

## News Release

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### **Oregon Child Welfare continued to make improvements in prevention and safety in 2023; new report highlights significant progress since 2016**

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(Salem) – Prevention and preservation efforts continue to help keep families safely together in Oregon, decreasing the number of children in foster care. At the end of 2023, Oregon had 4,597 children in foster care, a continued steady decline since reaching 7,908 children in 2018.

One key prevention effort is the family preservation demonstration sites, which grew to eight across the state in 2023. At these sites, Child Welfare works with the ODHS Self-Sufficiency Programs to engage with families and communities to understand what each individual child and family needs to manage and build safety and stability, while remaining at home.

“All children have tremendous potential, and we know they do best growing up in a family,” said Aprille Flint-Gerner, Child Welfare Division director. “Our prevention efforts are focused on connecting families with the supports and services needed to stay with their children, at home, safely.

Data show that kids do better in school and experience better physical and mental health when they remain in their families and communities.”

#### **Other highlights from 2023:**

- The Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH) reduced wait times to an average of one minute, 59 seconds down from the 2022 average wait time of two minutes, 42 seconds. Timely answering of calls ensures rapid response and Child Protective Services (CPS) assessment to ensure child safety.
- Oregon launched a new Certified Respite Program to provide services statewide. A certified respite care provider is trained to provide temporary care and supervision of children and young adults in foster care. In 2024, this program will expand respite services for resource parents to include families of origin during reunification. The program gives parents and resource

families time to take care of themselves so they have greater capacity to take care of those who rely on them.

- ODHS received a \$16.8 million allocation from the Legislature to raise the monthly reimbursement for resource families who provide children and young people with foster care, equaling an average increase of \$241 per month.
- The Legislature provided a \$9.7 million investment in behavioral rehabilitation services (BRS) that will increase rates for providers who serve children with some of the highest needs.
- In 2023, Child Welfare consistently met or exceeded new caseload ratio standards set by the state in 2022. Tracking and managing caseloads helps increase retention rates and higher workforce morale. Throughout 2023, new hires and promotions outpaced separations.

## Report highlights progress since 2016

In 2023, Public Knowledge (PK) completed a [new assessment](#) on Oregon's child welfare agency. This was a follow-up to an independent review conducted in 2016 that highlighted numerous challenges and improvement opportunities. The new assessment found that Oregon's child welfare agency has made substantial progress in a variety of areas since 2016, and in some areas, the progress was significant.

"Children and families involved in the child welfare system are better off today than in 2016," according to the report which cited priorities outlined in the Oregon Child Welfare Division's [Vision for Transformation](#).

## Examples of improvement areas cited in the report:

- Child safety
  - Child Welfare redesigned the process of screening and responding to child abuse allegations, launching a centralized child abuse hotline, the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH). Response times and agency-wide coordination have improved since 2019. ODHS also created a process for sharing safety information with Child Welfare stakeholders and agency partners, improving the efficiency of child abuse investigations.
- Organizational culture
  - Child Welfare leadership has prioritized building an engaged workforce, modeling leadership to encourage engagement and communication at each level of the agency. Core to this improvement

area was a consistent focus on anti-racism and equity throughout the agency.

- Data-driven quality improvement
  - Child Welfare made consistent progress in creating data-driven quality improvement systems to track caseloads, improve services, and make screening and placement decisions. Data capacity and related upgrades also improved significantly, encouraging staff to use data in daily decision-making.
- Resource parent recruitment, retention and support
  - Child Welfare made significant progress prioritizing targeted recruitment to ensure resource parents reflect and affirm the diversity of youth and children in foster care. Efforts included utilizing a child-centered approach focused on community partnerships, local planning, and inclusion of those with lived expertise in recruitment and retention efforts.
- Family and community connections for children in substitute care
  - Child Welfare made significant progress in prioritizing placement with relatives, maintaining sibling connections, facilitating family interaction and building parenting skills. More than a third of entries into substitute care result in initial relative placement, up nearly 5 percentage points from 2016 to 2021.

Oregon hired Public Knowledge as part of an ongoing class-action lawsuit to independently gauge efforts made in the child welfare system since the original PK report in 2016.

## **About the Oregon Department of Human Services**

The mission of ODHS is to help Oregonians in their own communities achieve well-being and independence through opportunities that protect, empower, respect choice and preserve dignity.