes
 - 5. Contracting with private providers
 - 6. Use of temporary staff
- C. Strategies to develop more efficient infrastructure and streamlined operations include:
 - 1. Policy changes such as paperwork reduction
 - 2. Accountability infrastructure to hold staff and leaders accountable to commitments
 - 3. Improvements to practice such as more consistent supervision

IV. From Franklin Covey's *First Things First*:

- A. Effective time management includes the following:
 - 1. Prioritizing;
 - 2. Goal-setting;
 - 3. Structuring the work day and modifying the work environment; and
 - 4. Monitoring your behavior.

B. Develop quadrants to organize tasks and prioritize work:



List compiled by VRTAC-QM Research Specialist II Melissa Kronberger.

References

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (2016, June). [Cost savings from reasonable child welfare workloads.](#)

The article discusses how when workers have reasonable caseloads that child welfare goals would be met.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2020). [Caseload/Workload](#) (Practice Portal).

Article discusses caseload and workload issues of speech language pathologists. Includes a variety of strategies and ideas for managing caseloads.

Agricola, F.T., & Hobbs, T.R. (2004). [The successful management of caseload stress: A case study.](#) *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 31(3), 265–267.

A case study of how clinical services are switched from an individual practitioner model to a work team model. Tasks are divided among team members.

Bailey, R.J., Erikson, D.M., Goates-Jones, M., Andes, R.M., & Snell, A.N. (2020). [Busy therapists: Examining caseload as a potential factor in outcome.](#) *Psychological Services*.

As demand increased for mental health services, especially in university counseling centers, providers have observed increasing numbers of clients. The effect of the increase on therapist caseloads is explored, with a recognition that past research on therapist caseloads lacks direct and fluctuating measures of caseload that reflect practice in naturalistic settings. Results included finding a small, but significant, effect of therapist caseload on outcome, and the finding is discussed in the context of the effect sizes in the literature on therapist effects.

Bain, H., & Baguley, F. (2012). [The management of caseloads in district nursing services.](#) *Primary Health Care*, 22(4), 31–38.

This article explores the principles of teamwork and the management of caseloads in community nursing. The article explores questions of workload analysis, referral, delegation, skill mix and leadership.

Casey Family Programs. (2017). Strategy Brief - [Backlog reduction: Effective strategies for managing the crisis.](#) Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

The article discusses strategies for reducing case backlogs.

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Caseload and workload management*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

A comprehensive article on assessing caseload and workload size. The article includes specific details of agencies and organizations that conducted workload studies. The article includes strategies for managing caseloads.

Collister, B., Slauenwhite, C.A., Fraser, K.D., Swanson, S., & Fong, A. (2014). [Measuring home care caseloads](#). *Home Health Care Management & Practice*, 26(4), 239–249.

A description of the development of the Caseload Intensity Tool that allows clinicians to determine the intensity of services needed by the client and using the information to creating manageable caseloads for service providers.

Colorado Department of Human Services. (2014). *Colorado child welfare county workload study*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Human Services. (1354S).

The report contains a detailed account and the results of a child welfare county workload study conducted in Colorado.

Covey, F., Merrill, A.R. & Merrill, R.R. (1996). *First Things First*. Free Press

Davidson, K.F., & Bressler, S.I. (2010). [Piloting a points-based caseload measure for community based pediatric occupational and physiotherapists](#). *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* (1939), 77(3), 174–180.

This article tracks the development of a caseload measure as a method to standardize caseloads across pediatric settings. At the time of the article, the measure could be used within agencies or by individual therapists seeking a tool of self-reflection and individual workload measure.

DeMichele, M. (2007). [Probation and parole's growing caseloads and workload allocation: Strategies for managerial decision making](#). U.S. Department of Justice American Probation & Parole Association

"The American Probation & Parole Association (APPA) has completed this report to offer baseline data to assist policymakers and administrators in confronting workload allocation issues. The report is not the final word in resolving workload decision making problems as caseloads and court-ordered conditions continue to escalate. Rather, this report is seen as a needed first step toward better understanding practitioner views toward workload allocation."

Effective VR Caseload Management: (Part 1) Heavy Caseload Management and Quality Documentation

This [webcast](#) introduces the principles of caseload management and procedures utilized with rehabilitation clients across the continuum of care in public state vocational rehabilitation agencies, rehabilitation facilities, and in private settings. It will provide strategies for managing heavy caseloads and describe effective methods for documenting caseloads. Presenter: Christina Dillahunt-Aspillaga

[Video](#)

This [webcast](#) originally aired on December 6, 2016, from 3:00 – 3:45 p.m. (ET) on YouTube.

Presentation Materials:

- [Slides](#)
- [Text version of PowerPoint™ presentation:](#)
- [Edited Transcript](#) of the presentation (MS Word™ 150kb doc)

Engel, C., & Weinshall, K. (2020). [Manna from heaven for judges: Judges' reaction to a quasi-random reduction in caseload](#). *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 17(4), 722–751.

In this article, researchers study this question empirically: “*Is increasing judicial staff effective in improving judicial services? Does it impact the substantive outcomes of decisions? In two districts, the civil caseload per judge was substantially reduced. The reduction had a significant impact on the process and outcomes of judicial decision making. Judges working in courts with reduced caseload invested more resources in resolving each case. The effect is mostly to the advantage of plaintiffs, who were more likely to win, recover a larger fraction of their claims, and be reimbursed for litigation costs.*”

Fletcher, C. (2020). *Attitudes and perspectives of the workload model from speech language pathologists*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC. (Order No. 27829568).

The thesis explores the workloads of four SLPs and their perspective on two different caseload/workload approaches. Success and challenges for each approach are detailed.

Gershowitz, A. M., & Killinger, L. R. (2011). The state (never) rests: How excessive prosecutorial caseloads harm criminal defendants. *Northwestern University Law Review*, 105(1), 261–301.

The article provides solutions to the excessive caseload problem in the criminal justice system.

Giddings, S.M. (2015). Six steps to the win: a successful strategy for caseload management. *Corrections Today*, 77(2), 56.

A short article that provides six strategies for managing caseloads in the justice system.

Grundy, C., & Wheeler, H. (2018). [The development of a district nursing caseload review tool](#). *British Journal of Community Nursing*, 23(6), 220–226.

The overall objective of the project was to develop a tool that would standardize the process for caseload reviews across all district nursing teams, and give assurance that caseloads are effectively, efficiently, and safely managed.

Indiana Department of Child Services (2015, March). *Caseload and Workload Analysis: Final recommendations*.

This paper provides a prioritized roadmap and profile of each recommended option that Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) can consider implementing to improve its ability to meet caseload standards while improving services to children and families.

Jaffe, S. (2018). “It’s not you, it’s your caseload”: Using “cronic” to solve indigent defense underfunding. *Michigan Law Review*, 116(8), 1465–1484.

“This Note argues that courts should utilize the procedural ineffectiveness presumption that the Supreme Court made available in United States v. Crunic to find state defense counsel carrying caseloads above the ABA-recommended maximums constitutionally ineffective. Thus, defendants could not be tried until caseloads in the locality fell within the maximums. This would incentivize state and local legislatures to spend more money on indigent defense.”

Katz LA, Maag A, Fallon KA, Blenkarn K, & Smith MK. (2010). [What makes a caseload \(un\)manageable? School-based speech-language pathologists speak](#). *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*, 41(2), 139–151.

The article discusses the factors that make caseloads unmanageable by examining caseload size and finding the predictors of unmanageable caseloads for speech therapists.

Kim, J., Yi, E., Pierce, B., & Hall, J. (2019). [Effective workload management in child welfare: Understanding the relationship between caseload and workload](#). *Social Policy & Administration*, 53(7), 1095–1107.

“The data indicated that both perceptions of unmanageable workloads and self-reported overtime work were significantly higher when caseworkers had a greater number of cases than the state caseload standard for the investigations units and

worked with at least two different types of cases simultaneously (e.g., working with both investigation and ongoing service cases). Additionally, sufficient staffing numbers to meet caseload demands at the regional level significantly decreased the odds ratio of having to do overtime work. Practice implications are discussed for effective and efficient workload management in the public child welfare system.”

Kim, J.J., Brookman-Frazee, L., Gellatly, R., Stadnick, N., Barnett, M.L., & Lau, A.S. (2018). **Predictors of burnout among community therapists in the sustainment phase of a system-driven implementation of multiple evidence-based practices in children's mental health.** *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice*, 49(2), 132–141.

“The current study sought to identify correlates of therapist emotional exhaustion, a key aspect of burnout, during the sustainment phase of a system-driven implementation of multiple EBPs in children’s mental health services...Therapists’ knowledge and confidence delivering EBPs and their positive perceptions of EBPs were protective against emotional exhaustion, but these perceptions did not buffer the risks associated with heavy workload. Findings point to implementation strategies to prevent burnout and associated turnover that compromise the returns on investments in EBP implementation.”

King R, Meadows G, & Le Bas J. (2004). **Compiling a caseload index for mental health case management.** *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 38(6), 455–462.

The purpose of the study was to explore methods of determining an appropriate caseload for mental health case managers.

Kleiman, M., Schauffler, R.Y., Ostrom, B.J., & Lee, C.G. (2019). **Weighted caseload: a critical element of modern court administration.** *International Journal of the Legal Profession*, 26(1), 21–32.

“This article provides a general introduction to the basic elements and applications of the weighted caseload model in both nascent and transitional democracies, outlines the advantages and disadvantages of two alternative methods for developing case-weighting systems, and summarizes real-world applications in the US and other nations. The article concludes with a set of practical findings regarding the development and implementation of a case-weighting system.”

McDonald, A., Frazer, K., & Cowley, D.S. (2013). Caseload management: an approach to making community needs visible. *British Journal of Community Nursing*, 18(3), 140–147.

The study “...explores the process employed in the development of a population health framework and documentation for managing community nursing caseloads.... The use of the developed documentation identified a framework that describes caseloads in primary care and provides nurse managers with an evidence base to allocate resources, match skill mix to need, and estimate future workforce requirements.”

National Center for State Courts (2020, August). *Success in Criminal Caseflow Management: Lessons from the Field*. Williamsburg, V.A.

This report is one from The Effective Criminal Case Management Project. The report outlines the importance of effective case management and details strategies used in courts that are successful and effective in managing criminal case flow.

Office of the Chief Social Worker. (2014). Qualitative review of social worker caseload, casework and workload Management. *Workload and Casework review*.

The report examines child welfare services in New Zealand. No strategies for managing caseloads were found in the article.

Pierce, L. (2016, December). The case for a case management approach in advising academically underprepared students. *Academic Advising Today*, 39(4).

The article finds that implementing case management strategies in advising potentially will increase the retention and the completion of underprepared students. The downside of the article is that it does not provide specific strategy details.

State of Montana Legislative Audit Division (2004). *Caseload Management*. Helena, MT. Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The audit examined caseloads of the various health and human services divisions in the state of Montana. Improvement suggestions for how caseloads are managed is included.

Social Work Policy Institute. (2010). High caseloads: How do they impact delivery of health and human services?

Short, general article on high caseloads. No strategies for managing caseloads included.

van Berkel, R., & Knies, E. (2016). Performance management, caseloads and the frontline provision of social services. *Social Policy & Administration*, 50(1), 59–78.

“This article empirically investigates and compares these consequences, drawing on the results of a quantitative study of frontline workers in 14 local welfare agencies in the Netherlands. These workers are responsible for the delivery of welfare-to-work policies to social assistance recipients. The findings show that high caseloads do, indeed, have a detrimental effect on workers’ performance, whereas the impact of performance management is more modest, though confirming some of the findings reported in other studies on performance management. The results also show that by focusing service provision on a proportion of their caseload, workers are able to reduce the negative impact of high caseloads somewhat. Overall, the article finds that the negative impact of high caseloads is more pervasive than that of performance management. The article concludes that the recent focus in the literature on performance management and its consequences for public services should not turn scholars’ attention away from the ‘traditional’ public administration problem of high caseload sizes.”

Vasquez, A., Scrivener, S., & MDRC. (2020). [How to design and implement advising services in community colleges: Lessons from two decades of research and technical assistance.](#)

Details how to provide advising services with strategies for developing small caseloads. Not all information applicable to VR but definitely worth the read to obtain insights on counseling different populations within an agency.

Wright C, & Bankston D. (2009). [Guidelines help Texas clinicians manage caseloads.](#) *ASHA Leader*, 14(3), 28–29.

The article details how the use of templates helps speech and language pathologists manage caseloads.

Yamatani, Hide, Engel, Rafael, & Spjeldnes, Solveig. (2009). [Child welfare worker caseload: What's just right?](#) *Social Work (New York)*, 54(4), 361–368.

The study is an attempt to establish a caseload standard. No strategies for managing caseloads were included.

Web-Articles

5 Effective Tips to Effectively Manage Your Caseload

Rana Kordahi. Oct 19, 2018

How to Manage Caseloads in Social Work.

Caseload and Workload Management

Series Title: Issue Briefs Author(s): Child Welfare Information Gateway

Year Published: 2016

Long Hours, High Caseloads: An Ongoing Surge of Cases Weighs on Child Welfare Workers.

The Center for New York City Affairs at the New School Kramer, A. (2021)

Tips for effective case management