

Performance Indicators Project Questions and Answers

1. What are performance indicators (PI)?

- A performance indicator is defined as a numerical result measuring an important child welfare service.
- Each individual performance indicator is not necessarily helpful on its own but collectively can provide some insight into the strengths of an organization and identify where improvements can be made.

2. What is the Performance Indicators Measurement and Management Project?

- The PI project has been led by OACAS on behalf of the child welfare sector.
- The goal of this project is to establish a performance measurement system that collects provincial performance indicators. This system will allow for effective organizational planning, will increase transparency and accountability, and will generate knowledge to improve services for vulnerable children, youth and families.

3. Why are we collecting performance indicators?

- To foster ongoing learning and continued quality improvement in service delivery
- To increase transparency and accountability in our ongoing work to achieve better outcomes for children and youth
- To raise public awareness on the performance of Children's Aid Societies related to the safety, permanency and well-being of children.
- Performance Indicators help to answer questions like "how well is an agency serving children and families?" and "what is the impact services are having on the safety and well-being of children, youth and families?".

4. What performance indicators are being publicly reported?

- Five provincial service performance indicators were selected for public reporting because they measure critical child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being.
 - Recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after an investigation (Safety Outcome)
 - Recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after ongoing protection services were provided (Safety Outcome)
 - The days of care, by placement type (Permanency Outcome)
 - The time to permanency (Permanency Outcome)
 - The quality of the caregiver and youth relationship (Well-being Outcome)

5. Why is there variation in the data and between the individual agency results?

Variation within the data:

- There is always variation in data results, it is normal and constant. Understanding the nature of the variation is key in decision-making about future action. Variation can be viewed in two ways:
 - as an indication that something has changed over time (a trend) – determine if it is meaningful change
 - as random variation that does not mean a change has occurred
- While a data line that trends sharply upward or downward is easy to read as an indication of success or failure, it is often the case that the data are more subtle and require more careful interpretation. With variation appearing on either side of the change, the trick is to compare the variation by looking at averages before and after. If the data after the change continue to fall within the same range as the data before the change, then more fundamental changes are needed to bring about true improvement.¹

Variation between individual agency results:

- Potential sources of variation in child welfare data include:
 - Child and family level factors / characteristics –population served
 - Case level factors (i.e. maltreatment type, placement)
 - Consistency of practice models (i.e. Signs of Safety, Customary Care)
 - Worker / Supervisor clinical decisions
 - Organizational factors (i.e. generic versus specialized teams, multi-service delivery)
 - Access to and utilization of community resources
 - Relation to other PIs (i.e. admission rates)
- The reliability of the data can be impacted by the following factors:
 - Consistency of definition and measurement
 - Data quality – sample size, bias, accuracy, reliability

6. What does the performance indicator “recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after investigation” measure?

- One way to measure safety concerns at a Children's Aid Society is to track if and when cases are returning to the system with verified protection concerns about a child or children in a family after they were closed following an investigation.

¹ Source: Langley G, Nolan K, Nolan T, Norman C, Provost L. *The Improvement Guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/ImprovementStories/UnderstandVariationinData.aspx>

7. What are the factors that explain the aggregate results for “recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after investigation”?

The following are contextual considerations and proposed reasons for variation of agency results²:

- “Higher recurrence rates were associated with agencies serving a higher proportion of individuals with lower income, a greater proportion of the Aboriginal population and greater proportion of lone parent families.”
- “Investigations involve the assessment of a broad range of child maltreatment, family functioning and well-being issues.” Caregiver-Child Conflict / Child Behaviour, Custody and Caregiver Capacity are the 3 highest types of investigations closed with the highest proportion of recurrence.
- “Complex and chronic family issues (e.g. caregiver mental health, addictions, child-caregiver relationship issues) may be more difficult for the child welfare system to address in isolation”.
- “Investigations involving urgent protection issues have much lower rates of recurrence than those that reflect chronic need.”

8. What does the performance indicator “recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after ongoing protection services were provided” measure?

- One way to measure safety concerns at a Children’s Aid Society is to measure how often cases are returning to the system with verified protection concerns about a child or children in a family after they were closed following an investigation and the provision of services.

9. What are the factors that explain what the aggregate results mean for “recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after ongoing protection services were provided”?

The following are contextual considerations and proposed reasons for variation of agency results³:

- “Higher recurrence rates were associated with agencies serving a higher proportion of individuals with lower income, a greater proportion of the Aboriginal population and greater proportion of lone parent families.”
- “Investigations involve the assessment of a broad range of child maltreatment, family functioning and well-being issues.” Caregiver-Child Conflict / Child Behaviour, Custody and Caregiver Capacity are the 3 highest types of investigations closed with the highest proportion of recurrence.

² Fallon, B., Filippelli, J., Black, T., King, B., Moody, B., (2016). *Service Recurrence Performance Indicators in Ontario Children’s Aid Societies: Contextual Considerations*, Retrieved from Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal <http://cwrp.ca/>

³ Fallon, B., Filippelli, J., Black, T., King, B., Moody, B., (2016). *Service Recurrence Performance Indicators in Ontario Children’s Aid Societies: Contextual Considerations*, Retrieved from Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal <http://cwrp.ca/>

- “Complex and chronic family issues (e.g. caregiver mental health, addictions, child-caregiver relationship issues) may be more difficult for the child welfare system to address in isolation”.
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10. What does the performance indicator “the days of care, by placement type” measure?

- This PI measures the total number of days a child who is not able to live with their own family, is in the care of a CAS, lives in family-based care, group care and other arrangements such as living in hospitals, justice facilities or independently.

11. What do the aggregate results mean for “the days of care, by placement type”?

- The majority (77 to 79%) of children in the care of a CAS live in a family-based care setting such as Foster Care, living with Kin and with potential adoptive parents.

12. What does the performance indicator “the time to permanency” measure?

- This PI measures the length of time it took for children and youth in care to leave care. A child and youth leaves care when they find a permanent, safe home, ideally in a family setting, or when they turn 18 years of age.

13. What do the aggregate results mean for “the time to permanency”?

- All children admitted in any fiscal year, over half (62-64%) exit from the care of a Children's Aid Society (CAS) within 12 months of coming into care. By 24 months 76% of children that came into care have exited the care of a CAS. Within 36 months or 3 years 85% of children that came into the care of a CAS have exited care. The remaining 15% of children are still in the care of a CAS.

14. What does the performance indicator “quality of caregiver and youth relationship” measure?

- This PI measures a young person's perception of his or her relationship with his or her caregiver.

15. What do the aggregate results mean for “quality of caregiver and youth relationship”?

- Children between the ages of 10 to 15 years old have rated the quality of their caregiver relationship higher than youth aged 16 and 17.

16. What were some of the challenges faced in developing performance indicators?

- Establishing a performance measurement and management system takes years of development and requires a significant commitment of time and resources from every stakeholder involved.
- Performance measurement starts with determining what is important to achieve by focusing on an organization's strategic directions and a Ministry's policies. It means selecting measures that will demonstrate accomplishments.
- Collecting the right information is critical because too often organizations select the easier indicators that have less meaning and do not support effective decision making.
- Collecting performance indicator data required engaging every Ontario Children's Aid Society to participate in the project and to develop a common set of definitions for the work of child welfare across the province.
- Collecting and measuring 26 performance indicators involved many technical challenges, notably "migrating" 200 pieces of data from 6 different case management systems in 45 agencies and harmonizing them into one common provincial data base system.

17. Why do some Children's Aid Societies not have performance indicator results?

- Due to technical limitations of two case management systems used in Ontario the performance indicator data was not accessible through a data extraction to be able to calculate the performance indicator results for eleven agencies.

18. Why have benchmarks not been established for the five publicly reported performance indicators?

At this time benchmarks will not be established until there is further understanding about what the results mean to identify if a specific direction or goal needs to be set.

- A benchmark is a target that defines movement from where you are (your current agency result) to where you want to be (what you are trying to achieve). The purpose of a benchmark is to set new goals and adapt the best practices for your agency which promotes greater efficiency and effectiveness in the services being delivered.
- Benchmarking is a continuous process of learning and discovery. Benchmarking involves the process of observing and learning about the current performance indicator results and determining what approaches / practices are contributing to good outcomes for children, youth and families. This is the first step before benchmarks can be set.
- It can be risky to set benchmarks prematurely before you understand the results as the benchmark you are striving to achieve can have an adverse impact on other areas of service.

19. What is the full list of performance indicators that have been chosen for collection and measurement?

- The original performance indicators were developed by an expert reference group that reported to the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare.
- OACAS, along with the child welfare sector, played a leadership role in the continued development of the indicators and in the formulas to calculate the PIs that were chosen.
- The Ministry confirmed 26 performance indicators in the areas of service, organizational capacity, and governance effectiveness. The indicators are listed below.

Sixteen Service Performance Indicators

(Data Source – Case Management Systems)

1. Response time 12 hours
2. Response time 48 hours
3. Response time 7 days
4. Recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after investigation
5. Recurrence of child protection concerns in a family after ongoing services were provided
6. *Safety in Care (on hold – new measurement required)*
7. Entry to care
8. Re-entry to care
9. The days of care, by placement type
10. The time to permanency
11. Placement stability / moves in care
12. Worker continuity – family services
13. Worker continuity – children's services

(Data Source – Ontario Looking After Children, Action and Assessment Record)

14. Developmental assets of children in care
15. The quality of the caregiver and youth relationship
16. Educational performance of children in care – age to grade

Six Organizational Capacity Performance Indicators

(Data Source – OACAS Survey)

1. Client feedback
2. Stakeholder feedback

(Data Source – OACAS HR Survey)

3. Staff turnover by job classification
4. Staff Sick days
5. Staff qualifications

(Data Source – Ministry Quarterly Report)

6. Accuracy of financial reporting

Four Governance Effectiveness Performance Indicators

(Data Source – Governance Board Survey)

1. Right people as directors
2. Clear and supportive structures
3. Reliable and enabling processes
4. Healthy and sustainable culture

20. What role did the University of Toronto and the University of Ottawa play in developing and measuring performance indicators?

- The University of Toronto Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Database System (OCANDS) was subcontracted to collect, validate and calculate the performance indicator results for thirteen of the service performance indicators. The OCANDS infrastructure translates the data into a common format so that data can be examined in aggregate. This involves a harmonization process where raw agency data are transformed and mapped to the OCANDS data definitions.
- The OCANDS team has provided leadership with the preliminary analysis of the aggregate performance indicator results and developed two FACT Sheets for service recurrence and time to discharge.
- The University of Ottawa collected, measured and calculated the service performance indicators 14 to 16. This data was compiled using the Ontario Looking After Children (ONLAC) data set for the period of June 1 to May 31 of each fiscal year.

21. What is the Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Database System (OCANDS)?

- OCANDS is a child-specific longitudinal database that has the capacity to follow the continuum of services provided to children and families from their initial report to a Children's Aid Society through to the end of their service. Through years of development it has harmonized hundreds of code table values for five of the systems used by Children's Aid Societies.
- OCANDS is not limited to the measurement of the performance indicators. It can measure many other aspects of service, as well as drill down into the details of age, gender, maltreatment type and many other drivers. Each CAS that has provided their data to OCANDS can use the database website to study any of the variables that have been collected to analyze their agency data for greater understanding.

22. What is ONLAC?

- The Ontario Looking After Children project (ONLAC) is a data collection project that the University of Ottawa has been undertaking since 2000. Children Aid Societies provide data to the project on the health, education, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development and self-care skills of children in care. The data comes from the detailed assessment that workers fill out for each child who has been in care for more than a year. The University of Ottawa collects and reports back this data to agencies in the form of trends. Agencies use the data to inform their strategies for areas of improvement.



23. What are the next steps for the performance indicator project?

- We have come a long way and accomplished a great deal in a short period of time. Yet there is more work to be done to achieve a provincial performance measurement system. Some of the key next steps that agencies need to work towards include:
 - Continue to migrate data from case management systems
 - Establish an analytical framework including establishing a baseline
 - Conduct the analysis and work with the findings to develop continuous improvement strategies
 - Develop Aboriginal specific performance indicators