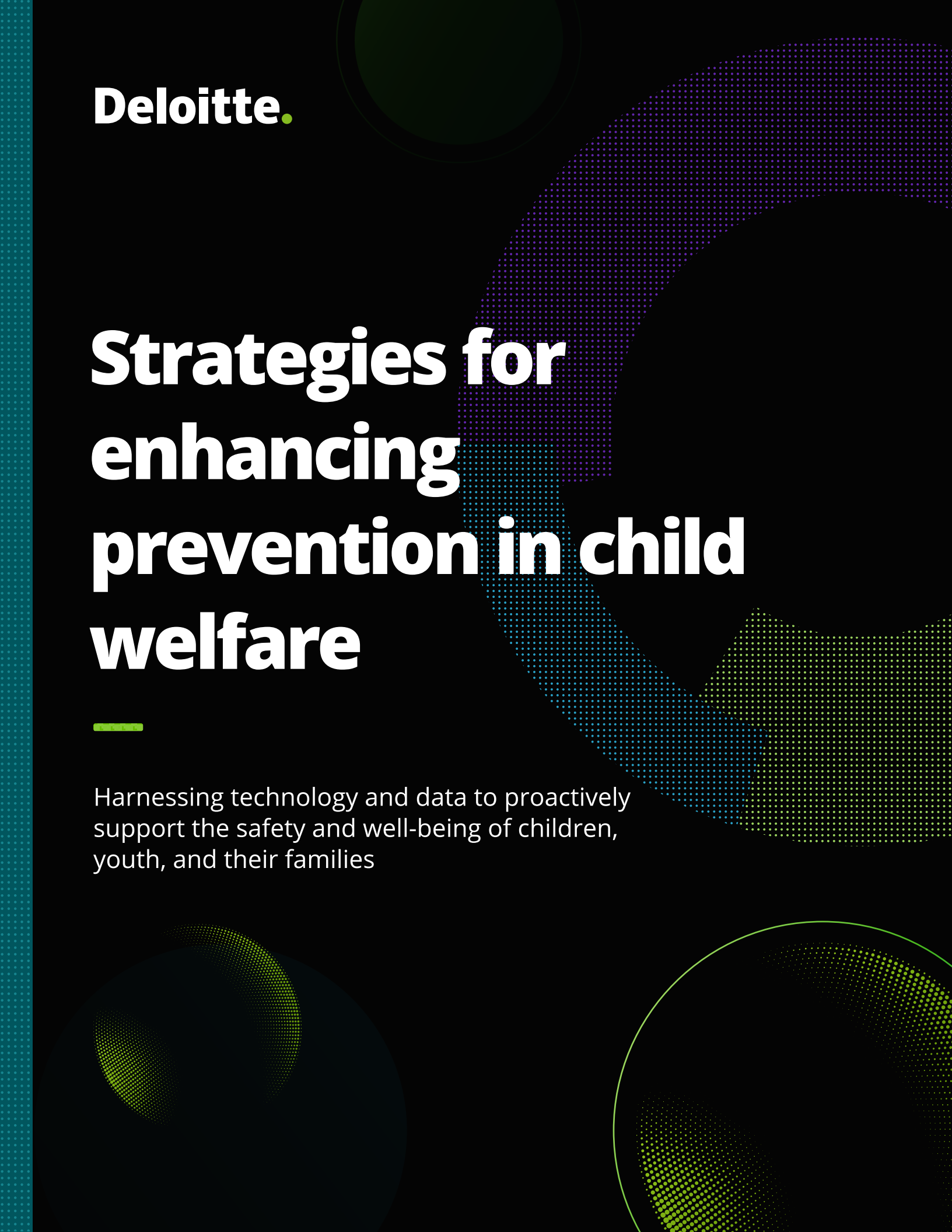


The background features a dark blue field with large, overlapping circles in teal and light blue, each filled with a fine dot pattern. A vertical teal bar with a dot pattern runs along the left edge. The Deloitte logo is positioned in the top left corner.

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Strategies for enhancing prevention in child welfare

Harnessing technology and data to proactively
support the safety and well-being of children,
youth, and their families

Introduction

A shift is underway in child welfare: prevention is taking center stage, driven by advances in technology, data analytics, and research—and supported by new policy and funding opportunities. The most exciting—and perhaps controversial—development is how artificial intelligence and integrated data platforms can support agencies and staff to design programs and interventions that promote prevention. These tools are helping transform the child welfare system from one that is reactive to a system that is proactive and supports the safety and well-being of children, youth, and their families.

By breaking down silos and accessing real-time insights, child welfare agencies are increasingly finding solutions to document, analyze and use information and data to drive improved outcomes for children and families. This new era of data-driven prevention is redefining what is possible for the safety and well-being of children and families nationwide.

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Preventing child maltreatment and unnecessary foster care placements requires a transformative approach across child and family serving systems and community partners. By leveraging data and technology, child welfare agencies and their state and local partners can innovate and scale initiatives to prevent child maltreatment and strengthen families. Modernizing information systems to meet the current and anticipated needs of staff and families—while fostering enhanced communication, coordination, and collaboration across systems and partners—is crucial to achieving prevention goals.

Progress can be made through large information system upgrades, as well as targeted, incremental enhancements—such as integrating modular tools, automating essential workflows, or improving data-sharing practices—that strengthen both day-to-day operations and cross-system collaboration that informs and tracks progress on actions to prevent maltreatment and unnecessary entries into foster care.

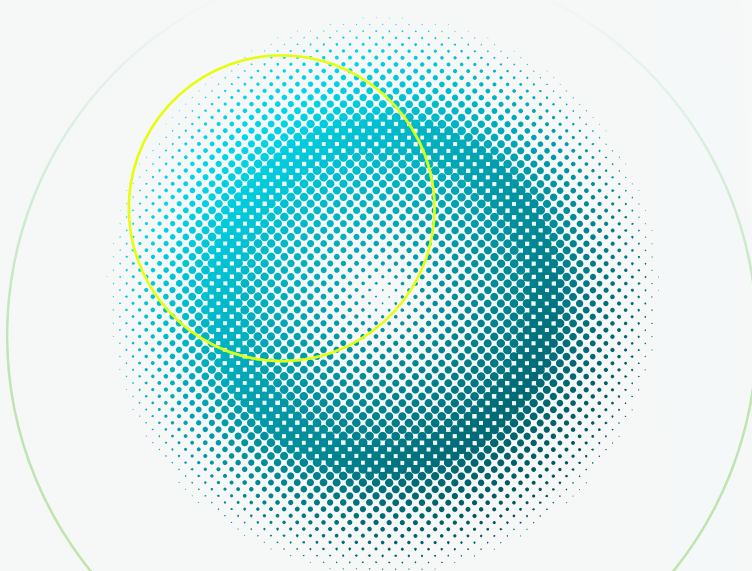
By integrating data-sharing tools across child welfare agencies and their system and community partners, child welfare agencies can more efficiently coordinate care and tailor support services that meet the individualized needs of children and families. Coordination and information-sharing can support stronger collaboration and partnerships with child and family systems, including Medicaid and behavioral health, and can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relevant health and social strengths, needs, and experiences of children and families at risk or involved with the child welfare system.

The use of data analytics, including predictive tools, can support child welfare agencies and their partners to identify indicators of risks and protective factors to target interventions to meet prevention goals and maximize limited resources. Analytics solutions that use social drivers of health data and predictive models to support child welfare and other child and family serving agencies can help optimize program management and service delivery. Efficiency and transparency in child welfare can be enhanced through technology and data analytics at any stage in an agency's technology journey.

Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems (CCWIS) offer agencies the ability to streamline processes, improve data documentation and utilization, and support decision making focused on each family's specific needs.

Efficiency and transparency in child welfare can be enhanced through technology and data analytics at any stage in an agency's technology journey. Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems (CCWIS) offer agencies the ability to streamline processes, improve data documentation and utilization, and support decision making focused on each family's specific needs. Importantly, solutions such as Children360 can deliver substantive benefits even as a stand-alone layer when a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) system is still in use, empowering agencies to incrementally improve operations without requiring a full system replacement. Children360 is an analytics solution that uses social drivers of health (SDoH) data and predictive models to support child welfare and other child and family serving agencies optimize program management and service delivery in their communities.

CCWIS and related platforms—whether integrated or complementing existing systems—are providing states with access to real-time and ongoing data that informs policy decisions, resource allocation, program development, and continuous quality improvement. Cloud-based solutions and integrated case management tools can be tailored to provide timely information, minimize delays, and support a responsive child welfare system. This flexible approach allows organizations to adopt enhancements that effectively fit their current environment, priorities, and readiness, while continually moving toward greater efficiency and impact for staff and families.



Enhancing child welfare through data and innovation

State and tribal child welfare agencies are now - more than ever - supported and positioned to have a robust network of community-based prevention services available to strengthen families and keep children safe. Through the development, implementation, and continuous quality improvement of prevention plans, including federal Title IV-E Prevention plans, child welfare agencies can provide and fund evidence-based programs to prevent unnecessary foster care placements and keep children safely with their families.

Technology can facilitate enhanced coordination, communication, and collaboration across child welfare systems and their partners, including healthcare services enabled via Medicaid which can significantly strengthen inter-agency coordination. Connections between child welfare agencies and community partners, including service providers, child care, law enforcement, and educational institutions, can support a comprehensive, synchronized approach to serving children and families involved with the child welfare system. Coordination and data sharing between child welfare and state agencies, such as Medicaid, can support the identification of service gaps, streamline service delivery, and support holistic service delivery to address immediate and long-term needs of children and families. Through a focused effort on integrating technology and aligning strategic child welfare practices, child maltreatment and unnecessary foster care placement and family disruptions are prevented by swift, informed, and compassionate interventions.

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Employing CCWIS and cloud-based platforms for better outcomes

To meet the significant and complex needs of families, child welfare agencies across the United States have embraced innovative technologies, by updating their legacy systems through implementation of a CCWIS. Currently, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico^[i] are operating or planning to operate a CCWIS.

CCWIS can be a pivotal tool for agencies to strengthen coordination and collaboration across the child welfare continuum. By integrating and sharing data effectively with other systems and community partners, agency leaders and partners can develop, implement, and evaluate an ongoing data-driven and continuous quality improvement approach to prevention. Moreover, the bidirectional interface regulation promotes data sharing among key system partners, thereby improving the effectiveness and efficiency of child welfare services.

Recognizing the challenges of using siloed data across disparate service systems, states like Delaware have pioneered the use of integrated case management systems, focusing on interoperability. ^[ii] Cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) platforms have emerged as a vital, cost-efficient tool, centralizing operational data to allow for comprehensive performance assessments and the promotion of continuous improvement. These systems offer a unified perspective of a child's and family's engagements across various programs, leading to improved collaboration

that allows essential information to be promptly accessible to caseworkers through a cloud-based, integrated CRM solution.

By integrating technology and data, states enhance prevention initiatives and promote the on-going success of children and families. These efforts allow for establishing streamlined communication channels for expedited interventions, comprehensive data monitoring for tracking progress and outcomes, and determining areas requiring additional intervention.

Integration of technology and data analytics to support child welfare goals

Across the United States, the integration of advanced technology and data analytics is playing a central role in reshaping strategies for child welfare agencies. New data tools and processes are enhancing prevention efforts and contributing to the improved outcomes children and families. As child welfare agencies increasingly adopt and continue to improve advanced technology and data-sharing tools, new opportunities to strengthen coordination and collaboration across systems and communities will continue to emerge. By fostering collaboration between these datasets, agencies can streamline services, proactively address needs, and reinforce stronger and healthier families and communities.

The Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF) in Pennsylvania used data to analyze substantiated fatalities and near fatalities of children and their prior involvement with the child welfare system. Understanding these patterns assisted OCYF in identifying potential policy and process changes, interventions, or screening improvements that could reduce the potential for fatalities/near fatalities. The Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF) in Pennsylvania used data to analyze substantiated fatalities and near fatalities of children and their prior involvement with the child welfare system.

Understanding these patterns assisted OCYF in identifying potential policy and process changes, interventions, or screening improvements that could reduce the potential for fatalities/near fatalities. Using Medicaid data and documented analytical findings, a review of trends and patterns indicated risk for fatalities and near fatalities for children in Pennsylvania, including those who never came to the attention of the child welfare system. The analysis included a variety of dimensions, which supported the identification of patterns, contributors, and potential intervention points.

AI-powered child welfare: Enhancing precision and collaboration

As the demands on child welfare systems continue to grow, agencies and practitioners are increasingly exploring innovative solutions to enhance both efficiency and outcomes. While the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in child welfare may prompt questions about data privacy, human judgment, and the evolving role of frontline staff, it is essential to recognize that AI is designed to augment—not replace—the expertise and compassion of caseworkers. By automating time-consuming documentation and surfacing actionable insights from complex data, AI can empower child welfare agencies with insights and efficiency so frontline staff can make informed decisions and focus on timely access to services and permanency. Rather than diminishing the human element, AI can be a powerful tool to help reduce administrative burdens, support decision making, and facilitate timely access to relevant services so children are safe and families are strengthened.

As AI continues to expand as a pivotal force in human services, there are opportunities to significantly bolster the effectiveness of caseworkers serving children and families and managing services.

The integration of AI into child welfare systems demonstrates how technology can substantially reduce administrative tasks and bolster collaboration across agencies and community partners. From expediting the collection of child abuse intake information, to synthesizing years of case notes and data to make qualitative data consumable, AI can improve workforce challenges, service delivery, and child and family outcomes.

AI can also support workers with insights from risk and safety data to inform services and support for children and families, aligning them with local community resources to meet specific needs. Using AI to inform service needs can reduce subjectivity and manual demands on caseworkers. It can equip frontline staff with information to inform decisions and expedite identification of services and automate referral processes.

In the State of Oklahoma, artificial intelligence is harnessed to assess and predict high-risk child welfare cases that could potentially lead to fatalities.^[1] This approach equips caseworkers with vital insights, enabling them to prioritize and intervene in these cases at the earliest possible stage. Through sophisticated predictive analytics, the state can proactively identify at-risk children and families, facilitating timely interventions that are crucial in preventing abuse, neglect, and other adverse outcomes.

By embracing these tools and advancements in technology, child welfare agencies can streamline processes, enhance service delivery, and ultimately achieve better outcomes for children, youth, and families. The future use of AI in child welfare has the potential to identify and inform workers of potential risks and protective factors to support more timely and relevant interventions for children and families that are specifically tailored to the needs of each child and family.

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[1] CCWIS Status, Administration for Children and Families, available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/training-technical-assistance/ccwis-status>

[2] “Beyond case management: Better child welfare outcomes through relationship management,” The HHS Innovator’s Playbook: Nurturing Bold Ideas in Health and Human Services Programs, Deloitte Insights.

[3] “Anticipatory government: Preempting problems through predictive analytics,” Government Trends 2020, Deloitte Insights, June 24, 2019.