

Social Services Working Group Stage Two Information Gathering

The work of the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working (SSWG) is divided into two stages. In Stage Two, the SSWG is charged with

- Developing recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory changes necessary to improve collaboration between counties in the administration of social services programs and services. The recommendations must address, at a minimum, information sharing, conflicts of interest, and inter-county movement of people enrolled in programs or receiving social services.
- Developing a vision for transitioning the State from a county-administered system to a regionally-administered system. The vision must identify general benefits and challenges associated with making such a transition.

In order to prepare the SSWG for this Stage Two work, the SOG support team scheduled a series of meetings and discussion groups to gather feedback from relevant partners and stakeholders involved with the social services system. Groups involved in this process included:

- Social services directors
- Social services attorneys
- Social services board members
- County commissioners
- State agency representatives
- Parent attorney representatives
- Behavioral health provider organization
- NC Pediatric Society
- National Association of Social Workers (NC)
- Prevent Child Abuse
- NC Partnership to Address Adult Abuse

SOG also posted a public survey on the SOG website and shared the link with many individuals and groups. It is still open and available at

<https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/stage-two-public-survey>.

SOG asked each group “what does SSWG need to know?” and posed variations on these two questions:

- What legislative and regulatory changes are needed to improve inter-county collaboration?
- What benefits and challenges might be associated with a state-supervised, regionally-administered (as opposed to a state-supervised, county-administered) social services system?

Below is a synthesis of the feedback SOG received about the first issue – inter-county collaboration. The feedback about the second issue – regional administration – will be synthesized and shared in several weeks.

Inter-County collaboration

What are barriers to inter-county collaboration?

What legislative and regulatory changes are needed to improve inter-county collaboration?

Issue	Potential changes
<p>Conflicts of Interest</p> <p>State COI policy relies on the directors to determine whether a COI exists and to seek out another county to manage the case. Some counties that receive a request disagree with the sending director’s decision that a COI exists. There is some confusion about the financial obligations of the sending and receiving counties. Lack of clear direction and specificity result in variation across the state in interpretation of law and policy.</p> <p>Some counties are not seen as good partners in COI management for a range of reasons, including quality of work, response time, willingness to assume responsibility, and understaffing. This results in a heavier burden on the “good” counties that accept COI cases and handle them well.</p>	<p>Additional clarification of expectations and definitions needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What constitutes a COI? Review and revise the definition. • Who decides a COI exists? Should receiving county be allowed to question the sending county’s decision that a COI existed? • Is it appropriate for the receiving county to screen the report if it knows that a COI exists? • Who funds the work? • What are procedural and substantive expectations for both counties? • What should be the protocol for counties sending/receiving/accepting? • What are expectations regarding reciprocity? <p>Designate particular person in each county to manage COIs to ensure that requests are received, reviewed, and handled consistently and in a timely manner.</p> <p>Clarify policy as described above.</p> <p>Rely on new regional offices to monitor county behavior with COIs, supervise COI process when necessary, serve as independent arbiter about which county must take case.</p>

Issue	Potential changes
<p>Counties do not have enough staff to manage COIs for other counties. Vacancy rates and caseloads are high across the state. It is difficult for a county to agree to accept a COI for another county when it does not have enough staff to manage its own caseload.</p>	<p>Find ways to increase or reallocate funding to allow social services agencies to have adequate staffing.</p>
<p>Inter-County Movement of Clients</p> <p>State law governing county of residence (G.S. 153A-257) creates some confusion regarding (a) transient families, (b) temporary placements, and (c) individual in institutions. The historical tether between residency and the “Medicaid home county” creates some tension and confusion.</p> <p>Cases are being transferred without notice, communication, or necessary information sharing (e.g., change of venue in child support, transfers in child welfare)</p> <p>Disruptions of Medicaid funded services take place when individuals change counties (or LME/MCO).</p>	<p>Clarification of residency law and policy. Revised policy should address residency in temporary circumstances (shelter, rehab, etc.). Policy could allow for options – Medicaid county, reside (but address definition), or is found. If efficiency is the goal, distant counties should not be responsible – counties should work together.</p> <p>Clarify supervision expected for transfers. When a case is transferred from one county to another, establish a standard practice for knowledge transfer, even if transferring county had a COI.</p> <p>Develop <i>reliable</i> statewide case management system to ensure all case records are accessible by all counties.</p> <p>Medicaid-funded services should continue uninterrupted during transitions, regardless of LME/MCO.</p> <p>Medicaid eligibility determinations and service approvals (medical necessity) should apply statewide.</p>

Issue	Potential changes
<p>Information Sharing</p> <p>Inconsistent access to data or case information (child support, JWISE, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without access to JWISE, DSS doesn't know if another court took on a case, terminated jurisdiction, etc. Extremely difficult to get info from child support in other counties. As a result, DSS doesn't use failure to pay support as grounds for TPR. <p>Counties are not always notified when Clerks appoint DSS as guardians, especially when the DSS is in another area of the state.</p> <p>Inconsistent understanding of what information may be shared; state staff offer conflicting advice and interpretations.</p>	<p>Increase DSS access to information systems available to others (JWISE).</p> <p>Create a system that allows child welfare and child support to receive notice when a child enters and leaves care.</p> <p>Require clerks of court to notice DSS prior to considering appointment as guardian. Will allow DSS to review case, discuss with other county DSS's involved, and travel to the other county for the hearing.</p> <p>Revise policy guidance from state and train state representatives (including regional state representatives) to ensure that they are interpreting and applying it consistently.</p>
<p>Inadequate resources/staffing</p> <p>Core issue that generates negative outcomes everywhere, including collaborative functions. Primary example is the inability to hire enough adequate, quality staff to support both intra-county responsibilities and inter-county collaboration.</p> <p>Staff hired and trained in one county moves to another county for higher pay.</p>	<p>Find ways to increase or reallocate funding to allow social services agencies to have adequate staffing</p> <p>Establish a uniform pay scale for county staff; consider prohibiting supplements.</p>

Issue	Potential changes
<p>Variations in programs and policy implementation</p> <p>Counties implement programs and policies differently. Can generate a lack of trust or confidence in practices in other counties. For example, one county may have a significantly different approach to a parenting program (e.g., content, delivery, credentialing, or availability). County A may require parents to participate in certain situations, but County B may not.</p>	<p>Consistent interpretation and application of policies and expectations will foster greater trust and willingness to collaborate.</p> <p>Adequate and accessible staff training is essential.</p>
<p>Travel demands to comply with policy</p> <p>County staff required to travel to distant second county to conduct home studies for placement or visit with incarcerated individuals or those in facilities. The travel can consume significant resources from first county. When assist requested from second county, the request is not always honored and the responsibility/funding not always clear.</p> <p>County staff required to travel to distant second county to transport incarcerated individuals to participate in court proceedings. The travel can consume significant resources from first county.</p>	<p>Set policies that broaden the expectations for providing assists to distant counties and that clarify the financial obligations of each county.</p> <p>Allow participation remotely. May require significant investment in equipment. Would require support from and coordination among (1) the correctional facility, (2) the county DSS where the correctional facility is located, and (3) the resident county.</p>

Issue	Potential changes
<p>Lack of models for successful collaboration</p> <p>There is anecdotal evidence about collaborative efforts over the years. Some have succeeded while others have failed. The directors’ association strives to collect and disseminate best practices, but it would still be helpful to have more comprehensive information and tools to support successful collaborations.</p>	<p>State (central or regional) or others should develop resources to facilitate inter-county collaboration.</p>
<p>Ad hoc collaborations</p> <p>Current system relies heavily on relationships between directors and initiative from county to county. There are no policies or guidance from the state on when and how to collaborate. Even though more structure and guidance is desired, participants believe that collaboration should still be voluntary and should focus on supporting local needs.</p> <p>Counties develop collaborations independently. The state does not incentivize or promote collaborations, even though such partnerships may improve service delivery or save money.</p>	<p>State (central and/or regional) or others should develop resources to facilitate inter-county collaboration.</p> <p>Regional offices can support collaboration by providing direction, parameters, and policies.</p> <p>State should establish a financial incentive program to encourage counties to invest in the start-up work to begin a new collaborative effort with one or more counties.</p>

SSWG Homework:

Identify any other issues or potential changes the working group should consider or clarify/expand upon those described above

Issue	Potential change

Other Notes:
