

State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS): Current Public and Private Agency Issues

Thirteen states, the District of Columbia and a representative of Stewards of Change, responded to the National Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services' request for information on the use of SACWIS among public and private providers. The following questions were asked:

As a public agency working with private providers or as a contracted provider, what are your thoughts are on utilizing the State's SACWIS system?

For example, what could make it easier to use the system? What is the best way to ensure the state system meets your needs? What would make roll-out of the system easier?

What support should the state give private providers using the system?

What other ways might the State meet Federal reporting requirements when utilizing contractors to perform the work?

The following themes were captured in this engaging discussion¹:

Common Database

Most responders agreed that being able to use one common database would be the most efficient use of this technology. Many suggested that altering the way in which data can be uploaded into SACWIS would be of tremendous benefit. Currently, most private provider users are entering into SACWIS and entering into a secondary system at their own agency which had been in place either prior to the state's SACWIS or case management responsibilities. Also noted was the lack of two-way data flow into and from SACWIS systems and the public and private agencies' data systems cannot communicate.

Database Accessibility

One accessibility issue addressed the inability to input and access data in SACWIS by professionals working on a family's case in addition to the case worker (i.e. aide). Two jurisdictions have opened up the access to a family's case based on their assigned role in the family. This access is limited to specific categories such as medical, family visitation or home visitation. Some private providers are provided access to enter such information as critical incidents and foster parent certification.

A second accessibility issue addressed the need for remote access to SACWIS, especially as workers in the field are often away from their offices (i.e. court) for extended periods of time. Most stated that a movement to a web-based system would allow for more uniform access to all users.

Functionality

Some voiced that their state's SACWIS system was cumbersome, difficult to work with and a drain on the worker's time. One jurisdiction in particular noted that SACWIS was not designed with privatized case management in mind. Others noted that SACWIS should be designed to be more intuitive, therefore, requiring less technical assistance and training. Another noted that there should be a more seamless integration of the work for both public and private agency users. A few states noted that SACWIS did not meet all of their individual needs, specifically regarding payment of foster parents. Another state pointed out that SACWIS did not accurately collect data (i.e. child placement), therefore, they are redesigning their system in collaboration with their private agencies to capture accurate child placement data.

Flexibility

Many felt a strong need for flexibility to be built into SACWIS for the unique needs of child welfare delivery systems, (i.e. county-administered systems vs. state-administered systems, urban vs. rural) although it was unclear what these specific needs were.

Development/Redesign

A great number of responses included the need for ongoing and consistent dialogue in systems development throughout the organization and with private providers. It was imperative that there is a representative body of users (public and private) involved in the planning and development phase. One responder stated that states should devote "protected" staff time to serve on these committees.

Training/Technical Assistance

A majority of states insisted that classroom and on-the-job training be made available for all users during the development and/or redesign of a system. One even suggested keeping track of attendees and conducting pre-/post tests. Many also noted the need for the public agency to provide help desk support (as most states do have this available).

Lack of funding for Private Provider Use

It was noted that funding for hardware and software to meet SACWIS entry requirements is necessary for the private providers; some public agencies provided the equipment, maintenance and training while others did not.

¹The following states/jurisdictions and private company participated in this discussion: Colorado, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New York, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Stewards of Change.