Foster Care Data

Data Assessment

assessing the scope, quality and accessibility of the agency’s data, The paper should also identify opportunities for agencies to release or organize data of public interest. how it has been used by journalists and how it could be used.

I got my data from two different sources, the Children’s Bureau and the Medicaid Statistical Information System.

Finding the data on the number of kids in foster care through the Children’s Bureau was the difficult part. Foster kids come in contact with a few departments within the Department of Health and Human Services, so finding inform

The Department of Health and Human Services had multiple departments that foster kids come in contact with, depending on their specific issues, so finding which department it was und

The Children’s Bureau along with the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) produces a lot of annual and quarterly reports and reviews on child welfare in foster care, but doesn’t make the raw data readily available on their website. The ARCARS collects case-level data and produces assessment reviews for states on a rotating basis. I chose not to use that information to compare the states since the fiscal years were different.

Also, the ARCARS doesn’t have a database where you can search for national, state, or case-level information on children in foster care so it makes finding the scope a little difficult. I did (finally) find a report summarizing the stats on kids entering, exiting, and in care on the last day of the fiscal year that had data for each state in the past 10 years. It was provided in an excel file that had to be cleaned up a little, but overall it was easy to work with once I found it.

Since ARCARS doesn’t have a database to search for national, state, or case-level information on children in foster care, I found the Medicaid Statistical Information System (MSIS). The MSIS is a ‘datamart’ with stats on enrollment, utilization and expenditures for state level Medicaid data.

The datamart comes with a user guide that defines all the abbreviations and gives step-by-step instructions for how to build tables. The user guide was really only helpful in figuring out what different terms meant because it was created in 2004 and the datamart website had been redesigned since then.

The MSIS datamart is a pretty complete database, but getting out the information that you want out of it is easier said than done. There’s supposed to be a certain order to how measures and dimensions should be searched for, but when I did searches, it kept returning error messages (or just showing up all zeros, which is equally as unhelpful)

Thankfully, there’s a designation for foster care children under the eligibility category. Using that for the basis of eligibility I had to find one piece of information at a time and export it. The MSIS allows you to export tables to excel or save them as a csv, and there’s also tools that create simple visualizations.

Overall, the MSIS is full of useful data – it just requires some understanding of how to query the database. The Children’s Bureau data was easy to access once I found it, but there wasn’t a lot of raw data available on foster care children.