

State of California Program Improvement Plan for the Child Welfare Services Program

Our vision is ...

***Every child in California lives in a safe, stable, permanent home,
nurtured by healthy families and strong communities.***

Pursuant to federal requirements, California submits this Program Improvement Plan in response to findings presented in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau Report on California's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) released on January 10, 2003. That report identified a number of areas where California's Child Welfare Services system needs improvement as well as areas where California exhibits strengths. CDSS previously has expressed its concerns regarding the CFSR process and its methodology. Submission of this PIP does not waive those concerns.

We recognize that we can do a better job providing for the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable children and families. It is our firm belief that improving the life prospects for these children and families also supports improvements for all children and families. In that regard, California commits to helping these children and families achieve a future free from abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.

The following statement expresses our vision for all children in California:

Every child in California lives in a safe, stable, permanent home nurtured by healthy families and strong communities.

In our view, setting a vision for children in the child welfare system is the same as taking a comprehensive view of child and family well-being for all of California's children. Achieving this vision entails taking a broad perspective of children and families, such as a population-based, public health perspective. It involves moving to a prevention and early intervention focus. Achieving this vision also involves establishing an accountability framework for all our activities that focuses on results. It requires coordinating services and supports for families in a way that enhances family strengths. Finally, achieving this vision involves increasing significantly the amount of community level collaboration among service providers to support children and families where they live. Nothing short of this comprehensive, child and family focused effort will succeed.

This Program Improvement Plan reflects this vision. It incorporates significant actions to ensure that California moves in the direction of conformity with federal

requirements. Further, this PIP builds on actions taken over the last four years by California to achieve this vision. These include:

- Under Governor Gray Davis, total funding for the Child Welfare Services system increased by \$699 million over the last four years.
- The California Adoptions Initiative increased the annual rate of adoptions by 140 percent for foster children who could not safely return to their birth parents and led to a federal DHHS Adoption Excellence Award in 2001 and more than \$17.6 million in federal Adoption Incentive Funds.
- Between 1998 and 2002, the foster care caseload declined by about 12 percent due to the removal of fewer children from their homes and to the implementation of our successful Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program.
- Added almost 220 Public Health Nurses to work with Social Workers and families to ensure that children in the CWS system have access to needed health care.
- Introduced numerous pilot system reform projects in counties to test system reforms, these include:
 - Wraparound services,
 - Family to Family Initiative,
 - Permanency Planning Mediation,
 - Structured Applicant Family Evaluation, and
 - Family Group Decision Making.

As California moves these pilot system reform efforts toward implementation statewide, they will bring the child welfare system closer to our other child and family programs and will drive the child welfare system to continuous quality improvement in ways that California has heretofore not required of its county partners. In addition, our new Outcome and Accountability system (also called the C-CFSR) currently under development will bring a broad group of local child and family stakeholders closer to the child welfare system. We expect the result will be significant improvements in the life prospects for all of our children and families.

This Program Improvement Plan has three parts. The first part, which follows, is an introduction that (1) presents a narrative on our two most important system reform strategies for improving practice statewide – the Child Welfare System “Redesign” and the California Child and Family Review process – our Outcomes and Accountability system; (2) and other cross-cutting issues. The second part is our item-by-item narrative describing our improvement goals and action steps. The third section is an item-by-item matrix providing timelines and benchmarks for each action step identified in the detailed narrative.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD WELFARE SERVICES: TWO MAJOR STATE EFFORTS UNDERWAY

California’s system of Child Welfare Services (CWS) is in transition. With the leadership of the Governor and State Legislature, to two major system reforms, described in further detail on the following pages, provide a new framework for changing the way state and county CWS programs do business to improve the lives of California’s children and families.

Why we need a new framework

In the past, the impetus for change in Child Welfare Services practice was cyclical, reflecting historically unresolved tensions between protecting children from abuse and neglect, and keeping families together – between a safe home and a permanent home. Our system reforms transform this historical tension by expecting children’s safety and well-being to become a widely-shared priority for entire networks of families, neighborhoods and community services – not just Child Welfare Services professionals. More directly, these reforms refocus our service systems on the customer – our children and their families.

Our system reforms will produce a major shift in the Child Welfare Services environment so it is no longer bounded by “traditional abuse and neglect.” Research in other fields has documented the importance of children’s relationships with caring adults, including stability in those relationships, as a precondition for learning and other positive life outcomes. Without stability and nurturing, children may fail to thrive – without evidence of abuse or neglect. In other words, this new knowledge requires a reinterpretation of “child welfare” and of our collective obligation to children. This new knowledge, in effect, significantly broadens who we view as clients.

California’s System Reform Components

This reform effort has two main components. The following chart outlines the underlying change in thinking embodied in these reform efforts:

	Current System	The Redesign and the C-CFSR
Overall orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Measures effectiveness as a reflection of compliance with service plans ▪ Minimizes exercise of professional judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Measures effectiveness as a reflection of children’s safety, permanence and well-being ▪ Promotes collaboration and non-adversarial relationships
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Process/timeframes ▪ At risk child ▪ Child Welfare as the single agency in charge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific outcomes ▪ Family as a whole ▪ Network of agencies, service providers and families within a given community

Service Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research-based/Professional judgment
---------------	---	--

The Redesign Initiative. Under the Governor’s direction, in 2000, California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Director Rita Saenz launched an effort to develop a comprehensive plan for reform. She appointed a Child Welfare Services Stakeholders’ Group to examine the program and develop a plan for broad-based reform of California’s child welfare system – referred to as the “Redesign”. The Redesign is the first in the nation undertaken as a state initiative -- California has a long tradition of innovation -- rather than as a forced response to a court order. The Stakeholders group began its work in August 2000 and will release recommendations and an implementation plan for the Redesign in June 2003. Details regarding the action steps and timeframes will be in the final Redesign report.

The Outcomes and Accountability Initiative. The California Legislature passed and the Governor signed Assembly Bill 636 in 2001, which requires the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS), Grantland Johnson, to establish a new outcomes-based review system, the California-Children and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) that, at a minimum, includes outcomes in the federal CFSR. Using county self-assessments and system improvement plans to monitor and track county child welfare department improvement and change, the C-CFSR will enforce a system-wide, results-based planning mechanism necessary for continuous improvement, and an outcome and accountability system necessary to ensure an ability to measure change and support that improvement. The C-CFSR will begin in January 2004.

These system reforms, currently in implementation, will infuse county programs with new knowledge and evidence-based improvements in professional social work practice. For example, through the Peer Quality Case Reviews described in further detail below, counties will learn about other counties’ promising practices in the areas needing improvement for the county under review. This transfer of knowledge will occur by bringing subject matter experts from high performing counties to participate in each PQCR. Additionally, the CDSS as lead agency on every PQCR will share successful practices that are identified with periodic updates to our promising practices guide.

Together, these system change efforts will result in greatly enhanced capacity at the county level to respond to unique and individual problems and circumstances of children and their families.

Other Related Reforms. While these system reforms should improve significantly our child welfare system, it is important to note two other sets of reforms underway outside the child welfare system that will amplify our efforts within the system. These initiatives are:

- **California Children and Families First Initiative (Proposition 10).** Proposition 10, approved by voters in 1998, established the California Children and Families Program and the State Commission, and authorized the establishment of county commissions. About \$650 million per year derived from tobacco taxes fund state and local projects designed to improve well-being for children under the age of five and their families. The local programs work collaboratively with existing community networks and child and family service providers, including county and state service programs.
- **Expansions of Health Insurance Coverage for Children.** Over the last four years Governor Davis made substantial investments in California's primary programs for uninsured children – Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. These programs also included reforms intended to create a more family friendly application process. Further, significant outreach efforts increased the number of children enrolled in these systems. The effect of these reforms is to create a system of health insurance for any child with a family income under 250 percent of poverty. As part of these coverage changes and expansions, the state Department of Mental Health significantly increased its use of EPSDT funding to provide children's mental health services.

While the Proposition 10 and children's health expansion initiatives began outside the child welfare system, we expect the Redesign and C-CFSR strategies to use their planning and assessment elements to improve collaboration and coordination with these initiatives. In turn, these outside initiatives should begin, through collaborative planning, accommodating their systems to meet the needs of the child welfare system. The next two sections discuss the Redesign and C-CFSR initiatives in more detail.

THE REDESIGN

It is important to note that the Redesign Initiative is an on-going collaborative process that brings together state, local, and academic experts to identify promising practices and to use that knowledge to improve evidence-based practice in all counties. Driving the Redesign Initiative are three imperatives:

1. **Create a Web of Inclusivity at the Community Level.** The redesign envisions reaching much deeper into every community to create partnerships with other organizations and even individuals at the neighborhood level. This strategy acknowledges that child safety and well-being are functions of safe schools, safe neighborhoods, safe communities -- and safe families.

2. **Cultivate Responsiveness.** Under the current system, we “sort” people into program categories. In contrast, the Redesign philosophy is to respond to people’s actual needs and unique circumstances -- even when that means reaching into the community for the help that organizations and individuals can offer outside of the traditional child welfare system.
3. **Let Professionals do their Job.** The vision embedded in the Redesign is that sharing knowledge, funding and responsibility brings together the people in every community who are best able to protect the safety of children in general and preserve the viability of individual families in particular.

The Redesign team identified and supported piloting of several evidence-based tools for use by child welfare professionals, including:

- **Safety and Risk Assessments.** The redesign will roll out tested strategies and methodologies for safety assessment, including how to determine current safety level, future risk of safety, parental capacity to protect their children from harm and family strengths and needs. This effort includes analysis of safety assessments that have demonstrated efficacy to determine the core elements of each approach that Social Workers can use to determine children’s safety throughout the life of a case.
- **Wraparound Services.** Wraparound services support efforts to keep children in their homes rather than in residential treatment facilities. These support services provide caregivers with assistance in parenting children with mental health problems. These supports also provide treatment services to the children to help them address these problems.
- **Permanency Planning Mediation.** Permanency Planning Mediation services give parents an option to voluntarily relinquish their children and have a say in the terms of the agreement (e.g., the right to have limited visits or to send the child birthday cards) rather than have their parental rights terminated through court action without opportunities to have input into the court order. This practice has proven to expedite adoptions and promote children’s sense of their roots.
- **Structured Applicant Family Evaluation.** Structured applicant family evaluations combine the foster home licensing process and the adoption home study process. Consolidating the home study with the licensing process can promote concurrent planning and timely permanence through reunification or adoption.
- **Family-Based Case Planning.** Engaging families in case planning using models such as the Family-to-Family Program or Family Group Decision Making is a very promising evidence-based practice. These techniques provide greater opportunities for fact finding as part of the safety assessment process, promote buy-in to service plans, and uncover

resources from relatives, friends and involved agencies that may be available to support families as they implement the service plans.

In addition, the Redesign team, working with Foundation partners, already has started rolling out in additional counties some reform pilots. Finally, the CDSS hosted a meeting on May 21, 2003 with senior staff from departments across state government to begin developing the state-level collaborative process needed to support county collaboration and system change contemplated in our Redesign and C-CFSR process.

The Child Welfare Services Redesign represents a **shift in thinking** about child welfare. The item-by-item narrative and the associated matrix in parts two and three of the PIP identify specific action steps using evidence-based practices identified so far and provide specific implementation timelines and benchmarks so we can get these reforms to all counties.

We have the right people in place in our county programs to use these tools, but we need to provide appropriate training, to develop comprehensively coordinated systems, and to create flexible organizational structures to reap the full benefits of these professionals' skills and expertise.

CALIFORNIA'S CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

The second initiative is the California Child and Family Service Review (C-CFSR), an initiative to reform California's child welfare review system. The purpose for this system is to implement a comprehensive planning system in all counties that focuses on improving outcomes for children and families in, or at risk of entry to, the child welfare system; and an accountability system whose purpose is to ensure continuous child and family system improvements in each county. Taking its lead from the federal Child and Family Service Review System, CHHS charged a workgroup, representing national experts and statewide stakeholders, with creating a new outcomes and accountability system called the California Child and Family Service Review. The new results-based planning and accountability system begins operation in January 2004.

The heart of the new C-CFSR is a State and local accountability system driven by a results-based planning and outcomes measurement process with on-going case reviews in each county. This system provides mechanisms to enforce continuous quality improvements in our county-operated system. It also provides a structured way to implement and assess both the Redesign initiative and the federal Program Improvement Plan. This system has five parts.

County-Level Performance Indicators: Since the goal of this Initiative is to improve child and family outcomes within and across all counties, the workgroup

developed a set of indicators that parallel the federal CFSR safety, permanency, and well-being measures. The C-CFSR indicators go beyond the federal effort in that they breakout California's CWS caseload in greater detail than the federal indicators, they exploit California's ability to look at the caseload dynamics using longitudinal data and entry cohorts, and include additional safety, permanency and well-being indicators. Please see the attached C-CFSR Outcomes and Accountability matrix, and refer to the third column for the state's indicators. Also, please note that we will continue to measure four of the six process measures (such as social worker visits with parents, children and others) from the recently eliminated Division 31 reviews. We highlight these process measures in bold and italics in the attached C-CFSR matrix. Finally, we expect to add additional well-being indicators as we develop additional data sources. We will make these indicators available to counties quarterly and publish them on our website.

County Self-Assessment: Counties will conduct a comprehensive self-assessment every three years, including a report and analysis of how the county performed on each of the C-CFSR outcomes and indicators. The purpose of the self-assessment is to focus the county on areas that need improvement and to involve the entire child and family service community (including local Proposition 10 commissions, schools, developmental services, and children's health services) in developing an assessment of where strengths and needs exist. By design the C-CFSR models the federal emphasis on safety, permanency and well being. It is important to note, however, that the C-CFSR goes beyond the federal CFSR outcomes and indicators, to provide a more thorough understanding of the system and the needs of California's children. The county self-assessment also will include information from the case review process discussed below.

County Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR): The purpose of the PQCR is to learn, through intensive examination of County child welfare practice, how to improve child welfare services practice in California. The case reviews will provide an important layer of qualitative information. Specifically, the case reviews will be another mechanism for understanding the key to the child welfare system: social worker practice. While the quantitative data (as illustrated in the attached C-CFSR Outcomes and Accountability matrix) provides integral, population-based information, the case reviews will provide a rich and deep understanding of actual practices in the field. In addition, the case reviews go beyond the County Self-Assessment by bringing in outside expertise, including peers from other counties, to help shed light on the strengths and areas needing improvement within that county's child welfare services delivery system and social work practice.

All Counties – not simply those with the most need for improvement – will participate in the issue specific case reviews. With the exception of the first planning cycle, the reviews, along with the self-assessment, will inform the

development and revision of county System Improvement Plans (SIP). Counties will benefit from the additional information provided by the case reviews. Moreover, the State has much to learn from high performing counties. The CDSS currently has guidelines for the PQCRs under development. These guidelines may include core elements and will allow counties to focus on targeted areas for improvement.

System Improvement Plan: Much like the federal Program Improvement Plan (PIP), the county SIP is the operational agreement between the county and the state outlining county strategies and actions to improve that county's system of care. Counties must submit their SIP to the CDSS for approval after completion of their County Self-Assessment and their Peer Quality Case Reviews (there is a slight variation in this process during the first planning cycle; specifically, most counties will prepare their first SIP without first having a PQCR so we can avoid delay in plan implementation). The County will provide the CDSS with an annual update to the County SIP. These updates will show both progress made during the year and changes needed based on additional information. The SIP, however, is more inclusive and community-focused than the federal PIP; by for example, including a strong prevention component that addresses broader child and family well-being issues than the federal review process (e.g., including programs and projects funded by nonfederal funds). The SIP will include progress toward meeting agreed upon improvement goals using the C-CSFR outcomes and indicators. For those indicators for which a county's performance is below the statewide standard, the SIP must include milestones, timeframes, and proposed improvement goals the county must achieve.

State Support for Improvement: Counties demonstrating a need for improvement in overall performance and/or compliance with the outcome measures specified in the C-CFSR will receive focused technical assistance and training. If a county demonstrates a lack of good faith effort to participate actively in this process or any portion thereof, and/or consistently fails to follow State regulations or make the improvements outlined in the county SIP, the CDSS, in accordance with current law will ensure county compliance.

Beginning the Reform Effort

In order to support counties in making improvements, on April 30, 2003, the CDSS sent a Request for Application (RFA) to county welfare directors announcing a planning grant application process to begin aligning Child Welfare Redesign strategies with the PIP and the C-CFSR (see PIP Matrix Item 2A). Federal and state funding available for this RFA is \$2.5 million. The CDSS sees these county plans as one step in getting the Redesign, C-CFSR, and PIP action steps implemented.

Planning for C-CFSR implementation currently is underway. State statute mandates implementation of the system beginning in January 2004.

Consequently, county self-assessments and development of system improvement plans begins in January 2004. Further, implementation of the PQCRs begins at that time. Specific timing for the PQCR and the choice of counties receiving case reviews in the first year currently is in development. Our quarterly reporting for the PIP will include updates on progress of the C-CFSR initiative beginning in January 2004. The Item 36 in the Matrix (Part 3 of the PIP) outlines the major implementation tasks for the C-CFSR from January 2004 through June 2005.

The Redesign and the New Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System will Drive California's Effort to Meet the Federal Goals and Requirements of the PIP

The Child and Family Services Review conducted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, is part of the foundation underlying the creation of our new framework and the performance measurements that inform us about our progress. Taken together, the changes brought about by the Redesign and the new C-CFSR will become infused in California's Child Welfare System and other federal, state and local child and family programs. Child Welfare practice methodologies implemented will rely on evidence of what works to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

Specifically, these reforms will:

- Build on the federal reviews, and assist the state's efforts in meeting the goals of the federal PIP.
- Hold the state and counties accountable for performance through uniform standards and improvement goals, required county plans approved by County Board of Supervisors, and regularly published quarterly progress reports.
- Support the increased effectiveness of social workers that interact with and provide services for children and families.
- Help drive program and county collaboration to a more community-based, family-focused service system.
- Move the focus to program designs that prepare all children for life – the real message in the vision statement.
- Measure, track, and monitor counties on a quarterly basis, looking at outcomes that deal directly with well-documented issues such as keeping siblings in foster care together and ensuring appropriate placements for foster children.

- Provide the state and counties with better program information and an opportunity to assess critically the system's strengths, and, more importantly, areas for improvement.
- Share promising practices among counties, and encourage coordination with all relevant State and local agencies.

Implementation of California's System Reforms and Their Relationship to the PIP

As discussed in the previous sections, California's reform initiatives will make significant changes in our Child Welfare Services and other child and family programs over time; and will guide the state in reaching its vision for the child welfare system. It is our expectation that tracking outcomes, bringing local and State partners to the table, enforcing continued improvement using local collaborative planning and other processes, and focusing our attention in counties with the greatest need for improvement, will improve the future for all children including those in the child welfare system.

Specific reforms already identified during design and implementation of these initiatives will influence our ability to achieve our PIP goals across the board. We know we cannot implement each reform in all counties simultaneously, and some reforms require many years to implement fully. Nonetheless, we plan significant investments in the reforms that address multiple PIP goals. We identify these reforms in the matrix, show the portions that we will implement during the two years of the PIP, and show where cross-references to other goals occur.

In addition, we plan to implement our reforms using the following safety, permanency, and well-being priorities. Federal regulation requires that safety related items found in need of improvement during the CFSR must receive the highest priority in States' Program Improvement Plans. Accordingly, the first priority for California's PIP is improving on the safety outcomes. Because of the overlap among many of the permanency outcomes, the second priority for California's PIP will be improvement in permanency. We believe that the reforms we implement to respond to the safety and permanency imperatives, also will improve significantly the well-being outcomes.

- **Child Safety Outcomes:** California, over the last two decades, experienced high numbers of child abuse reports that have grown increasingly complex and have challenged our capacity to respond effectively. The complexity of issues facing child welfare families reaches beyond the child welfare system's ability to handle alone and requires participation by other partners who have responsibility in these areas; thus, our emphasis on system reform and collaborative action.

- **Permanency Outcomes:** The application of non-adversarial approaches to engage the vast majority of families whose children are in out-of-home care is the underlying philosophy for our approach. This includes placing an emphasis on reunification of families through a variety of steps. Where alternative permanency is the case plan goal, the emphasis is on critical practices needed to support successful legal and emotional permanency.
- **Child Well-being Outcomes:** Our goal is to develop within all communities, specific services needed by most parents and children. Services and supports to meet the needs of the family will begin at initial identification of a family at the child abuse reporting “hotline.”

When fully implemented, the Redesign calls for case plans to be based on comprehensive family needs assessments that identify underlying issues and will include service strategies to address physical, behavioral and developmental health conditions of the child and family. We will adopt promising practices that engage parents, children, youth and foster families in developing case plans as other efforts to improve well-being outcomes, including improving the quality and frequency of social worker visits with parents.

In addition, our goal is that all children in out of home care will receive the array of health, educational, developmental, cultural, recreational, and other needed services and supports from Child Welfare Services, foster parents and the community. To ensure a successful transition to adulthood, our goal is that foster youth exiting from the system will have at least one caring adult that they can turn to for supports and guidance regarding education, employment, housing, medical care and relationships. In essence, needed services and supports will provide the foundation for the well being of children and families.

Assessing the PIP

California’s primary process for evaluating progress in achieving the PIP goals is the C-CFSR process. Throughout the “Matrix” we indicated that the new C-CFSR system plays an important role in ensuring that the reforms we implement work for our children and families. This new system has several features that make this possible. The system requires broad self-assessments and comprehensive and collaborative improvement plans for each county. Specific improvement goals embodied in the county plans will depend on each county’s indicator reports, PQCR reviews, and self-assessed needs. We will measure performance quarterly and make those indicator reports public. Counties that are not achieving the targeted level of improvement will receive progressively intense oversight by the state. Finally, since these reviews and assessments are ongoing, and parallel the PIP, we expect them to provide useful information about implementation of action steps in the PIP, too.

In addition, we will monitor the PIP performance indicators and monitor quarterly progress reports from each county on their progress in completing tasks and action steps. We expect that counties will identify most if not all of the issues identified in the PIP and will develop appropriate action plans, based on their analysis of local performance. As we assess State progress on the PIP, we will use the progress reports from each county for a specific outcome and build a list of counties that are contributing to overall state improvement. This will allow the CDSS to focus technical assistance on the highest priority counties. We will summarize these reports into a state report and transmit that report to Region IX quarterly.

As you know, California currently faces a severe State budget shortfall. If sufficient funding or staffing resources are not available to implement the requirements of this PIP, and/or we are unable to meet the specified dates for items that require federal or legislative approval (such as automation or legislative changes) thereby requiring that we adjust the action steps, we will notify you through the quarterly reporting process.

OTHER CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Viewing the Redesign as a Means to Lower Caseloads

The CWS Stakeholders Workgroup on Workforce Preparation and Support reports that California's child welfare agencies can neither consistently meet the accepted standards established by CWLA or a recent Workload Study commissioned by CDSS. Social Workers report that high caseloads make it very difficult to check family compliance and maintain relationships with workers in partner agencies. Shifts in worker's duties and conflicts over demands on workers' time, challenge the workforce's ability to achieve successful case outcomes. A lack of administrative support services such as paralegal aides, case aides, clerical staff and volunteers also compounds the workload issue.

Significant evidence exists to suggest that manageable caseloads are an important element in improving caseworker practice and in creating a beneficial service environment for the children and families served by child welfare. Studies show that reasonable caseloads are associated with better outcomes. Lower caseloads and a focus on child and family engagement, ensures workers are more available for relationship building.

Several elements of the Redesign create opportunities to reduce caseload and workload, including:

- Restructuring the baseline for the CWS funding allocation so that it is, in part, driven by county plans developed in conjunction with local partnerships;
- Allowing for unspent funds/savings to be carried over from year to year if they are reinvested in the Redesign;

- Applying flexible funding strategies, including exploring the feasibility of increasing flexibility in Federal IV-E funding;
- Leveraging community partnerships to divert low-risk cases through the shift to a Differential Response intake system (see Glossary); and
- Working in partnership with the philanthropic foundations to build community capacity to serve children and families throughout the continuum of CWS, including aftercare.

In addition, CDSS will assess the workload effect of recent and proposed changes to the Child Welfare Services program stemming from this PIP as well as from the CWS Redesign and the new C-CFSR process. Based on the findings, CDSS will work with the counties, the Legislature, and other stakeholders to address workload issues.

PIP Survey Methodology

For the PIP improvement goals where we do not have relevant information in our automated CWS system (Items 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, and 23) the CDSS will provide quantitative measures of improvement by use of a survey methodology. The survey will be conducted using methods that will provide statistically significant statewide quantifiable information to measure changes in these Items.

Methodology. The basic strategy is to use a telephone survey to collect the necessary data. The survey will be administered in three waves: an initial baseline survey followed by surveys at Year One and at the end of the PIP period, Year Two. Findings from Year Two will be reported in the final PIP report, showing percentage point changes in the improvement goals indicated above.

The sampling frame includes all open cases in the CWS/CMS system on the target day for each wave (i.e., one month before the start of each wave). The respondents will be birth parents (for ER, FM, and in-home FR cases) and foster parents/caregivers (for PP and out-of-home FR cases). We plan to interview about 2,200 individuals with cases open for at least three months for each wave, including 1,100 from our in-home cases and 1,100 out-of-home cases. The out-of-home cases will include probation-supervised children. This is based on using $p < 0.05$ and confidence interval of plus or minus 3%.

Our interviews will be conducted by telephone using an automated survey instrument so data will stream directly into a database for analysis. This also allows the survey interviewer to use an automated skipping approach so one survey instrument can gather information for all the relevant improvement goals without needing to ask respondents irrelevant questions. This approach also has the advantage of allowing interviews in languages other than English.

Constructing the Goal Measures. The survey will include yes/no questions, pick lists and scales from which the CDSS will construct indices and calculate performance levels for the PIP items shown above. Please see the PIP Matrix for the specific calculation method to be used for each item.

Reporting the Survey Results. The CDSS will review the baseline, Year One and Year Two results to assess the percentage change in each of the PIP items measured. These will be reported timely to Region IX accompanied by (1) explanations of the methods used for data collection and calculation of the measures and (2) interpretation of the results to indicate whether the CDSS met the improvement goals.

The final results will be included in the Final Report of the PIP at the end of Year Two. Findings for the Baseline and Year One waves will be reported in the same format (methods plus interpretation of change measures) for review by Region IX, CDSS, and county program representatives.

Los Angeles County

The Child and Family Services Review process requires that each state's largest metropolitan jurisdiction be included in all reviews; Los Angeles County is the largest metropolitan area in California, with approximately forty percent of the State's caseload. Therefore, we have incorporated specific action steps in this plan and in the matrix for Los Angeles County.

Some of the Los Angeles County strategies currently underway include:

- Resolve barriers to timely adoptions. The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services recently developed and started implementation of a comprehensive adoption initiative, which incorporates as appropriate, recommendations from a Los Angeles County Auditor-Controller adoption audit.
- Implementing the Family to Family program and concurrent planning countywide. These efforts will decrease length of time to permanency through increasing the rates of reunification, adoptions and guardianship.
- Full implementation of a standardized safety assessment and risk assessment in the form of Structured Decision Making (SDM), on all referrals. Currently, the county is in the process of implementing SDM at all decision points in the life of a case. The CDSS is working with Los Angeles County to fully implement SDM with technical assistance provided from both the SDM contractor as well as CDSS staff. Additionally, in cooperation with the local Departments of Health Services and Mental Health, the county is developing a more comprehensive needs assessment process for all children entering the system.

- Developing a new Research and Evaluation System that will track the C-CFSR outcome data down to the eight individual Service Planning Areas (SPA) and to the individual DCFS offices within each SPA. This will improve State and county oversight and will provide for better measurement of the impact of program improvements.
- The county currently is in the process of assessing and re-engineering all placement policies, procedures and practices with a focus on stability and reducing incidents of maltreatment in out-of-home care.

Development of Improvement Goals

Where national data standards exist, we reviewed the statistically significant improvement data based on the 2000 runs. Then we reviewed our 2001 measures and discussed whether we could make additional improvements. Our goals for those items reflect our conclusions about what we thought we reasonably could achieve. Where national standards do not exist, we examined the status of our program reforms and where we thought we would be in two years. Based on those discussions, we made decisions on improvement goals. All considerations of improvement took into consideration LA County and both its current and its expected performance during the life of the PIP. The individual Items reflect these decisions.

Data Improvement Efforts

An important factor in program improvement is the need for accurate and reliable data. The Child and Family Services Review generated much interest in the importance of data collection and analysis and the application to program and practice. Data quality has already begun to improve, but there are still areas that need more work. We are improving data quality in a number of ways, including:

- In December 2002, we modified the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to capture data on the relationship between the child and alleged perpetrator for cases of abuse in out-of-home care.
- Technical changes to the CWS/CMS system, in January 2003, improved the quality of data reported to National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).
- Technical changes to the CWS/CMS, planned for July 2003, will improve the quality of data reported to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Report System (AFCARS).
- By July 2003, we will release an All County Information Notice (ACIN) that addresses data quality issues and emphasizes the need to enter data accurately and consistently.

- Formed a workgroup, as part of our C-CFSR implementation, that identified indicators to measure child well being using quantifiable statewide data available through CWS/CMS.

Data quality issues can arise from many sources. These sources range from missing data due to lack of consistent data entry practices to the vendor's data architecture. Ongoing discussions between county staff and the vendor are necessary to identify and understand where errors occur and how to eliminate them. For some error elimination efforts, measuring improvement is straightforward (e.g., we expect to see a reduction in the number of critical fields with missing data). In addition, the CWS/CMS vendor makes visits to counties to perform analyses of the county database and provides technical assistance designed to improve data quality. Finally, for other problems, the move toward outcomes and accountability in itself will encourage staff to enter data correctly (e.g., we do not get "credit" for an adoption until the fact that it occurred is entered into the system). Over time, the difference between what the system reflects and what the case record reflects will diminish.

Revised Data for Incidence of Child Abuse/Neglect in Foster Care

Because California's reporting on child abuse/neglect in foster care was incomplete at the time we completed our data profile, the State submitted data that had limitations in that only 40 percent of the out-of-home care population was included. After looking at various options, the Federal data expert recommended the use of our data on this subpopulation, and the Federal Health and Human Services Regional Office concurred.

In reviewing our computations for the national standard on abuse in foster care, we discovered errors in both the numerator and the denominator. The numerator (number of children abused in foster homes) used data for the entire calendar year, instead of the first nine months of the calendar year. The denominator (number of children in foster homes at any time during the first nine months of the calendar year) inadvertently excluded some children who were still in care on the last day of the nine-month period. **The approved temporary methodology remains unchanged.** Our revised performance for 2000 calculated only on the sub-population of children in foster family or in foster family agency homes, resulted in a measure of 0.67 percent instead of 1.06 percent as reported in our data profile.

Reporting

The Department will provide quarterly reports to the Federal Region IX office on measures of improvement and completion of action steps by no later than 30 days after the end of the report quarter. Due to certain limitations of federal data set updates, we will report performance measures based on those data every six months. Under the new C-CFSR, the Department will publish quarterly information on county performance and improvements within 30 days after the end of the quarter. We will make the C-CFSR data available to Region IX upon

completion of the updates but no later than 30 days following the end of the quarter. The State will calculate the AFCARS or NCANDS data for the indicator for reporting in the quarterly reports.

FFY 2001 State Data Profile. In the preparation of this Program Improvement Plan, the CDSS included benchmarks and due dates in the Program Improvement Matrix section of the report. The base year for all improvement goals is AFCARS/NCANDS reports for 2000. In the development of quantifiable improvement targets, the CDSS considered data from 2001, and if data showed improvements over the base year, we adjusted our targets to reflect that improvement. Additionally, the CDSS established annual targets to track interim progress.

Quarterly Improvement Goals. The CDSS determined that any interim measurement under a year would be irrelevant, given that action steps begin at different times and will take several quarters to show up in the data. Further, it is unlikely that improvements will occur in ways that allow for quarterly projections. In some instances, data will not be available quarterly so performance against benchmarks would not be possible. We will monitor and report on all areas quarterly in order to understand effects of our system reforms as soon as possible.

Technical Assistance Needs

We wish to request technical assistance from National Resource Centers (NRC). We identified the following Centers as potential sources for Technical Assistance that could help us reach targeted improvement levels:

- National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues – assist the State and the Judicial Council on issues specifically relating to terminating parental rights, data collection, statutory changes, if any, needed to implement differential response.
- National Child Welfare Resource Center on Foster Care and Permanency Planning – provide technical assistance on effective practices to implement concurrent planning.
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement – help the State evaluate its management practices and identify effective strategies for improvement.
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice – help assess our current services and develop a plan to expand accessibility and improve the quality and types of services provided to children and families receiving Child Welfare Services.

- National Resource Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare – provide expert consultation on how to effect change in parents and youth who have substance abuse problems in a timely way so that we meet timeframes for permanency.
- National Resource Center on Child Maltreatment – continue to assist us with the Child Welfare Redesign by providing guidance to its implementation.
- National Resource Center on Youth Development – provide expert consultation on Items 7,10,14,18 and 36.
- National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption -- assist the State in strengthening its recruitment efforts to reflect racial and ethnic makeup of children in foster care, including African American and Native American families.

Region IX has identified the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning to work with us on the issue of disproportionality of children of color, particularly African American and Native American children, as described in Systemic Factor 7, Item 37. In addition to the assistance from the National Resource Center, the state also will apply information learned through U.C. Berkeley and California State University at Sacramento to address the over-representation issue.