



CDSS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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EDMUND G. BROWN JR.  
GOVERNOR

September 13, 2017

ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) NO.: 17-91

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL TITLE IV-E AGREEMENT TRIBES

SUBJECT: CLARIFICATION ON DOCUMENTING CALLS TO THE CHILD  
WELFARE HOTLINE THAT DO NOT REQUIRE AN IN-PERSON  
INVESTIGATION

REFERENCE: WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE (WIC) SECTIONS [300](#);  
[16504\(a\)\(c\)](#); MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (MPP)  
SECTIONS [30-051](#); [31-002](#); [31-101](#); [31-105](#), [31-130](#); ACL NO. [03-61](#);  
[STRUCTURED DECISION MAKING \(SDM®\) POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL](#)

The purpose of this ACL is to provide county child welfare services (CWS) agencies with clarification as to how to document and respond to calls to the child abuse hotline that do not require an in-person investigation by CWS.

**CLARIFICATION: INFORMATION AND REFERRAL AND EVALUATE OUT**

Counties are required to maintain a 24-hour response system to respond to all referrals that indicate a child is subject to abuse or neglect (WIC section [16504\(a\)](#)). State law requires counties to respond to a referral to the child abuse hotline by conducting an in-person investigation or completing the Emergency Response (ER) protocol to determine if an in-person investigation is necessary or if the referral may be appropriately evaluated out. If a call to the child abuse hotline does not indicate any allegation or potential risk of abuse or neglect to a child, the call may be screened as "Information and Referral" (I&R). This letter clarifies the definitions and appropriate use of the I&R and evaluate out processes.

**REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL**

- ☐ State Law Change
- ☐ Federal Law or Regulation Change
- ☐ Court Order
- ☒ Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- ☐ Initiated by CDSS

### ***Information and Referral (I&R)***

As a toll-free, public hotline that is widely advertised, the child abuse hotline may receive calls that do not indicate a child is the victim of or at risk of abuse or neglect. To ensure that citizens are able to easily access the community resources for which they may be eligible (a “no wrong door” philosophy), CWS can claim funding for directing these callers to a resource able to answer their needs. To protect the privacy of these individuals and avoid any confusion about their involvement with the child welfare system, the personal information and nature of the inquiry of these callers is not maintained in the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS).

Calls that do not indicate any form or risk of abuse or neglect of a person under age 18 are within the definition of I&R, defined in regulations at MPP section [30-051](#):

*.1 Information and referral services means those activities by social service staff to:*

*.11 Enable persons to have current and accurate knowledge about the available public and private resources established to help alleviate socio-health problems.*

*.12 Provide short-term help to enable persons to identify and gain access to resources appropriate to their needs.*

*.13 Provide beneficiaries under the California Medical Assistance Program (Medi-Cal) with health-related transportation to meet an urgent need as specified in W&IC.*

Examples of items that should be screened as “I&R” include, but are not limited to:

- Allegations of abuse, neglect or maltreatment on a person over the age of 18, who is not in foster care<sup>1</sup>, where there is no risk to a child (i.e., abuse of an elderly or disabled person).
- Allegations of animal cruelty or maltreatment, where there is no child in the household that may also be at risk of being abused.
- Requests for general information or complaints about community services, not involving the health and safety of a child (i.e., legal, substance abuse, homeless, or mental health services).
- Requests for information or complaints about custody or child support issues where there are no indications that the children are victims or at risk of abuse or neglect.

These calls are not required to be evaluated for risk and documented as referrals in CWS/CMS. When a call is received that does not fall within the scope of CWS and therefore a referral is not necessary, the screener should to the best of their ability refer the caller to the appropriate source and/or agency. It is important to make sure that

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<sup>1</sup> WIC section [16504\(c\)](#) obligates the county to investigate if a referral is received regarding a nonminor dependent.

calls not pertaining to child welfare are recorded accurately and are not entered as referrals, and that child welfare referrals are not incorrectly entered as an I&R. Inaccurate entry of an I&R could potentially put the health and safety of a child at risk. Therefore, CWS agencies should implement sufficient quality assurance protocols to ensure that all calls are accurately assessed. The CWS agencies are encouraged to develop tracking mechanisms for I&Rs and ensure county social worker supervisor review before an I&R is completed.

### ***Evaluate Out***

Per MPP section [31-101](#), the county shall respond to all calls that allege a child is endangered by abuse, neglect, or exploitation by conducting an in-person investigation or assessing the referral by completing an ER protocol. If upon completion of the ER protocol, the county social worker determines an in-person investigation is not required, the county may evaluate out the referral, with or without a referral to another community agency, as appropriate.

An evaluated-out referral is a referral that alleges harm or risk of harm to a child, but does not meet the criteria for investigation by CWS. Evaluated out referrals generally include:

- Allegations where the described maltreatment or threat does not meet the definition of abuse, neglect, or exploitation contained in MPP sections [31-002\(c\)\(9\)](#), [31-002\(e\)\(13\)](#), or [31-002\(n\)\(1\)](#).
- Allegations where another agency, such as law enforcement, has exclusive jurisdiction.
- A duplicate allegation on an already open referral or case.
  - Per ACL No. [03-61](#), duplicate allegations are defined as an allegation involving the same child, same allegation and same incident.

Counties are reminded that under MPP section [31-130.2](#), a law enforcement investigation can aid, but does not replace, the need to perform the ER protocol and in-person investigation, if one is necessary. While there are situations where CWS may conduct a dual investigation with law enforcement or licensing, or may stand down pending a law enforcement investigation, it is never appropriate to evaluate out a concern of abuse or neglect indicating a child falls within the description in WIC section [300](#) to law enforcement, licensing or another agency without gathering the information and conducting the assessments required by the ER protocol.

In the event that an accusation of abuse occurring outside the home is evaluated out to law enforcement, licensing or another agency, the county still must conduct an assessment in accordance with MPP section [31-105](#) to determine if the child's parents have been appropriately protective. The county must conduct an in-person investigation of the home as necessary under the ER protocol if the assessment indicates the parents' ability to protect the child from future harm is in question.

## **DETERMINATION AND DOCUMENTATION OF RESPONSE**

In making the critical decision whether or not to investigate a referral, counties are instructed to consistently and correctly utilize the evidence-based SDM® hotline assessment tool. If the allegation described by the reporter matches any item on the SDM® hotline tool, an in-person investigation is the recommended response. If no item is marked, it is recommended that the referral be evaluated out as not meeting the criteria for investigation. If a screener chooses to override the SDM® recommendation, the hotline screener and supervisor should ensure that the reason for the override is appropriately documented in the tool and screener narrative.

Per MPP section [31-105.117](#), all evaluated out referrals must include documented rationale for the decision to evaluate out the referral and be approved by a supervisor. Supervisor approval is critical in ensuring that hotline determinations are made consistently by different screeners, and to ensure that the screener has appropriately considered all the information, including a review of prior referrals and collateral contacts, before the decision is made to close the referral without an investigation. This applies even in situations where the caller alleges maltreatment that does not rise to the level of child abuse or neglect and no community referral is needed.

For more information on this ACL, contact the Child Welfare Policy and Program Development Bureau at (916) 651-6160.

Sincerely,

### ***Original Document Signed By:***

GREGORY E. ROSE  
Deputy Director  
Children and Family Services Division

c: County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA)  
County Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC)  
County Behavioral Health Directors Association (CBHDA)

Attachment I

## Attachment I

### CWS/CMS DATA ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

#### Information and Referral

When a report is made that does not fall within the purview of CWS and is not recorded as a referral (an incident of alleged abuse or neglect), but is screened and referred to other agencies for potential services, it is reported as an 'Information & Referral'.

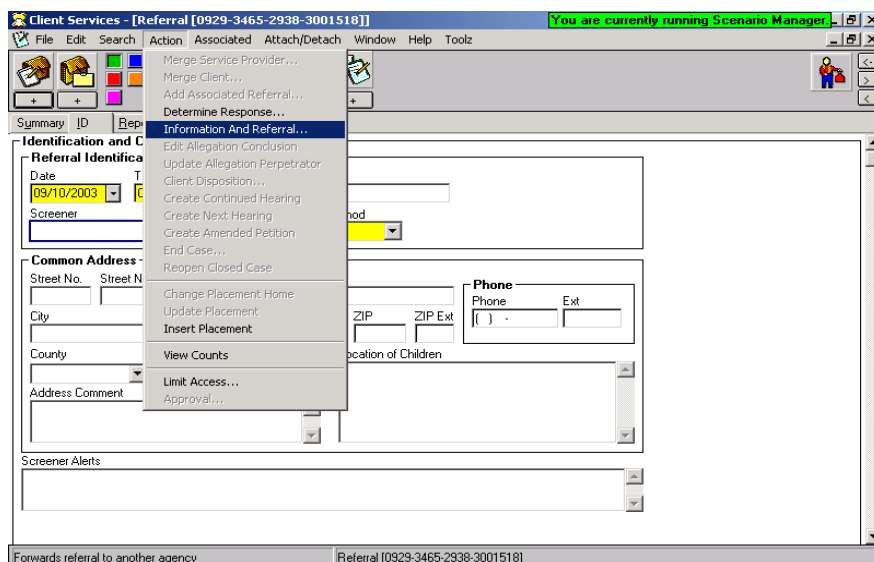
To record an I & R call in CWS/CMS:

Begin a New Referral – using the plus + sign under the referral folder.

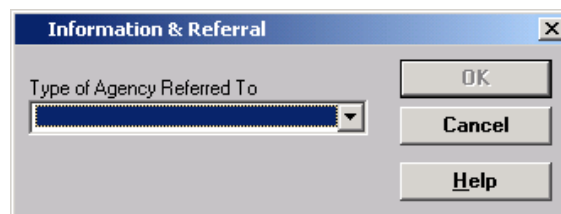
Then,

#### ACTION

##### Select Information & Referral



This dialog box will appear to allow you to select the agency you referred the client to. You can also select 'Entered in Error' if a mistake has been made.



A monthly report can be produced that reflects the activity of screeners in relation to screening calls that are unrelated to direct child welfare services issues.