

Questions & Answers: Federal Child and Family Service Review

The Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) mark the federal government's first attempt to provide an outcome-oriented approach to its oversight of State Child Welfare Services programs. This initiative complements efforts by the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders' Group and by counties already underway in California to improve service delivery and measure outcomes.

The CFSR presents an exciting opportunity for California to partner with the federal government to institutionalize a system that focuses on results, not processes. While the federal review methodology presents some challenges, it nonetheless provides states and counties with additional data to enhance our ongoing quality improvement efforts. Just as importantly, the CFSR will give the federal government critical feedback with which to more thoroughly evaluate its policies, procedures and funding strategies with regards to state and local efforts at program improvement.

“What is the federal child and family services review?”

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is a federal mandate to review state child welfare service programs in order to ensure substantial conformity with the state plan requirements contained in Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is conducting the reviews in all states. The review examines service delivery and outcomes for children and families served by the child protective services, foster care, adoption, family preservation, family support and independent living programs. The intent is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of state performance with regard to outcomes rather than process, and to stimulate nationwide improvement.

The CFSR is outcome-focused, examining seven outcomes of services provided to children and families and seven systemic factors that have an impact on the state's ability to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. The CFSR emphasizes accountability and relies on a variety of sources in analyzing a state's performance, including a statewide self-assessment, case record reviews, statewide

aggregate data, and interviews with clients and state and community representatives.

In the review the state's quantitative and qualitative data is examined and a finding of conformance or non-conformance is made. Fiscal penalties are established for any of the 14 areas (seven systemic factors and seven outcomes) in which the state is found in non-conformance. The state must develop a Program Improvement Plan when a finding of non-conformance is made for any single element. A state will have the opportunity to achieve program improvement prior to any fiscal sanctions being applied.

“How is California conducting the review?”

The CFSR is being conducted in California for the first time. It is comprised of two parts: a statewide self-assessment and an onsite case review in three counties.

The Statewide Assessment, a series of narrative-style questions and answers, is a self-examination of the effectiveness of California's child welfare services programs. The State, in collaboration with its partners, assesses the effectiveness of the State's performance in seven systemic factors that evaluate counties' capacity to deliver services to children and families and seven outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and child and family well being.



The Statewide Assessment also incorporates the State's narrative analysis of data profiles for three years, including statewide aggregate data indicators that are used to determine whether the state is in substantial conformity with the National Standards.

It was necessary for California to dedicate 18 months of work involving approximately 100 people on various committees to complete the Statewide Assessment. California's Statewide Assessment task force involved representatives from the California Department of Social Services; the County Welfare Directors

Association and individual counties; the Chief Probation Officers of California; the California Health and Human Services Agency; the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children and the Courts; and the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley. This labor-intensive process also involved focus groups, written surveys and structured in-person and phone interviews. The interviews were conducted with key stakeholder groups, such as birth parents, county social workers, juvenile court judges, tribal members and service providers. California's statewide assess-

ment was submitted to DHHS on July 8, 2002.

California's onsite portion of the CFSR will be conducted during the week of September 23, 2002, in Los Angeles, San Mateo and Stanislaus Counties. The onsite review is designed to amplify the information reported by California's Statewide Assessment and to gather qualitative case-specific information. During the onsite case review, case files are read and case participants, as well as local and state-level stakeholders, are interviewed for their qualitative input. A team of federal and state reviewers will read a total of 50 cases. The state reviewers will include state and county staff and other external stakeholders.

“How will California score on this review?”

The bar for scoring the states on the various elements of the CFSR has been set deliberately high by the federal government in order to encourage program improvements. They purposely set standards that most of the states could not meet so that every state would need to make improvements in some aspects of their programs. Like all other states in the country, California will be challenged to meet some measures and do well on others.

Actually, California has achieved an impressive array of accomplishments in the field of child welfare services that the National Standards fail to reflect. The

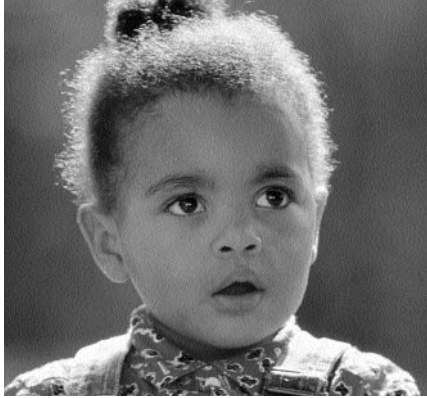


California Adoptions Initiative won the federal DHHS 2001 Adoption Excellence Award by achieving a 140% increase in the annual rate of adoption for foster children who could not safely return to their birth parents. To date, the State has captured over \$17.6 million in federal Adoption Incentive Funds. Furthermore, implementation of the successful Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program has allowed thousands of children to exit foster care to the home of relatives.

Major system enhancements have been implemented through best practice innovations such as wraparound, the Family to Family Initiative, Permanency Planning Mediation, the Structured Applicant Family Evaluation (SAFE) and family group decision-making, to highlight just a few. As a result, children today are better supported in their birth families or extended families. Fewer children are in foster care, and those who do come into care are exited to permanency in higher numbers. Yet, there is still more to be done.

“What will California do to improve its performance?”

For any areas where California is found to be in non-conformity, the state will need to submit a Program Improvement Plan, or PIP, that outlines specific steps the state will take to come into substantial compliance with federal standards. California will draw upon the framework for improvement outlined in the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders’ Group in addition to forming new workgroups to address specific issues that arise in the reviews. In future reviews California will be able to better gauge its performance against the federal standards by implementing recently passed state legislation called the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act of 2001 (Assembly Bill 636) which mandates changes in how the state monitors county performance to parallel the federal Child and Family Services Review process.



“What are the penalties for non-conformance?”

California may be assessed a fine of up to approximately \$16M for failing to substantially comply with federal standards. However, all fines will be suspended while we develop and implement a PIP. Upon successful completion of a PIP that demonstrates significant program improvement, all fines will be forgiven.