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## Shared Principles for Child Welfare Fiscal, Policy, and Practice Alignment September 2014

The Alliance for Children and Families, the American Public Human Services Association (APHS) and the National Organization of the State Associations for Children (NOSAC) believe in the power of home- and community-based, family-centered systems of supports and engagement that help families ensure that their children grow up in nurturing environments, safe from abuse and neglect. When these systems are aligned to a prevention model, they help promote the well-being of all children and their families. When some children and families need a system that provides protective intervention to address issues of abuse or neglect, the systems pave the pathway to a successful forever family.

We are partners and advocates working together to build a system that strengthens families, prevents the need for protective intervention whenever possible, yet stands ready to respond with a broad array of supports and services designed for the children and families who need them as a result of abuse and neglect. Shared responsibility throughout this system helps advance a shared vision across public and private sectors, philanthropy and business communities.

When situations require protective interventions and pathways to a forever family, the system of care, services, and support must effectively promote and improve the social, physical, cognitive, behavioral and emotional well-being outcomes for the children who interact with it. To do this, the system needs the capacity to enhance the following elements that support well-being: a safe and nurturing home environment; adequate nutrition and health care; supportive, loving, adults, including engaged family members; appropriate developmental and educational opportunities; and caring communities.

Through finance reform, we aim to realign the system so that it delivers an appropriate, integrated array of preventative, early, protective and therapeutic interventions to children and their families at the earliest identification of need, and does it in a cost effective, family-friendly manner. The system comprises home- and community-based supports and services provided through a variety of options including foster, kinship, and guardianship arrangements. Services and support include evidence-based treatment and stabilization that, depending on the unique needs of a child, may best be provided through high quality, family-connected residential settings. The entire system of care is focused on the outcomes of protecting child safety, ensuring successful forever families and sustaining the well-being of our children and youth.

In this work, the single most important guiding principle is to place the best interests of the child and the family at the center of our collective decision making and system reform efforts. With that as our focus, we lead with this complement of guiding principles:

## Child- and Family-Centered Principles

- 1. Every child feels a sense of belonging, safety, and permanency for healthy growth and development.** Support systems designed to protect and nurture children who are in its care have the capacity and commitment to promote and improve the social, physical, behavioral and emotional well-being outcomes for children and families.
- 2. Whenever possible, a child lives with family members.** A system of supports and services strives to keep children with their birth families. When removal from the home is necessary, the best interests for the child's sense of belonging, safety and well-being are at the center of decision making within the context of available familial and community resources. For example, when a child needs a home outside of the birth family, through a foster care placement, intensive family finding and engagement is implemented to identify willing and able relatives as the preferred alternative.
- 3. Families are partners.** All types of families, whether birth, extended, foster, kinship or adoptive, need access to services and supports designed to improve child and family outcomes. Family engagement is an integral component in developing the service delivery plan.
- 4. Each child and family receives the right services and supports at the right time for the appropriate length of time.** When children and families come to the attention of the Child Welfare System to protect a child's safety and well-being, appropriate assessments are done to determine what interventions address and identify underlying and presenting needs. An appropriate level and intensity of services and supports that protect the child and stabilize the child and family are provided across a coordinated and integrated system of care.
- 5. When intensive therapeutic intervention is required in a residentially-based setting, the connection between the child and the family is maintained, including foster and kinship families.** Some children require intensive behavioral or behavioral health treatment which may include high quality, evidence-based, family-connected residentially-based treatment. Residential settings are used when interventions delivered in less restrictive living situations cannot safely or effectively address the needs of children or youth. And when children are admitted, there is no risk of losing their homes or placements. Just as the family of a child admitted to a hospital to treat a physical ailment, e.g. cancer, does not lose custody or placement of the child, a family or caregiver does not have to relinquish custody to secure needed residential treatment. The family is involved in the child's treatment and also receives the help they need for successful reunification, greatly reducing the cycle of failure associated with post residential and foster care placement.

## System-Centered Principles

6. **Public systems effectively promote and improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families.** System effectiveness is increased when guided by standards that set expectations for the quality of services, supports, and experiences. The ultimate measure of any system's effectiveness is achievement of established child and family outcomes for safety, permanency and well-being.
7. **Responsive systems of care deliver appropriate, integrated, comprehensive, home- and community based services and supports.** These systems are resourced to respond to the underlying and presenting needs of children and families through evidence-informed screening, assessment and treatment. Systems are equipped to assess and address the stressors that correlate to higher levels of risk, which include, but are not limited to: childhood trauma, behavioral health challenges, substance use, family violence, community violence, high poverty, and housing instability.
8. **Multiple sectors work together to achieve outcomes within a strengths-based, multi-disciplinary framework.** Achieving safety, permanency and well-being is not the Child Welfare System's responsibility alone. An effective child welfare system of services collaborates, coordinates, and connects agencies, programs and financing streams, and shares information across related systems. An appropriate, integrated system of care views families – birth, foster, and kinship – peers and professionals as partners and shares a unifying focus on generating positive outcomes for children and their families. When this happens, systems are able to more fully leverage opportunities to develop, implement, and sustain quality services and supports that prevent crises, stabilize children and families after crises occur, and provide them with the resources and skills to effectively address future crisis situations. Sectors that intersect with the Child Welfare System include housing, public health, employment, child care, pre K – 12 education, juvenile justice, and physical, mental and behavioral health.
9. **Public and private agencies operate within a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) framework and share the responsibility of providing evidence on the effectiveness and efficiency of programs.** The federal monitoring system promotes the utilization of state CQI frameworks and supports and encourages innovation and transformation. Performance-based, quality assurance and quality improvement efforts are fundamental to CQI which comprise a continual cycle of identifying areas of need, outlining strategies for improvement and testing and monitoring interventions to measure success toward achieving goals and improving outcomes. Public and private agency staff receive the levels of training and support necessary to secure the skills, information and tools needed to do what's best for children and families. Under a realigned federal financing structure enables states to target investments to programs and practices that have demonstrated quality as attested to by evaluation, research, or other evidence-producing processes.
10. **The court system helps facilitate each child's safety, permanency and well-being as its paramount concerns.** Court practices are trauma-informed, child- and family-centered, and age-appropriate. Federal funding supports projects to improve practice, such as the Court Improvement Program, and builds the competency and consistency of practice among practitioners, specialists, attorneys and judges.

## Finance Reform Principles

11. **A meaningful accountability framework balances oversight and flexibility and is an essential component of a better aligned financing system.** An accountability framework balances oversight, achievement of established outcomes, and incentives to recognize and encourage scaling up proven, effective programs and practices. Within this federal child- and family well-being framework, incentives are tied to improvement in safety, permanency, and well-being outcome measures; CQI and related processes demonstrate and validate efforts made toward improving child and family outcomes, and states strategically target resources and invest in evidence-informed strategies. This furthers delivering the right services at the right time for the appropriate length of time.
12. **Federal financing provides base funding to support state Child Welfare Systems and the federal-state-local partnership includes a mechanism for shared risk taking.** As the nexus for Child Welfare funding streams, state agencies can reliably budget for federal financing that can be leveraged using state, local and private resources. Within the financing formula, there is a risk-sharing provision to manage dramatic increases in the number of children entering the Child Welfare System due to extenuating circumstances.
13. **The federal government establishes accountability across programs and agencies that are part of an integrated system of care to improve child and family outcomes.** The effectiveness of the Child Welfare System is enhanced through the practice of braiding or blending relevant funding streams from other sectors and programs. Mechanisms are in place to incentivize the integration of systems and funding streams to achieve an established set of shared outcomes.
14. **Federal child welfare financing is available without regard to the parent's income.** Financing is provided for all maltreated children in need of safety, protection and permanency. The 1996 look-back provision that linked the Child Welfare System to the prior AFDC program is eliminated.

## About the Partners:

The [American Public Human Services Association \(APHSA\)](#) is a bipartisan, nonprofit national organization representing chief executives in state and local human service agencies, public child welfare administrators, and human service program leaders. With and through our members, we support outcome focused policies and practices, advance innovation and knowledge development, and work with public and private networks to collectively promote better, healthier children, adults, families, and communities.

The [Alliance for Children and Families](#) is a national organization dedicated to a vision of a healthy society and strong communities for all children, adults, and families. The Alliance works for transformational change by representing and supporting hundreds of nonprofit human service organizations in North America. Through its Washington D.C.-based office of public policy, the Alliance utilizes a systems reform agenda and policy recommendations to improve the lives of vulnerable citizens. The policy agenda also includes civic engagement efforts that leverage authentic voices in neighborhoods and communities. More information is available at [alliance1.org](http://alliance1.org).

The [National Organization of State Associations for Children \(NOSAC\)](#) is a national organization of 28 state associations representing over 1,500 private agencies across the country serving vulnerable children, youth and families in the public child welfare and children's mental health systems. NOSAC is committed to improving the care, services, and support provided to young people and their families through collaborative policy advocacy, information sharing and mutual assistance.