

Oregon Child Welfare

Vision for Transformation



“We all know that infants, children, adolescents and young adults do best growing up in a family that can provide love, support, life-long learning, shared-values and important memories.”

Rebecca Jones Gaston, DHS Child Welfare Director

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is committed to transforming our Child Welfare Division into one that successfully works to support and meet the needs of families as a way to best serve Oregon’s children and young people.

DHS envisions going far beyond improving or reforming the current child welfare system. Rather our goal is to achieve true transformation built on core values and a belief that children do best growing up in a family.

In developing a final Vision for Transformation, DHS Child Welfare will engage and collaborate with diverse partners to establish and implement a strategic roadmap for success. Our Vision includes specific guiding principles, strategies, and measurable outcomes.

As a result, DHS will be in a better position to support Oregon families and children at home and in their communities. We believe that by transforming our child welfare system, children and youth, and young adults will be safer and healthier, and they will experience less trauma and greater well-being.

Our children and families deserve nothing less from us in the most prosperous and the most challenging of times.

A Vision for a Transformed Child Welfare System

All children experience safe, stable, healthy lives and grow up in the care of a loving family and community.

The Child Welfare division of the Department of Human Services is one part of a larger statewide social safety-net system that works to support families and communities and seamlessly meet the needs of people not just during a life-threatening crisis but well beforehand, when small interventions can make an enormous difference in their lives.

Collectively, DHS and its public and private partners are working to support families and communities in a myriad of ways, including but not limited to: providing economic support; enhancing parental skills; helping people with their housing needs and employment goals; providing health and behavioral services; helping treat alcohol and substance use disorders; and ensuring child safety and family well-being.

The mission of DHS Child Welfare is to ensure that every child and family is empowered to live a safe, stable and healthy life and is based on a set of beliefs and core values:

We believe children and youth, and young adults do best growing up in a family.

We believe that our child welfare agency and its partners can better ensure people's safety, health, and well-being if they work in constant collaboration and proactively engage individuals, families, and communities.

We believe that when families and communities are strong, fewer children experience abuse and neglect.

We believe that earlier, less-intrusive support for families means more children can remain safe and healthy at home and in school, and in the end, children and young adults have better long-term outcomes and maintain the bonds and connections that are critical to their well-being.

We believe families and communities working together in a more proactive, holistic way will also help free up budget and staff resources. This allows DHS and its partners to allocate resources to where they can have the greatest impact for children, young adults and families. Integrating services will mean less need for costly foster care, residential placements, and other crisis support, creating opportunities for more innovation, creative solutions, and new business models.

Child Welfare's vision is for all children to experience safe, stable, healthy lives and grow up in the care of a nurturing family and community.

Our Vision for Transformation is based on core values of safety, integrity, innovation and respect as the basis for equitable and culturally appropriate services for our children, youth, and young adults, and their families and support for our staff.

DHS Child Welfare will achieve this Vision for Transformation through its various functions that work to:

1. Assess child safety and provide in-home support to prevent placements away from family, friends and community.
2. Expand services to prevent unnecessary foster care placements and ensure that intensive interventions are as effective as possible.
3. If foster care is needed, ensure it will be family-based, time-limited, culturally-responsive, and designed to better stabilize families, rather than just serving as a placement for a child.
4. Establish that children and youth, and young adults will be placed in the care of family, friends, and neighbors whenever possible, and help children maintain connections to their cultures, communities, and Tribes.
5. Recognize that if higher-level physical or mental health services are needed, such treatment programs are to be short-term, customized therapeutic support while children or teens are living in families – with birth parents, relatives, close friends or foster caregivers.
6. Acknowledge that residential treatment can be life-saving and may be needed for short-term stabilization.
7. Collaborate and build strong relationships with our partners.
8. Guarantee our workforce is supported and has the resources, training, coaching, and services needed to support our children, families and communities.

By proactively reaching out, engaging, and including families, community stakeholders, and Tribes in the design of a Child Welfare Transformation, the agency will move forward in achieving one of its goals of becoming a more trusted resource for information, expertise, and education about child safety and support.

This transformation will not happen overnight, and some families will still experience crisis situations, even with proactive engagement and supportive services. It is critical, therefore, that DHS and its partners create interdisciplinary and cross-system teams to support children and families to meet their individual needs. DHS Child Welfare will also improve its use of data to inform decision making and activate appropriate levels of services and supports.

Families will be strong and successful when everyone works together, and the system works well for them. DHS Child Welfare will work collaboratively with families, communities, Tribes, and partners to make this transformation a reality, based on the guiding principles, strategies, and measures outlined below.

The world's circumstances have changed profoundly since the initial development of this vision. Many of the strategies within this document require investment, resources and new tools to be developed and made easily available. The current situation with the global pandemic has changed how readily and how quickly these might be accessed. What does not change, however, is the focus and goals of transformation.

The Need for Transforming Child Welfare

Nationally, the current approach to child welfare is not working, here's why:

- Preventable fatalities due to child abuse and neglect remain high¹.
- Subsequent maltreatment remains high².
- Poverty is often mistaken for neglect, resulting in increased rates of child abuse reports³ and unnecessary foster care, group and institutional placements.
- Research shows that placement in substitute care can cause further serious trauma⁴.
- The system produces disparately high negative outcomes for children of color and their families due mainly to practices and critical decisions that too often result in racial, ethnic and Tribal disproportionality⁵.
- Children stay in the child welfare system too long and too often and as young adults age out of the system without strong, permanent family connections⁶ and none of the supports needed to become self-sufficient.
- The child welfare system itself is constantly strained without adequate resources⁷.
- A significant number of youth, and young adults "crossover" between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, an event that often leads to deeper involvement in both systems and a pathway into the criminal justice system. These trends are in part due to the lack of strong cross-system coordination, inattention to indicators around child well-being.⁸

Historically, the system has focused on removing or rescuing kids from their families, homes, and neighborhoods for safety reasons. Research, however, consistently shows that children and young people can have better outcomes when they remain safely in their home while maintaining ties to their family, friends, schools and communities.⁹

Because we want to truly ensure the safety, good health, and well-being of children and young adults, we must rethink our approach and our systems, processes, and structures for serving and supporting them, their families, and communities. Thus, additional input and rethinking with our internal staff and with external community partners are critical components for the development and successful implementation of this DHS Child Welfare Vision for Transformation. Short-term and long-term planning and actions will ensure that the transformation efforts are nimble and adaptive to respond to the evolving changes in the field of child welfare in the world arena.

¹ [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatality.pdf#page=2&view=How many children die each year from child abuse and neglect?](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatality.pdf#page=2&view=How%20many%20children%20die%20each%20year%20from%20child%20abuse%20and%20neglect?)

² <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/iaa/recurrence/>

³ <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2014/addressing-underlying-issue-poverty-child-neglect-cases/>

⁴ <http://www.sakkyndig.com/psykologi/artvit/doyle2007.pdf>

⁵ https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/racial_disproportionality.pdf

⁶ https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nscaw_ltfc_research_brief_19_revised_for_acf_9_12_13_edit_clean.pdf

⁷ <https://www.socialworkers.org/Advocacy/Policy-Issues/Child-Welfare>

⁸ Stewart, M., Lutz, L., & Herz, D. H. (2010). *Crossover Youth Practice Model*. Washington, DC: Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy; and, Herz, D. H., Dierkhising, C. Raithel, J., Schretzman, M., Guiltinan, S., Goerge, R., Cho, Y., Coulton, C., & Abbott, S. (2019). Dual System Youth and their Pathways: A Comparison of Incidence, Characteristics and System Experiences using Linked Administrative Data. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 48. 10.1007/s10964-019-01090-3.

⁹ https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/inhome_services.pdf

Guiding Principle 1: Supporting Families and Promoting Prevention

Our Child Welfare transformation is built on trauma-informed, family and community centered and culturally-responsive programs that are focused on engagement, safety, well-being and prevention.

This means strategies with an approach that is:

- ✓ **Centered on family support** focused on individual needs and appropriate services;
- ✓ **Based on early support services** at a time when small interventions can make an enormous difference in people’s lives, prevent a crisis situation and if one does occur provide appropriate resources.
- ✓ **A multi-generational approach for** meeting families’ needs and addressing factors that contribute to risk, trauma and safety concerns and to the cycles of child abuse and neglect.
- ✓ **Focused on strengthening and preserving connections to family and community** by keeping children and young adults safely in their own home and communities whenever possible; maintaining connections to family, culture, and community when temporary substitute care is needed; and making permanency the priority, starting with safely reunifying families.
- ✓ **Engaged with the community** by helping families and community partners and integrating the voices of children, young adults, parents, families, Tribes, and partners.
- ✓ **Culturally-responsive** by embracing the communities and cultures of children and young adults in decision-making that impacts their safety, health, and well-being and by delivering services that are aligned with the cultural context of the child, young adults, family, and community.
- ✓ **Trauma-informed** and recognizes the impact of trauma, including historical trauma, and promoting a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing.
- ✓ **Strength-based** to provide families and individuals the tools to better handle issues related to mental health, substance use, domestic violence, and other factors that can contribute to child abuse and neglect.
- ✓ **Research-based and data-informed** by utilizing the latest research and data in effective strategies for transformation

Strategic Projects and Initiatives

DHS Child Welfare has several initiatives and improvement projects that are either underway or in a planning phase and that align with this guiding principle as to create a road map for transformation.

Title	Description
Family support to prevent unnecessary foster care	The goal of this initiative is to improve support and remove barriers for families to help them become self-sufficient, prevent the need for unnecessary foster care for children, and support those children and families that have experienced out-of-home care.
Response to community concerns and reports of child abuse and neglect	DHS Child Welfare created a centralized hotline for screening reports and allegations of child abuse and neglect. The hotline was fully operationalized in 2019, and will need ongoing improvements to help reduce wait times, better manage workloads, and address the correct amount of assessments assigned to specific districts.

Safety and Fatality Review and Prevention	This project works to improve various aspects of the Safety Program and Fatality Review and Prevention to better ensure the safety of children and young adults.
Foster family recruitment, training, support and retention.	Oregon is making significant investments in the recruitment, training, support and retention of foster families to meet the needs of our children, youth, young adults and communities.
Equity and inclusion	This initiative seeks to improve equity and inclusion in all aspects of the Child Welfare program and to provide inclusive, equitable and culturally appropriate services to children, young adults, and families.
Timeliness to permanency and family ties	DHS Child Welfare is working on several related initiatives to improve procedures for reunification, family engagement in case planning, and coordination with court partners to help improve permanency timeliness including set deadlines that will result in better outcomes for children and young adults in care.
Training, policy, and practices related to Tribes and Native Americans related to Oregon's tribal children and families	DHS agencies including Child Welfare are working to improve training, policy, and practices that reflects a tribally responsive approach. By partnering with Oregon's Tribes and honoring tribal history, DHS Child Welfare can better serve tribal children and families.
A 2020-2022 strategic communications plan	DHS Child Welfare is developing a strategic communications plan that will guide how the Division will engage families and stakeholders and how we will communicate with both internal and external audiences. Its purpose is to help DHS Child Welfare take a proactive, strategic approach to communications by ensuring better clarity and transparency; providing opportunities to gather and incorporate input and feedback; and, improving collaboration and coordination with staff and community partners.

Desired Outcomes

By following these principles, we expect to achieve outcomes that include:

- Safer and more stable placements
- Stronger community partnerships
- Stronger Tribal relationships
- Better cross-system collaboration
- A better-connected network of prevention services
- Communicating our accomplishments and challenges with clarity and transparency
- Families are healthy and thriving economically and socially
- A data-informed service array that meets the needs of children and families

- A more equitable system leading to better outcomes for children and youth of color
- Fewer children and youth in foster care

Some examples of how we will monitor and identify progress include:

- Decreased racial disproportionality and disparities
- More children served in their homes and fewer in substitute care
- Lower rates of child neglect and abuse
- Fewer child fatalities
- Lower rates of child neglect and abuse perpetrated by those who experienced substitute care
- Fewer re-reports and recurrences of maltreatment
- More diverse resource families
- Reduced time to permanency
- A comprehensive strategic external and internal communication plan

Guiding Principle 2: Enhancing our Staff and Infrastructure

A supported, skilled, respected and engaged workforce that reflects and embraces the communities we serve is an essential element for a successful transformation.

This means strategies with:

- ✓ **A clear vision and purpose for transformation and a strategic direction** that is well understood and operationalized collectively and individually by staff.
- ✓ **An effective organization and implementation infrastructure** that is driven by inter-and-cross-program collaboration and facilitates shared decision-making and respect.
- ✓ **A culture of spiritual, social, psychological, and physical safety across the workforce** that values and enhances well-being.
- ✓ **High, clear expectations and accountability** for all staff, managers, and leadership that ensure staff have direction, guidance, and support needed for the challenging work they to do every day.
- ✓ **A management that values staff input and feedback and ensures meaningful participation, engagement, and inclusion**, including ample opportunities for sharing of ideas and professional development.
- ✓ **A partnership focused relationship between management and labor toward common goals and outcomes.**
- ✓ **Recruiting and hiring new staff, workforce development, retention and succession-planning practices** that attract, reward and promote high performing staff and represent the communities we serve with clear opportunities for career advancement.
- ✓ **An exceptional workforce that is developed and supported at all levels** and is diverse, talented, dedicated, motivated, skilled, resilient, and adaptable to change, and that includes those with lived experiences in order to competently, confidently and compassionately apply what they are learning to their day-to-day work.

Strategic Projects and Initiatives

DHS Child Welfare has several initiatives and improvement projects that are either underway or in a planning phase that align with this guiding principle as to create a road map for transformation.

Title	Description
DHS Child Welfare organizational effectiveness	DHS Child Welfare is improving the effectiveness of the program by redesigning organizational infrastructures and systems that support the organization's core work.
A supported and engaged workforce	These initiatives seek to improve and transform DHS Child Welfare's organizational culture and to develop a supported and engaged workforce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved training: DHS Child Welfare will benefit from a revamping of its training for staff to align with best practices and the goals and values of the organization. • Improved onboarding employees: Child Welfare is revamping its onboarding process for all classes of new employees to ensure they have the needed training and other resources to effectively begin their work and to establish consistency and continuity with onboarding.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement RiSE: RiSE is an enterprise-wide effort to develop an intentional and positive organizational culture that helps employees thrive at work. It is both a direct response to employee input and a commitment from leadership.• Improved recruiting and hiring practices: DHS Child Welfare is working to revamp hiring and recruiting to help ensure that Child Welfare has the workforce, leadership, and succession planning it needs to support its mission, vision, and goals.
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Desired Outcomes

By following these principles, we expect to achieve outcomes that include:

- Strong, consistent leadership and an effective organizational infrastructure and implementation processes
- A team-oriented environment where supporting relationships are encouraged
- Improved field and central office connection and clarity of roles and responsibilities
- An effective, adaptive, and responsive learning environment, which includes improved training and coaching at all levels

Some examples of how we will monitor and identify progress include:

- Fewer vacancies
- Higher retention rates and longer tenures
- Increased promotion
- Reduced caseloads
- Higher morale
- Increased internal communications to highlight success stories and what is working
- Increased public perception that staff are the experts in child safety and support

Guiding Principle 3: Utilizing Data with Continuous Quality Improvement Systems

Data-informed practice supported by continuous quality improvement and modernized information technology systems and tools is a cornerstone for a successful transformation.

This means strategies with:

- ✓ **A holistic continuous quality improvement (CQI) system**, based on implementation of evidence-based best practices in order to evaluate and improve child and family outcomes, as well as the delivery of services and supports on an ongoing basis.
- ✓ **Clear, uniform metrics** that align with the vision of the transformation, measure progress toward key goals and outcomes, and metrics that matter and are relevant to our children, families, partners, and Tribes.
- ✓ **Timely, accurate, useful and digestible data** to best understand progress, identify and close gaps, and continuously improve quality.
- ✓ **Championing the use of data** by managers to ensure people understand the value of data, have access, and use it effectively in decision making and in their day-to-day work.
- ✓ **User-friendly, effective information technology systems and tools** that make it easier to improve outcomes for children and families; keep them safely together; and, provide insight and analysis into what’s working and what’s not as to leverage advancements in research and technology.

Strategic Projects and Initiatives

DHS Child Welfare has several initiatives and improvement projects that are either underway or in a planning phase that align with this guiding principle as to create a road map for transformation:

Title	Description
Continuous quality improvement (CQI) and Quality Assurance (QA) systems for evaluation of DHS Child Welfare programs and initiatives	In order to become an evidence-based, data-driven, and implementation-science-informed organization, DHS Child Welfare is developing data collection and analysis processes to identify areas for improvement and a to assess and measure accurately our progress and outcomes over time.
A Child Welfare Research Agenda	The development and implementation of this agenda will use data and research to help establish and assess further progress toward program goals and priorities, including the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices and the development of effective services
Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) implementation	OR-Kids, the state's case management system, is being updated to meet the new federal Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) regulations and to improve the infrastructure and processes of the DHS Child Welfare to better enhance and support our workforce.

An array of treatment services based on evidence-informed data	These initiatives seek to improve the array of treatment services to better suit the individual needs of children and young people in care.
An array of prevention and family support services based on evidence-informed data	DHS Child Welfare will use evidence-based data to develop an array of services that will support individual families and reduce the need for out-of-home, substitute care.

Desired Outcomes

By following these principles, we expect to achieve outcomes that include:

- Aligned reporting, metrics, measures across the child and family serving system
- A research agenda that supports key goals and child and family outcomes
- High level of usage of data and dashboards in daily operations and decision making
- IT solution that meets needs of case management and data information system
- A continuous quality improvement system based on implementation science best practices

Some examples of how we will monitor and identify progress include:

- Real-time, accurate data dashboards for key metrics
- Identification, tracking, and use of overall trends in key performance metrics

DHS Child Welfare welcomes the review, input and support for our ambitious transformation plans that embraces our beliefs and core values. Our plan is based on three key principles, numerous strategies and specific outcome measures outlined in this Vision Statement. For more information, contact: ChildWelfare.DirectorsOffice@dhsosha.state.or.us