

How can data tell a story that keeps a child safe?

Safeguarding vulnerable children to improve wellbeing in a sustainable way



The better the question. The better the answer. The better the world works.

Foreword

Safeguarding children who have experienced abuse or neglect is one of the most pressing challenges facing governments today. Despite the best intentions and the hardest work, vulnerable children continue to fall through the cracks of the child protection system.

Too often, the decisions social workers make are a calculation of the least-worst outcome today - not a sound judgement of the best intervention to improve a child's wellbeing in the long term. Children are also the experts on their own problems, yet their views and ideas are frequently overlooked.

To better protect the most vulnerable children, social welfare agencies need to provide front-line workers with relevant and timely information that tells the story of what is going on in the life of a child.

This data and evidence will provide a vital foundation for making better decisions and improving outcomes. Making smarter use of data through analytics will allow front-line workers to intervene earlier to help those that are most at risk. And listening to the voices of children and young people will make sure services and policy are designed around their needs.

At EY, we're helping government agencies and their partners around the world to formulate better policy and allocate budgets more efficiently. In doing so, we're helping them to deliver the right services, at the right time and in the right places - and improve the lives of vulnerable children.

This report explains EY's end-to-end approach to help governments transform their child protection systems. We hope you find it useful. To find out more, get in touch.



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Overview

Every day, stories of child protection failures hit the headlines in countries all around the world. They paint a grim picture: growing numbers of children at risk of abuse and neglect; physical violence by a family member or caregiver that's resulted in the death of a child; more and more children being taken into care; and child protection systems stretched to the limit. Various factors are heightening the risk – from domestic violence to substance abuse problems.

The immediate impact of violence, abuse and neglect on children's wellbeing is devastating enough. But in some cases, poor outcomes for children who have been in care continue through later life and can even continue down the generations. Childhood trauma can limit educational performance and job prospects, lowering individuals' life chances, reducing productivity in the workforce and putting significant strain on government finances.

How governments deal with this issue will affect the lives of millions of children for generations to come. Yet despite numerous independent reviews and reforms, the

response of most has been haphazard to date. The long-term outcomes for maltreated children are still well below the level that citizens would want and expect. And as the number of children at risk increases, child protection systems all over the world are reaching breaking point.

It's clear from the scale of the challenge that governments need to fundamentally change their approach to child protection. To be effective and sustainable, they need to move from a crisis-driven model of service delivery to one that focuses on early-stage interventions and the wellbeing of vulnerable children over their lifetime.



We believe there are three priorities for governments to transform the system:

1 Adopting an investment approach

to fund the most effective prevention and early intervention services and improve outcomes for children and young people

2 Redesigning service delivery models

to offer personalized packages of care and move to performance-based contracts that incentivize providers to achieve permanency outcomes

3 Collating and analyzing data from multiple agencies in a single platform

to identify children at greatest risk of harm and make interventions more effective.

At EY, we've seen from our work that taking this broader approach can help governments to transform the lives of vulnerable children, so they can lead happier, more fulfilling lives and contribute in a positive way to society.

But we believe the same approach could help governments to tackle other big challenges, such as homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence, poor mental health and social exclusion. It has the potential to help millions of vulnerable citizens around the world to lead better lives and create more sustainable social welfare systems.

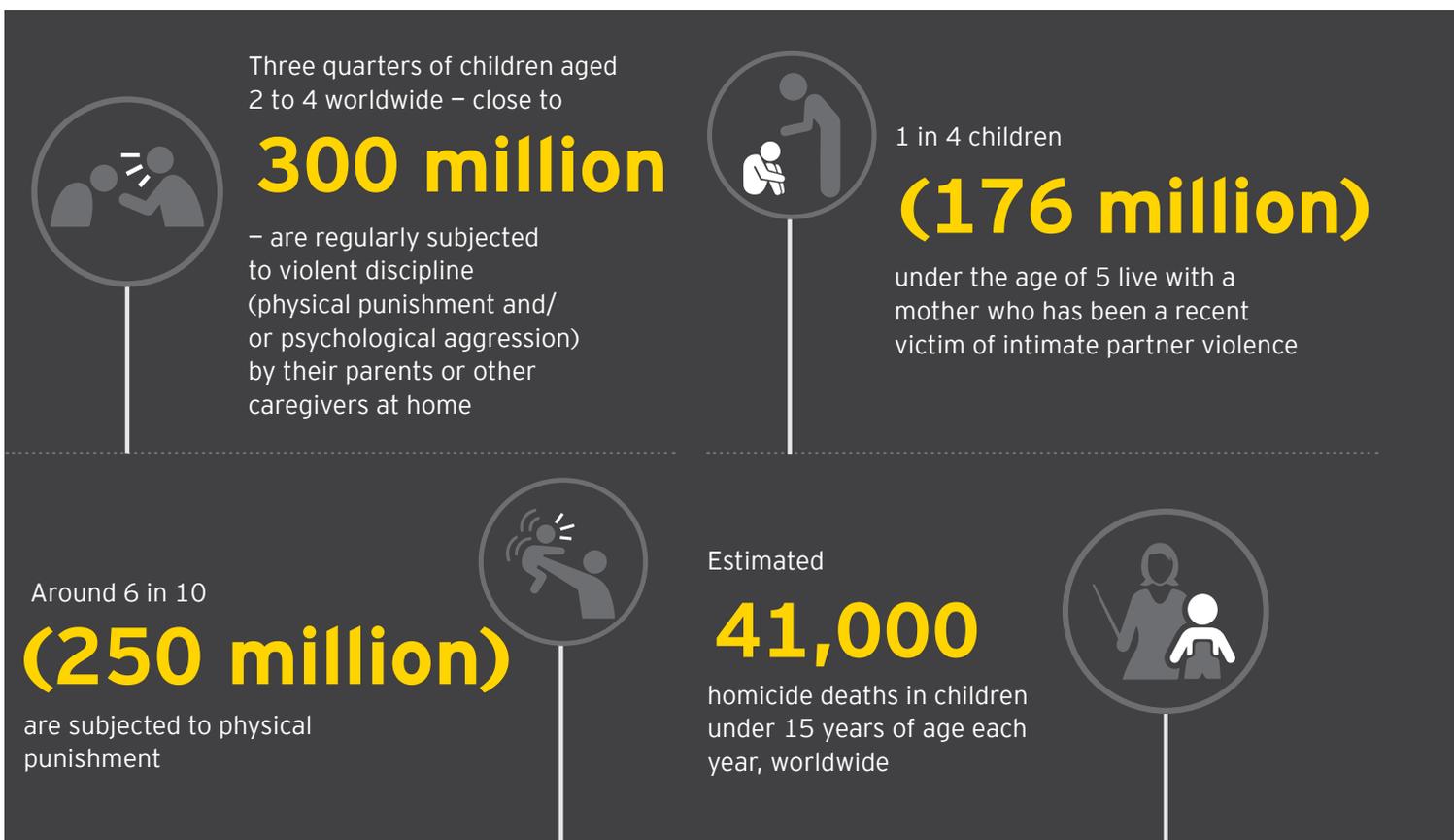


Protecting vulnerable children: a key priority for governments

The number of vulnerable children who are at significant risk of harm is growing across many developed and developing countries. At the same time, the number being taken into institutional care in developed countries has risen steadily. Worse, once a child enters care, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to leave.

Yet the potential for exploitation in care institutions is huge. Many care homes are unregulated, which means staff are poorly trained, recruited without background checks and unaccountable.¹

Child maltreatment – the scale of the global challenge



¹ van Doore, K., Martin, F., and McKeon, A. (2016). Better Volunteering Better Care. <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Expert%20Paper%20-%20International%20Volunteering%20and%20Child%20Sexual%20Abuse.pdf>

* UNICEF estimates based on the number of children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 who died as a result of interpersonal violence and collective violence and legal intervention, in 2015, and population projections from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*.



Close to

2 million

children and adolescents could be killed by an act of violence by the year 2030, if current trends continue *



Approximately

2.7 million

children between the ages of 0 and 17 years could be living in institutional care worldwide **

Worldwide, around

1.1 billion

caregivers, or slightly more than 1 in 4, admit to believing in the necessity of physical punishment as a form of discipline



By 2030 an estimated

69 million

children under the age of 5 will die from preventable causes.



Sources: *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*. UNICEF November 2017; World Health Organization (WHO); N. Petrowski et al. / *Child Abuse & Neglect* Volume 70 August 2017, Pages 388-398.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213416302873>

Child abuse and neglect: the short- and long-term costs to individuals, governments, business and society

Violence, abuse and neglect towards children have a tragic immediate and sometimes life-long impact on the wellbeing of children. But they also bring short- and long-term costs that extend far beyond the significant sums governments spend on social services for vulnerable children.

The short-term costs affect:

- ▶ child protection agencies, for investigating reports of maltreatment, protecting children from abuse or paying for out-of-home care services and family support
- ▶ health providers, for providing medical treatment and other health services
- ▶ the criminal justice system, for apprehending and prosecuting youth offenders
- ▶ the education system, for supporting the needs of more vulnerable children and dealing with persistent absenteeism.

However, there are also long-term costs that affect:

- ▶ the individuals themselves. Evidence shows that chronic adult illnesses, mental health problems, higher welfare dependency and more interaction with the adult justice system can be linked back to childhood trauma. It can also lead to social problems – such as difficulties with forming relationships or assuming parenting responsibilities in adult life, along with an increased risk of substance abuse
- ▶ employers and the wider economy. Lower educational achievements and productivity can dampen a country's overall economic growth. A 2014 study by the Child Fund Alliance estimated that the global economic impact and costs resulting from the consequences of physical, psychological and sexual violence against children could be as high as US\$7 trillion.

The cost of intervening too late

**US\$7
trillion**

The estimated global economic impact and costs resulting from consequences of violence (high end estimate). This is equivalent to 8% of the world's GDP.²

**US\$5.9
trillion**

in lifetime spending, US\$2.7 trillion in lost GDP and 27.9 million person-years of employment

The estimated costs of first-time child maltreatment in the US.³

**£17
billion**

per year (US\$23 billion), or nearly £300 (US\$400) per person⁴

The estimated immediate cost of late interventions for problems that affect children and young people in the UK.

² "The costs and economic impact of violence against children," Paola Perezniето, Andres Montes, Lara Langston and Solveig Routier, Child Fund Alliance, September 2014.

³ "Suffer the Little Children: An Assessment of the Economic Cost of Child Maltreatment," Perryman Group, 2014.

⁴ "The cost of late intervention: Early Intervention Foundation analysis," 2016.

Governments and international agencies have taken steps to tackle the problem ... but it's not enough



Given the scale of the problem, the high cost of failure and the strong public reaction to child abuse tragedies, child protection is a priority for governments and agencies worldwide. In 1989, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This calls for legislative, administrative, social and educational actions to protect children from all forms of violence, including abuse and neglect. But despite being one of the UN's most widely ratified conventions, its impact has been questionable.

More recently, child welfare has gained international attention as an important component of global development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has a specific target to end all forms of violence against children, and other targets addressing related risk factors.

Many national governments have taken steps to strengthen the legal and policy frameworks to protect children. But according to UNICEF, only 60 countries have adopted legislation that fully prohibits the use of corporal punishment at home. More than 600 million children under the age of 5 are still without full legal protection.⁵

What's more, many systemic problems hamper governments' efforts to manage the problem. Despite increased spending in many countries, long-term outcomes for vulnerable children remain poor and the cycle of intergenerational abuse and neglect continues.

⁵ "A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents," UNICEF, November 2017.

Child protection systems in crisis: why is the problem so difficult to tackle?

Child protection and care services across the world are reaching breaking point. This is partly due to the sheer number of children flowing through the system, and partly because of the complexity of their needs.

In developed countries, risk factors including the “toxic trio” (drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues) are growing. As a result, the number of referrals and assessments, and children subject to child protection plans or in out-of-home care, is on the up.

Social workers with excessive caseloads don't have time to investigate reports fully or to develop care plans that meet the specific needs of children and families. All too often, the daily painful decisions they make are a calculation of the least-worst outcome for the child.

To add to this strain, children's social services budgets are falling in many countries. In England, for example, councils expect to face a funding shortfall of £2 billion by 2020. At the same time, the cost of providing support is going up thanks to rising demand, the expanding scope of protection services and inefficiencies in service delivery. Worse, evidence suggests that children are staying longer in the care system in many countries, which adds to the cost. For many governments, the situation is simply unsustainable.

In our view, three main challenges prevent child protection systems from being effective.



1 Lack of evidence-based investment in proven interventions



In the face of cuts, it's more important than ever that child protection agencies target their spending at the programs and interventions that will get the best results. But it's rare for them to measure costs and outcomes to determine what works and what will help them to do things better in the future.

According to a report from the UK's National Audit Office (NAO), no national data tracks children in need, or measures whether the services they receive have helped to keep them safe or improve their wellbeing.⁶ As a result, child protection services aren't generally good at learning from good practice. And frontline social workers lack the evidence they need to make day-to-day decisions and prevent issues from escalating.

What's more, the most effective services are based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children. But the NAO report revealed that children don't always think professionals listen to them, see them often enough or ask them for their views.

2 Ineffective policy and service delivery



Many child protection systems have a narrow definition of vulnerability, which uses a statutory intervention model as its basis. This means they tend to be "crisis-driven," focusing mainly on short-term safety and offending.

But these systems aren't set up to respond to early risk factors effectively. So by the time a vulnerable family or child enters the system, their needs have escalated beyond the point where early intervention could help. Spending goes on delivering short-term services, rather than early interventions that will help reduce demand downstream.

Today's systems aren't geared up to achieve permanency outcomes, either. So a child who enters care may find it difficult to leave and stay out of the system. This is partly because there isn't the sufficient investment or active casework to address trauma and help keep the family

together. It's also due to a lack of long term support as children transition to adulthood. In many cases, this means an individual is more likely to need government services for life – at considerable cost.

Finally, child protection systems aren't "person-centered." Many children and families have complex and entrenched needs that cut across multiple services, including health and education. Yet no agency has a clear mandate to direct services or investment across the sector, or accountability for the "whole person." This lack of clarity and coordination means it's easy for children and young people to fall through the cracks. And it means some will receive services that don't address their complex needs.

3 Poor use of data



Many child protection systems struggle to capture and share information about vulnerable children and their families. Intake, assessment and referral systems tend to operate via separate databases which only link certain information about clients and their contacts with the system. This prevents caseworkers from having the full picture they need to make the right decisions, at the right time.

The problem worsens when multiple agencies are involved. Because they work on different IT systems, without access to each other's databases, they tend to cut and paste information from one system to another. This means that the information on a child is often incomplete, increasing the odds of them falling through the cracks.

Privacy concerns are another barrier to sharing information. Despite guidelines from the government, in the UK some partners, such as family doctors, won't provide information because of data protection concerns. Governments need to be crystal clear about the rights and obligations of agencies to share their data.

Finally, child protection teams aren't using performance and management information to prioritize issues, make decisions and allocate resources effectively. Without accurate, complete and comparable data, they can't benchmark or assess the value for money of the services they provide.

⁶ "Children in need of help or protection," National Audit Office, October 2016.

How can governments manage the crisis better?

It's clear from the scale of these challenges that governments need to fundamentally change their approach to child protection. To be effective and sustainable, they need to shift their focus from reducing the number of children in care and replace it with a broader goal of improving children's wellbeing and helping them to reach their full potential as adults.

What do we mean by "wellbeing?"⁷

Safety

both being and feeling safe from harm

Security

appropriate access to financial and Social resources

Stability

understanding who they are, where they belong, and their connection to culture

Wellness

both physically and emotionally healthy and free from trauma

Development

equipped with the skills they need to be independent and meet their aspirations

Through EY's work with social service agencies around the world, we know that a multi-faceted approach is needed to achieve this broader goal. This includes:

1. **Adopting an investment approach** to fund the most effective prevention and early intervention services and improve outcomes for children and young people.
2. **Redesigning service delivery models** to offer personalized packages of care, and move to performance-based contracts that incentivize providers to achieve permanency outcomes.
3. **Collating and analyzing data from multiple agencies in a single platform** to identify children at greatest risk of harm and make interventions more effective.

These changes will help to provide a complete view of the investments in services for vulnerable children and families across agencies. So governments can spend their money on the interventions that produce the best long-term results.

EY has a three-fold approach to improving children's wellbeing.



⁷ Adapted from "Evening the odds. Modelling wellbeing to drive better outcomes," Oranga Tamariki, November 2017

1

Adopting an investment approach



The first shift requires child protection agencies to target their spending on evidence-based interventions for those with the greatest need, at the earliest opportunity. This can help to minimize the number of children entering care, as well as improve lifetime outcomes. As a result, governments can reduce both the direct and indirect costs of child protection and out-of-home care, which will make the system more financially sustainable.

The social investment approach helps governments to save money in the long term by investing early addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of people. It involves identifying the major risk factors, undertaking data analysis to model the current and future wellbeing of those cohorts, and the cumulative lifetime costs and benefits associated with their life outcomes, to understand the fiscal impact on

government. By better understanding the life trajectory of all its people, including the vulnerable people, the government can prioritize specific cohorts and target its resources on those who will benefit the most.

An outcomes framework supports this approach. It gives a single view of the desired outcomes for children and families across all agencies, and defines the indicators used to measure and report on progress. This helps to focus resources across the system to deliver better services and outcomes for clients.

Developing more “evidence-based” programs will also make interventions more effective, by allowing governments to invest in programs and policies that they know work – and eliminate any that don’t.

Improving lifetime wellbeing for vulnerable children: New Zealand’s transformation journey

In April 2015, the New Zealand government asked an expert panel to examine ways to overhaul the country’s child protection system. The panel recommended introducing a new child-centered operating model with a stronger focus on preventing harm and intervening early. One of the key building blocks is the adoption of an approach that invests in children’s holistic wellbeing. This uses lifecourse modelling and evidence of what works to identify the best way of targeting early interventions, so all children receive the care and support they need.

We worked with the Ministry of Social Development (and later the newly created Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children), to develop and build the underlying model of children’s lifecourses. The model identifies the indicators associated with better and poorer wellbeing and associated future outcomes, shows the likelihood of these outcomes occurring and identifies the avoidable fiscal costs associated with poor outcomes. Where the Ministry needs prevention services, it is enhancing its approach to strategic partnerships across government

agencies and community organizations to deliver the right ones, at the right time.

The model covers all children aged 16 years and under in NZ, and includes projections up to the age of 25. It draws upon data in the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), a linked, longitudinal and anonymized research and policy data set that combines information from a range of organizations. This gives the Ministry a broad view of each child, their parents, family and carers.

We also helped to develop a wellbeing framework to model child outcomes over their lifetime. To do this, we drew on data and expertise from the child protection, education, health, justice and welfare agencies. We also used analytic and decision support tools and processes to inform decisions across the operating model.

Over time, this child-centered approach and associated analyses will help to transform New Zealand’s child protection system. It will help prioritize and assess the impact of interventions as part of making New Zealand “the best place in the world to be a child.”

2

Redesigning service delivery models



The aim of this second shift is to take a “whole of government” approach to provide more child- and family-centered services that focus on permanency and stability for children.

Personalized support plans provide tailored interventions to improve children’s life chances. They aim to divert a child from entering care by offering intensive home-based family preservation and restoration models that target the causes of harm and treat trauma. They also offer sustained support to help young people transition to adulthood.

The plans are based on input from children and young people, as well as their parents, families and child welfare professionals. Key workers define the support package, allocate funding (which follows the child, rather than sitting in agency silos) and procure services as needed. They also review the plans regularly, and change them in line with the child’s needs.

In this model, social service departments still deliver statutory services. But they also commission a wider range of evidence-based services from other organizations and fund their service providers differently. In some countries, for example, the unit (placement)-based system incentivizes providers to put more children in care and keep them there for longer. By moving to performance-based contracts that reward permanency, agencies can hold their service providers to account for “whole-of-person” outcomes.

Redesigning service delivery and cost models in this way allows agencies to address the child’s specific needs. It helps to reduce time in institutional care by prioritizing family reunification, and makes service providers accountable for delivering better life outcomes. And it helps to break the intergenerational cycle of abuse and neglect.



Redesigning the child protection service and cost model: New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services (FACS)

In the last decade, the New South Wales government has seen a steady rise in the number of children needing protection services, and a decline in exit rates. The state's Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is now implementing recommendations from a number of independent reviews. Its aim is to create a more child-focused and personalized service delivery system that's financially sustainable. This will give children and young people the chance to have a safe, loving, permanent home for life, and help them reach their potential.

To achieve this vision, we helped FACS to design a new service delivery system and supporting cost model. The system includes a separate Aboriginal Strategy to acknowledge the differences in care for Aboriginal children and young people. The cost model shifts funding from a child placement approach to one that focuses on permanency outcomes.

The system offers a continuum of care, including early intervention and prevention (to help reduce the number of children entering care) and more support for those already in care. It provides personalized support packages that reflect the child's changing needs; support from a key worker; flexibility in the services it provides and the funding it allocates; and ongoing support.

The new approach also requires the government to change the way it funds service delivery partners. As a result, government has developed outcomes-based contracts, putting more focus on helping families stay together. It's also developing a single framework to define the desired outcomes, based on safety, permanency of care and a wider focus on child wellbeing.

New South Wales is still on the journey to transform its child protection system. But early indicators suggest that its recent reforms will go a long way towards preventing harm to vulnerable children. They'll also help to break the intergenerational cycle of abuse and neglect and improve life chances for children and young people.





3

Collating and analyzing data from multiple agencies in a single platform



The third shift is to bring together and analyze data from multiple systems and agencies, so frontline staff have a consolidated view of a child's needs across the sector. Having easy access to this data through a single intelligent platform:

- ▶ allows caseworkers to make informed decisions on when, and what type of, support the child needs
- ▶ gives them more time to work directly with children and families

- ▶ allows other service providers to work more closely with the Department, sharing information and coordinating care
- ▶ gives children a voice through capturing relevant data about their experiences to inform service design and policy, and empowers them with tools to interact with everyone involved in their care

Providing a single view of vulnerable children: New South Wales FACS' Child Story

Until recently, information on the wellbeing and living arrangements of vulnerable children in New South Wales sat with different authorities and service providers. So it was hard to identify when a particular child was at risk. The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) needed an information system that could help caseworkers to make decisions and collaborate better with the wider network of family, carers and service providers.

We helped to migrate data from 14 FACS legacy systems to a single platform. Called Child Story, the cloud-based platform integrates, matches and merges the data to provide a holistic, single view of every child and young person under care. We also helped to put in place the strict controls, reconciliation mechanisms and protocols needed to govern data sharing. Over time, data from other organizations will move to the platform, too.

The platform puts relevant information about a child in the hands of frontline staff. With access to better tools, caseworkers can spend more time working directly with children and families and make informed decisions about the child's welfare.

To be successful, the system needed more than just better IT. It needed a design that places the child at the center of FACS' work. Recognizing that people are the experts in their jobs and lives, FACS used a co-design process to better understand the interactions between children and families, frontline staff and partners. This involved a significant number of workshops, interviews and work shadows. This process gave them a deep appreciation of the needs of the people who will use the system.



Targeting early interventions: the Early Help Profiling System in London councils, UK

In the UK, funding cuts have put considerable financial strain on local authorities in recent years. As a result, councils see early action as an effective way to support the most vulnerable children and prevent more disruptive and costly interventions later. The cuts have also been a catalyst for working with local partners to use the available resources in the best possible way.

We have been working with an alliance partner, Xantura, since 2014 to develop an early help profiling system, LEILA (Learning, Evolving, Improving Life outcomes through Analytics.) This predictive risk model brings together a range of data from multiple agencies and applies analytics to identify those children that are at greatest risk of maltreatment and in urgent need of support.

Each month, the system sends professionals working with children, young people and their families automated alerts on 20 families not already in the safeguarding system. That's compared to the 8,000 to 10,000 referrals each council currently receives every year. The alerts come in as a report, fax, email or telephone contact and include factors that might raise flags about a family, such as levels of debt. They can come from the child themselves, professionals (such as teachers, the police, GPs and health visitors) as well as family members and members

of the public. The data is anonymized, aggregated, and desensitized. Only when it reaches a critical risk level is it reattached, unencrypted and pushed to the social worker to decide if they need to take action.

Experience has shown the model to be more than 80% accurate. It allows councils to intervene with the most vulnerable individuals and families in a more targeted, effective way, and potentially reduce the number of safeguarding cases. It allows professionals to dedicate more time to working with children and families. And it allows local authorities to build a robust evidence base on the impacts of interventions. So they can commission more effective services and model potential demand for the service in future.

Four London councils are piloting LEILA to help them unlock the potential of Early Help services and transform the way children's services address the needs of the most vulnerable children. Indicative figures suggest a financial benefit of around US\$910,000 per local authority each year for early targeted interventions; US\$160,000 from replacing human-conducted screenings with an automated system, and US\$193,000 from improving access to multi-agency data.

Analyzing the data brings more benefits. The insights this provides allows caseworkers to identify and deliver targeted services to high-risk children and families before crisis situations arise. They help determine which interventions will be most effective. And they create feedback loops that allow agencies to continually improve how they design and deliver services. In this way, they help to build an evidence-based system.

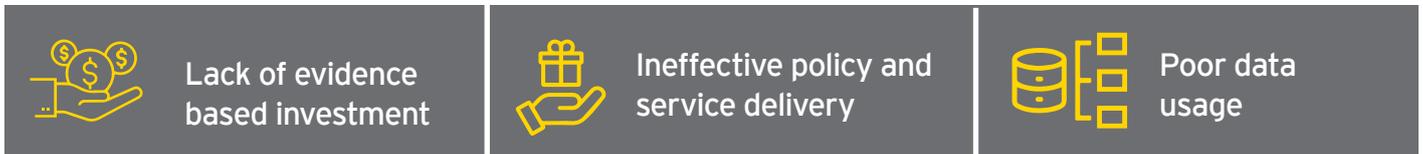
They can also show the agency's Executive how the system is performing at a macro level. This means senior decision-makers can:

- ▶ get a complete, current view of vulnerable children and families by region and cohort
- ▶ assess the costs of interventions (at cohort and individual level), and see each service provider's full activities and costs

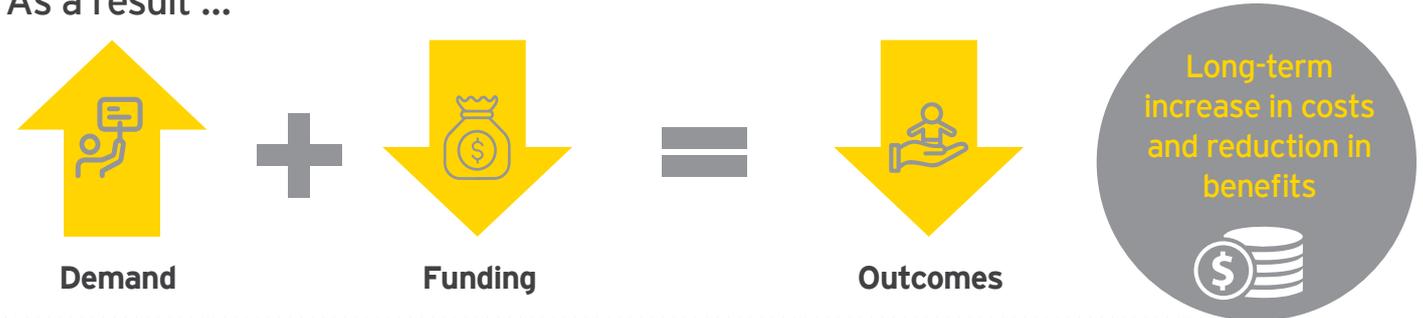
- ▶ measure the effectiveness of different programs and interventions, and reinvest any savings in program costs in prevention measures
- ▶ allocate resources more effectively and reduce financial and administrative overheads.

But collating quality data can be a challenge for agencies that don't routinely record it. It's important to build in quality control and assurance processes, and extend them to strategic partners. The system should also create and uphold clear guidelines and protocols about how to capture and store data securely – including when caseworkers need to get consent, when data can be shared and who can view it.

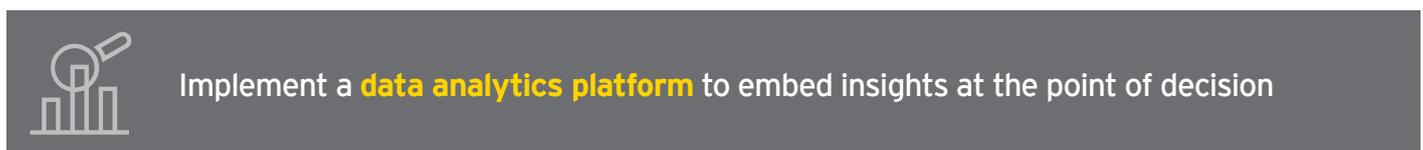
Why is the child protection crisis so difficult to tackle?



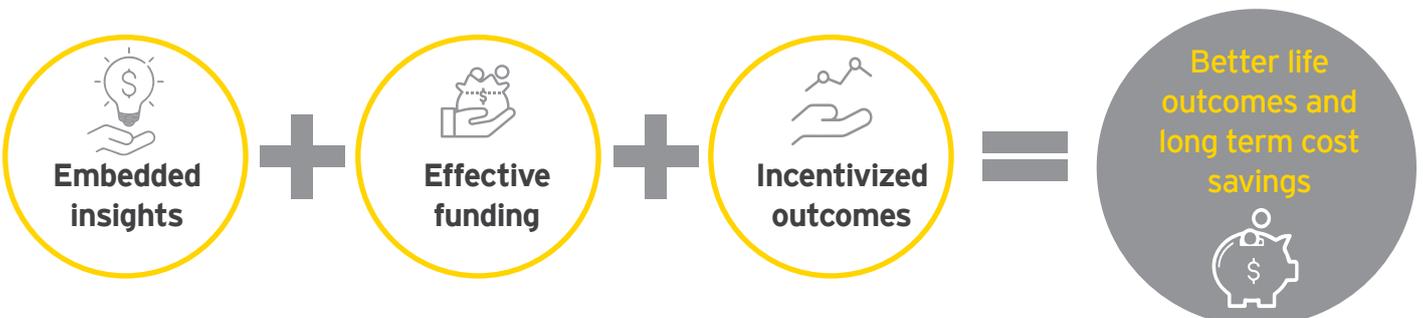
As a result ...



How can governments manage the crisis better?



As a result ...





How EY can help

At EY, we're helping governments and organizations globally to shift from a critical response to an early intervention support and funding model. To be effective, the Child Protection and Out of Home Care system must be examined holistically. By adopting an end-to-end approach, governments can transform their child welfare systems and improve the long-term wellbeing of vulnerable children. And by cutting the costs of social failure, they can reinvest the money they save in prevention measures and other priorities to create a more sustainable system in the long term.

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