The CARES Explorer

Your newsletter and guide to discovering the world of CWS-CARES

CARES
Child Welfare Services

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

- Arthur Ashe

Welcome back for another adventure through the world of Child Welfare Services - California Automated Response and Engagement System (CWS-CARES)!

Every three months, we will continue to publish updates, highlight new information and raise awareness on the latest developments to navigate your journey to Go-Live. For all the latest news from CWS-CARES, don't forget to **subscribe** and share this newsletter with staff as needed.

The CARES Compass is a bimonthly two-page summary of upcoming communications and project highlights.

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CARES Explorer Navigation

Meet the Stakeholders

Discover the various ways organizations are working with groups on the project.

Explore CWS-CARES

Dive deep into the places and destinations where stakeholders make an impact.

Find Hidden Gems

Learn about resources to support you and help you find success.

SAVE THE DATE

The next **CWS-CARES Stakeholder Briefing** will be held on Wednesday, **January 29, 2025** from **9am – 12pm.**

Meet the Stakeholders

Leadership Corner: A Message from Tricia Gonzalez

The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) is happy to be working to advocate, educate, and collaborate to ensure the voice of the user is heard in the development and implementation of CWS-CARES. CWDA is represented with a seat on the CWDS Board, as one of three members of the Executive Leadership Team, and several staff embedded in the project.

CWDA participates in and hosts regular ongoing conversations with counties.
- **The CWDA Children's, Children's Operations, and Children's Regional Meetings:** Child Welfare leaders discuss issues that impact all county operations, implementation of new regulations and systems, and best practices.
- **The CWDA Information Technology Committee:** Informs well-designed technology that allows human services professionals to focus on serving their customers' needs.
- **The CWDA Fiscal Committee, Financial Analysis and Data Systems (FAADS) subcommittee:** Provides insight into essential financial, administrative, planning, and policy needed to develop local agency budgets as well as payments and revenue claiming.

The CWS-CARES Team will also be participating in the CWDA Annual Conference (themed "Every Story Matters") from October 9th – 11th in San Diego, California. This will be a great opportunity to interact with up to 1,300 county staff and partners at our resource booth. Executive Leadership will also be presenting a breakout session titled, "California Automated Response and Engagement System (CARES)".

Thank you all for recognizing the importance of keeping our users at the forefront. Because of your efforts, we can develop a system that supports the safety, permanency, and well-being of children at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Tricia Gonzalez
Executive Liaison to the CARES Project

California Department of Social Services (CDSS): CWS-CARES Program Sponsor Overview

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is the project sponsor and participates in various areas of the CARES project. Subject matter experts from Accounting, Fiscal, Legal and Program provide input and policy guidance on development activities.

The Child Welfare System Branch (CWSB) is responsible for representing the CDSS at Child Welfare Digital Services (CWDS). The branch chief wears multiple hats including sitting on the CWDS Executive Leadership Team. Five of the staff are Service Managers and work directly with the Product Delivery Team to develop functionality to support case management, external stakeholder coordination, financial management, resource family approval, resource management, reporting and metrics. Staff research child welfare regulation, statute, and county letter guidance to ensure CARES supports current child welfare policy and practice to comply with the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) requirements.

The team works directly with multiple tribes to identify how CARES will support users in meeting the Indian Child Welfare Act requirements. Working directly with counties, the team identifies external or ancillary systems to ensure business operations will not be impacted when CARES goes live. The team also provides fiscal oversight to the CARES project and conducts biennial data quality reviews as required by CCWIS.

County Contributions to CWS-CARES: El Dorado

Thank you to El Dorado County's Child Welfare Department for contributing to CWS-CARES. El Dorado County is a core constituent and participant in Case Management 1 and 2 and in Extended User Scenario Testing (EUST). In addition to their support in these areas, the El Dorado staff have provided significant feedback to the project in various subject matters, including Data Validation and External Systems coordination, where their input has helped improve processes and planning for CARES V1.

A special **thank you** to the following individuals from El Dorado County for their accommodation and effort through the CWS-CARES Implementation: Tammy C., Karen A., Alexxa L., Leslie G., and Jamie M. A special thanks to Karen A. for co-chairing the Mountain Valley RUG. We look forward to our continued partnership in establishing CARES V1!

ICWA: A Voice for Tribal Governments and Native Children

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law enacted in 1978 to protect the best interests of Native American children and promote the stability and security of Native American tribes and families. The ICWA establishes minimum Federal standards for the removal of Indian children, delineates the roles of State and Tribal governments in child welfare cases, establishes placement preferences for placement with family and Tribal members, and institutes protections for parents regarding the termination of parental rights. In California, ICWA provides guidance to counties, regarding the handling of child abuse and neglect and adoption cases involving Indian children and sets minimum standards for these cases, to support Indian children and families, and ensure children remain connected to their family, Tribe, and culture.

Among protections for Indian children, ICWA requires caseworkers to make several considerations when handling an ICWA case, including:
- Providing active efforts to the family;
- Identifying a placement that fits under the ICWA preferences provisions;
- Notifying the child's tribe and the child's parents of the child custody proceeding; and
- Working actively to involve the child' tribe and the child's parents in the proceedings.

ICWA ensures that tribes as sovereign nations, have a strong voice in child custody proceedings involving Indian children. Tribes have exclusive jurisdiction over cases when the child resides on the reservation, or when the child is a ward of the tribe. Tribes have concurrent jurisdiction for an ICWA case, when the child is living or domiciled off the reservation, or the Tribal court declines to take the case. In California when the county and Tribe have concurrent jurisdiction, ICWA establishes a presumption that the county must transfer jurisdiction to the Tribe, upon request.

Core Constituent Survey #2 - Analysis

Thank you to core constituents who participated in the second quarterly Core Constituent Survey. We heard from **62** core constituents across **24** counties and 6 service areas, and your feedback is already shaping the future of the project.

Here's a quick look at what we learned:
- Early agenda distribution and detailed follow-up notes are helping participants come better prepared and stay focused during meetings.
- Participants appreciate consistent communication and structured meetings, making it easier to contribute meaningfully.
- There's a strong interest in fostering more collaboration, with many respondents valuing the open dialogue and diverse voices heard during meetings.

We also received valuable suggestions for improvement. Participants are asking for clearer updates on how their feedback is being incorporated into CWS-CARES. There is also a need for updates around project progress and the next steps in product development. Core constituent feedback is essential to the project's success, and improvements are under development. We are excited to share updates with you soon.

Explore CWS-CARES

In this section, we will further explore service areas, system functionality, and workgroups like interfaces, content management, data conversion, and external systems.

CWS-CARES is grouped into **Service Areas**. A **service area** is a type of service offered by CWS-CARES related to child welfare program and practices. In this issue, we'll focus on Case Management.

Case Management Service Area: Highlights for CARES V1

Case Management involves processes to identify, provide, monitor, and evaluate the services and decisions necessary to reduce the risk of harm to the child. Activities include everything from the opening of the case, whether court-monitored or voluntary, through the closure and some aftercare services. Case Management includes the following process areas:

- Prepare and Open Case
- Engagement, Assessment, and Services
- Placement
- Adoptions
- Closure and After Care

Case Record
An electronic and/or written record for each child receiving child welfare services including, but not limited to, the emergency response protocol. The case record contains all of the documentation requirements specified by the Division 31 regulations and includes court documents maintained by the child welfare services agency, as defined in Rule 5.552 of the California Rules of Court (CDSS Manual Policies and Procedures Division 31).

Milestones Related to Case Management

CWS-CARES is organized by milestones, which break down the product functionality into manageable units. Some of the milestones that closely relate to Case Management are detailed below.

Case Management: Engagement

Case Management – Engagement equips social workers to create, assign, and transfer a case from an investigation as well as from non-investigative entry points. This milestone also expands on the creation and updating of the Person Profile, delivering additional elements related to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), education, health, behavioral and mental health, and Regional Center data. The broader scope of information captured allows for a more robust Health and Education Passport (HEP).

Prevention Services

Prevention Services equips social workers to search a Service Provider Directory - created in Resource Management (Service Provider Profile & Services Milestones) - based upon the identified needs/strengths of the child or family. The social worker will then match the child/family with services or providers.

Case Plan

Case Plan establishes Case Plan, the foundation and central unifying tool in child welfare services. The milestone equips the worker to partner with the child, family, and care team to develop, monitor, and provide services and case management to assure the child's best interest is met through the provision of a safe environment.

Placement

Placement delivers the functionality to equip workers to find a high-quality placement for a child or nonminor dependent in a timely manner. The worker can add any potential placement option to a shortlist for the child, allowing for the worker to view all placement options and their status (e.g., placement provider accepted the child) on a single screen.

Case Management: Engagement and Services

Case Management - Engagement and Services provides a range of capabilities to support and improve engagement with families in the context of an open case. Such capabilities include preparing for, conducting and documenting family visitations and convening the Child and Family Team (CFT).

This milestone equips workers to clearly capture the assessment of a child's visitation needs. It also captures visitor statistics to measure attendance, visitation quality, and new skills learned are being captured to provide concrete feedback to inform visitation changes, identify needs, and reflect progress. Feedback from the visitors is being sought and captured, as well as the feedback from visit monitors.

Case Closure

Case Closure provides social workers with the ability to assess cases for closure, finalize and close a case, and support any other areas of practice related to the ending of a child welfare case. This ultimately equips the social worker with the best practices for family engagement in transition and aftercare planning, with the goal of helping families prepare for their exit from Child Welfare and reduce the likelihood they will need services in the future.

Aftercare & Re-entry

Aftercare & Re-Entry equips the worker with a platform for intentional planning for aftercare services as a family, child, or youth approaches case closure. The structured format for capturing this planning process (i.e., CFT, case plan, family preservation, etc.) assures that those exiting child welfare case management services are doing so with services, people, and resources in place to provide ongoing support.

Small Change, Big Impact: Smarty Streets

In the current CWS/CMS system, addresses are not validated when they are entered. This can cause problems if there are errors, or if the address does not exist.

In CARES V1, users will enter the address, search, and then select the correct one from a validated list. This data will come from a tool called Smarty Streets.

Address Validation
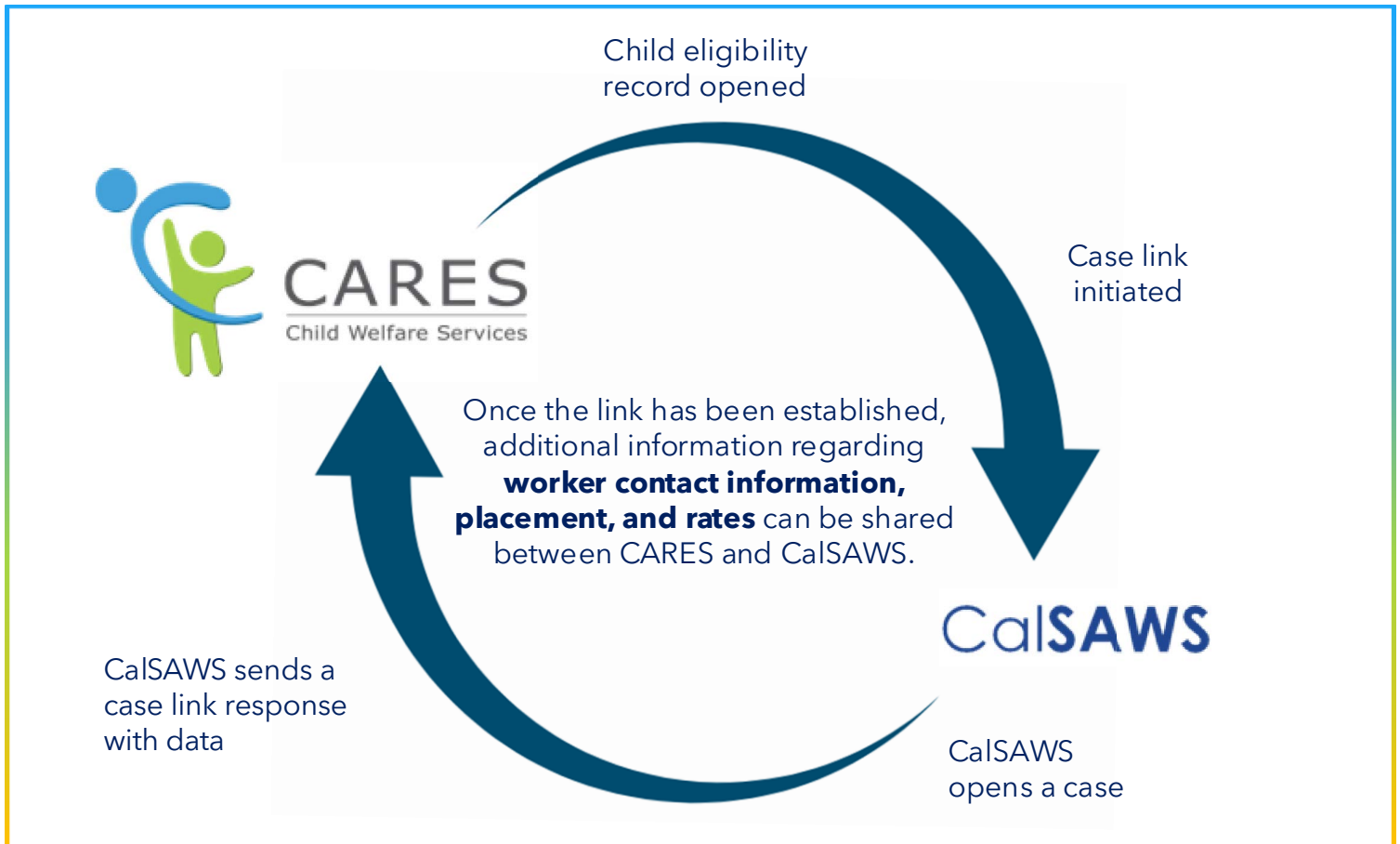
Address Line 1

1360 Walden Dr

Address Line 2

City	State
Folsom	California

Zip Code	Country
95630	United States

Validate Address   Clear   Search

Action	Address Line 1	Address Line 2	City	State	Country	Zip Code
Select	1360 Walden Dr		Folsom	California	United States	95630
Select	1260 Waldenbooks Place		Folsom	California	United States	95630
Select	1300 Walden Pond Ave	Apt 930	Folsom	California	United States	95630
Select	1500 Waldorf Blvd		Folsom	California	United States	95630

Note: Product features and screens are subject to change; we may make adjustments based on feedback.

CWS-CARES Interface with CalSAWS

When a child has been placed in a foster home, forms have to be completed and sent manually to CalSAWS, the California Statewide Automated Welfare System. The foster family might not receive timely payments due to delays in processing. In CARES V1, as soon as a child is placed, an eligibility record will be opened and information will be sent through the Foster Care Eligibility Determination (FCED) interface with CalSAWS. This interface supports a child by reducing delays in data exchange, ensuring more accurate data exchange, and reducing data entry.

Child eligibility record opened

Case link initiated

Once the link has been established, additional information regarding **worker contact information, placement, and rates** can be shared between CARES and CalSAWS.

CalSAWS sends a case link response with data

CalSAWS opens a case

Data Conversion: How Counties are Participating

To accurately capture the questions and needs of our counties, the Data Conversion Team has a process that they repeat every Data Conversion Cycle with new and existing groups for Practice and Data Validation (depending on service areas).

First, they schedule a kickoff meeting to provide a general overview of the data conversion process so that the counties know what to expect. For Practice Validation, the workgroup meets regularly to discuss the source to target mapping (STTM) and transformation logic for the original field in the legacy system and the new field in CARES V1. For Data Validation, office hours are scheduled to answer questions and walk through issues reported by the county testers.

The Data Conversion team tracks and addresses issues brought up by the counties, and revises STTM and/or transformation logic as needed. When functionality questions come up, the team also creates clarification requests and follows up with the Product team. All the responses and updates to issues raised are accessible real-time via MS Teams.

In the latest Data Conversion Cycle, which finished in August 2024, the team engaged with **155 Data SMEs** from 45 counties, 1 tribe, and CDSS to validate how data was mapped and transformed; **49 Data SMEs** from 14 Core Constituent counties participated in data validation. We want to thank counties for their continued support in this critical process of validating data conversion!
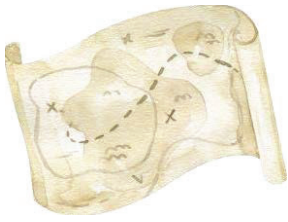
Find Hidden Gems

In this section, you can learn about various resources to support you and help you find success.

Holistic Design Progress Update

What is holistic design?

The holistic design approach considers the larger Child Welfare ecosystem in which the product exists, and the relationships between functional areas of the product. With holistic design, milestones will be grouped into Process Areas, so that reviews of the CWS-CARES system are conducted in the context of overall business processes.

Holistic design allows the Product Team to:

- Identify dependencies across business areas, design, downstream requirements, and user feedback earlier.
- Conduct analyses across business areas to reduce the likelihood of unexpected findings earlier.
- Gather Core Constituent feedback earlier and at multiple stages of design and build reviews.
- Streamline the user experience with a holistic view of all needs within a process area.

With holistic design, Core Constituents are being involved in the **pre-build review** of a larger portion of the system. The Product Team demonstrates how the system would function and can gather feedback prior to building the system, making it easier to address feedback.

> Holistic design aims to provide a more robust user experience for Core Constituents by gathering and addressing their needs and expectations early on.

Core Constituents are invited to attend a series of demonstrations. These demonstrations began September 19th, 2024 and are currently scheduled through October 31st, 2024 to provide a walkthrough of key business scenarios using a **working prototype** of CWS-CARES.

What are prototypes?

- Prototypes are designs of CWS-CARES built in Salesforce to represent system functionality, where the presenter can showcase the screens during the demonstration.
- Prototypes illustrate the user experience, navigation, and screen actions viewers can expect to see in CWS-CARES.
- Prototypes give Core Constituents an opportunity to provide early feedback on user experience, navigation, and screen actions before the screens go into development.

Opportunities for review by organizations are also increasing with holistic design. Outside of Core Constituents, workers at implementing organizations can expect to see additional review opportunities of the system design once prototype sessions conclude. More information will be available on this in the coming months. For immediate questions, email the paascaressiteam@osi.ca.gov.

Probation Information Technology Managers Association (PITMA) Conference Recap

Probation plays a significant role in California's child welfare services, particularly when children are involved in the juvenile justice system. Probation departments work closely with child welfare agencies to coordinate services for children and will use CWS-CARES in the future.

The CWS-CARES Project was invited to speak at the annual **Probation Information Technology Managers Association (PITMA) Conference** in San Diego on August 22, 2024. CWS-CARES executives spoke on the CWS-CARES history and delivery approach, features and framework, service areas, people involved and technical aspects of the system. The proposed County Probation implementation team structure was shared, along with the Probation engagement timeline. A workgroup is being formed with the California Probation Officers of California (CPOC) to identify probation needs and prepare for CWS-CARES after Version 1. Eight counties have volunteered so far, and more are encouraged to get involved.

Conference attendees were very interested in the future data exchange between CWS-CARES and county probation systems. At CWS-CARES Version 1 Go-Live, Probation staff will do data entry directly into CWS-CARES. After Version 1, there are plans for an Application Programming Interface (API) to exchange data seamlessly between probation systems and CWS-CARES. We were honored to speak at this conference and share more information about CWS-CARES with the PITMA attendees.

CWS-CARES at the 2024 CWDA Annual Conference

The **County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)** is hosting its **2024 Annual Conference** from October 9th – 11th, 2024 in San Diego. The CWS-CARES team will host a panel presentation breakout session on Thursday, October 10th from 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM.

The presentation follows the theme of the conference – "Every Story Matters" – featuring child welfare scenarios with varied perspectives. The presentation will also highlight navigating and collaborating across California welfare systems, including the Foster Care Eligibility Determination (FCED) interface.

The CWS-CARES project team will also be staffing a booth with demos, giveaways, and more information about the new system. We hope to see you there!

More information about the panel presentation breakout session:
CWS-CARES modernizes child welfare technology by connecting children and families with vital resources and supporting child welfare workers more effectively. Together, across 58 counties, Tribes with Title IV-E Agreements with CDSS, resource families, and other entities, CWS-CARES establishes standards and helps ensure that all children receive a similar level of care, protection, and support -- regardless of location or community. The session format consists of speakers, visuals, and live Q&A. Through scenarios, we will demonstrate what a child, family, and social worker experience, and how CWS-CARES puts a family's voice at the center of decision making.

Implementation Spotlight: The Role of Implementation Coordinators (ICs)

The role of the CWS-CARES Implementation Coordinator (IC) is very important to the successful implementation of CWS-CARES. An IC serves as the primary point of contact between their county, tribe, or organization and the project Implementation Team. The IC works closely with a designated CWS-CARES Implementation Lead (IL) to conduct, manage, track, and report on a set of readiness activities. In addition, the IC supports their organization's Implementation Team (which includes the Data Quality Analyst, OCM, Training, and Technical Coordinators) to understand and complete readiness activities that are being tracked on the Go-Live Readiness Checklist. The IC responsibilities include informing their leadership of the progress being made and to ensure implementation readiness activities are completed to prepare their organization and end users for CWS-CARES Go-Live.

"CWS-CARES: A New Way Forward"

The CWS-CARES Implementation OCM Team is proud to present the second of several videos in the CWS-CARES Video Series. The videos showcase the CWS-CARES product and prepare you for the coming changes.

The second video, **CWS-CARES: A New Way Forward**, was developed with all end-users in mind and expands on the benefits of CWS-CARES from the first video (*Why CARES? A Case for Change*). This video first launched on August 7 via a communication to CARES SPOCs, Implementation Coordinators, State Leadership, OCM Coordinators, specific CWDA Staff related to Child Welfare, and OCM Advisory Workgroup representatives.

We encourage you to show the video to your teams in upcoming meetings or when someone contacts you to ask about CWS-CARES. We hope you can use this video as a tool to help jump-start conversations with your teams about the future.

Watch the new video:
CWS-CARES: A New Way Forward

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the CWS-CARES Implementation OCM Team.

Tell Us: Tote bags, T-shirts, or Tumblers?

We're setting up a CARES branded store! Branded items will be made available for individuals or organizations to purchase with their own funds. Let us know the items you'd like to see in stock. We hope to launch the store by Spring 2025, so stay tuned for more!

Take the CARES branded store survey now!

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