



Bi-Directional Referral Pathway Phase 2 Evaluation Report **September 2025**

Summary of Key takeaways

- **Stronger Together** – Staff at both organizations see the pathway as beneficial and effective.
- **Broader Reach** - The new pathway is projected to cross-refer more than 800 families this fiscal year, more than double the number cross-referred last fiscal year.
- **Technology and protocols were easy, efficient, and beneficial to families** - Overall, both HMG WA and CCA-WA staff reported the new workflow and technology were easy for staff and valuable for families.
- **Wrap-around support** - The pathway strengthened CCA-WA staffs' understanding of the challenges families face, and helped them identify a wide range of needs warranting a referral to HMG WA. The pathway helped HMG WA staff to identify more families with childcare needs.
- **Evaluation Identified improvement opportunities** - Overall, the rate of successful connection was 31%. HMG WA's electronic referral option had a 50% success rate, so a change in protocol could improve success.

Contents

Background	3
Evaluation Goals and Design	5
Results	6
Conclusions and Recommendations	12

Background

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the roll out of the permanent bi-directional referral pathway between the Help Me Grow Washington (HMG WA) and Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA-WA) systems. The overarching goal is to assess the impact of this pathway on connections between these two service systems, each of which provide essential infrastructure that supports families with young children in Washington State.

Why did we establish a bi-directional referral pathway between HMG WA and CCA-WA?

Families and providers shared during Washington's Statewide Early Learning Needs Assessment process that it is overwhelming and hard to navigate the complicated systems of care in Washington State. Systems coordination is necessary so that families can access the resources they need, when they need them.

For the past two years, Help Me Grow Washington (HMG WA) and Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA-WA) have been working to identify and implement nexuses in their work that will allow both statewide networks to increase their reach and achieve more effective wrap-around supports, simplifying the process of service navigation for families. Through this collaborative partnership, shared messaging and outreach, and enhanced technology, both systems can engage new communities and share resources and coordinate care to ensure that families are discovering, accessing and using multiple benefits.

Last year, HMG WA and CCA-WA conducted a short-term pilot program designed to increase connections between organizations serving Washington State families in navigating and connecting families and youth to various services that address family needs. This year, we moved from a small pilot project to a permanent bi-directional referral pathway.

What is a bi-directional referral pathway?

The term bi-directional referral pathway means that clients are referred seamlessly from one organization to another. It is "bi-directional" because the pathway ensures that HMG WA clients are seamlessly referred to CCA-WA, and CCA-WA clients are seamlessly referred to HMG WA.

The design of this pathway is informed by the previous pilot project, which tested several bidirectional referral methods – email, providing the phone number, and a warm hand-off. The pilot evaluation estimated an additional 1000 clients would be referred between CCA-WA and HMG WA per year. Detailed pilot results are available in a previous report.

Overview of the Bidirectional Referral Pathway

We implemented the following:

- 2) Referral from HMG WA to CCA-WA - callers that contacted the HMG WA hotline were asked if they were interested in support finding childcare, and offered 2 options for referral: a) provide the client with the CCA-WA phone number, or b) place an electronic referral on behalf of the client to receive a call back from CCA-WA. The electronic referral option was built into the HMG WA client management system and triggered an automated email to be sent to a designated CCA-WA inbox.
- 2) Referral from CCA-WA to HMG WA - callers that contacted the CCA hotline were asked if they were interested in support with a list of social and health resources. The electronic referral option was built into the client management system and designed to trigger an automated transfer of referrals to HMG WA's referral queue. Due to some automation challenges on CCA-WA's end, lists were exported from CCA-WA and uploaded to HMG WA's client management system twice weekly.

The data collection period for the evaluation ran from July 1, 2025 – September 9, 2025.

CCA-WA Screening Script

We partner with Help Me Grow, a free program that connects families to community resources like parenting support, child development guidance, food and housing assistance, or help finding a doctor. With your permission, we can share your contact information so they can reach out directly and walk alongside you in finding the help you need.

Help Me Grow: Do you have interest in additional resources in the areas of Health Insurance, Housing, Child Development, or other Basic Resources?

- a. *Adult & G W Pediatric Medical Care*
- b. *Child Development Supports*
- c. *Family Stability Supports*
- d. *State Benefits, Programs & Resources*
- e. *Local Community Supports & Resources*

HMG WA Screening Script

Do you have any questions or needs related to childcare?

- a. Yes
- b. No

We partner with a great organization called Child Care Aware, they are a Washington-based nonprofit that can help you find childcare and early learning resources in our state. Like us, they help people over the phone. If you would like, I can submit a referral to them on your behalf using the information you've already shared with me today and they will call within the next 2 business days to discuss childcare resources with you.

- a. Email referral only
- b. Phone Number Only
- c. Declined All Options

Evaluation Goals and Design

What did we hope to learn as we roll out this pathway?

The key questions for this evaluation reflected HMG WA and CCA-WA's shared goals for this pathway:

- 1) **Effectiveness** of referral pathway: Do referrals effectively help families access and navigate wraparound supports and services? Specifically,
 - a. Does the pathway increase the number of families referred between HMG WA and CCA-WA?
 - b. Does the pathway increase the number of families that successfully access services from both HMG WA and CCA-WA?
- 2) **Efficiency** of referral workflow: Are partner organizations equipped (data and workflow) to make referrals efficiently without placing undue burden on staff?
- 3) **Perceived Value**: Do call center staff perceive that the referral pathway helps them better address client's unmet needs?

Data Collection & Analysis Methods

To answer the questions above, we integrated data from several evaluation activities. Some focused on quantitative data to understand the uptake and success rate of the referral options being tested. Others focused on qualitative data to learn about staff experiences.

- **Screening:** Screening Questions to assess needs were integrated into the intake forms at both organizations.
- **Comparison of data from each organization's Client Management System:** Closing the loop – HMG WA and CCA-WA compared clients screened and referred between agencies. We checked each referred client to confirm whether they successfully received resources from both organizations.
- **CQI Meetings & Facilitated Discussions:** We hosted frequent meetings before and after we launched the pilot in order to troubleshoot and fine tune any issues. Evaluators also facilitated separate debrief discussions with direct service staff at WR and CCA-WA.

Evaluation Results

Effectiveness of the Referral Pathway

Overall 157 clients were referred between the two organizations in the 7 weeks since the pathway launched. We anticipate the pathway will generate over 800 referrals by the end of the first year, increasing referrals between the two organizations by 221% over last year.

Referral volume was quite even between the two organizations with HMG WA referring 76 clients to CCA-WA and CCA-WA referring 81 clients to HMG WA. Overall, 31% of referred clients successfully accessed services at both organizations. Notably, clients that opted for an electronic referral to CCA-WA had a far greater success rate compared to clients that just wanted to be given the CCA-WA phone number so they could call on their own (50% compared to 3%).

Referral Option	# of referrals	# (%) successfully accessed services
HMG WA to CCA-WA - Electronic	38	19 (50%)
HMG WA to CCA-WA - Phone	38	1 (3%)
CCA-WA to HMG WA	81	28 (35%*)
All Combined	157	48 (31%)

*HMG WA staff are still following up on 16 cases that were recently referred. If these were removed from the calculation, the success rate would be 43%.

819	221%	31%
Projected referrals for FY26	Projected % increase in referrals for FY26	Successful connections

Trends and demographics

HMG WA has historically made a steady stream of referrals to CCA-WA. The introduction of the new pathway doubled the number of referrals. After the pilot last year, CCA-WA had stopped making referrals to HMG WA because the process was too cumbersome. Once the new pathway was launched, referrals shot up immediately.

Figure 1: Number of clients referred from HMG WA to CCA-WA by month

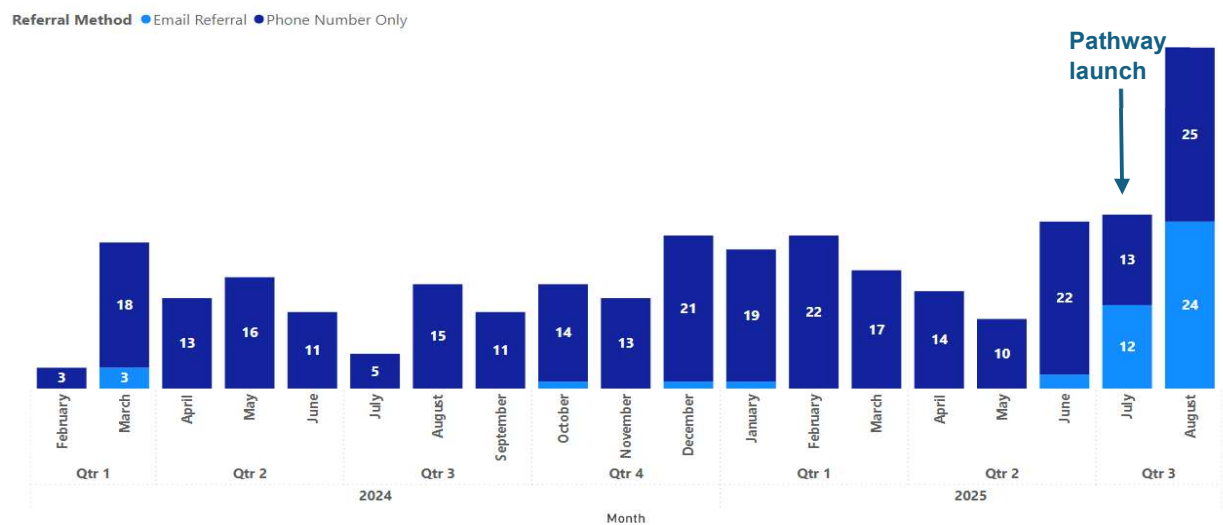
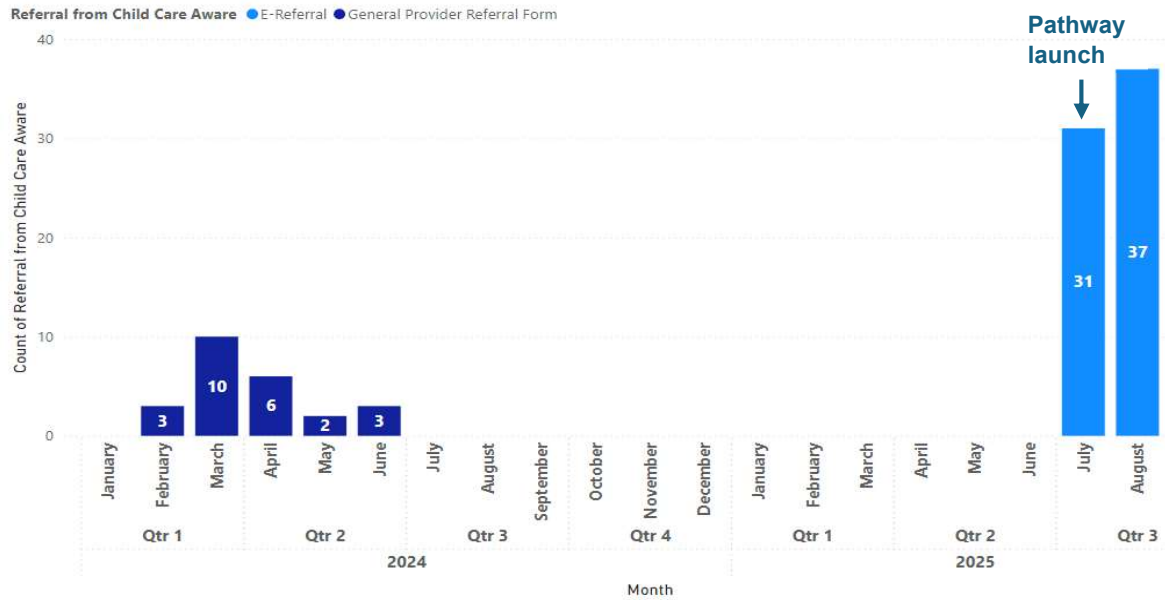


Figure 2: Number of clients referred from CCA-WA to HMG WA by month*



*Chart data produced from WithinReach records. 2024 data are missing a few referrals that CCA-WA logged but who never accessed HMG WA services.

Figure 3: Race/Ethnicity of referred clients

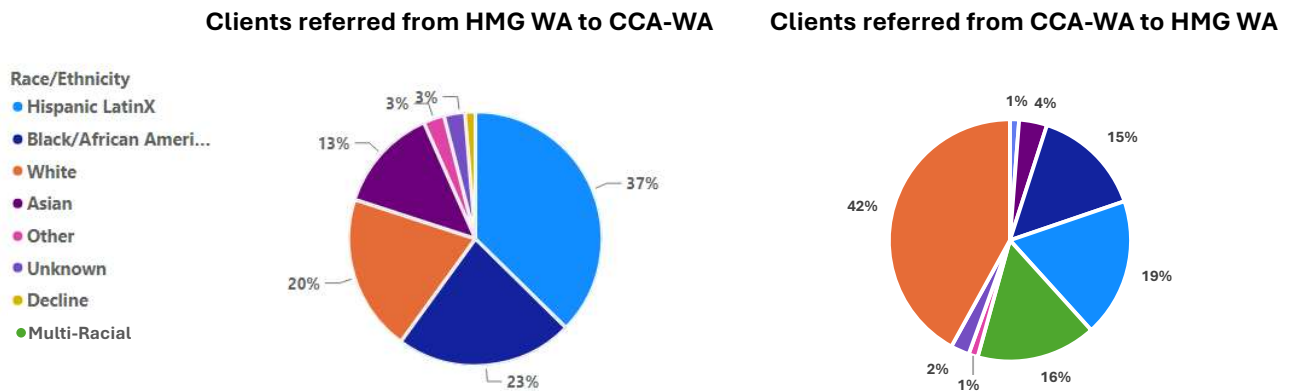


Figure 4: Primary/home language of referred clients

Clients referred from HMG WA to CCA-WA

Clients referred from CCA-WA to HMG WA

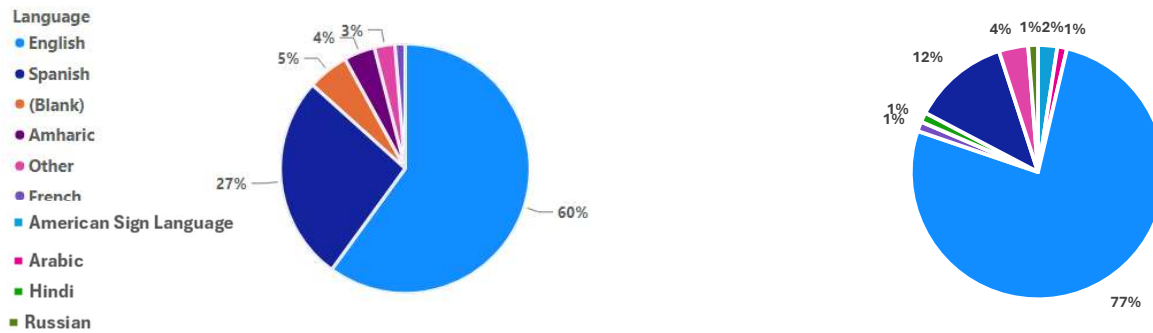


Figure 5: Average household size of referred clients

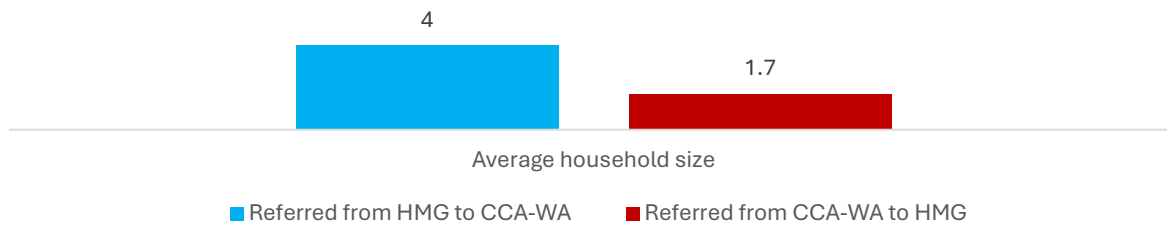


Figure 6: County of residence of referred clients

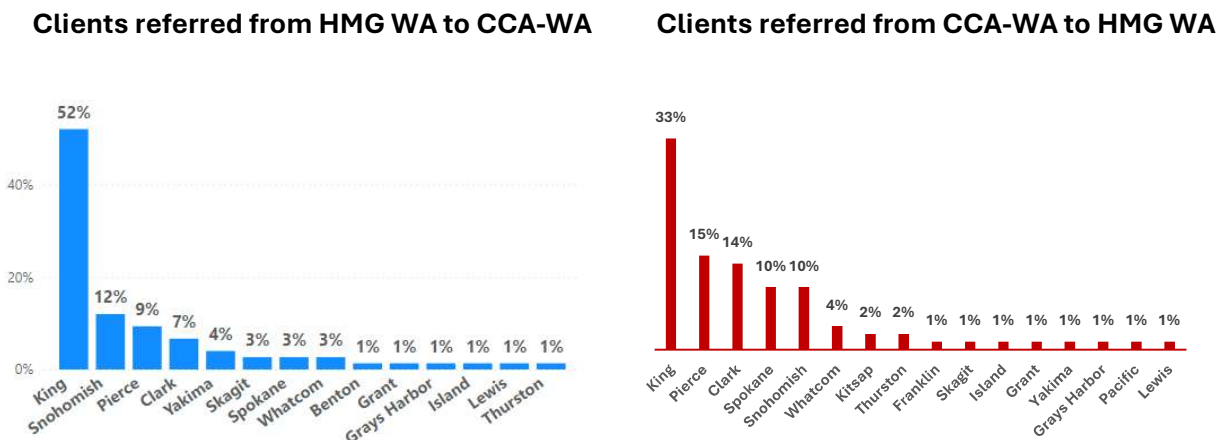
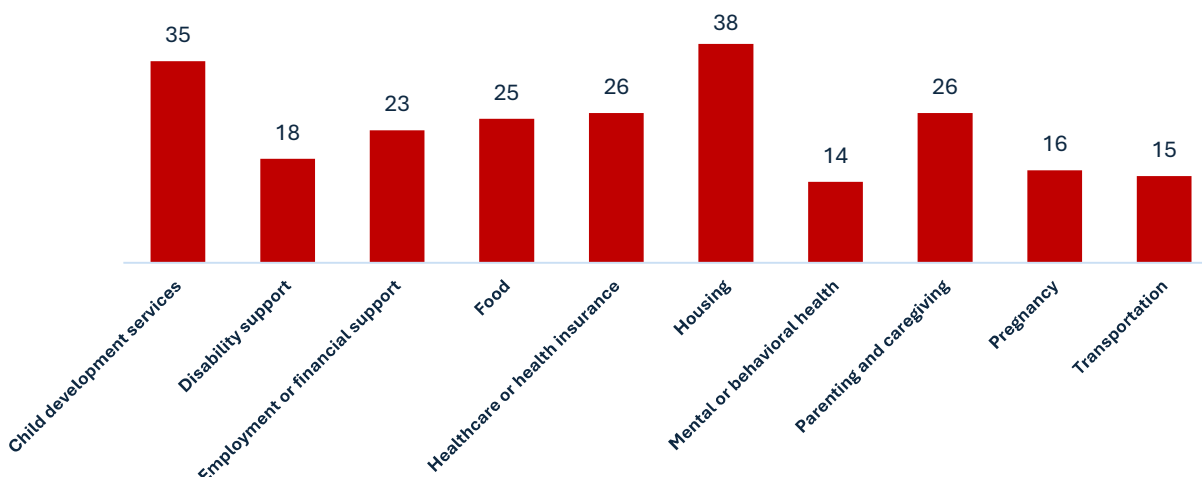


Figure 7: Referrals to HMG WA by area of service*

CCA-WA clients expressed interest in a referral to HMG WA for various reasons. The top two reasons were housing and child development services.



*Count of referrals includes multiple selection of service areas.

Efficiency of the Referral Pathway

	HMG WA Staff Feedback	CCA-WA Staff feedback
Perceived administrative burden	Staff are satisfied - Process is “seamless, easy and efficient” Tech challenge - Manual transfer of referrals from CCA-WA was unexpected and add slight extra burden	Minimal impact - Tech challenge: issues with API developed resulted in having to manually referrals adding extra administrative burden.
Suggestions for improvements	Missing Data – Some referrals lack client profile info, preferred language, email, consent to contact, and referring Navigator’s email. Staff Visibility – Direct service staff benefit from access to referral data.	Visual Walkthrough – Offer a visual walkthrough of how intakes transfer to HMG WA, and vice versa (HMG WA to Call Center) providing transparency and clarity.
% of referrals that were electronic	50% (38 electronic referral; 38 phone # only)	100% CCA-WA only offered the electronic referral option
Average days from referral to initial contact	1.8	3.84

Perceived Value of the Referral Pathway

	HMG WA Staff Feedback	CCA-WA Staff feedback
Ability to meet client's needs	• Client-Centered – Clients choose referral method; few opt for electronic. • Transparency – Full visibility into referral details improves clarity. Staff add notes about special needs • Collaboration – Regular meetings foster learning and connection. • Model Partnership – Staff recommend this approach for future collaborations.	• Stronger understanding of family challenges. • Improved intake process, with easier integration into service fields.
Insight about client's needs	• Screening works – More callers express childcare needs when explicitly prompted. Recently relocated and TANF-enrolled families most likely to have childcare needs • Unmet Childcare needs – families with disabled children or ineligible for subsidy were most likely to report unmet childcare needs after working with CCA-WA. • Other unmet needs – Housing, rent and utility assistance remain the most requested unmet needs.	• Builds awareness - Families are not always aware of the full scope of their needs or whether they qualify for supports (e.g., homelessness, developmental screenings, wraparound supports). • Gratitude - Families expressed gratitude for access to additional services. • Smooth experiences - Follow-up from HMG WA appears consistent, with families reporting smooth connections when re-engaging for new referrals. • Uncovers hidden needs - Staff are able to uncover hidden needs, even when families initially decline services. • Reduced stigma - The process reduces stigma around asking for help, allowing families to access more resources.
Main reasons for referral	• Childcare • Paying for childcare	• Housing • Child developmental services • Healthcare or health insurance • Parenting & caregiving • Food

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key takeaways

Stronger Together – Staff at both organizations see the bidirectional referral pathway as beneficial and an important opportunity to serve families more effectively. The pathway has broadened the reach of each organization, ensuring families across Washington State benefit.

Referrals Doubled - In just 7 weeks, the new screening and referral workflow successfully identified 157 families that wanted both CCA-WA and HMG WA services. The new workflow is projected to cross-refer more than 800 families this fiscal year, more than double the number cross-referred last fiscal year.

Easy, efficient, and beneficial to families - Overall, both HMG WA and CCA-WA staff reported the new workflow was easy for staff and valuable for families. Both teams were satisfied with the technology and said it was minimally burdensome. CCA-WA staff reported that screening gave them a stronger understanding of the challenges families face, and helped them to identify a wide range of needs warranting a referral to HMG WA. HMG WA staff reported that explicit screening helped them identify more families with childcare needs. Both teams value the partnership and said regular meetings particularly enhance collaboration across agencies; the HMG WA team recommended this structure as a model for future partnerships.

Opportunities to improve outcomes for families- Overall, the rate of successful connection was 31%, which means over two-thirds of families that wanted to be cross-referred did not get connected. HMG WA offered two different ways of referring, and the data clearly showed that electronic referrals were far more successful than providing the phone number alone. Help Me Grow may want to consider offering only the electronic referral option as CCA-WA is doing. Additionally, there may be a need for additional monitoring and follow-up with families to ensure they get the support they need. Staff identified some remaining service gaps related to housing, children with disabilities, and families impacted by the “care cliff” (ie. working families who can’t afford child care because they make too much to qualify for subsidized care but not enough to cover the total cost of their child care needs out of pocket).

Opportunity to improve technology - Due to unexpected technical issues, referral transfer from CCA-WA to HMG WA requires a semi-manual export/import process. This is error-prone and depends on one staff person at each agency to stay on top of sharing the data. CCA-WA is currently undergoing a technology system transition, so it was determined to revisit this process down the road.

Recommendations for future activities

Survey clients - Both organizations should survey referred clients about the quality of their experience, the longer-term outcomes of referrals, and suggestions for improvements

Eliminate phone referral option - HMG WA may want to consider removing the phone referral option and switching to electronic referral only to improve the rate of successful connections.

Additional follow-up - Both organizations could consider additional strategies to follow-up with families to ensure connection

Incorporate staff recommendations - Address staff recommendations for improvement related to missing data, data reporting and monitoring, and a visual walkthrough of the system to increase transparency.

Discuss unmet needs - Consider hosting cross-agency discussions about specialized resources and strategies to address unmet needs – housing, children with disabilities, and families impacted by the “care cliff” (working families who can’t afford child care because they make too much to qualify for subsidized care but not enough to cover the total cost of their child care needs out of pocket)

Fix technology challenges After CCA-WA launches their new client management system, revisit automation options to send referrals to HMG WA.