The CARES Explorer

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

"Spring is proof that there is beauty in new beginnings."

- Matshona Dhliwayo
Canadian Philosopher, Author and Entrepreneur

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.

Keep an eye out for iconic California flowers that bloom in spring – we've sprinkled them throughout this issue!

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Looking for just the project highlights?
Check out The CARES Compass - a bimonthly two-page summary of upcoming communications and project highlights.

Golden Poppy –
The California State Flower

What's in this issue?

Meet the Stakeholders

Learn more about the individuals, teams, and organizations engaged in CWS-CARES across the state.

Leadership Corner: A Letter from Cynthia Tocher

As we move into Spring of 2025, we are experiencing a season of growth with the continued development of CWS-CARES. It's shaping up to be a significant year as we approach our Version 1 Go-Live date in a little over **a year and a half**!

This spring feels particularly significant. We're not just planning for the future; we're actively building it. We recently published the initial CWS-CARES data dictionary and legacy mapping which allows counties to understand how data will be structured and exchanged in the new system. This enables counties to make necessary adjustments to their systems, ensuring they can continue to function after CWS-CARES Version 1 goes live.

At the end of this month, we kick off one of our most important activities of the year: **Extended User Scenario Testing (EUST) 2**, with approximately 270 staff from 30 organizations involved. Testers are getting ready by participating in a kickoff and training to prepare them to execute scenarios in CWS-CARES. This second round of testing provides valuable insights into how users interact with the system and is an essential step for receiving and integrating end user input.

By summer 2025, we will finish our prototype reviews with Core Constituents, where they provide feedback on CWS-CARES prototype for functionality, usability, and design. We are very appreciative of participating counties and organizations to work with us on these critical activities.

Looking ahead, our collective efforts this year will reflect remarkable progress and brings us further than we've ever come to building a new system for California's child welfare professionals.

Cynthia Tocher, CWDS Deputy Director

*Pink Camellia –
City of Sacramento Flower*

"Who CARES? We do!": OCM Engagement in Yolo County

The Yolo County Implementation Team showed their creativity and enthusiasm for CWS-CARES by crafting branded project T-shirts for their Organizational Change Management (OCM) meetings. In addition to the CWS-CARES logo, the team added the catchy slogan, "Who CARES? We do!" to blue T-shirts.

Yolo County implementation staff play a critical role in generating excitement and engagement in CWS-CARES for users across the county. During their meetings, implementation staff communicate pertinent project updates, highlight CWS-CARES objectives, and create a collaborative culture of care among users.

The Role of the Office of Tribal Affairs in CWS-CARES

The CDSS Office of Tribal Affairs (OTA) is grounded in meaningful Tribal Consultation and Engagement that elevate and assist in building the capacity of the State, Tribes, and Counties to collaboratively create and sustain an equitable continuum of care for American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

The Office of Tribal Affairs, as a part of the Office of Equity, guides the California Department of Social Services efforts to help create and facilitate policies, procedures, and programs that serve Tribes, and tribal children and families.

OTA actively contributes to CWS-CARES development by guiding the direction of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Steering Committee. This workgroup consists of tribal representatives collaborating with CWDS and CDSS to improve data quality and ICWA implementation in California. Through these discussions, OTA has helped shape key system updates to be more inclusive and culturally responsive. These efforts ensure CWS-CARES better reflects tribal children and families' needs and strengthens data collection for improved child welfare outcomes.

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.

EUST 2 Preparations: Gathering User Feedback

The CWS-CARES project is preparing for Extended User Scenario Testing (EUST) 2, the second round of testing to improve system usability. The EUST 2 testing period is 3/24/2025 – 4/18/2025. Testing will take place remotely, allowing users to complete scenarios independently during the testing period.

EUST 2 Kickoff

A 1.5-hour kickoff session for all EUST 2 participants was held on March 10, 2025, from 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM. The session covered the following topics:

- **Introduction & Overview:** Objectives of EUST 2 and its role within the CWS-CARES Project.
- **Testing Experience & Timeline**: Expectations, schedule, roles, responsibilities, and testing scenarios.
- **Feedback Process:** How to provide feedback and how the project will evaluate, categorize, and prioritize it.
- **Training:** Training schedule, approach, and topics covered.
- **Resources & Next Steps:** Access to key resources, frequently asked questions, and upcoming steps.

The slides and recording are available in the "Files" tab of the EUST 2 Microsoft Teams Channel. EUST 2 participants who need channel access can request it by emailing CARESEUST@otsi.ca.gov.

EUST 2 Preparations (Continued): Scope and Process

EUST 2 Scope

Service Area to be Tested	Milestone
Resource Management	Service Provider Profile (Milestone 1) Services (Milestone 2)
Case Management	Engagement (Milestone 6) Placement (Milestone 8)
Courts	Court Hearing Framework (Milestone 15)
Interfaces - JNET	JNET – Specific to San Bernadino County (Milestone 15.1)
Eligibility	Request Determination (Milestone 19) Redetermine Eligibility (Milestone 20)
Interfaces – FCED	FCED Interface (Milestone 20.1)

Tools

Microsoft Teams Channel for Feedback
Testers will log all feedback in a dedicated Microsoft Teams channel titled *CARESV1 EUST 2 Feedback*. The project team will review, triage, and prioritize the feedback during and after the testing period. A summary of findings will be shared with testers at the conclusion of the EUST period.

User Guide
Participants will be provided with testing documentation, including a detailed User Guide outlining scenarios and tasks to complete during the testing process.

Terminology in CWS-CARES: Update on "Folio"

You may have seen the term "Folio" being used in CWS-CARES. Based on feedback from counties and core constituents, this term will be removed, and the original terms of "Referral" and "Case" will be maintained.

Those participating in EUST 2 will see an updated version of CWS-CARES that does not contain the word "Folio" in the user interface. Additional back-end changes will continue after EUST 2.

Process Improvements: What's Changed from EUST 1 to EUST 2?

Expanded Participant Group: Previously, testing was limited to certain counties. To broaden participation and gain insights from a more diverse set of users, all counties – both core constituents and non-core constituents – have been invited to participate, provided they have staff available and access to the EUST 2 environment. Approximately 270 testers from 29 counties and CDSS are participating in EUST 2.

Improved Feedback Mechanism: Previously, feedback was collected via Microsoft Forms, which did not allow participants to see the status of their input. With EUST 2, feedback will be managed through the Microsoft Teams channel to enable participants to monitor the status of their feedback in real-time.

Polling for Virtual Office Hour Scheduling: Rather than scheduling office hours without input, the CWS-CARES team conducted a poll ahead of the EUST testing period to identify the most convenient times for participants during the week.

EUST 2 Preparations (Continued): Participation and Training

EUST 2 Participation

Twenty-nine of the 58 California counties are participating in EUST 2 this spring. EUST 2 will support a total of approximately 270 testers from various backgrounds relating to child welfare. Roles include Social Workers and Supervisors, Children's Service Administrators, Court Officers, Eligibility and Case Management Workers, Probation Officials, SPOCs, CDSS Workers, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and more. **Thank you, testers!**

To participate in the next testing cycle (EUST 3) in spring 2026, please contact your Implementation Coordinator.

*Please note that county participation numbers are subject to change.

Participation Quick Stats:

- Approximately 255 county testers and 15 Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) are participating
- EUST 2 has over a 300% increase in testers from EUST 1!
- 29 of 58 counties represented
- Los Angeles county has the largest number of testers followed by Fresno county

Douglas Iris – Native to Northern California Coasts

EUST 2 Training

EUST 2 training took place from March 17th – 28th. This instructor-led training provided testers with the materials, support, and knowledge needed to execute testing scenarios. To ensure readiness, training included self-paced learning aligned with comprehensive end-to-end child welfare workflows in the CWS-CARES system.

Training Sessions
There were three training sessions held:
1. **CWS-CARES Overview, Basics, and Navigation:** PowerPoint Guided Overview of CWS-CARES, Live instructor demonstrations, and Q&A
2. **CWS-CARES Instructions and Demonstrations:** Walkthrough of CWS-CARES functions using Quick Guides, live instructor demonstrations, and Q&A
3. **Hands-on Practice:** Instructor-supported hands-on practice using EUST scenarios data and Q&A

Training Materials
Training recordings, Quick Guides, Glossary, and training materials from developed Milestones that relate to testing scenarios will be made available in the EUST 2 Teams Channel.

Optional Virtual Office Hours
Testers can join virtual office hours to ask questions, resolve issues, or receive assistance with system navigation. During testing weeks, office hours will occur on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9-10 AM, and on Thursdays from 2-3 PM with the exception of Monday, March 31st.

Navigating External Systems: A Guide

One of the main benefits in transitioning from legacy to CWS-CARES is the creation of a single, comprehensive data system. With streamlined case data entry and storage, counties will save time and resources and reduce the need for supplementary external systems.
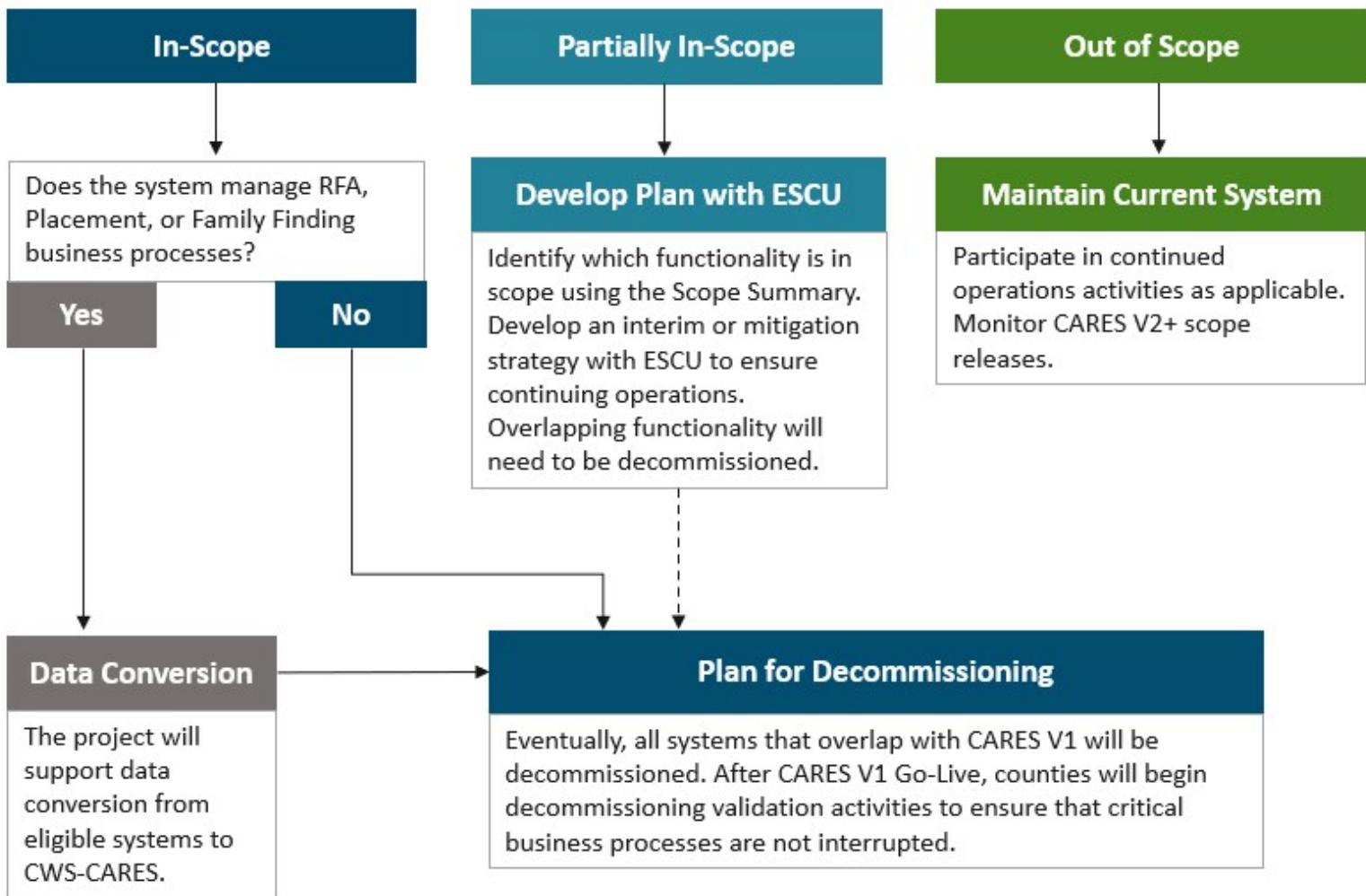
What are external systems?

An external system is defined by the project as, "a tool or application used by organizations to deliver child welfare services in addition to, or outside of, the legacy CWS/CMS solution. This includes Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) software, County-developed systems, and data files." The project is actively working on identifying which of these external systems have overlapping, or "duplicative," functionality with CWS-CARES.

How does the project determine which external systems have overlapping or duplicative functionality?

Given that CWS-CARES is still in development, discussions about external systems can be challenging. While the CWS-CARES Project Value Services (PVS) team has made initial assessments on which systems are duplicative, they rely on county input and collaboration to make all final determinations. The External Systems Coordination Unit (ESCU) has defined the categories for external systems as:

- **In-scope** – a system with functionality that will be fully covered by CARES V1
- **Partially in-scope** – a system with some functionality that overlaps with CARES V1 and some functionality that does not overlap with CARES V1
- **Out of scope** – a system with functionality that is not planned for inclusion in CARES V1

In-Scope

Does the system manage RFA, Placement, or Family Finding business processes?

Yes / **No**

Partially In-Scope

Develop Plan with ESCU

Identify which functionality is in scope using the Scope Summary. Develop an interim or mitigation strategy with ESCU to ensure continuing operations. Overlapping functionality will need to be decommissioned.

Out of Scope

Maintain Current System

Participate in continued operations activities as applicable. Monitor CARES V2+ scope releases.

Data Conversion

The project will support data conversion from eligible systems to CWS-CARES.

Plan for Decommissioning

Eventually, all systems that overlap with CARES V1 will be decommissioned. After CARES V1 Go-Live, counties will begin decommissioning validation activities to ensure that critical business processes are not interrupted.

Navigating External Systems: A Guide (Continued)

What will happen to external systems after Go-Live?

Due to federal regulations, all systems that are fully in-scope (duplicative functionality to CWS-CARES) will eventually need to be decommissioned, or discontinued, from use. Counties, in collaboration with ESCU, will develop tailored plans for external systems deemed in-scope and partially in-scope, to ensure continued operations. These plans will account for system dependencies with other external systems, the criticality of any missing functionality, alternate solutions, and whether the absent functionality is planned for inclusion in future versions of CWS-CARES. Out of scope systems may continue operating with or without modifications, as long as they remain compliant with federal and state regulations.

What support can counties expect when planning for decommissioning?

We are committed to meeting county and tribe needs for support, transparency, and uninterrupted county and tribe business activity throughout the transition to CWS-CARES and beyond. We have created the External Systems Coordination Unit (ESCU), a team solely dedicated to providing counties with support in preparation for the decommissioning process. As we approach Go-Live, ESCU will work in collaboration with county representatives to create decommissioning plans that address individual county needs while also ensuring federal and Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) compliance.

How will external systems data be converted to CWS-CARES?

Counties will conduct Source-to-target-mapping (STTM), data cleansing, and data loading for eligible systems.

For systems that are not being converted but will be decommissioned or taken offline, counties will need to determine how best to retain and access necessary data. This may include maintaining read-only access, manual data entry, or implementing other solutions to support operational needs.

We recognize that counties and tribes are experiencing a lot of change in the transition to CWS-CARES; we appreciate your patience, feedback, and active participation throughout the process.

CARES V1 Scope Summary

In late February, an updated CARES V1 Scope Summary was shared with counties. The goal of the Scope Summary, in combination with the CWS-CARES Data Dictionary and product demos, is to provide counties with a better picture of CARES Version 1. The Scope Summary includes a summary of each Service Area, key functionalities of each Milestone, and the Building Blocks (specific capabilities) for each Milestone. Counties are encouraged to use this resource to help assess which external systems have overlapping functionality with CWS-CARES. It will continue to be updated as CWS-CARES is developed.

The CARES V1 Scope Summary (published February 2025) covers the following Service Areas and Milestones:

- Intake & Investigations (Milestones 3, 4, 5)
- Case Management, Placement, Adoption (Milestones 6, 6.1, 7, 7.1, 8, 9, 10, 10.1, 11, 13)
- Courts (Milestones 14, 15, 16, 17, 18)
- Resource Family Home – Post Approval (Milestones 26, 26.1, 27, 28)
- Resource & Provider Management (Milestones 2, 6.1, 8)
- Financial Management (Milestones 1, 23, 23.1, 23.2, 24)
- Eligibility (Milestones 19, 20, 20.1, 21)
- Reporting (Milestones 29, 30, 31)
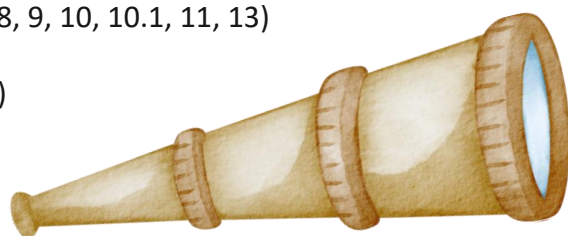
The CWS-CARES Data Dictionary: Update and Resources

Definitions

The CWS-CARES Data Dictionary and Entity Relationship Diagrams (ERDs) are designed to assist counties and other data partners in understanding the structure, purpose, and use of data within CWS-CARES.

The **Data Dictionary** is a reference guide that explains the structure and meaning of data in CWS-CARES system, such as database fields, types, and relationships, ensuring consistency and clarity.

Entity Relationship Diagrams (ERDs) are a visual representation of how different data elements are related within CWS-CARES system, helping to design and understand databases.

Evolution of the Data Dictionary

The initial version of the CWS-CARES Data Dictionary and legacy mapping of CWS/CMS fields is now available. This version reflects the current state of CWS-CARES. As CWS-CARES continues to evolve and improve over the coming months, this initial version will be updated to incorporate new changes.

The CWS-CARES Project conducted a walkthrough of the initial version of the CWS-CARES Data Dictionary and related materials with county representatives and data partners in March 2025. A recording of the walkthrough is available in the CWS-CARES Data Dictionary Microsoft Teams channel.

Publication and Ongoing Updates

A dedicated Microsoft Teams channel has been created for all CWS-CARES Data Dictionary-related materials. Contact CWDSDataManagement@osi.ca.gov to request access to the Microsoft Teams Channel called *CWS-CARES Data Dictionary*. Questions can be submitted directly to the CWS-CARES Technology team's inbox: CWDSDataManagement@osi.ca.gov.

Future iterations of the Data Dictionary will be published quarterly to provide greater clarity, address gaps, and potentially modify or remove certain fields or rename them. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we work diligently to ensure the successful implementation and ongoing maintenance of the CWS-CARES Data Dictionary.
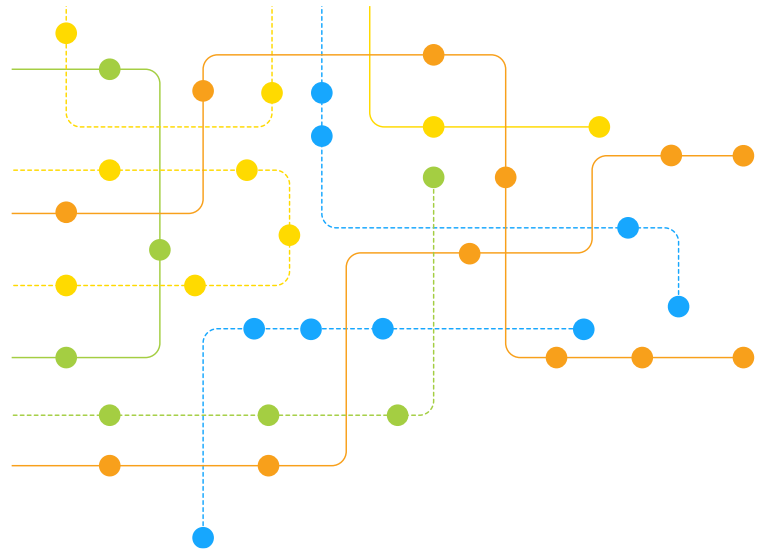
Interfaces in CARES V1

A system interface is the point of interaction or communication between different systems. Interfaces allow systems to interact with each other and share data.

CARES V1 will include the following interfaces:

- Case Management Assessment (CMA) Suite (Opeeka)
- Structured Decision Making (SDM)
- Facility Management System (LIS/FAS Data)
- Foster Care Eligibility Determination (FCED) with CalSAWS
- County Expense Claim Reporting Information System (CECRIS)
- Data Extract from California Department of Education (CDE)
- Regional Center Services for Department of Developmental Services
- JNET - San Bernardino County only

California White Poppy –
Often the first growth in soil scorched by wildfire

Find Hidden Gems

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

Announcing the CWS-CARES Public Library!

The CWS-CARES Public Library is here! Explore curated content from our CWS-CARES newsletters, now posted as individual articles for easier use and sharing – no password required! You can search the text of articles by keyword or navigate by subject: Product Features; Service Areas and Milestones; Teams and Roles; or Data and Interfaces.

New articles will be added every quarter, so check back in regularly for updates.

Real-Time CWDS Events and Meeting Calendar

We've heard your feedback! While the CWS-CARES Meeting Calendar was designed to offer visibility into upcoming CWS-CARES meetings, it only provides a snapshot of planned meetings at a single point in time. That means if a meeting changes, moves, or gets canceled, there's no easy way to see the most up-to-date schedule. To make it easier to stay informed, the CWS-CARES Project has launched a near CWDS Meeting & Events Calendar—now available on the CWDS public website with no login required.

This new calendar provides the most current meeting details, including:

- CWS-CARES, CARES RFA, CARES-Live and CWS/CMS recurring meetings and ad-hoc meetings streamlined into one view.
- Core Constituent meetings, Implementation meetings, workgroups and committees that involve external audiences such as counties, Probation, Tribes with Title IV-E agreements with CDSS, and State and Federal partners.

The Real-Time CWDS events and Meeting Calendar will replace the previous calendar; Core Constituents and Points of Contact will no longer receive the static, point-in-time calendar via email. Instead, they can check the public site anytime for the latest updates. Core Constituents will continue to receive calendar invites via email.

We're excited to provide a more dynamic and accessible way to keep up with CWDS meetings and events.

Core Constituent Survey and Guide

The CWS-CARES Project conducts quarterly surveys to gauge the effectiveness of Core Constituent meetings and identify ways to improve communication and collaboration. Your feedback continues to drive meaningful enhancements, including our latest resource—the **Core Constituent Orientation Guide**—a 1-page reference to help you navigate CWS-CARES. The guide includes:

- Essential resources to get started
- Key activities for Core Constituents
- How to provide feedback
- Contact information for questions

The guide will be attached to all Core Constituent demonstrations and service area meeting invitations going forward. We value your feedback and hope you find this guide useful.

CWS-CARES Stakeholder Briefing Series

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Stakeholder Briefing Session on January 29, 2025! There were **557 virtual attendees** for this session – the largest recorded participation rate to date. 52 counties, 13 county probation offices, and 1 tribal community were represented.

Stakeholder Briefing sessions are pivotal to keep counties, tribes, and partner organizations informed on the CWS-CARES project. During the session, participants had an opportunity to ask questions to Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and view CWS-CARES feature highlights and demonstrations. This session, SMEs answered 137 stakeholder questions.

At the end of the session, participants completed an anonymous survey to share their experience with the January Stakeholder Briefing. An overview of the survey results are shown on the right.

Session materials and future dates are posted on the CWDS Website.

Stakeholder Briefing Survey Results

A total of **183 complete responses** were collected in January.

88% of respondents felt satisfied or very satisfied with the Stakeholder Briefing.

94% felt that the information presented was either somewhat clear or very clear.

89% felt that the information presented was helpful or very helpful in understanding CWS-CARES.

Product Highlights and Demonstrations

During the January Stakeholder Briefing, teams showcased some of the changes that have been made as a result of core constituent feedback. This session included recorded demonstrations of Screening and Investigations, and feature highlights (screenshots) on Case Management and Foster Care Eligibility Determination (FCED).

Screening Demonstration
- Updated Design Templates & Label Updates
- Safely Surrendered Baby Pathway
- Provisional Harm and Provisional Danger Statements
- Unknown Person Name Generator
- Address updates
- Structured Decision Making (SDM) Hotline Tool Interface
- Cross Reports to RFA & SCAR
- Evaluate Out & Community Resources

Investigations Demonstration
- Supervisor Response Type Override
- Person Relationship Builder
- Fatality/Near Fatality Documentation with Critical Incident Unit Notification
- Cross Report – CACI Documentation & Form Generation

Case Management Highlight
- Case Type Differentiation
- Family Transfer Summary
- Removal & New Child Location
- Placement Needs

Foster Care Eligibility Determination (FCED) Highlight
- Submit data to CalSAWS, Case Link Request
- CalSAWS worker views: Foster Care Case is linked
- Data exchange between CARES and CalSAWS

SAVE THE DATE

Don't miss the next Stakeholder Briefing!

Wednesday, June 25, 2025, 9am – 12pm

The session agenda with product demonstration topics and participating Subject Matter Experts will be shared in April.

Bird of Paradise – City of Los Angeles Flower

Process Information Sessions: Understanding New Processes in CWS-CARES

When an organization replaces a software system, the changes extend beyond the technology. The transition requires updates to workflows, processes, policies, and procedures that impact the way staff perform their daily tasks. This is especially true for a change as comprehensive as the transition from CWS/CMS to CWS-CARES.

To support a smooth transition, the Implementation Team will host a series of **Process Information Sessions** for county child welfare and juvenile probation departments, related California Department of Social Services (CDSS) subdivisions, and Tribes with Title IV-E Agreements with CDSS. These sessions will provide an overview of new system processes and highlight the key features and benefits that CWS-CARES users can expect. Here's what participants can expect during the sessions:

- Recorded demonstrations of high-level functionality in CWS-CARES
- A walk-through of new processes, key changes, new features, and new terms in CWS-CARES
- Guidance on next steps each organization's team will take after the session

After the session, participants will receive a packet of materials including CWS-CARES (To-Be) Process Maps, CWS/CMS current (As-Is) Process Maps, a list of change impacts, and a description of terminology changes between CWS/CMS and CWS-CARES. Participants will take the information and materials from the session back to their teams to identify policies, procedures, and other updates needed to align with the new processes in CWS-CARES.

Lupine

When will these sessions be held?

The first set of sessions will focus on Intake (Screening and Investigations*) and will be held in May 2025. Intake sessions will be scheduled for county child welfare departments according to their region, along with sessions for Los Angeles County. County Implementation Coordinators are working with their teams to finalize the attendees for the sessions.

Additional sessions for other service areas will be held throughout 2025 and into early 2026. The project will continue to coordinate with CDSS, juvenile probation departments, and Tribes with Title IV-E Agreements with CDSS to determine which sessions they should attend based on the type of work their teams perform.

If you have any questions about these sessions or the attendance lists, please reach out to your CWS-CARES Implementation Lead.

*Some counties refer to **Screening** as "Hotline" or "Intake" and to **Investigations** as "ER (Emergency Response)" or "Referral Investigations."*

Session Dates by Region:

Mountain Valley Region: Tuesday, May 6th at 1pm – 3:30pm

Central Valley Region: Wednesday, May 7th at 1pm – 3:30pm

Bay Area Region: Thursday, May 8th at 9:30am – 12pm

Los Angeles County:
- Intake: Screening - Tuesday May 13th at 10am – 11:30am
- Intake: Investigations - Thursday, May 15th at 1pm – 2:30pm

Northern Region: Tuesday, May 20th at 9:30am – 12pm

Southern Region: Tuesday, May 27th at 2pm – 4:30pm

Project Resources

[CWDS Events & Meetings Calendar](#) (New!)

[CWS-CARES Public Library](#) (New!)

[Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)](#)

[CWDS Glossary](#)

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