



# CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL



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## ***Statement on Information Sharing, Data Standardization and Interoperability***

The California Child Welfare Council (“Council”) acknowledges the importance of legal protections concerning confidentiality for children, families, and caregivers served by state and local agencies, the courts, and other public and private entities. The Council acknowledges these entities deal with extremely personal and sensitive information in attempting to provide an array of services and resources to meet the complex needs of children, families, and caregivers. Given this complexity and the vast number of programs and services involved, the Council also acknowledges that children, families, and caregivers are best served in a system that allows for fully informed decisions and timely access to information to meet the needs of this population.

The Council further acknowledges the importance of accessing and using standard information sharing frameworks, models, and data elements. Standardization provides a basis for interoperable systems and reusable data exchanges. This is necessary to advance an effective integrated system of care that ensures children and families assisted by the child welfare system and those who serve them are appropriately informed and acquire timely access to comprehensive information.

The Council envisions an inclusive, integrated state and local information technology strategy that leverages and supports:

- Improving care provided to children and families by holistically addressing their needs (e.g., “no wrong door”);
- Improving connections among comprehensive health services (including mental, behavioral, substance abuse, etc.), human services, and education services;
- Reducing cost of operation and maintenance for all levels of government and the private sector through sharing reusable data exchanges and information technology resources; and
- Providing greater availability of timely program data for evaluating program performance.

The Council envisions comprehensive information linkages within workplaces dedicated to routine and systemic sharing across jurisdictional boundaries while ensuring confidentiality and legal protections for children, families, and caregivers with respect to personal and sensitive information.

The Council enthusiastically affirms its continued commitment to the exchange of child welfare information between federal and state government, tribes and tribal organizations, local public entities, the courts, and authorized child-serving private entities. The Council is further committed to research and analysis of data to achieve continuous improvement across systems—further enhancing informed public policy decision making.

The Council joins the California Blue Ribbon Commission for Children in Foster Care in endorsing information technology systems that allow for appropriate data exchange and maximizes the information available regarding how the courts and the child welfare system are serving children and families and meeting the federal outcome measures specified in the Child and Family Services Reviews and the state's Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System as implemented in Assembly Bill 636.

Therefore, the Council urges collaborative and cooperative efforts by federal and state government, local public agencies, the courts, tribes and tribal organizations, and authorized child-serving private entities in undertaking and implementing information sharing initiatives and transforming the way we share information with each other. The Council also urges that these entities reinforce the central attributes of its information sharing policy—to ensure that child welfare information is shared comprehensively and routinely; to provide information responsive to the needs of each other; and to present that information in forms useful to children, families, and caregivers.

The Council supports and encourages, to the extent practicable, the use of national, nonproprietary, and interoperable standards to leverage and preserve existing state and local investments in information technology and create more flexible, adaptive systems.

Furthermore, the Council recommends moving forward aggressively to document, develop, and expand information gathering and sharing capabilities to permit each entity to participate more fully and uniformly in information sharing efforts and to draw upon existing relationships and agreements whenever possible to lend leadership and assistance to implementation. The Council encourages the leadership of all child- and family-serving systems to advance the ability to share data across those systems.

The Council recommends and urges all information technology efforts involved in the exchange of information regarding children and families served by the child welfare system to:

- Establish a common data element vocabulary;
- Promote the development, sharing, use, and reuse of information technology processes, applications, data structures, and infrastructures required to enable data exchanges;
- Use common frameworks and models, such as the Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) model, to encourage flexible applications;
- Use interoperable standards developed and maintained by Federal entities and intergovernmental partnerships, such as the National Information Exchange Model (NIEM) standard, as the basis for information exchanges; and
- Use common or uniform confidentiality/privacy agreements consistent with Federal and State laws.

Furthermore, the Council recommends the dynamic use of standardization so the goals of improving care and connections, reducing costs, and providing timely data are achieved over time as policies, practices, and technologies evolve from the changing needs of children and families and adapt to the continuous improvements in child welfare services.