



# CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE COUNCIL



## Prevention and Early Intervention Committee

### Community Pathway Recommendations

#### Co-Chairs:

Kathryn Icenhower, Ph. D.  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
SHIELDS for Families  
Los Angeles, CA

David Swanson Hollinger  
*Deputy Director*  
Children and Family Services  
Human Services Agency  
County of Ventura, CA

California's vision for [Child, Family and Community Well-Being, centered on equity and social justice and respect for tribal sovereignty](#), requires an approach that is dependent upon the successful implementation of Comprehensive Prevention Plans (CPPs) that keep children, youth and families out of the child welfare system through supports provided by Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) and other resources. CPPs will be most impactful if they include a Community Pathway that enables parents and families to access culturally derived, appropriate, relevant, and responsive services and supports, that are located in their community, from organizations and community partners they know and trust.

However, this vision for Child, Family and Community Well-Being will only be fully realized if current practices and policies regarding mandated reporting, and responses to child abuse and neglect allegations, are dramatically reformed. This is evidenced in the large volume of reports to child protection hotlines each year that are screened out, unsubstantiated, or include allegations of general neglect only—which often cause harm and trauma as opposed to providing support—as well as the continued increase in the numbers of children in out-of-home care who are disproportionately Black and Tribal Children.

The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Committee of the State Child Welfare Council, in alignment with the recommendations of the [California Citizen Review Panel](#) and the Safe & Sound issue brief, [“A Paradigm Shift from Mandatory Reporting to Community Supporting](#), respectfully propose the following recommendations to move us towards statewide implementation of Community Pathways (as included in [California's Five-Year State Prevention Plan](#)) that are available and accessible to all families in California, and co-created with individuals, parents, and families with lived expertise.

## ◆ RECOMMENDATION 1: SHIFTING THE FOCUS

**1.1** Implement a statewide Mandated Reporting to Community Supporting Task Force in alignment with the recommendations of the California Citizen Review Panel, no later than July 2023.

- a) The Task Force shall be under the auspices of the Child Welfare Council with oversight by the PEI Committee and in partnership with CDSS in order to lead a coordinated statewide effort to review and reform the mandated reporting system and encourage use of community resources and services that mitigate risk and avoid child welfare system involvement for families.
- b) The Task Force will be Co-Chaired by two Child Welfare Council members, designated by the PEI Co-Chairs, who serve on the PEI Committee, including one member with lived expertise and one member with task force experience.
- c) Ensure the composition of the Task Force includes community members with lived expertise, representatives from Tribal Families and other communities disproportionately impacted by the child welfare system, leadership and advocates from organizations that serve and support families impacted by poverty, housing instability, substance use, domestic violence and other factors that lead to allegations of neglect and abuse, as well as stakeholders representing the child welfare and probation systems and mandated reporters (Education, Law Enforcement, First Responders, Health Professionals, Child and Family Serving Organizations).
- d) PEI Co-Chairs will identify organizations that have the resources and expertise to support the development and coordination of the Task Force, with PEI Co-Chairs oversight. Responsibilities include ensuring composition reflects recommendation 1.1(c), as well as providing for financial assistance, training, and mentoring to sustain engagement of community members and individuals with lived expertise

**1.2** Task Force goals are to provide guidance and actionable recommendations to reform the mandated reporting system statewide, including, but not limited to:

- a) Legal and legislative reforms necessary to enhance the movement from mandated reporting to community support, including setting limits on liability for mandated reporters and narrowing the legal definition of neglect.
  - i) Following on the recent passage of AB 2085, the Task Force will provide guidance to establish requirements to limit reportable General Neglect.
- b) Input and oversight of the redesign of (CDSS) mandated reporter training to ensure referrals focus on child safety, as well as use of the community pathway to divert families from the child welfare system. Ensure training includes data on disproportionality as well as implicit bias of reporters and information on the consequences of over surveillance, i.e., trauma, increased risk due to family's

disrupted trust in organizations, overburdening the system, etc., and support for reporters in decision making and the actual process of filing the report.

- c) Policy and practice reforms necessary for the transition to community support, inclusive of access to and expansion of the concrete services and supports necessary to implement and sustain a community pathway consistent with the State’s FFPS vision, including, for example, policy and practice reforms that may be necessary for Law Enforcement reports (which account for a significant percentage) to CPS after they have responded to Intimate Partner Violence calls.

**1.3** The task force shall provide quarterly updates to improve the statewide mandated reporting system at the quarterly Child Welfare Council meetings with a final report due by the end of Fiscal Year 2023-2024, in alignment with the Citizens Review Panel recommendations.

## ◆ **RECOMMENDATION 2: ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT**

Community Pathways will only be successful if they are built by and for families in the community, with an intentional focus on communities impacted by disparities and disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. Resources and supports must match the needs and assets of the community, be accessible and culturally responsive, and be available from providers that families know and trust. To that end, in order to ensure that children, families and communities are truly “better off” and on the path to well-being, there needs to be planning AND oversight specific to the Community Pathway at both the State and County level, that incorporates youth and parents with lived expertise, community residents and community partners.

**2.1** A State Community Pathway Advisory Group should be established as a subcommittee of the State FFPS Advisory Committee. The Advisory Group’s responsibilities would include identification of statewide measures of Community Pathway progress, review of statewide aggregate data for Community Pathway outcomes, policy recommendations based on results of data review, as well as identification and promotion of culturally responsive models.

**2.2** The State should encourage all Counties implementing a Community Pathway to implement and maintain a Community Pathway Advisory Committee to provide the accountability and oversight of local Community Pathway services and outcomes achieved. Counties may use an existing group in lieu of developing this Committee, however, tasks to be completed should be consistent with those outlined below and membership should be representative of those with lived expertise, community residents, local CBOs and other key partners. Specific tasks should include: 1) identification of culturally responsive and population-specific resources and services needed in local communities participating in the Community Pathway, 2) review and consultation on measurement strategies, key indicators and outcomes, and 3) assessment of opportunities and challenges in assuring equitable participation. The committee would also advise and confer with public sector partners on

lessons learned during implementation and make recommendations on equitable funding distribution to address gaps in services and/or systemic barriers.

- 2.3** The State and County Community Pathway Advisory Committees (or advisory group acting in that capacity) should report directly to the Governance Body identified in the State and County Comprehensive Prevention Plans (CPPs), respectively, be aligned with system of care integration efforts, and to the extent possible, be Co-Chaired by a community resident and/or individual with lived expertise. Further, the Advisory groups should provide regular quarterly reports to the Governance Body detailing progress made on identified tasks. On an annual basis, progress on the Community Pathway should be presented to the public, related Commissions and Councils and other interested parties to ensure awareness, coordination and alignment of FFPS efforts with key partners at the State and County levels.
- 2.4** Members of the Community Pathway Advisory groups should be provided the training and technical assistance necessary for their participation, including mentoring. Further, members should be financially compensated for their time and efforts, if outside of the normal course of employment, and reimbursed for travel and personal expenses, such as childcare.

### ◆ **RECOMMENDATION 3: CONSISTENT DEFINITIONS**

- 3.1** California should develop a statewide Community Pathway implementation framework that ensures access for all families regardless of FFPSA candidacy and/or eligibility. While each county requires flexibility unique to their concerns, core components of the framework are necessary statewide for achievement of the State’s vision, inclusive of consistent definitions and identified outcomes for the Community Pathway that are informed by individuals with lived expertise, community residents, and community partners. Therefore, we recommend that core components of the Community Pathway framework include:
  - a) No wrong door - A robust Community Pathway should consist of a wide network of community entities where families seek supports and services, such as, but not limited to family resource centers, wellness centers, schools, faith-based organizations, early childhood settings, primary health care sites, and other community partners.
  - b) Builds on and integrates existing resources - The Community Pathway is an opportunity to coordinate and streamline services and supports to families across community partners, as well as to promote integration and braiding of funding and resources to address service gaps and build provider capacity.
  - c) Role of public and private cross systems partners - A Community Pathway should leverage and integrate initiatives and complementary efforts that support children, youth, and families across systems in alignment with the tenets of AB 2083.
  - d) Equitable access and services - A successful model will intentionally promote access and supports for populations and communities who have traditionally been disproportionately overrepresented in the child welfare system, without fear of surveillance.

- e) Built on community and lived expertise - The Community Pathway will be co-created with communities and individuals with lived expertise to provide guidance about both the structure as well as the engagement and practice strategies.
- f) Supportive of protective factors - The Community Pathway will support access by all families to primary and secondary prevention strategies, services, and supports that address basic parental and child needs and build on a family's protective factors in a culturally responsive manner, as well as access for eligible families to evidenced-based practices under FFPSA Part 1.

## ◆ **RECOMMENDATION 4: FINANCING - INTEGRATION AND BLENDING OF FUNDING**

Developing a Community Pathway requires: (1) identification of available resources and funding that support a continuum of care that is equitable, (2) knowledge of and strategies for integration and blending of resources and funding, and (3) procurement and claiming methods that enable grassroots, faith-based, CBOs, and non-traditional partners to actively participate in Community Pathway service delivery. All efforts should be made to build the Community Pathway on existing resources and services and incorporate strategies to develop the infrastructure necessary for sustainability. Additionally, decisions regarding reimbursement for services delivered and funding allocations should be advised by the designated Community Pathway Advisory Committee. Further, for the Community Pathway to be effective, the State must provide clear guidance and support, as well as assist with eliminating barriers that deter resource availability for families and communities. To that end, we recommend the following:

**4.1 County Community Pathway Inventory:** Counties implementing a Community Pathway should conduct a local Community Pathway Inventory that is driven by families' needs and strengths and focused on identifying the existing resources, both formal and informal, available to support those needs; the funding source (if applicable) that finance those resources; and any gaps in needed services. This should be developed in alignment with the asset mapping conducted for the County's CPP. However, the Inventory should have a specific focus on the Community Pathway component of the County's CPP. In larger Counties, multiple inventories may need to be conducted to accommodate regional approaches to Community Pathway implementation.

**4.2 State Fiscal Inventory:** To provide support to Counties, the State should conduct a Fiscal Inventory to assist with Community Pathway development and advise decisions based on Community Pathway Inventories. The Fiscal Inventory should focus on the identification of public funding across systems that can be utilized to support primary and secondary services for families such as mental health, substance use disorder services, education, housing and maternal and child health and utilize existing fiscal inventory work that has been conducted to assist in the mapping of available financial resources that can assist in building a robust Community Pathway.

**4.3 Integration and Blending of Resources and Funding:** To maximize funding available for the Community Pathway, existing resources and funding should be analyzed to determine if

blending of resources or funding is possible, as well as identify any funding that could be utilized as a match for Title IV-E funds available through FFPSA. This analysis should be informed by the State's Fiscal Inventory, as well as the County's System of Care. Analysis should include the ability to integrate or blend resources through the identification of potential partnerships and/or the development of community partner networks to enhance the availability of services to families. Further, to the extent possible, counties should incorporate new initiatives that will enhance the Community Pathway and provide for community employment and growth, such as new CalAIM benefits for Community Health Workers, Doulas and community supports for housing.

**4.4 Procurement and Claiming Methods:** Counties should implement procurement and claiming methods that allow the Community Pathway to be equitable and inclusive in the access to and distribution of funding to ensure the participation of grassroots, faith-based, local CBO and non-traditional partners. Requirements for procurement of any new funding should be minimally restrictive and utilize methods that enhance the opportunities for equitable access. Examples include: (1) Implementation of a vendor payment system; (2) Distribution of funds to a Fiscal Entity/3<sup>rd</sup> Party Administrator such as a private foundation or current contracted agency, and (3) Use of an abbreviated Request for Information process.

Further, claiming methods that simplify the invoicing process and associated fiscal requirements and place the onus of responsibility on the County for identification of the appropriate funding source should be instituted. In addition, Counties should provide training, technical assistance, and financial support to develop infrastructure necessary to enable participation by all interested community partners.

**4.5 Sustainability:** In order to ensure sustainability, Counties should be encouraged to build the Community Pathway upon existing resources and available funding. This includes working across systems to identify funding initiatives that support the needs identified by families in the community and builds on existing work with similar goals, such as AB 2083. In addition, Counties should provide the technical assistance and financial support necessary for community partners to develop sustainable sources of funding that will enhance the Community Pathway and provide for community employment and growth. This might include assisting partners with developing infrastructure necessary to claim Medi-Cal or funding for electronic fiscal and data systems.

**4.6 Funding Decisions:** Counties should be encouraged to work with potential partners to determine all costs necessary to implement any required services for the Community Pathway. Funding Allocations should be equitable and ensure the inclusion of local grassroots, faith-based and other non-traditional partners in the Pathway. Final funding decisions regarding reimbursement for services rendered and the County's allocations should be advised by the Community Pathway Advisory Committee that is representative of those with lived expertise, community residents, local CBOs and other non-traditional partners.

**4.7 Clear Guidance and Elimination of Barriers:** The State should assist Counties with Community Pathway development by providing clear definitions and guidance on concepts

that impact financial planning, such as “Payor of Last Resort” and “imminent risk,” to ensure Counties are making informed decisions. Further, the State should eliminate systemic barriers that impede the blending of public funding streams and/or deter Community Pathway development. Additionally, the State should support Counties who implement Community Pathways consistent with the State’s vision by providing financial and other incentives to Counties that demonstrate blended funding, use of existing resources and the integration of State and local initiatives in Community Pathway plans.

## ◆ **RECOMMENDATION 5: MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OF WELL-BEING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

In order to determine if the Community Pathway is effective and generating better results for families, in addition to required State FFPS data, Community Pathway outcomes should focus on: (1) expanded access to community based supports and services, both formal and informal, (2) partnerships that are developed or enhanced amongst key child and family service organizations and community groups, (3) families getting access to what they want, and when they want it, and (4) impact of community-based service delivery (items 1-3) on child welfare involvement. To do so, we recommend that the State and Counties implementing a Community Pathway:

- 5.1** Work in collaboration with the Community Pathway Advisory Committee to develop key indicators of Community Pathway success that are informed by parents, youth and children with lived expertise and community residents. These indicators should be built on current best practices in community provider data collection, tracking and outcomes measurement, and allow for the review of data through an equity lens to monitor impact on disproportionality and disparities.
- 5.2** Incorporate the voice of parents, youth and children referred to the Community Pathway into the data collection in order to determine if services are accessible, available and meet their identified needs. To enhance families’ willingness to fully disclose their experiences without fear of retribution, data should be collected in a confidential and anonymous manner, and to the extent possible, individuals with lived expertise should be collecting any qualitative data acquired.
- 5.3** Ensure a process is established for the ongoing review of data by the Community Pathway Advisory Committee in order to assess progress on outcomes, as well as make adjustments and/or enhancements, as needed. This review should include, but not be limited to, an analysis of the impact of services on disproportionality and disparities and gaps in service delivery. The Community Pathway Advisory Committee shall provide an update on the status of Community Pathway outcomes in their quarterly report to the Governance Body, as well as make updates available to the public and other key interested parties.



## ◆ RECOMMENDATION 6: SERVICES AND PRACTICES OF THE COMMUNITY PATHWAY

Community Pathways should be inclusive of both evidence-based practices (EBPs), as well as primary and secondary services and supports that are reflective of, and tailored to, the needs and strengths of families and communities, as advised by stakeholders including those with lived expertise. Critical to developing this service array is providing support to counties and community partners to promote staff training and capacity building necessary to successfully implement selected EBPs under FFPS. Also critical will be integration and expansion of primary and secondary services and supports, as well as cultivation of community-defined best practices and identification of additional culturally responsive EBPs for future inclusion in the state FFPSA plan. To do this, we recommend:

- 6.1** The State should support the training, technical assistance and development required to enable public agencies and community partners to build the needed workforce, resources and administrative capacity to effectively deliver EBPs. This might include support in convening statewide or regional collaboratives intended to leverage training and capacity building resources.
- 6.2** A robust community pathway will also include provision of existing services and supports targeting the needs of all families, regardless of imminent risk. Particular emphasis shall be placed on supporting and building the service capacity of those grassroots community partners that have traditionally served populations disproportionately represented in the child welfare and probation systems, and are trusted by those populations for accessing the community pathway.
- 6.3** The State should use the key indicators of Community Pathway success, as developed by the Community Pathway Advisory Committee, to identify, evaluate and build evidence for community-defined evidence-based practices for future inclusion in the state's FFPSA plan, and collaborate with other efforts to promote equity based models.
- 6.4** State level training and technical assistance will continue to support public and private organizations to coordinate these services and to leverage financing and cross sector initiatives to both maximize services and provide more seamless service delivery to families.

## ◆ RECOMMENDATION 7: TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The State should provide training and technical assistance (TA) to counties specific to the development and implementation of Community Pathways and implementation of ALL the recommendations made above. Any technical assistance provided should also be available to community partners and community members involved in planning and development. Therefore, to ensure Training and TA supports the implementation of Community Pathways consistent with the State's FFPS vision, we recommend the following:

- 7.1 Accessible Training and TA Infrastructure:** Building on its robust training and technical assistance process for the FFPS program, the State shall develop a central training and technical assistance (TA) support infrastructure, accessible to public systems, community



partners, Tribal Families, and individuals with lived expertise and experience to advance the development, implementation and monitoring of Community Pathways. The centralized training and TA can build from existing training and TA providers/centers/supports, but must address support to this topic.

- 7.2 Usability:** Training and TA must recognize and address the need for the varied audiences/users—public systems, community partners, Tribal Families, and individuals with lived expertise and experience—to interact with, learn from, and develop capacity together, in order for the Community Pathway to achieve success.
- 7.3 Vendor Selection:** For the identification and selection of training and TA vendors, the State will utilize an advisory process that intentionally includes counties, community partners, and community members, leveraging the expertise of the State’s Community Pathway Advisory Committee, as incorporated in Recommendation 2. Further, vendors should be representative of the Community Pathway vision and be inclusive of Training and TA expertise across all child and family systems, not limited to child welfare.
- 7.4 Alignment of Training and TA Content with FFPS Vision:** For the identification and selection of training and TA content, the State should prioritize building on existing strategies that promote integrated systems and service approaches relevant to the needs of Community Pathways. Content should also include evidenced based practice implementation support in alignment with Recommendation 6.
- 7.5 Oversight and Accountability:** The State should utilize the State’s FFPS Community Pathway Advisory Committee, as indicated in Recommendation 2, to guide development of these strategies, as well as for annual review of the usage and impact of these training and technical assistance strategies in order to modify them as needed.