A Snapshot of States' Child Welfare Data Systems of Record

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Background

The [State Child Welfare Data Linkages (SCW) Descriptive Study](#) (1) examined the extent to which child welfare agencies in 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia connected administrative data on child maltreatment to other data sources and (2) collected information about state practices related to sharing and connecting data. More information about the study's research questions and data collection activities are provided at the end of this snapshot, along with a glossary of terms. The SCW Descriptive Study aims to provide novel information regarding connected (linked or integrated) state data that may be leveraged to improve ongoing and accurate surveillance of child maltreatment incidence and related risk.

This snapshot highlights information gathered from a survey of state child welfare directors (or their designees) between July and October 2022. We refer to these respondents as states. Forty-four states responded to the survey. This snapshot presents findings about states' systems of record (i.e., the child welfare information system used to report to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)) and addresses the following questions:

1. What is the status of states' systems of record?

2. What types of service data are integrated into states' systems of record?

3. How long do states keep reports of child maltreatment in their systems of record?

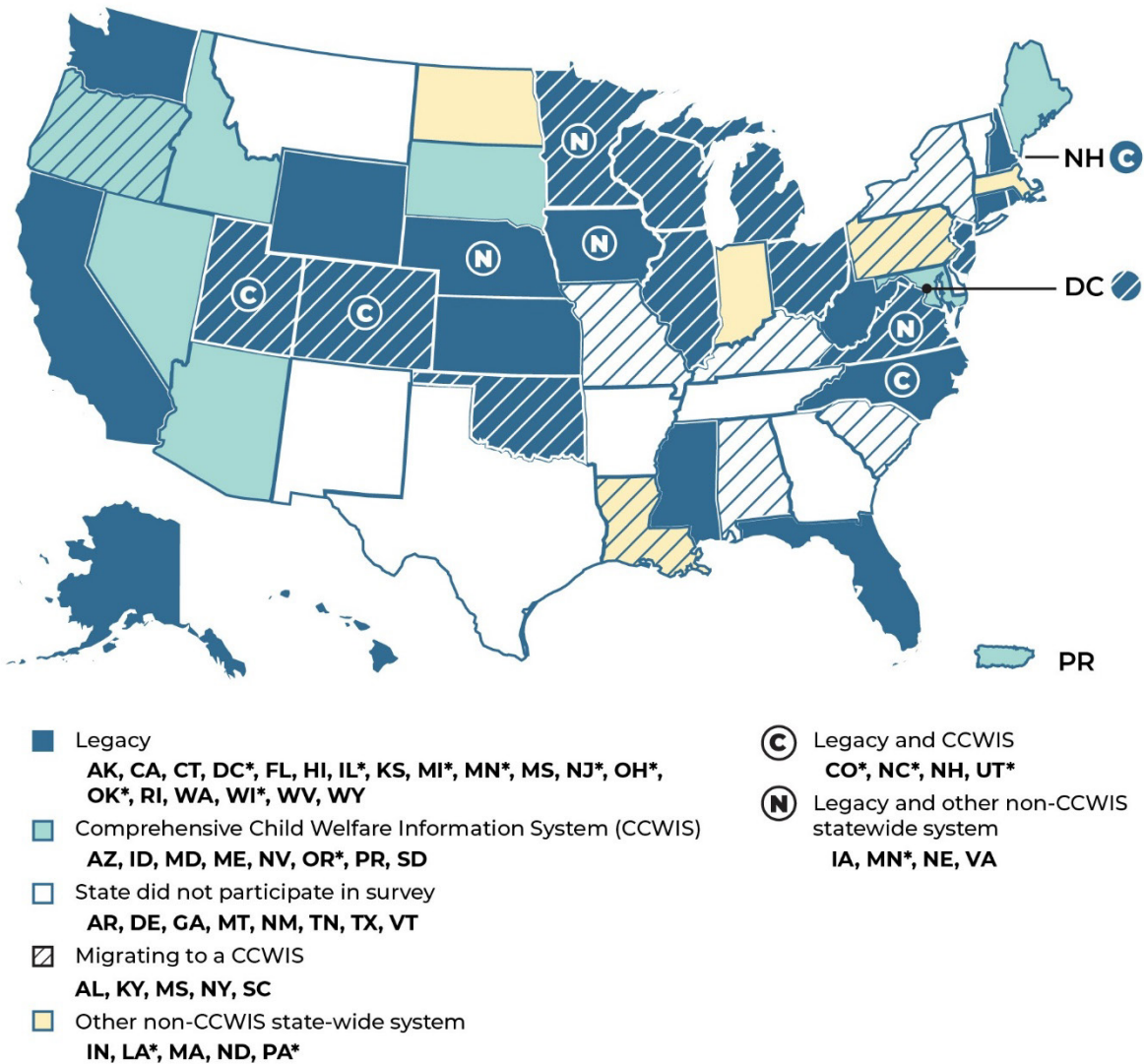## What is the status of states' systems of record?

We asked states to describe the child welfare information system that staff use to report to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). We refer to this system as the system of record.

Exhibit 1 shows the status of systems of record at the time of the survey. Most states (26 of 44) reported having a legacy system. The second most common response (18 of 44) was that the state was migrating a legacy system to a

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Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System
(CCWIS). Twelve states reported having a CCWIS.

Exhibit 1. Status of states' systems of record

Legend:

■ **Legacy**
AK, CA, CT, DC*, FL, HI, IL*, KS, MI*, MN*, MS, NJ*, OH*, OK*, RI, WA, WI*, WV, WY

■ **Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS)**
AZ, ID, MD, ME, NV, OR*, PR, SD

□ **State did not participate in survey**
AR, DE, GA, MT, NM, TN, TX, VT

▨ **Migrating to a CCWIS**
AL, KY, MS, NY, SC

□ **Other non-CCWIS state-wide system**
IN, LA*, MA, ND, PA*

Ⓒ **Legacy and CCWIS**
CO*, NC*, NH, UT*

Ⓝ **Legacy and other non-CCWIS statewide system**
IA, MN*, NE, VA

Source: SCW Descriptive Study Initial Survey, Question 6.

Note: States could choose one or more statuses for their system of record from the following: legacy system; Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS); currently migrating a legacy system to a CCWIS; other non-CCWIS statewide system; no statewide system, only county-based systems; and other. No states selected that they only had county-based systems; it was excluded from the exhibit and key. N = 44.

* State reported migrating to a CCWIS in addition to another status shown in the map.

Which types of service data are integrated into the system of record?

States were asked about their integrated data (i.e., data that have been systematically incorporated into the state system of record). States identified which state services had data integrated into their system of record and the method of integration.

Exhibit 2. Service data integrated into state systems of record

Service data	Overall	Number/percent of states that integrate each type of service data into their system of record		
		Same system of record	Integrated through a data exchange	Integrated through a data warehouse
Child abuse and neglect investigation data	44 (100%)	43 (98%)	6 (14%)	5 (11%)
Foster care placement data	42 (95%)	41 (93%)	5 (11%)	7 (16%)
Child welfare case management data	42 (95%)	42 (95%)	6 (14%)	6 (14%)
Services defined in the state's Prevention Plan for the Family First Prevention Services Act	32 (73%)	32 (73%)	5 (11%)	5 (11%)
Medicaid eligibility records	29 (66%)	2 (5%)	21 (48%)	6 (14%)
Other child protective services (CPS)-contracted services	22 (50%)	20 (45%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) records	22 (50%)	4 (9%)	11 (25%)	9 (20%)
Medicaid claims records	18 (41%)	1 (2%)	14 (32%)	3 (7%)
Child support systems	18 (41%)	0 (0%)	13 (30%)	6 (14%)
Other social assistance records	17 (39%)	3 (7%)	10 (23%)	4 (9%)
Social Security benefits	17 (39%)	1 (2%)	14 (32%)	3 (7%)
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) records	16 (36%)	1 (2%)	9 (20%)	5 (11%)
Education services	14 (32%)	0 (0%)	10 (23%)	2 (5%)
Judicial/court services	13 (30%)	2 (5%)	7 (16%)	3 (7%)
Juvenile justice services	9 (20%)	5 (11%)	2 (5%)	3 (7%)
Child care services	9 (20%)	5 (11%)	6 (14%)	1 (2%)
Birth records	8 (18%)	0 (0%)	6 (14%)	2 (5%)

Source: SCW Descriptive Study Initial Survey, Questions 10a–10z.

States could choose multiple services and then multiple integration methods for each service. Exhibit 2 shows the number of states that integrated each type of service data, overall and by integration method.

How long do states keep screened-out and unsubstantiated reports of child maltreatment in their systems of record?
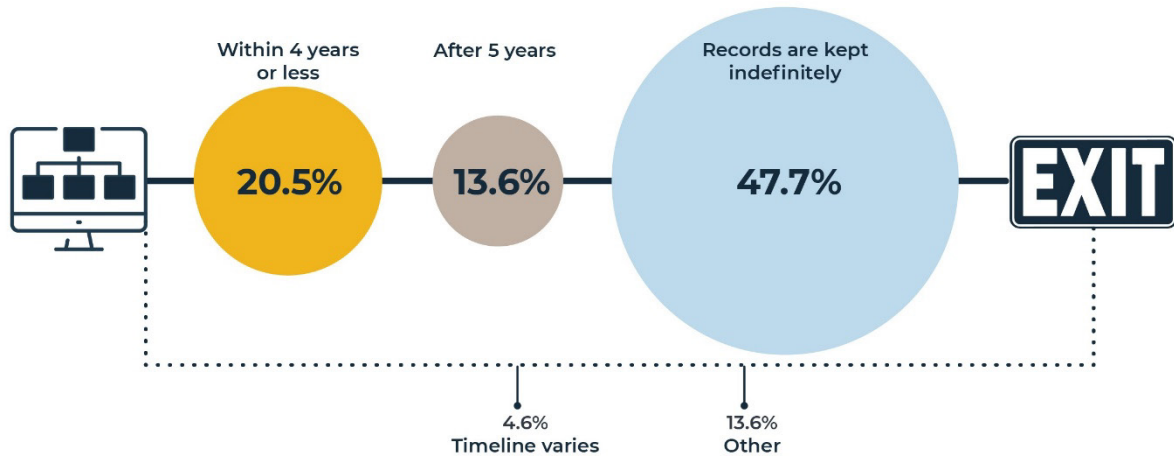
All states retain records on substantiated reports of child maltreatment and use them to conduct background checks for people who will be working with, fostering, or adopting children (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2018b). However, states vary in their standards for expunging data—that is, removing old or inaccurate records related to child maltreatment reports that are not substantiated. Older records can be used as part of screening and investigating subsequent reports of child abuse and neglect. States that expunge data more quickly may have less historical information on maltreatment reports to connect to data in child welfare and other systems.

Exhibits 3 and 4 provide information on the availability of historical child maltreatment data based on state practices for expunging data. States were asked separately about records for reports that were screened out or not investigated and records for reports that were investigated and not substantiated. For records on reports that were screened out and reports that were unsubstantiated, states most often indicated that they kept records indefinitely. The next most common response for both types of reports was that states kept the data from two to seven years.

For more information on expunction of records of child abuse and neglect reports, see the Child Welfare Information Gateway's Review and Expunction of Central Registries and Reporting Records, which describes statutes and regulations across all states through May 2018.
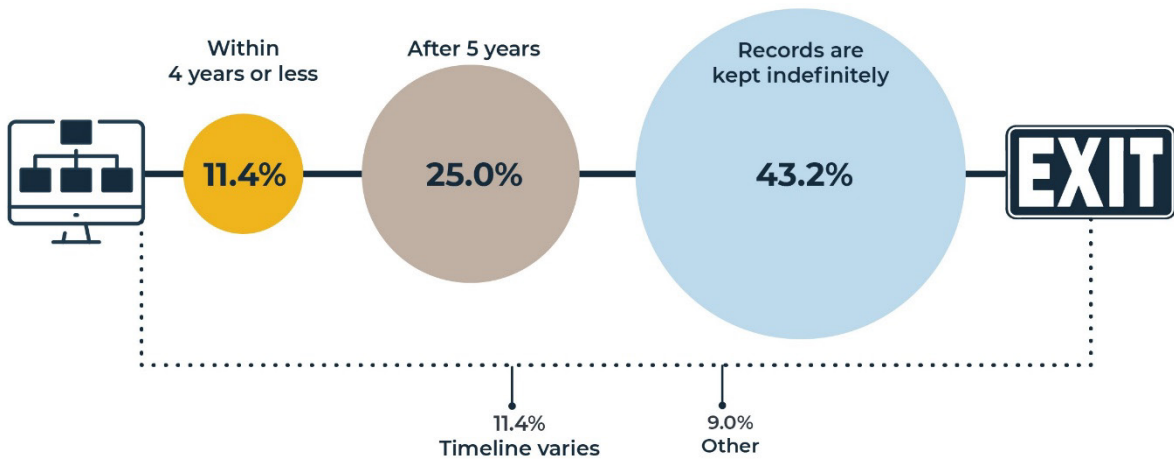
Exhibit 3. State expunctions of data on screened-out reports

Within 4 years or less **20.5%**
After 5 years **13.6%**
Records are kept indefinitely **47.7%**
4.6% Timeline varies
13.6% Other

Exhibit 4. State expunctions of data on unsubstantiated reports

Within 4 years or less **11.4%**
After 5 years **25.0%**
Records are kept indefinitely **43.2%**
11.4% Timeline varies
9.0% Other

Study overview

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), first authorized in 1974 and reauthorized regularly since then, requires the examination of a wide range of topics related to the incidence of child abuse and neglect with the aim of informing efforts to better protect children from maltreatment and improve the well-being of victims of maltreatment. One promising approach to addressing these topics is to connect administrative records—such as those from child welfare, health, social services, education, public safety, and other agencies. Connecting data may help improve the quality, usefulness, interoperability, and availability of child maltreatment data.

The State Child Welfare Data Linkages (SCW) Descriptive Study explored the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics of states' data systems of record?
- What states have connected data and how are those data used?
- What data sources are being connected, and what are the characteristics of the connected data?
- How do states link, manage, and govern their connected data?
- What are states' plans for connected data and how are they building capacity?

The SCW Descriptive Study team conducted the following three data collection activities:

- A high-level web survey of state child welfare directors (or their designees)
- A more in-depth web survey of a state agency staff person knowledgeable about connected data
- Semi-structured interviews with a subsample of state agency staff to further learn about efforts to develop connected data, the outcome of those attempts, methodologies used to connected data, the policies and resources that support or hinder connected data efforts, and future plans

Additional products from the SCW Descriptive Study can be found at: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/state-child-welfare-data-linkages-descriptive-study. Data from both surveys are archived at the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect.

Glossary of terms

Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS): Case management information system that meets Administration for Children and Families regulations for information systems supporting the administration of Title IV-E and IV-B programs. CCWIS regulations focus on data and quality and require data exchanges and data quality monitoring.

Connected data: Linked or integrated data.

Data exchange: A separate agency systematically shares administrative records that are linked to records in the system of record.

Expunction: The procedures used by states to maintain and update their records by removing older or inaccurate records.

Integrated data: Data that have been systematically incorporated (through direct entry by staff or a data exchange) into the state system of record for child maltreatment reporting to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System.

Investigated: Reports that were screened in are investigated to determine whether the alleged maltreatment occurred.

Legacy system: An existing, non-CCWIS state system of record that meets previous federal reporting requirements.

Linked data: A set of records that includes data from the state system of record for child maltreatment reporting to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System joined with data from other sources, based on a common identifier or other matching criteria.

Screening: Process by which reports of child maltreatment are evaluated before an investigation to determine whether they meet the definition of child maltreatment.

System of record: Child welfare information system used to report to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System.

Unsubstantiated: Classification for cases when investigators have been unable to confirm the occurrence of abuse or neglect.

References

Child Welfare Information Gateway. "State vs. County Administration of Child Welfare Services." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, 2018a.

Child Welfare Information Gateway. "Review and Expunction of Central Registries and Reporting Records." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, 2018b.

Acknowledgments

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