



August 29, 2022

Contact: DCFS Office of Public Affairs
(213) 371-6244
publicaffairs@dcfs.lacounty.gov

DCFS Shares Risk Stratification Pilot Insights, Data Online

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) today shared data and insights emerging from its risk stratification pilot. Launched in August 2021, the pilot relies on data-informed technology – referred to as a risk stratification model – to help child welfare social workers identify families who could benefit from enhanced support.

The model was developed following a rigorous analysis conducted by DCFS and university-based researchers with the Children’s Data Network, who in 2020 established that there are a relatively small number of investigations in which chronic patterns of alleged child abuse and neglect signal significant service needs for families.

Intent on advancing transparency and strengthening public trust, DCFS leadership held meetings with internal and external community partners in the project’s early stages and committed, at the outset of the pilot, to release information about the model’s development and implementation when substantive findings became available.

Today, the department posted materials to its [website](#) including a methodology report, implementation insights, quantitative data for investigations and an ethical review of the tool’s use case.

“Making this information public is just one small step toward good governance and enhancing confidence in the work we do,” DCFS Director Brandon T. Nichols said. “It’s important to us that families and those who advocate for both children and their parents have the data they need to hold us accountable.”

“While our opinions may differ at times, we all care deeply about the safety of children and we want community members to know how this enhancement is informing our practice with families and the policies that guide the front end of our system,” Director Nichols added.

The three-office pilot is one part of a series of prevention services efforts the department has adopted as it shifts to more equitable, needs-based and tailored responses for families being investigated for allegations of child abuse or neglect. At this time, the pilot has been implemented in the Belvedere, Lancaster and Santa Fe Springs regional offices. Foreseeing an involved period of evaluation and review, the department has remained flexible in its timeline, adapting the pace of the work in order to make informed decisions about the pilot’s future. At this time, DCFS has not decided whether to expand the model’s use.



In 2021, the county's Child Protection Hotline (800-540-4000) received 168,045 child abuse and/or neglect calls and about 750 emergency response social workers completed 43,505 investigations involving 86,487 children in Los Angeles County.

The model identifies opportunities for practice improvement to prevent the cycle of repeated reports to the hotline. By using this resource, the department is able to deliver critical information to supervisors at the outset of an investigation – a time during which social workers have a small window of opportunity to conduct safety assessments, gather information and develop service plans. This information is expected to assist staff in making better-informed decisions earlier in the investigative process, allowing social workers to quickly connect families to services that bolster child safety and keep families safely together.

Recognizing that African American children are placed in out-of-home care at a higher rate than other populations, the model's Racial Feedback Equity Loop advances the department's use of data for the purpose of identifying screening practices, and community reporting patterns that may result in unnecessary investigations disproportionately burdening African American families.

###

About the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) promotes child safety and well-being by partnering with communities to strengthen families, keeping children at home whenever possible, and connecting them with stable, loving homes in times of need. As the largest child protective services agency in the nation, DCFS is responsible for ensuring the safety of more than two million children across 88 diverse cities in Los Angeles County. Established in 1984 to keep children safe and support families in crisis, DCFS is governed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. DCFS has nearly 9,000 staff across more than 20 offices, specialized bureaus, and administrative services. DCFS is led by Director Brandon Nichols, an attorney with more than 20 years of expertise in child welfare, foster care, adoptions, and mental health. For more information, visit <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov>.