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California Department of Aging Presents
A Primer on Aging Programs Common Dataset
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PURPOSE OF THIS PRIMER

The purpose of this document is to introduce and explain the concept of the California Department of Aging's (CDA) proposed **Common Dataset** to Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and their network of service providers.

This document explains the rationale supporting the development of the proposed Common Dataset and the need for software technology improvements. It also answers some common questions and concerns raised in regard to a Common Dataset.

DEFINITION OF COMMON DATASET

What is a "Common" Dataset?

A common dataset is a set of instructions and data specifications that standardize data elements and data definitions across multiple programs. For example, Activities of Daily Living (ADL) data elements and definitions would be standardized across multiple programs and services. ADLs and definitions in one program would match ADLs and definitions in another. As it is now, these data definitions and coding might be slightly different and therefore could not be combined for analysis.

The primary purpose of and rationale for the proposed aging network Common Dataset is to establish a common set of data across Older Americans Act (OAA) and Older Californians Act (OCA) programs for the purpose of creating a statewide management information system (MIS) that would make it possible, both at the local and state levels, to: (1) better analyze the characteristics and needs of program clients, (2) identify programs that frequently share the same clients, and (3) to track changes in program client demographics over time. This information would be instrumental for short and long term policy development, program planning, and resource management.

A Common Dataset does not necessarily prescribe reporting requirements. Rather, it spells out the data elements and definitions that, **IF** required for reporting, must be used. That's slightly a different concept than a "minimum

dataset” which usually means the minimum data that must be collected and reported.

BACKGROUND

Over the past twenty years, there have been various California projects and proposals calling for some form of common data across aging services programs. As far back as 1986, the SEED project, under the general guidance of the Andrus Gerontology Center at the University of Southern California, proposed to integrate long-term care management data across several programs to facilitate a system of community-based long-term care. Discussion about tracking client and utilization data across funding streams and programs is not new.

The impetus for this latest effort came with the passage of **SB 910** (Vasconcellos, Statutes of 1999, Chapter 948). This statute requested the University of California to develop a comprehensive long term master plan for California’s aging population, including a “longitudinal database” of older Californians.

In March 2003, the University of California (UC) issued a *“Special Report - Planning for a Comprehensive Database on Aging Californians: Meeting Public Policy and Research Needs for Better Information,”* 2003, Frank Neuhauser, Henry Brady, and Jason Seligman. This report lays out a strategy for improving the data available for policy making and concluded that to develop good comprehensive statewide data on California’s aging population it is more cost efficient and constructive to build on the existing data system, and supplement it when necessary, rather than develop an entirely new longitudinal database.

Benefits would be derived from combining certain information from Census on the whole aging population to the population that is eligible, in need, and have actually been served by OAA/OCA services. This will result in improved identification of client needs, service utilization, and potential unmet needs.

However, the authors expressed serious concerns about the existing aging network data system’s ability to provide both accurate data and data that could be linked with other databases. The UC report recommended:

“Some aspects of the data-gathering effort should be standardized. ...We suggest a minimum dataset to provide the necessary data in a way that enables linkage with other data sources.” (Page 11)¹

¹ The report refers to a “minimum” dataset rather than a “common” dataset, but for our purposes here the Common Dataset is not setting the minimum reporting requirements, as would be the case in a minimum dataset.

“The first and most important step in creating a Comprehensive Database on Aging Californians is to focus on improving the data collected by local Area Agencies on Aging and their providers.” (Page 28)

This is a part of an overall strategy of using data on an evolving aging population, tracking the demographic changes in the population over time, and using OAA/OCA data as an important part of local and State planning, resource allocation, and policy decision making. With these data, local service providers, AAAs, and the State could analyze the service utilization of those clients who use more than one program or service. Systematically identifying how many clients are using multiple programs and services would help at the micro level to do better client service coordination. At the macro level, it would help in targeting program coordination efforts and the potential benefit of co-locating certain services.

PARAMETERS USED IN DEVELOPING THE OAA/OCA COMMON DATASET

The parameters used in developing this Common Dataset include:

- All Older Americans Act and Older Californians Act Programs and Services should eventually be included in the Common Dataset.² The common dataset will meet the challenges of preparing for a comprehensive and longitudinal database for aging Californians [SB 910].
- For the OAA programs, we are required to use the National Aging Programs Information System (NAPIS). The common dataset will meet both the requirements of federal National Aging Program Information System (NAPIS) and the requirements of a statewide integrated data system for California’s OAA and OCA programs. NAPIS is a requirement of the federal Administration on Aging, which has oversight authority for the implementation of the OAA. Any statewide standards above and beyond NAPIS will be governed by CDA state standards.
- Client-Specific Data Are Needed. Client-specific data is needed for quality control (including controls for unduplicated client counts/registered clients), management analysis, public policy research, and resource distribution decisions.³ Aggregate data cannot be used to connect utilization patterns to client characteristics. Client-specific data can.

² For a complete list of these programs and services go to www.aging.ca.gov , then select Programs and Services in the left hand menu.

³ See UC Special Report, Executive Summary, page vii.

- Additional “Registered Services” Are Needed. All OAA and OCA services may be considered for “registered” status, unless specifically exempt.⁴ Proposed exempt services at this point are Information and Assistance services and Outreach services. Registered services require client-specific data be collected at the local level in a way that controls for unduplicated counts. Registered services require clients to be uniquely identified to prevent duplication of the total count and to identify specific individuals with their specific utilization and profile data. Therefore, the data collected would be “client-specific” data connected to each individual person served.⁵ For example, the system would be able to identify how many OAA/OCA services each individual had used within a year.
- Sources Used in Establishing Our Standards. The basic sources of standards drawn from are: (1) NAPIS; (2) the decennial U.S. Census; (3) California Health Interview Survey (CHIS); and (4) National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). These four sources of standards allow for alignment of the common dataset with other larger data systems.
- Missing Data Accountability. Missing data from each applicable data variable must be accounted for in the local AAA system. The UC Special Report (p. 10) suggests that complete data are vital for anti-bias purposes. However, the OAA requires services to be rendered, even in the absence of data, so missing data needs to be reduced to the greatest extent possible, but also identified when the data truly is missing.

UNIQUE IDENTIFIERS AND PRIVACY CONSIDERATIONS

The most sensitive issues in any client specific level databases pertain to protecting the use and disclosure of personal information and personal identification. This involves both privacy and security of sensitive health data or information. An underlying consumer right of privacy in this country is that, except in certain defined circumstances, an individual has a right to keep their personal information from public disclosure. Security refers to technical and process by which government protects sensitive personal data and information of individuals from unauthorized access and use.

Does this new proposal envision collecting, storing, and analyzing private information on individuals at the State level? No. The purpose is not to have sensitive information at the State level. It is not proposed that this new state level database will store individual names, addresses, or sensitive health information. However, in order to be able to cross tabulate data across services,

⁴ Currently unregistered services in NAPIS include: Legal services, Transportation, Information and Assistance, Outreach, and Nutrition Education.

⁵ CDA has piloted efforts over the past several years that demonstrate that more registered services can be achieved.

some form of unique identification number must be attached to individuals in order to allow client profile information to be connected to utilization data and to control for duplication. In this proposal we are suggesting a combination of unique identifying numbers be used to control for this. This could include:

- ❑ A Unique Identifier Number
- ❑ The Client's Home Phone Number
- ❑ The Client's ZIP Code
- ❑ The Client's Date of Birth (DoB)
- ❑ Planning and Service Area (PSA) Number [1 to 33]

A Word About the Social Security Number (SSN)

While the software system being designed will include a capacity or capability to use the SSN, this proposal is not proposing to use a mandatory SSN as the identifier number for clients.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Several other considerations must be kept in mind as we implement a Common Dataset for OAA and OCA programs. First and foremost, we must adapt to federal changes in NAPIS. Second, CDA will need to modernize its information technology to allow greater flexibility for warehousing data and using web-based communications. And third, CDA must set a strong foundation for the envisioned future system and its expansion. We will start by making all necessary NAPIS changes and include Title III E, Family Caregiver Support Program in the electronic reporting. Over the next few years, we will gradually include all other OAA and OCA programs.

Implementing Federal NAPIS Changes

This effort involves catching up with the federal Administration on Aging's (AoA) National Aging Programs Information System (NAPIS) changes that were issued in November of 2004. Proposed federal NAPIS changes also require that we shift from an aggregate reporting system to a client specific system.

Upgrading the CDA Technology to Handle a Client-Specific Database

The envisioned new database will be a component in CDA's new client level MIS that in the future will be referred to as the **California Aging Reporting System (CARS)**. Electronically incorporating all OAA and OCA program data in the data reporting process, establishing a common dataset for these programs, and beginning to collect client level data are the first fundamental steps. The second component in this process involves migrating to a web based software system

that will facilitate an easier data reporting process and the type of analyses already discussed.

Common Dataset and CARS Implementation

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and their service providers will eventually be asked to adopt this proposed “common” set of data that can be integrated at higher levels, as described in SB 910 longitudinal database and planning legislation. CARS implementation must come first, then certain programs may be phased into the system over several years. In 2006, CDA will begin this process by incorporating the NAPIS SPR and Title III E (Family Caregiver Support Program) data. We project the CARS to be in place and fully tested for the start up of State Fiscal Year 2008-09.⁶ Other programs will be phased in and integrated over time

Again, not all of the elements in the common dataset will be reported to CDA, but the dataset requirements ensure a system is in place that is capable of collecting and extracting such information if and when needed. Some data may, in fact, be better suited for collection on a sample basis rather than from the routine MIS (see pages 13 and 14 of the UC Special Report).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How will this change my services or how will it affect my data collection and reporting?

The first changes will only be to upgrade to the minimum AoA OAA NAPIS requirements. This affects NAPIS reporting and Title III E Family Caregiver Support Programs only. The intent is to first come into compliance with existing federal reporting rules (see AoA NAPIS Instructions of Nov. 1994).

Over a period of time, all other programs and services within the Common Dataset will gradually have to adopt changes to data and data definitions so that OAA/OCA programs and services meet the same standards. So, for example, if you have a service or program datum that is different than the Common Dataset, you will be asked to eventually align with the Common Dataset.

Area Agencies on Aging and OAA/OCA service providers must begin planning for the necessary adjustments to bring their databases into alignment with the Common Dataset over a period of time. The Common Dataset for aging services will be phased in over several years to allow programs time to adjust.

⁶ Implementation dates were revised from 2007-08 to a 2008-09 schedule in September 2007.

Will I have to report all these data?

Not necessarily, although the Common Dataset lays the foundation for consistent data reporting across all programs, the Common Dataset is separate from “program reporting requirements.” Reporting instructions and specifications will be issued separately for each OAA/OCA program or service. Some programs may be exempt from collecting and reporting certain data, even though it is in the Common Dataset. If, however, at a later date it was determined that capturing these data would be helpful to a program, then the data reported would have to conform to the Common Dataset. This allows the data to be tabulated across OAA/OCA programs and all variables.

I Can’t Ask People to Provide Social Security Numbers!

We do not envision the SSN to be a mandatory unique client identifier. However, the CARS software system will have a capacity or capability to collect SSN data should that be necessary in any particular circumstance.

Where does HIPAA come in?

HIPAA does not affect this part of the CARS planning or the Common Dataset. [See Program Memo 03-24 (P) available on our web site at www.aging.ca.gov , then select AAA Partners, then select Program Memos]. HIPAA is only involved when transacting insurance. AoA and CDA have determined that OAA and much of the OCA data is not affected by HIPAA requirements. There are some exceptions which will be covered in a separate document.

How does the Common Dataset relate to CARS?

The Common Dataset is one component of the CARS project. The CARS project is to install the needed technology to handle client specific data on a statewide database.

RESOURCES

For a copy of the complete UC Special Report, go to our web site on www.aging.ca.gov, then select “AAA Partners” in the left menu, then select California Aging Reporting System (CARS), then select “Planning for a Comprehensive Database” from the “General Information” link.

For a copy of the AoA NAPIS requirements document, click on www.aging.ca.gov , then “AAA Partners,” then California Aging Reporting System (CARS) under the General Information link, then select “NAPIS Guidelines 2007” document.