

California Aging Reporting System (CARS)

An Introduction to the CARS Project

Issued June 2007

Welcome to the introduction of the California Aging Reporting System (CARS) Project. This introductory document follows two consecutive conference calls on June 18 and 19, 2007, between the California Department of Aging (CDA) and California Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). The content of this document repeats much of the same information offered in the original conference calls, but is updated based on what was learned during those calls.

Summary of CARS Project:

The CARS Project is a multi-phased multi-year project beginning in June 2007 which will transform the existing Older Americans Act (OAA) and Older Californians Act (OCA) **aggregate** reporting system into a new web-based system capable of providing the State with client-specific data from the Aging Services network. The complete project envisions web-based access to one common database on OAA and OCA fiscal, program performance (utilization), and client-specific demographic profile data. In this vision, reporting in the current sense of quarterly and annual reporting will eventually become obsolete.

Phase I will use a modified off-the-shelf system configured by its contractor, RTZ Associates, to accept client-level National Aging Programs Information System (NAPIS) and Family Caregiver Support Program data from the AAAs over the web. This will provide the first step toward the goal of a system that will capture both federal and state data and allow AAAs and CDA to compare service utilization data across programs. This phase of the Project also implements the underlying technology to accept client-specific data at the state level.

CDA Project Team Members:

- **Bill Hogan**, Chief Information Officer and **CARS Project Manager**
- **Diane Paulsen**, Deputy Director, Administration Division
- **Kareme Shihabi**, Database Administrator, Information Technology (IT) Branch
- **Wayne Lindley**, Policy Manager, Data Team

Background: Two significant events brought CDA to where we are today with respect to the implementation of CARS: (1) issuance of a joint 1998 CDA/California Association of Area Agencies on Aging (C4A) Vision Statement; and (2) passage of SB 910, statutes of 1999.

CDA launched its first electronic reporting system, called ManAge, on February 10, 1997. Less than one year later, CDA and C4A agreed to a joint "Vision Statement" concerning the long-range goals of improving and using the Aging Services network data for better advocacy and management purposes. In that joint Vision Statement, it was agreed that the potential for using OAA and OCA data in **combination with other social and health-related data systems** would be a significant contributor to a statewide aging population database.

Specifically, objective #7 was to “attain interdependent . . . data systems, including (with) larger (State) social and health data systems outside the Aging Network’s responsibility, that are useable in observing the global effect of (OAA and OCA) programs on society.” Such a dataset would be helpful in advocating for community-based services programs.

The second event was the passage of State Senator Vasconcellos’ bill, SB 910, in 1999. This bill addressed the need for a statewide planning process to meet the future needs of a growing aging population in California. There was concern that the State was unprepared for the coming Baby Boomers. To that end, one of the components of this legislation asked the University of California to begin looking at a longitudinal database on the aging population.

In 2003, the U.C. California Policy Research Center published a document entitled: **Special Report – Planning for a Comprehensive Database on Aging Californians: Meeting Public Policy and Research Needs for Better Information.** In this document, Frank Neuhauser, et al, outlined several critical elements and opportunities for enhancing the existing Aging Services data system and proposed a “network” of databases rather than building yet another major and costly longitudinal dataset.

These two events led CDA to develop a “Common Dataset” to standardize the data elements captured by the state system. See the CARS web site for the details of the Common Dataset (CDA Home Page, “AAA Partners,” “California Aging Reporting System (CARS).” The CDA system will have additional data elements and standards from the Common Dataset built in. Future transitions to the whole Common Dataset will be in later phases.

How Will CARS Affect My AAA and Providers?

In some sense, there will be very little change. The current data elements being reported will not change in Phase I. This will be the same NAPIS and Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP); Title III-E, of the OAA data that service providers and AAAs are reporting now. Some AAAs with client-specific systems already in place may find the change in the way CDA accepts data to be very simple to adopt and for little cost. Others may not have a true client-specific database where program service utilization is actually connected to client data. Those AAAs may find they need another option before they are ready to fully integrate with the new state system. CDA will work closely with each AAA to ensure this first transition goes as smoothly as possible. Keep these things in mind:

- Again, there is no change in the type of data we will require from you—the same NAPIS and California FCSP Title III-E data we collect currently.
- Phase I of CARS does change the way you report the data. The data will be reported as client-level or client-specific, not aggregated as it is

currently.¹ It will also be reported over a web-based system operated for CDA. Client-level data means that individual services are linked to an individual client using a “unique identifier” that is consistent across your various OAA and OCA programs. In Phase I, you will be asked to use certain standardized unique identifier information (such as Social Security Numbers (SSN) or partial SSNs).

- AAAs will be able to see data errors prior to downloading into the new CDA system. AAA’s will be required to correct those errors and “de-duplicate” their own data. De-duplication means ensuring that the same client hasn’t been reported under multiple ID’s over multiple OAA/OCA programs.
- You will have **six months minimum lead time after the specifications are confirmed final and released by Program Memo (PM)**. You may want to transition faster if you can, but this means you may not be able to start reporting client-level data until July 1, 2008, if you are not ready by January 1, 2008.
- Fiscal reporting. By January 31, 2008, all AAAs will enter their periodic fiscal reporting information over the web in a format that will simulate current spreadsheets, with internal calculation and validation procedures. The web interface will be familiar to any fiscal staff who have performed the existing process. The fiscal data will not change.

Initial Schedule:

First week in July ‘07 Detailed “draft” IT specifications go out to AAAs for review and comment.

Mid July ‘07 CDA issues a “Readiness Survey” to help CDA and AAAs understand each AAA’s unique circumstances and capabilities. The information will be used to determine commonalities between various AAA systems and the new state system, analyze each AAA’s capacity to meet the new specifications, and help identify and resolve potential problems.

End of July ‘07 Second conference call or meeting with AAAs and RTZ Associates after survey results are reviewed.

¹ On one of the conference calls of June 18 and 19, 2007, it was brought up that client-specific data wouldn’t be reported in the quarterly performance (service utilization) reports, but rather only in the client profile reporting at the end of the State Fiscal Year. While this is technically accurate under the current circumstances, the fully implemented client-specific database must connect client profile data to all service utilization. That is to say each unduplicated client’s service utilization will be known. Some AAAs do not currently have this connection established.

Aug/Sept '07	Establish a "Champion AAA Users Group" in an advisory capacity and establish a "Testing Group" to pilot and test client reporting procedures.
September '07	CDA issues a PM initiating Phase I of CARS and issuing FINAL CARS specifications.
November '07	Formal RTZ AAA technical assistance session for AAAs on client-level reporting and file transfers.
January '08	AAAs have six months to comply with new specifications. Some AAAs may begin to come on line with the new system between January and July 2008.
July 1, '08	Deadline for all AAAs to be in compliance with new specifications and begin, if not already, collecting and reporting client-specific data to CDA.

Reporting Timeline Waivers

First quarter data submission for 07-08 on the current ManAge (Oracle) system MAY be waived on a case-by-case basis if a AAA needs the time to prepare for this transition.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and CARS Web Site

FAQs and answers will be posted to this web site. There will be three areas: General Information, Progress Reports, and FAQs and Answers. The web site will be used to post important specifications and training documents as well.

For Information About RTZ Associates: www.rtzassociates.com