Child and Family Services Review Statewide Data Indicators: Information for Child Welfare Leaders and Program Managers

Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) statewide data indicators provide performance information on states' child safety and permanency outcomes. This brief describes the statewide data indicators, explains their use in program improvement efforts, and highlights tools that help states calculate their performance on the indicators. A better understanding of these indicators can help child welfare administrators and program managers communicate about and use these data for strategic planning and continuous quality improvement (CQI).

Overview of Statewide Data Indicators and the CFSRs

The Children's Bureau (CB) conducts CFSRs in partnership with state child welfare systems in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. CFSRs allow CB to:

- Assess conformity with federal child welfare requirements
- Determine what is happening to children and families while receiving state child welfare services
- Help states identify agency and program strengths and areas in need of improvement

CFSRs assess states' performance on seven outcomes for children and families related to safety, permanency, and well-being and seven systemic factors that affect those outcomes. CB collects information from statewide assessments submitted by states, case reviews that include case-related interviews, and stakeholder interviews to assess state performance. The reviews are conducted in rounds, with the recent completion of Round 3 having occurred from 2015 to 2018. For more information on CFSRs, visit CB's website at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews.

While not used in the determination of state conformity with federal requirements in Round 3, the seven statewide data indicators provide important context in the evaluation of child outcomes related to safety and permanency:

- Safety outcome 1 – Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect
  - Recurrence of maltreatment
  - Maltreatment in foster care
- Permanency outcome 1 – Children have permanency and stability in their living situations
  - Permanency in 12 months for children entering foster care
  - Permanency in 12 months for children in care 12 to 23 months
  - Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more
  - Reentry to foster care
  - Placement stability

The appendix describes each of the seven indicators, what each measures, and the data source for each measure. For a more detailed explanation of each of the seven data indicators, see the CB CFSR Round 3 Statewide Data Indicator Data Dictionary and the CB and Center for States' CFSR Round 3 Data Indicator Series.

CB calculates performance on the statewide data indicators using administrative data submitted by states to two national child welfare data systems:

- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)
- National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)

Observed, Risk-Standardized, and National Performance

CB uses three related calculations to look at performance on CFSR statewide data indicators:

- **Observed performance** refers to performance on the CFSR indicators using states' data.
  - Observed performance can be helpful to examine performance of a single state at a point in time or to monitor trends in that state's performance over time.
  - Each state can calculate its observed performance using state AFCARS and NCANDS data and the syntax provided by CB.
- **Risk-standardized performance** refers to the state's performance after adjusting for risk through multilevel statistical modeling. Risk adjustment minimizes differences in outcomes due to factors over which the state has little control, such as the number of children the state served, the age distribution of these children, and, for some indicators, the state's foster care entry rate. This calculation leads to a fairer comparison of state performance against national performance.
  - Risk-standardized performance can be useful in comparing a state's performance to national performance.
  - States are unable to calculate risk-standardized performance, as this requires a national dataset.
- **National performance** refers to the collective observed performance on the CFSR indicators. National performance previously was referred to as "national standards."
  - National performance is useful as a comparison point for states.
  - Calculation of national performance requires national datasets.

CB typically uses statewide data indicators in the determination of state conformity with CFSR Safety Outcome 1 and Permanency Outcome 1. In prior CFSR rounds, CB has required states not meeting a national standard to include proposed plans for improvement of that data indicator in its Program Improvement Plan (PIP). However, during Round 3, in response to the discovery of a number of technical issues, CB both revised its methods for calculating performance on the statewide data indicators and conducted an external, comprehensive review and validation process. To allow time to review syntax, make revisions, and validate the accuracy of related calculations, CB suspended use of the indicators in determinations of substantial conformity during Round 3 (see CFSR Technical Bulletin #9). CB continues to recommend that states consider state performance on the indicators as context for their PIP, their Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), and other strategic planning processes.

Syntax Available to Calculate Data Indicators

CB has released the revised **syntax** and supporting files that it uses to calculate performance on the CFSR Round 3 statewide data indicators and to conduct related data quality checks. States may use this syntax to replicate CB calculations for observed performance[1] and data quality and to further analyze the data. Syntax refers to the rules for how different NCANDS and AFCARS data elements are used to calculate performance on each indicator. States are encouraged to monitor their performance on statewide data indicators regularly, and replicating the syntax enables states to do this on their own.

CB's syntax for observed performance and data quality checks uses SPSS, a statistical analysis and reporting software. Agencies may opt to use SPSS or other software to calculate and analyze statewide data indicators. If an agency uses other statistical software, the existing syntax can still be helpful to inform the logic needed for data analysts to replicate the calculations. For detailed instructions on calculating performance using the SPSS syntax, see related resources listed on the CFSR Statewide Data Indicators webpage.

Reports and Dashboards: Tools for Examining Performance

Some jurisdictions use **reports** or **online dashboards** of the indicators to take a closer look at data at a given time. Data teams, in collaboration with program managers, can create reports or dashboards to show observed performance on the indicators statewide and for specific geographic areas or units. Managers can then "drill down" to see which areas or units are performing well and which areas are struggling. These tools can help managers identify where to follow up to learn more from jurisdictions performing well and where to focus improvement interventions and supports.

Longitudinal reports help leadership and managers see changes in performance on the indicators over time. Through quarterly, semiannual, or annual comparisons, these reports show whether performance is improving, staying the same, or declining over time.

> ### Dashboard and Report Examples
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> See examples of reports and online dashboards that present state performance on the child welfare outcomes as measured by the CFSR Round 3 statewide data indicators:
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> - California: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/default.aspx
> - Florida: https://www.myflfamilies.com/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/index.shtml
> - New York: https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cfsr/child-welfare-data.asp
> - Washington: https://partnersforourchildren.org/projects/data-portal
> - North Carolina: http://sasweb.unc.edu/cgi-bin/broker?_service=default&_program=cwweb.icfsr3.sas&county=North

Statewide Data Indicators Inform CQI and Problem Exploration

States can use CFSR statewide data indicators in their ongoing CQI process to help proactively identify problems, explore their causes, target strategies and interventions to address the identified problems, and monitor improvements.

Problem exploration is a process in which agencies use data and engage staff and stakeholders to gain a clearer understanding of the nature and underlying causes of a problem or need[2]. One important aspect of problem exploration is disaggregating data, or looking at data by subgroups, to isolate where problems are

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1. Note that state and CB calculations for observed performance will be identical only if the state uses the same AFCARS or NCANDS data submission as CB used.
2. For more information on problem exploration, see the Center for States' publication, "Change and Implementation in Practice: Problem Exploration," available at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/change-implementation/problem-exploration/.

occurring and characteristics of the population. While statewide data indicators provide state-level performance on key outcomes, they can be further analyzed to identify groups where performance is strong and where there is opportunity for improvement. For example, when looking at "Reentry to Foster Care," a state could examine whether outcomes are the same for all children and youth in care or worse for youth in certain age groups. Some dashboards and reports allow states to explore patterns in different regions or counties, across age groups, and racial/ethnic populations over time, which supports more indepth analyses. States are encouraged to use additional data sources such as other aggregate data, case reviews, surveys, and focus groups for further insight into underlying issues impacting performance.

> ### Tips on Using Data Indicators for CQI
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> To support ongoing CQI processes, administrators and program managers may find it helpful to:
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> - Set aside a routine time to discuss performance on statewide data indicators and national performance
> - Review current and longitudinal reports and disaggregated data
> - Discuss the implications of the data and identified trends with agency stakeholders (e.g., frontline staff, family representatives, court and legal representatives, and community partners)
> - Identify indicators on which to conduct further analysis and those to closely monitor moving forward

Role of Leaders and Program Managers

Agencies benefit from child welfare administrators and program managers who are actively engaged in monitoring performance on statewide data indicators. Such engagement is one method for assessing the success of child welfare services in promoting child safety and permanency. Examining data indicator patterns and trends on an ongoing basis, coupled with analyses from other data sources, can support informed decision-making that contributes to improved outcomes for children and families.

Child welfare administrators and managers provide leadership by engaging in the following:

- Understanding how the statewide data indicators are calculated and what data elements are used for each indicator
- Helping to ensure good data quality, for example by ensuring and monitoring timely data entry
- Analyzing data across regions, districts, or counties to identify areas of strength and those needing improvement
- Asking questions and engaging frontline staff in discussions about the data and exploring reasons for patterns and trends
- Developing and testing hypotheses about factors contributing to state's performance
- Identifying effective program strategies, informed by data, to strengthen areas needing improvement
- Integrating improvement strategies into PIPs, CQI efforts, CFSPs, APSRs, and other strategic planning
- Monitoring changes over time and making program and practice adjustments, as needed

For effective reporting, analysis, and use of statewide data indicators, program staff will want to collaborate closely with data and information technology staff.

Conclusion

Statewide data indicators are valuable data sources not only as context for CFSRs but also for strategic planning and CQI efforts related to child safety and permanency. Using available syntax to calculate performance on the CFSR Round 3 statewide data indicators provides states ready access to ongoing performance information and a way to track and analyze data in more meaningful ways.

> ### Support Services for Using Statewide Data Indicators
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> The **Center for States** provides free services and supports to states and jurisdictions in several areas related to CFSR statewide data indicators, including:
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> - Calculating observed performance on statewide data indicators using SPSS syntax or other software
> - Conducting problem exploration and "drilling down" into the data to better understand problems
> - Improving data quality
> - Explaining statewide data indicators to agency staff and stakeholders
> - Improving the use of data at all levels of the agency to make decisions and shape programs, policy, and practice
> - Developing and strengthening CQI systems
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> **To ask questions or request services** tailored to your needs, email capacityinfo@icfi.com or contact your Center for States Liaison.

Related Resources

- **Center for States' CFSR Statewide Data Indicators webpage** at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/cfsr-data-syntax-toolkit

  - "Instructions and Tips for Running the CFSR Round 3 Statewide Data Indicator Syntax"

  - CFSR Round 3 Statewide Data Indicator Series

- **CB's Round 3 of the CFSRs webpage**, "Supporting Documents for CFSR 3 Statewide Data Indicator Syntax Revisions" subsection at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews/round3

  - "CFSR Round 3 Statewide Data Indicator Data Dictionary"

  - "CFSR Round 3 Statewide Data Indicator Syntax Zip File"

- **CB's CFSR Information Portal, Round 3 Data Indicators and National Standards** at https://training.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources/3105#Data Indicators and National Standards

- **Center for States' CQI and Implementation webpage** at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/

Appendix
Seven Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Statewide Data Indicators

Statewide Data Indicator	CFSR Outcome	Purpose	Description	Data Source
Recurrence of maltreatment	Safety outcome 1	Measures whether the agency was successful in preventing subsequent maltreatment of a child if the child was the subject of a substantiated or indicated report of maltreatment	Of all children who were victims of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report during a 12-month period, what percent were victims of another substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within 12 months of the initial victimization?	NCANDS
Maltreatment in foster care	Safety outcome 1	Measures whether the agency ensures that children do not experience abuse or neglect while under the state child welfare system's placement, care, or supervision	Of all children in foster care during a 12-month period, what is the rate of victimization per 100,000 days of care?	NCANDS, AFCARS
Permanency in 12 months for children entering foster care	Permanency outcome 1	Measures whether the agency reunifies or places children in safe and permanent homes as soon as possible after removal	Of children who enter care in a 12-month period, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering care?	AFCARS
Permanency in 12 months for children in care 12 to 23 months	Permanency outcome 1	Measures whether the agency reunifies or places children in safe and permanent homes in a timely manner if permanency was not achieved during the first 12 to 23 months of foster care	Of all children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously between 12 and 23 months, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?	AFCARS

Statewide Data Indicator	CFSR Outcome	Purpose	Description	Data Source
Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more	Permanency outcome 1	Measures whether the agency continues to ensure permanency for children who have been in foster care for extended periods of time	Of all children in care on the first day of a 12-month period who had been in care continuously for 24 months or more, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of the first day?	AFCARS
Reentry to foster care	Permanency outcome 1	Measures whether the agency's programs and practices are effective in supporting reunification and other permanency goals so that children do not return to foster care	Of all children who enter care in a 12-month period who discharged within 12 months to reunification, live with a relative, or enter guardianship, what percent reentered care within 12 months of their discharge?	AFCARS
Placement stability	Safety outcome 1	Measures whether the agency ensures that children whom the agency removes from their homes experience stability while they are in foster care	Of all children who enter care in a 12-month period, what is the rate of placement moves per 1,000 days of foster care?	AFCARS