

# EXAMINING RACE AND ETHNICITY IN CHILD WELFARE: TWO APPROACHES

## BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2021, Evident Change and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) began a series of statewide workgroups with California tribal partners to build a set of recommendations related to implementing the Structured Decision Making® (SDM) system with and for tribal communities. To better examine critical data related to child welfare decision making for tribal children, Evident Change analysts conducted an analysis of SDM® use and decision making in California using two different methodologies for examining race/ethnicity and tribal affiliation. These methods are described below.

## METHOD 1: TRADITIONAL

The traditional method for examining race/ethnicity relies on two pieces of information recorded in Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS): the primary ethnicity and Hispanic origin code. Evident Change used these two pieces of information to determine the race/ethnicity of each alleged child victim (child) involved in the referral as described in Table 1, aligning with the race/ethnicity classification method used by the University of California Berkeley's California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP)<sup>1</sup> and SafeMeasures®.<sup>2</sup> As each referral may involve more than one child, Evident Change analysts assigned the family's race/ethnicity using the races/ethnicities of all children on the referral. When the

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<sup>1</sup> The California Child Welfare Indicators Project may be accessed at <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/>.

<sup>2</sup> SafeMeasures is a proprietary service from Evident Change that helps social system professionals to access and use their case management data efficiently and effectively. SafeMeasures users may access the site at <https://app.safemeasures.org/ca/>. For more information on SafeMeasures, visit <https://www.evidentchange.org/analytics/safemeasures>.

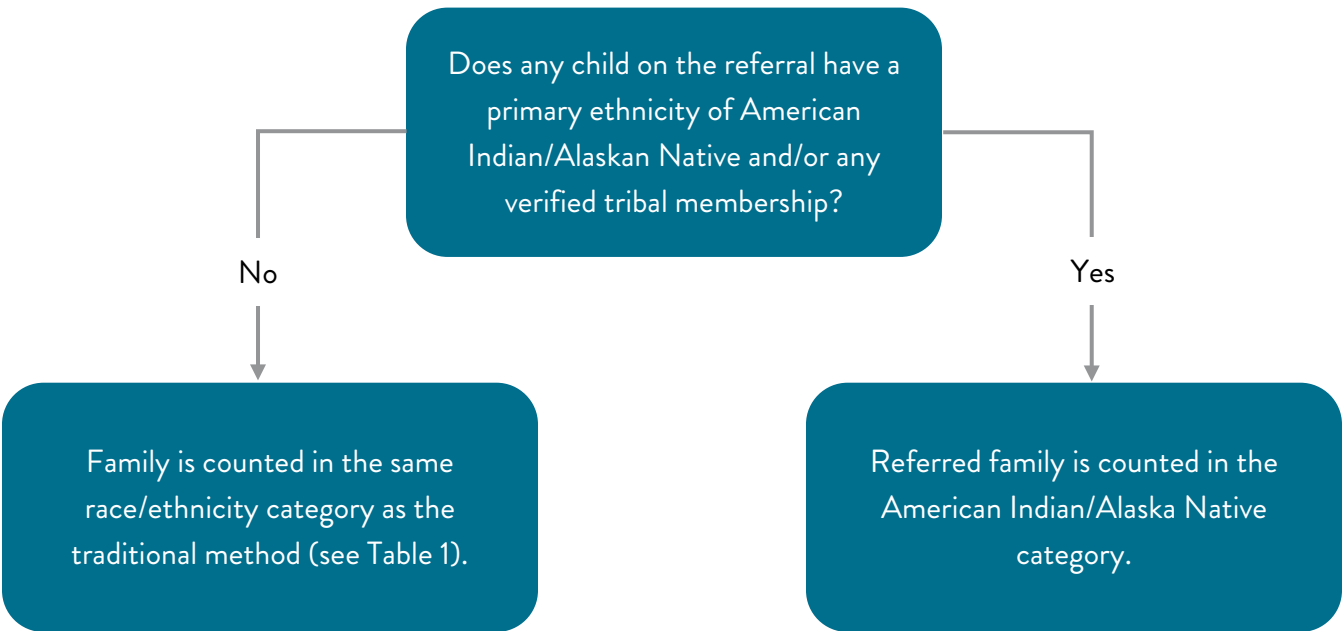
children on a single referral had races/ethnicities that differed from one another, the family was defined as having multiple races/ethnicities within the household.

TABLE 1	
CHILD-BASED RACE/ETHNICITY DEFINITIONS	
RACE/ETHNICITY GROUP	PRIMARY ETHNICITY TYPE INCLUDED
Asian/Pacific Islander	<p>Hispanic origin code is no or unknown AND primary ethnicity type is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asian Indian</li> <li>Cambodian</li> <li>Chinese</li> <li>Filipino</li> <li>Guamanian</li> <li>Hmong</li> <li>Hawaiian</li> <li>Japanese</li> <li>Korean</li> <li>Laotian</li> <li>Polynesian</li> <li>Samoan</li> <li>Vietnamese</li> <li>Other Asian</li> <li>Other Pacific Islander</li> <li>Other Asian/Pacific Islander</li> </ul>
Black/African American	<p>Hispanic origin code is no or unknown AND primary ethnicity type is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Black</li> <li>Ethiopian</li> </ul>
Latinx/Hispanic	<p>Hispanic origin code is yes AND/OR primary ethnicity type is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hispanic</li> <li>Caribbean</li> <li>Central American</li> <li>Mexican</li> <li>South American</li> </ul>
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<p>Hispanic origin code is no or unknown AND primary ethnicity type is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alaskan Native</li> <li>American Indian</li> </ul>
White	<p>Hispanic origin code is no or unknown AND primary ethnicity type is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White</li> <li>White – Armenian</li> <li>White – Central American</li> <li>White – European</li> <li>White – Middle Eastern</li> <li>White – Romanian</li> </ul>
Unable to Determine/Missing	<p>Hispanic origin code is no or unknown AND primary ethnicity type is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unable to determine</li> <li>Decline to state</li> <li>Other race unknown</li> <li>Invalid codes (such as 0)</li> <li>Children for whom ethnicity is not coded</li> </ul>

## METHOD 2: AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN NATIVE FOCUS

Particular interest has been raised regarding child welfare involvement for American Indian/Alaskan Native children. Using the traditional method described above may underestimate the number of American Indian/Alaskan Native children involved in child welfare. For example, children who are Latinx/Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native would not be counted in the American Indian/Alaskan Native race/ethnicity group using the traditional approach; these children would be counted in the Latinx/Hispanic category. Therefore, Evident Change developed a methodology to take a closer look at children with any primary ethnicity<sup>3</sup> of American Indian/Alaskan Native and/or any verified tribal membership (i.e., the child was determined to be eligible for membership or was a member). In this method, referred families with a child whose primary ethnicity was American Indian/Alaskan Native or who had verified tribal membership were counted in the American Indian/Alaskan Native category (Figure 1). Through this approach, analysts and readers can better understand the population of children served at intake and investigations with any American Indian/Alaskan Native racial/ethnic identity, which may be a closer approximation of the number of children subject to federal standards under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

**Figure 1**  
**American Indian/Alaskan Native Focus Methods**



<sup>3</sup> Note that this approach considered only the primary ethnicity from CWS/CMS. Workers may enter secondary ethnicities into CWS/CMS; secondary ethnicities were not included in this approach.