

California Child Welfare Council Data Linkage and Information Sharing Committee

The California Child Welfare Council Data Linkage and Information Sharing Committee (Committee) recognizes those charged with the care of children in foster care are faced with a fragmented system of information, both manual and electronic. Key information on a child and family that is needed to achieve safety, and timely reunification or other permanency is found in records of multiple child welfare departments, courts, schools and school districts, medical offices and health services departments, probation, and many other providers. This fragmentation leads to well-documented problems for children safety, continuity of health care and education, and lack of coordination among care providers leading to significant court or service delivery delays. For electronic data sharing, information on children is equally fragmented and leads to the same negative outcomes for children and families. Problems in linking electronic records include data systems developed without planning the interoperability to exchange information and a complex landscape of confidentiality and privacy laws and regulations.

Work on resolving the fragmented landscape and promoting the exchange of information is proceeding at the federal, state and local level. In its preliminary work, the Committee determined that improving information exchange must take place on a much broader front. In addition to courts and state/local child welfare departments, agencies representing health, education, probation, child support, and other stakeholders must participate in the work. The Committee also realized a great deal of useful work continues to be done in the area of information sharing and it is essential to organize and provide this work to all stakeholders.

In 2009, the Committee continued work on its previously established goals.

- Clarify State policy on the importance of data integration and information sharing to strengthen the relationships between the different entities maintaining data on children and families assessed by the child welfare system.
- Conduct an environmental scan across the different entities maintaining data on children and families assisted by the child welfare system in order to identify common data elements and performance measures that would be mutually beneficial if shared.
- Create an inventory of the data integration and information sharing barriers existing between the different entities maintaining data on children and families assisted by the child welfare system and develop recommendations to overcome the barriers.

Committee work was designed to involve broader stakeholders in efforts to improve information sharing in child welfare, and provide a set of tools to facilitate information sharing. Work during the year included performing an analysis by the University of California at Davis, which identified relevant, shareable data across departments and agencies, legal barriers to sharing information, including confidentiality and privacy laws, and the proposed solutions for enhancing data sharing.

Resulting from the Committee's work over the past year, the following recommendations were accepted by the Council on December 17, 2009:

Articulate a policy supporting sharing and linking data related to children in child welfare.

The Committee recommended the Child Welfare Council (CWC), representing almost all stakeholders maintaining information on children and families assisted by the child welfare

system, agree to a policy statement that supports sharing data. This statement on data sharing, drawing together stakeholders beyond courts and child welfare agencies, represented needed progress for both the data sharing resolution from the California Blue Ribbon Commission for Children in Foster Care and the federal Pew Commission recommendations on data sharing. The CWC approved the statement on data sharing at their December 17, 2009 meeting. In 2010, the Committee plans to disseminate the statement on data sharing to executive branch agencies, Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee of the Judicial Council, local Blue Ribbon Commissions and Statewide Improvement Program teams, and other stakeholders. CDSS will distribute the statement to county welfare directors through an All-County Information Notice.

Create and maintain an inventory of national, state, and local level practices on data sharing and information exchange to disseminate and promote information sharing statewide.

The Committee efforts towards providing tools to state and local entities ready to explore information sharing, resulted in the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template for information sharing, and also an archive of existing agreements and contracts. This inventory of data sharing examples and best practices will help to share data between two entities and foster dissemination and standardization of information sharing practices statewide. In 2010, CDSS plans to create a website where the MOU template and other materials will be posted so state and local agencies can access the resources, and potentially add their own. In addition, the Committee, in conjunction with the Judicial Council of California Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), plans to conduct a baseline survey of information sharing agreements at the local level, using recently established local Blue Ribbon Commissions as respondents. It is anticipated this survey will be updated on a yearly basis to track the progress of information sharing agreements statewide.

Prepare a set of policy briefs on the laws relating to information sharing in the following areas: health, mental health, education and substance abuse.

During 2009, AOC prepared a set of draft policy briefs on the laws relating to information sharing in the following areas: health, mental health, education and substance abuse. In 2010, AOC is planning to implement a series of regional focus groups with County Counsels to discuss known and/or perceived data integration and information sharing barriers between different local entities. This effort is anticipated to assist the Committee with developing recommendations to overcome the barriers existing between the different local level entities maintaining data. The Committee will use the locally identified barriers and other issues discovered during the regional focus groups to more fully develop the policy briefs and ultimately to develop additional recommendations to present to the CWC.