

Modernizing Child and Family Services Information Systems

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Governments at all levels possess **comprehensive information systems** on citizen services that often exist in silos. Significant issues and inefficiencies arise from fractured information systems, such as:

- Inability to address known imminent risks quickly, such as when a family of an abused child flees to another county or state
- No trigger for locales that an adopted or foster child may have experienced an informal custody transfer
- Difficulty tracking involvement or services across multiple systems (e.g., identifying dual-status youth involved in child welfare and juvenile justice)
- Limited information available for local decision-making, such as cost-analyses or how programs in one setting (e.g., education) may achieve goals in another setting (e.g., criminal justice)
- Inefficient process for obtaining records among children involved in child welfare (e.g., school district)
- Incomplete information about risks or circumstances that involve multiple systems (e.g., human trafficking)

Current Efforts at Federal, State, & Local Levels

- [ACF](#) leads federal initiatives to promote compliance with the standards of [Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems \(CCWIS\)](#), which seeks to integrate data and share information to improve child welfare coordination, including the appropriate sharing of the [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System \(AFCARS\)](#) and the [National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System \(NCANDS\)](#). States can design or procure their own CCWIS system but it must meet certain requirements; these efforts are ongoing and with varied results.
- **Allegheny County, PA** leads with 20 years of data integration across human service providers with sources both internal and external to the County. This mature system allows social workers to coordinate care through **integrated dashboards** via their [Client View](#) tool. The analytics also answer local decision-makers' questions (e.g., how many children in a school district are involved in child welfare).
- **State of Wisconsin** leverages data through university-agency partnerships to answer questions for state departments. The state department also links information across agencies to help workers find information about system-involved children (e.g., parental criminal justice status).
- **Rhode Island Health and Human Services (HHS) integration efforts led to robust findings about the adults connected to children in the system**

KEY RESOURCES

- [ACF's Interoperability Action Plan](#)
- [HHS/ACF Interoperability Toolkit](#)
- [CCWIS Final Rule Overview](#)
- [Reimagining Data at ACF](#)
- [Child Trends Notice on Federal Data Changes](#)

Barriers and Potential Solutions:

platforms must be useful to the end-user and draw on real-time information.

- **Legal ambiguity** around federal and state-level privacy and data-sharing regulations, like HIPAA, FERPA, CAPTA creates misunderstanding and hinders local agency collaboration.
- **Data Use Agreements** (or Memoranda of Understanding) address privacy concerns and require local leadership and interoperability commitment. Information memorandums distributed by federal offices (i.e. Children's Bureau) can support leadership understanding and improve buy-in.
- **Lack of common child identifiers** limits the ability to connect information between systems (i.e. interoperability). A uniform identifier should be assigned by agency personnel (e.g., chief data officer).
- **Usability by front-line staff** since data projects are often managed by a technical team instead of one with substantive child welfare knowledge, and thus is not reflective of front-line experience. Project teams should involve both end-users AND technological developers.
- **CCWIS compliance ambiguity** rewards states for progress but there is no deadline for complete compliance, and efforts are often modular and make either modest or haphazard progress. CCWIS could bring together leadership and technical staff from various agencies to create a thoughtful design for future RFPs.



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