Modernizing Child and Family Services Information Systems

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 info 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**

Barriers & 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 modest or haphazard progress. CCWIS could bring together leadership & technical staff from various agencies to create a thoughtful design for future RFPs.

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](#)

Research-to-Policy Collaboration