DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

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SECRETARY

WAYNE E. BLACK
SR. DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES
AND COUNTY OPERATIONS

April 1, 2017

Dear County Director and Child Welfare Administrators, Managers, and Supervisors

Attention: Information Security Officers

Subject: Child Welfare IT Tool: Accessing Sensitive Safety Information through Secure Technology (ASSIST)

We are pleased to announce the availability of a new software application developed in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology, Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC). Child Welfare Accessing Sensitive Safety Information through Secure Technology (CW ASSIST; also referenced in the abbreviated format of CWA) provides authorized personnel at county departments of social services access to data related to possible risk indicators while working with children and families. This system will be available beginning April 3, 2017, using the existing e-IRAAF procedures.

This web-based application consolidates data from several systems into a single view of a person or address. The data incorporated into CWA has been selected to address the requirements as specified in SL 2014-100 and SL 2015-241 (See Attachment 1). The application can be accessed in offices using desktop or laptop computers as well as on mobile devices, such as smart phones or tablets, while in the field. In all situations, the application is accessed via a web browser, therefore, can only be used if the device has access to the internet. This application does not support the storing of data on the device, minimizing privacy and security concerns.

CWA is designed to yield information on records across systems that do not share a common unique identifier; therefore, the application may return a search result for individuals that is not an exact match. Data matching algorithms are used to identify unique individuals across the different systems. The process involves building logical relationships between these data sources rather than exact matching to gather all information about an individual.

It is possible that displayed information about a single individual in CWA is actually composed of information from two or more distinct individuals. The application could also return multiple search results for the same individual due to not having enough demographic information from the different data sources to link the records.

Users will need to think critically about the results displayed and may need to search the application on multiple variables to obtain a full set of possible results. Since the information compiled is from multiple source systems, users should also refer to the system of record for data verification.

Additionally, the data extracted from the various sources has not been verified back to the source system. For these reasons, results from CWA should be seen as "indicators" of risk and not to be used for final decision making. Any information within CWA will need to be used as an engagement tool with family members and other system stakeholders, such as law enforcement agencies to enable a stronger dialogue to support better decision making.

NC DSS Child Welfare Children's Program Representatives (CPRs) will be the first point of contact for any questions and feedback regarding programmatic aspects of this tool. Technical support for the CW ASSIST is provided by GDAC customer support at: 919.754.6950.

County Information Security Officers (ISOs) and Child Welfare Services Program Supervisors should keep in mind that the Child Welfare ASSIST (CWA) application will need to be included in the Quarterly State DSS System Access Review for the April – June 2017 quarter, and reflected in the Quarterly Report due in July 2017 (reference PM-REM-AL-01-2016 and PM-REM-AL-02-2016). Questions in this regard may be submitted via email to the DSS Security Access Review Manager.

Attached are several documents that provide the detailed information on how to authorize access to CWA for county personnel, as well as user guides for navigation and use of the application. Additionally, a web-based video demonstrating the navigation of the system is being developed. That video will be shared as soon as it has been developed.

Sincerely,

Kevin Kelley, Section Chief
Child Welfare Services

Attachments (5):
1. CPS Pilot Project Legislation
2. How to Request Access to CWA
3. CWA User guide
4. CWA Searches
5. CWA Information

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