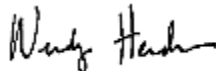


To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator  
DCF Area Administrators  
Child Placing Agency Directors  
Child Welfare Agency Directors  
County Departments of Community Programs Directors  
County Departments of Human Services Directors  
County Departments of Social Services Directors  
Group Home Providers  
Tribal Social Service/Indian Child Welfare Directors  
Private Child Placing Agencies  
Residential Care Center Providers  
Shelter Care Providers  
Tribal Chairpersons

From: Wendy Henderson  
Administrator



Re: **Alternative Response (AR) Pilot Updates**

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this memo is to inform local child welfare agencies of the Department's decision not to expand the Alternative Response (AR) Pilot statewide and to provide an overview of the process, including the information used, which informed this decision.

#### **BACKGROUND**

In January 2010, the Wisconsin State Legislature approved a pilot initiative to implement Alternative Response in Child Protective Service (CPS) agencies in Wisconsin. In September 2010, DCF published the [Addendum to the Child Protective Services Access and Initial Assessment Standards: Alternative Response Pilot Program Requirements and Guidelines \(September 27, 2010\)](#). This addendum included supplemental requirements and guidelines to be used in conjunction with the state's [CPS Access and Initial Assessment Standards](#).

Between 2010 and 2016, DCF implemented the AR pathway within the Initial Assessment (IA) process in 22 local child welfare agencies through a multi-phase approach. The implementation of AR in Wisconsin has been primarily focused on creating flexibility as part of the IA process and adhering to standards for ensuring child safety. The following significant steps were taken during the pilot period and are described in further detail in the Attachment of this memo:

- Conducted a formal outcome evaluation;
- Employed a robust facilitative process to identify key learnings from participating pilot county agencies; and
- Generated practice conclusions and recommendation from the AR pilot.

#### **INFORMATION SUMMARY**

Based on the results of the evaluation in combination with the learnings from the pilot counties, DCF has determined that further expansion of the AR Pilot will not be advanced, and the current AR policy addendum will be phased out.

As a critical next step, DCF will turn its focus to strengthening the current one-pathway system that promotes flexibility and emphasizes our state's CPS professionals' ability to carry out the following aspects of the IA process:

- Focuses on family engagement as a cornerstone to best assess and serve children and families;
- Supports practice consistent with the Wisconsin Safety Model, particularly as families enter CPS ongoing services, and;
- Continues to elevate the Wisconsin Child Welfare Model for Practice.

We believe that many of the learnings from the AR pilot are and will continue to be leveraged to advance the strategic goal of supporting Wisconsin's families to raise their children.

At this time, local child welfare agencies currently included in the AR Pilot can continue to use the AR pathway as instructed in the [Addendum to the Child Protective Services Access and Initial Assessment Standards: Alternative Response Pilot Program Requirements and Guidelines \(September 27, 2010\)](#) until the plan to phase out the AR policy, including accompanying technical changes related to eWisACWIS components, has been established. DCF remains committed to incorporating feedback from local child welfare agencies regarding how to responsibly phase out the AR policy for existing pilot agencies.

DCF would like to thank all of the local CPS agencies who participated in the AR pilot. The work that AR pilot counties have done to operationalize best practice while prioritizing safety and well-being for the children and families served has been integral in shaping our current and future child welfare system.

CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT:           Alternative Response Policy Coordinator  
                                                  Bureau of Safety and Well-Being  
                                                  608-422-6957  
                                                  [DCFAlternativeResponse@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DCFAlternativeResponse@wisconsin.gov)

MEMO WEB SITE:                   <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>

ATTACHMENT:                   Wisconsin's Alternative Response Pilot: An Overview of Key Activities  
                                                  and Related Documents

LINKS :                   Child Protective Services Worker Alternative Response Information  
                                          <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/access-ia/ar>  
                                          (Alternative Response Information section)

                                          Child Protective Services Access and Initial Assessment Standards  
                                          <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/cwportal/policy/pdf/access-ia-standards.pdf>

## Wisconsin's Alternative Response Pilot: An Overview of Key Activities and Related Documents

Between 2010 and 2016, DCF implemented the AR pathway within the Initial Assessment (IA) process in 22 local child welfare agencies through a multi-phase approach. The implementation of AR in Wisconsin has been primarily focused on creating flexibility as part of the IA process and adhering to standards for ensuring child safety. The following significant steps were taken during the pilot period and are described in further detail below:

- Conducted a formal outcome evaluation, and;
- Employed a robust facilitative process to identify key learnings from participating pilot county agencies to advance and support key learnings based on local implementation during the AR pilot implementation and generated practice conclusions and recommendation from the AR pilot.

### Formal Evaluation Overview

In 2016, DCF contracted with the Institute for Child and Family Well-Being (ICFW) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to conduct an evaluation of the pilot. The two-year evaluation included process and outcome components. The outcome evaluation (see [Alternative Response Outcome Evaluation Report and Appendix](#)) focused on four areas of inquiry: (1) pathway assignment and reassignment, (2) child safety, (3) family engagement, and (4) client experience with services. The process evaluation (see [Alternative Response Process Evaluation Report and Appendix](#)) focused on the description of AR pilot counties, fidelity to the AR addendum policies, provision of services during the IA process, implementation priorities and activities, and implementation supports.

### Facilitative Processes Overview

In 2016 and 2017, DSP held several AR Policy Review Meetings which included participation from local child welfare agencies implementing AR. The goal of the meetings was to increase understanding of how AR implementation in Wisconsin impacted practice within the state's child welfare system. In addition, these meetings were an opportunity for open dialog with state AR policy experts and practice consults from Blue Spiral Consulting (BSC) who provided training and technical assistance over the course of the AR pilot period.

In 2018 and 2019, DCF collaborated with AR pilot counties and stakeholders in a Think Tank committee. The AR Think Tank was facilitated by BSC and AR experts that also supported the ongoing implementation of Wisconsin's AR Pilot at both the state and local levels. The goal of the AR Think Tank was to use lessons learned during implementation, data collected through the AR evaluation, and perspectives of lived experiences of families and the child welfare workforce in order to understand how the implementation of AR in Wisconsin has resulted in changes to child welfare policy and practice. Additionally, the AR Think Tank members were charged with the task of turning this knowledge into actionable insights and options for moving those lessons forward



to enhance child welfare practice across the state. Specifically, the work of the AR Think Tank concluded with identified recommendations about what elements of AR will improve and strengthen child welfare practice across the state.

Building on the above AR Policy Review work and incorporating results of the formal AR evaluation as well as other administrative and case review data, the AR Think Tank assessed the results of the AR Pilot and considered the cultural, practice and policy changes that arose within the state's child welfare system and the 22 implementing counties. While the full report (see [Report of the Experience, Findings, and Recommendations from the Alternative Response Pilot and Think Tank](#)) details the work and conclusions of the AR Think Tank, the following key takeaways and learnings arose from the AR Pilot and the AR Think Tank (see [Alternative Response Think Tank Overview and Highlights](#)):

- The AR Pilot strived to improve practice and outcomes for children, families, and child welfare professionals by fundamentally shifting the way we think about serving children and families during the Initial Assessment and by elevating the Wisconsin Safety Model;
- Many key components of AR philosophy, principles, and IA pathway practice are aligned with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Model for Practice and likely contributed to the critical culture shift that led up to the creation of this model for practice.
- The formal evaluation (see [Alternative Response Evaluation Overview and Highlights](#)) found the following positive results of the AR pathway practice within the IA process:
  - Children served on cases assigned to the AR pathway were no less safe than if they are served on cases assigned to the TR pathway;
  - Removing the focus of maltreatment determinations at the conclusion of the Initial Assessment allows child welfare professionals to focus on family engagement and assessment; and
  - Both families and child welfare professionals had a better experience.
- While the above components of the AR pathway contributed to both the family's and the agency's experience in the IA process, the formal evaluation also found that not all families had the same opportunity to experience these same positive effects noting the following practice concerns:
  - Agency implementation and operationalization of AR policy and practice was highly varied amongst counties and amongst supervisors within a given agency, including variance in initial pathway assignment and switching between AR/TR pathways over the course of the IA process; and
  - The results of this variation, which were further detailed in a post-hoc analysis conducted (see [Post-Hoc County-Specific Rates of Assignment Over Time](#) and [Alternative Response Post-Hoc Race Analysis](#)) by the ICFW, directly impacted which families are served using an AR approach or not.