Risk Stratification Pilot Fact Sheet

- The risk stratification tool was developed following a rigorous analysis conducted by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and university-based researchers with the Children's Data Network. The analysis revealed that a relatively small number of child abuse investigations involved young children at imminent risk of foster care placement. It was determined that these investigations could benefit from enhanced support, allowing social workers to quickly connect families to services that bolster child safety and keep families safely together.

- The enhanced support approach screens for factors and historical information that could heighten the likelihood of future reports of maltreatment and foster care placements. When completing a child abuse investigation, the risk stratification tool supports social workers in evaluating current allegations to ensure the needed services are provided.

- The risk stratification tool uses a computerized algorithm that extracts existing data from the state's Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) and DCFS. The model does not pull data from other systems or County departments.

- Use of the risk stratification tool can help guard against implicit bias and reduce data entry errors. It does this by automatically generating information that helps supervisors and social workers assess the family's needs in order to support children's safety and family unity.

- At the outset of an investigation, the risk stratification tool identifies if enhanced support is needed and then notifies the supervisor. This information is critical early in the process because it prompts additional feedback and expertise from supervisors to determine the most supportive response for families.

- Transparency in the tool's development and implementation is key. DCFS has released preliminary findings from the pilot's first 12 months. Information may be accessed at https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/resources/reports/.

- In August 2021, DCFS launched the risk stratification pilot in three regional offices: Belvedere, Lancaster and Santa Fe Springs.

- The risk stratification pilot is one part of a series of efforts the Department has implemented to deliver more equitable, needs-based and tailored responses for families where there is suspected child maltreatment.

- The tool is also being used to support a Racial Equity Feedback Loop to identify screening practices and community reporting patterns that may result in unnecessary investigations disproportionately burdening African American families.

- The risk stratification tool supplements, but does not replace, existing tools used by DCFS in the pilot offices. It is used to deliver information to supervisors and social workers, but it is not used to make any decisions.

- The risk stratification pilot will continue at the three offices as DCFS continues to gather data and evaluate the effectiveness of the tool as one approach to improving practice.