

November 12, 2021

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 21-135**

This All County Letter (ACL) provides child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers with information about changes in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). Furthermore, this ACL delineates the proper use of the “Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client” grid accessed through the Case of CWS/CMS.



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GAVIN NEWSOM  
GOVERNOR

November 12, 2021

ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) NO. 21-135

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS  
ALL FOSTER CARE MANAGERS  
ALL TITLE IV-E AGREEMENT TRIBES  
ALL EMERGENCY RESPONSE STAFF  
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS

SUBJECT: PROPER USE OF THE NEW “DRUG/MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AFFECTING THIS CLIENT” GRID IN THE CHILD WELFARE SERVICES/CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (CWS/CMS)

REFERENCE: [WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE SECTION 16501](#); CHILD WELFARE SERVICES [MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES SECTION 19-000, 31-100 AND 31-320](#); [ACL 02-54](#); [ACL 05-09](#); [ACL 17-27](#); [ACL 17-107](#);

### **PURPOSE**

This All County Letter (ACL) provides child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers with information about changes in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). Furthermore, this ACL delineates the proper data entry and use of the “Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client” grid accessed through the Case of CWS/CMS, while also considering the confidential and sensitive nature of this information.

On July 17, 2021, a System Change Request (SCR) was implemented in CWS/CMS that added the “Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client” Grid to the Client Notebook on the Client ID page in the **Case** for **all** clients – children, youth and parents/caregivers.

While it is important for counties to capture this data so they can best support children, youth and families, it is also important to respect their confidentiality and rights to protect their sensitive mental health and substance use information. This sensitive information should only be entered in this new grid and used when the law permits.

### **BACKGROUND**

The “Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client” grid was previously only able to be accessed through the **Referral** on the Client ID page and **only for alleged perpetrators**. The recent system change added this grid into the **Case**. The grid in the **Case** provides the ability to document if mental health or substance use impact **any client** – child, youth, caregiver or parent - in the case.

When entering information into the grid in the *Referral*, this information will not populate into the new grid in the *Case*. When entering information into the grid in the *Case*, this information will not populate into the grid in the *Referral*.

This grid also provides the ability to identify drugs by name associated with substance use for each client in the case. This grid will allow counties and tribes to enter data to help identify and assess the prevalence of mental health needs and substance exposure and use in their county or tribe.

The intended use for this grid is to provide child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers with a tool to better track data on the prevalence and impact of substance use and mental health needs during the life of the **current** cases and to provide counties the opportunity to track if there are specific drugs contributing to child maltreatment and removals at a **county or tribal level**. Having this data may give counties and IV-E tribes an additional tool to identify emerging trends and gaps in services, and to apply for substance-specific grants or target resources to address these gaps.

### **DEFINITIONS OF GRID OPTIONS INFORMED BY CANS ASSESSMENT**

The California Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment provides the following guidance on how to rate each item for each child/youth/parent. When completing this grid, child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers may use the below definitions as a guide. Click “yes” if 2 or 3 from the below scale is selected on the CANS Assessment and click “no” if 0 or 1 from the below scale is selected on the CANS Assessment.

#### **Substance Use (Alcohol or Drug use):**

Parent/Caregiver: This item rates the impact of any notable substance use by caregivers that might limit their capacity to provide care for the child/youth.

Child/Youth: This item describes problems related to the use of alcohol and illegal drugs, the misuse of prescription medications, and the inhalation of any chemical or synthetic substance by a child/youth. This rating is consistent with

DSM-5 Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders. This item does not apply to the use of tobacco or caffeine.

Mental Health:

Parent/Caregiver: This item refers to any serious mental health issues (not including substance abuse) among caregivers that might limit their capacity to provide care for the child/youth.

Child/Youth: What are the presenting social, emotional, and behavioral needs of the child/youth?

Scale Number Definition	Substance Use (Drug Use/Alcohol Use)	Mental Health
<p><b>0:</b> No current need; no need for action or intervention.</p> <p>This may be a strength of the caregiver. No evidence of caregiver substance use issues or mental health difficulties.</p> <p>Child/youth has no notable substance use or mental health difficulties at the present time.</p>	No	No
<p><b>1:</b> History or suspicion of problems; requires monitoring, watchful waiting, or preventive activities. This may be an opportunity for strength building.</p> <p>There is a history or suspicion of substance use or mental health difficulties, and/or caregiver is in recovery from substance use or mental health difficulties.</p> <p>Child/youth has substance use or mental health difficulties that occasionally interfere with daily life (e.g., intoxication, loss of money, reduced work/school performance, parental concern). History of</p>	No	No

Scale Number Definition	Substance Use (Drug Use/Alcohol Use)	Mental Health
substance use or mental health difficulties without evidence of current difficulties related to use is rated here.		
<p><b>2:</b> Action or intervention is required to ensure that the identified need is addressed; need is interfering with functioning.</p> <p>Caregiver's substance use or mental health difficulties interfere with their capacity to parent.</p> <p>Child/youth has substance use or mental health difficulties that consistently interferes with the ability to function optimally but does not completely preclude functioning in an unstructured setting.</p>	Yes	Yes
<p><b>3:</b> Problems are dangerous or disabling; requires immediate and/or intensive action.</p> <p>Caregiver has substance use or mental health difficulties that make it impossible to parent the child/youth at this time.</p> <p>Child/youth has substance use or mental health difficulties that represent complications to functional issues that may result in danger to self, public safety issues, or the need for detoxification of the child/youth.</p>	Yes	Yes

### **CWS/CMS CHANGES**

On July 17, 2021, a System Change Request (SCR) was implemented in CWS/CMS which added the "Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client" Grid (displayed

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below) that is accessed through the *Case* on the Client ID page. This grid is only available for each of the clients – children, youth, parents/caregivers – when accessed through the *Case* of CWS/CMS.

The screenshot shows the 'Client (Case Focus Child) [John A]' page. The 'Name and Identification' section includes fields for Prefix, First, Middle, Last, Suffix, Name Type, Sex at Birth, Marital Status, SSN, Client Index Number (CIN), Driver's License, State/Number, Date of Birth, Age and Age Unit, Alien Registration #, Client Number, and Outstanding Warrant Exists. The 'SOGIE Data' section includes Sexual Orientation, Reason Unable to Determine, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression. The 'Language' section includes Primary Language, Secondary Language, and Literate. The 'Race/Ethnicity' section includes Primary Ethnicity, Other Ethnicity, and Unable to Determine - Reason. The 'Hispanic or Latino Origin' section includes Yes, No, Declines to State, and Unable to Determine. The 'Dual Status Information' section includes Dual Status Type. The 'Safely Surrendered Baby' section includes a checkbox for 'This Client has been involved in the Safely Surrendered Baby Program'. The 'Confidentiality' section includes a checkbox for 'Confidentiality In Effect' and an Effective Date. The 'Indian Ancestry Notification' section includes a table for County and Date, and a Date Informed. The 'Other Client Information' section includes ICWA Eligible, Incapacitated Parent, and Child has Indian Ancestry. The 'Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client' section is circled in blue and includes checkboxes for Drug Use, Alcohol Use, and Mental Health Issues, and a table for Drugs and Other Drug.

**When recording drug or mental health information for a client:**

1. Click on the Client Services Tab ("blue" tab)
2. Click on the "Open Existing Client" box
3. Select the client for whom you want to enter the information.
4. The new grid is located on the "ID page."
5. Select 'Yes' or 'No' for each of the three frames:
  - 'Drug Use'
  - 'Alcohol Use'
  - 'Mental Health Issues'

Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client		
Drug Use	Alcohol Use	Mental Health Issues
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<div>+ Drugs</div>		
<div>Other Drug</div>		

Examples of Selecting 'Yes':

Select 'Yes' for each of the factors that are affecting the client – child, youth, parent or caregiver. For example, select 'Yes' for substance use for the parent, if the parent's substance use is impacting their ability to care for their child(ren) or in keeping themselves or their child(ren) safe.

Examples of Selecting 'No':

Select 'No' for each of the factors that are not affecting the client. Select 'No' if the factor is not impacting the youth or parent/caregiver's ability to complete essential tasks or the parent/caregiver's ability to care for their child(ren) and keep them safe.

For example, occasional drug or alcohol use by a parent/caregiver who makes appropriate care arrangements for their child(ren) when they are using or drinking does not necessarily indicate an impact on their ability to care and provide for their child(ren) and keep them safe.

Identifying Drugs:

If 'Yes' is selected in the 'Drug Use' box, a specific drug can be selected by clicking the '+' button in the box titled 'Drugs.' Any drugs impacting that specific client can be added. If the drug you are looking for does not appear, you can select 'Other Drug' in the drop down and type the name of the drug in the 'Other Drug' text box. Check to see if the drug is on the list first, before using the 'Other Drug' text box.

List of drugs included:

- Amphetamine
- Barbiturates
- Benzodiazepines
- Cannabinoids (Marijuana-THC)
- Cocaine
- Cocaine Metabolite
- Codeine
- Crack Cocaine
- Ecstasy
- Fentanyl
- Hallucinogens
- Heroin
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Methamphetamine
- Mehadone
- Morphine

- Opiates
- Oxycodone
- Phencyclidine (PCP)
- Polydrug
- Valium
- Xanax
- Other Drug

**Additional details about drug use, alcohol use or mental health needs:**

Record additional details about drug use, alcohol use or mental health needs in the contact notes or in the “Diagnosed and Observed Conditions Grid” when appropriate. For example, be sure to provide more details about frequency of use, impact on the child(ren), if there are any diagnoses or medications, timeframes etc.

**Error Message:**

If the ‘Drug Use’ option is changed from ‘Yes’ to ‘No’ and Drugs have been selected in the ‘Drugs’ grid, the system will display the error message:

***“The drug use information recorded for this client will be deleted. Proceed?”***

If proceeding to change the ‘Drug Use’ option from ‘Yes’ to ‘No,’ the drugs that were selected in the ‘Drugs’ grid will be deleted for this client.

**Changes to previously existing “Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client” grid accessed through the Referral:**

Please note, the functionality has not changed for the existing “Drug/Mental Health Issues Affecting this Client” grid, accessed through the *Referral* which is still only available for perpetrators. However, if a user is editing the grid accessed through the Referral and no radio button is selected on the Client ID page for one or more of the given frames ‘Drug Use,’ ‘Alcohol Use,’ or ‘Mental Health Issues,’ a reminder titled ***“Drug/Mental Health Issues not Complete”*** will appear. This message will only appear for the grid accessed through the *Referral* and only for a perpetrator with at least one allegation that has not been concluded or has been concluded as “Substantiated” or “Inconclusive.” This reminder will not appear for the new grid that is accessed through the *Case*.

**PROPER USE OF THE “DRUG/MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AFFECTING THIS CLIENT” GRID AND GRID INFORMATION**

**When to enter information in this grid:**

- Drug use and mental health information can change throughout an individual’s case and an individual’s life. Caseworkers must keep this information up to date and reflective of the individual’s current situation, and regularly update this information as a client’s circumstances change.



- This grid does not provide space to elaborate on the mental health and/or substance use e.g. frequency of use, if there is treatment, if there is improvement, start or end dates etc. Thus, when entering information into this grid, be sure to also record additional relevant information in case notes or where more details can be documented to provide a full understanding of the circumstances for mental health and/or substance use.
- Only enter and use the information into the grid if it complies with applicable confidentiality and privacy laws. In accordance with state Division 19-008 regulations for Record Keeping, “the purpose of public assistance and social service records is to evidence eligibility and delivery of public social services. The applicant's or recipient's record should only contain facts relevant to his or her case.” Only enter the information if it is relevant to the client's case.

**When to use the information in the grid:**

- Only use the client-specific information in the grid for the duration of the case.
- Child welfare workers and juvenile probation officers can use this grid to better track the prevalence and impact of substance use and mental health needs on the current case.
- Once the case is closed the data should only be used to track and assess the prevalence and impact of mental health needs and substance exposure and use contributing to child maltreatment and removals at a county or tribal level, which is consistent with Division 19-003 Nonconfidential Information which states, “Statistical information and social data, that is not identified with a particular individual may be released.”
  - Counties can pull the data from the grid into a report using Business Objects. When using the aggregate data, remove all Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and observe [CDSS de-identification guidelines](#) if the data is shared.

**When information should NOT be added to this grid: :**

- When a **child or youth** discloses information regarding **their own** mental health or drug/alcohol use, discuss with them if it is okay to record this information and how it may be used.
  - Do not document information in this grid if the child/youth does not provide consent to use their own mental health or substance use information.
  - Do not enter information in this grid if a child/youth indicates a specific intent or limitation for the use of their own substance use or mental health information.

**Limitations on use of the information in this grid:**

- When investigating a new referral or allegation and reviewing past referral and case information, the information contained in the **past referral or case grid**

cannot be used as evidence for the **current** substance/alcohol use or mental health needs in **subsequent** emergency response or court investigations of child abuse and neglect involving the same clients. The historical grid information cannot be used as evidence to support a new allegation. All workers must still conduct their own safety, risk and needs assessment on the family's *current* circumstances and follow the expected protocols during child abuse and neglect investigations as outlined in the Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Section [31-105](#), 31-115 and 31-120, which includes an assessment of current substance use and mental health needs as risk factors and their impact on the safety of the child(ren).

- If a new referral or case is opened and there is historical information in the grid in the prior case, this information should only be assessed in the context of the individual's *current* situation and used to best support the individual and their family in the current referral or case. The caseworker must assess:
  - If substance use and/or mental health are currently impacting the individual and their family.
    - If substance use and/or mental health is impacting the individual and their family, is the historical grid information still impacting the individual and their family in the current referral or case?
  - If the individual overcame or attempted to overcome past struggles with substance use or mental health, what worked in the past for the individual to overcome these struggles e.g. "What has the individual and family already done well to address substance use or mental health impact on the child(ren) and family?" or "What coping strategies or services worked in the past to prevent substance use or mental health needs from affecting the child(ren) and their safety?"
  - What other factors in the individual's life could impact the substance use and/or mental health needs for the individual?

If you have any questions or need additional guidance for data entry regarding the information in this letter, contact the Child Welfare System Branch, Child Welfare System Support Unit at (916) 891-3100 or at [CFSD\\_CARES\\_Admin@osi.ca.gov](mailto:CFSD_CARES_Admin@osi.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By***

ANGELA SCHWARTZ  
Deputy Director  
Children and Family Services Division