

December 07, 2016

Statement on Information Sharing, Data Standardization and Interoperability

This document affirms the strong support of the California Child Welfare Council (“Council”) for enhanced data sharing across service systems to improve decision making as well as the provision, integration, and quality of services for children, families and caregivers. The Council recognizes the importance of legal safeguards for protecting the confidentiality of children, families, and caregivers served by state and local agencies, the courts, and other public and private entities. These entities deal with extremely personal and sensitive information in attempting to provide an array of services and resources to meet the complex needs clients. Notwithstanding this complexity and the vast number of programs and services involved, the Council declares 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 importance of accessing and appropriately using standard information sharing frameworks, models, and quality data elements cannot be overstated. Standardization provides a basis for interoperable systems and reusable data exchanges that advance an effective integrated system of care. It ensures children and families are assisted by a child welfare system that is properly informed, guided and striving for ongoing improvement through timely access to comprehensive information.

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

- Improving access to effective and quality care provided to children and families by holistically addressing their needs (e.g., “no wrong door”);
- Engaging youth and families in care and planning;
- Enhancing connections among comprehensive health services (including mental, behavioral, substance abuse, etc.), human services, education services, the courts, and probation;
- 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 and improving program performance.

The Council further envisions comprehensive information linkages within workplaces dedicated to routine and systemic sharing of child welfare information across jurisdictional boundaries while ensuring confidentiality and legal protections 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 quality improvement across systems— further enhancing informed public policy decision making.

The Council encourages the California Department of Social Services and the Office of Systems Integration in the development of the new Child Welfare Digital Services system as they develop an agile software platform to maximize integration between the California Department of Social Services, County Child Welfare Services, County Resource Family Home Approval, and Tribal Child Welfare. The Council further encourages, to the extent practicable, that the Child Welfare Digital Services system develop and support bi-directional data exchanges that are capable of sharing child welfare data with courts, education, health, mental health, probation and other child welfare information systems in accordance with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth & Families (ACYF) standards for a Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) to better serve clients, inform decision-making and improve outcomes.

The California Department of Social Services has implemented Child and Family Services Reviews and the state's Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System in accordance with California Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 10601.2, which specify federal outcome measures for courts and the child welfare system. The Council joins the California Blue Ribbon Commission for Children in Foster Care in endorsing information technology systems that track these outcome measures and permit appropriate data exchange and maximize the information available regarding how the courts and the child welfare system are serving children and families.

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 information is shared. The Council also urges these entities to 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 encourages the leadership of all child and family-serving systems to advance the ability to share data across those 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 recommends and urges all information technology efforts involved in the exchange of information regarding children and families served by the child welfare system to:

- Embrace Open Data by providing open access to public non-confidential child welfare data in accordance with the California Health and Human Service Agency's Open Data Playbook to improve transparency and efficiency of government services;
- Establish a common data element vocabulary, and leverage applicable standards where appropriate, such as the National Information Exchange Model (NIEM);
- Promote the development, sharing, use, and reuse of information technology processes, applications, data structures, and infrastructures required to enable data exchanges, through broader data sharing agreements that extend beyond individual systems and data elements, but and are reciprocal between entire departments for purposes set forth in the agreements;
- Use common and open frameworks and technologies to encourage the development of flexible applications;
- Use interoperable standards developed and maintained by Federal entities and intergovernmental partnerships;
- Use common or uniform confidentiality/privacy agreements consistent with Federal and State laws;
- Employ user-centered design principles and develop processes for continuous, iterative improvement in response to user feedback.

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, families and caregivers and adapt to the continuous improvements in child welfare services.