



Report for the Washington State Legislature

# Annual Quality Assurance Report Fiscal Year 2024



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families  
Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability  
PO Box 40975, Olympia, WA 98504-0975

## Executive Summary

State law requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to produce an annual Quality Assurance Report, which summarizes the agency's efforts to provide high-quality service to families involved in the child welfare system, ultimately improving the resilience, health, and education of children, youth, and families. This is the 28<sup>th</sup> report detailing performance outcome data under RCW [43.216.022](#) and RCW [74.13.260](#) that shows performance in the following specific service areas.

### Child Protective Services (CPS) Response Time

DCYF responds quickly to allegations of abuse or neglect and implements safeguards to protect children who have been abused or neglected from further abuse or neglect by their caregivers.

### Children's Health and Safety in Out-of-Home Care

DCYF monitors children in out-of-home care, performs health and safety monitoring visits in licensed foster homes, and works to provide safe placements to children who have been removed from their families due to abuse or neglect so that they are not abused or neglected in licensed care.

### Adherence to Permanency Planning Guidelines

DCYF works toward placing children in safe permanent homes as quickly as possible, and measures whether permanency is achieved through reunification, adoption, or guardianship within 12 months of children entering out-of-home care.

### Children's Length of Stay in Out-of-Home Placement

DCYF seeks to minimize the amount of time children spend in out-of-home care prior to reunification or other permanency plan completion.

DCYF provides or oversees the provision of services and supports throughout the public child welfare continuum of care. DCYF's roles include:

- Responding to and investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect.
- Providing or overseeing the provision of child and family services and supports to help parents safely care for their own children whenever possible.
- Securing safe and stable temporary placements for children until they may safely be returned home or placed into an alternative safe and stable permanent home.
- Overseeing the provision of medical, educational, and mental health services to children in out-of-home care.
- Licensing and monitoring foster family and relative homes for temporary placement of children, as well as congregate care or therapeutic facilities to care for children.
- Providing services and supports to youth transitioning from out-of-home care into responsible independent living.

DCYF tracks performance in many areas of service delivery and oversight to improve outcomes. For more detail on these measures and others visit our [Agency Performance Page](#).

## Performance Measure Summary

DCYF is accountable to the Governor, Legislature and the public for continuing to improve the child welfare system. DCYF recognizes no government entity alone can ensure the safety of children. DCYF relies on mandated reporters such as community-based service providers, medical professionals, and school personnel, as well as caring individuals to speak up on behalf of vulnerable children by reporting suspected child maltreatment.

This data comes from FamLink, which is Washington's automated child welfare information system. All measures are reported by state fiscal year (SFY), which is July 1 through June 30, and display the most current data available for each specific measure. Federal measures are required by the federal Administration for Children and Families, for which all states are accountable, and state measures are additional metrics identified by DCYF as other important areas of focus.

Federal targets in this report reflect federal requirements and performance needed to avoid a federal Program Improvement Plan. These federal measures use an entry cohort approach, which requires the state to wait 12 months or more to determine whether the outcome being measured has occurred. The year label reflects the year of the entry cohort being measured.

The metrics in the [Agency Performance Page](#) are updated annually; therefore, results may vary slightly from what was reported at the time this report was finalized.

Measure	State Target* / Federal Target**	Performance***
Children in emergent reports seen within 24 hours. (As of 12/2022, time extensions and attempted contacts are no longer counted as compliant)	> 95%*	80.4%
Children in non-emergent reports seen within 72 hours	> 95%*	90.3%
Children who experience recurrence of maltreatment	≤ 7%**	8.8%
Children who are abused or neglected while in the placement and care authority of the state	≤ 6.0 victimizations / 100,000 days**	7.6
Foster homes receiving health and safety monitoring visits	> 10%*	13.0%
Children visited every month by their caseworker	> 95%*	98.3%
Children achieving permanency within 12 months of placement	≥ 38%**	44.8%
Median number of days children are placed in care	< Previous year: 534	473
Percentage of children who re-entered care within 12 months following guardianship or reunification with their family	≤ 5.6%**	5.5%

Source: DCYF, OIAA, Agency Performance Page

\* State targets are established by DCYF to set a standard for performance. \*\* Federal targets reflect performance necessary to avoid a federal Program Improvement Plan. \*\*\* State measures report performance through SFY 2024. Federal measures report performance for children entering in SFY 2022 and SFY 2023 because the measures look forward 12 or 24 months to determine if the outcome being measured occurred in SFY 2024.

## Performance Improvement Initiatives

### Strategic Priorities

The DCYF five-year [Strategic Race and Equity Plan](#) was released in 2021, shortly after the agency's creation. The plan includes six agency wide priorities – a first overarching priority related to Racial Equity, three priorities related to our intention for children, youth, and families, and two related to building the necessary capacity needed to accomplish the first four.

1. [Eliminate racial disproportionalities and advance racial equity](#)
2. [Safely reduce the number/rate of children and youth in out-of-home care by half](#)
3. [Create successful transitions into adulthood for youth and young adults in our care](#)
4. Create a high-quality integrated birth to 8 system
5. [Improve quality and intention of our practice](#)
6. [Improve quality and availability of provider services](#)

These priorities were selected to help the agency meet our outcome goals of resilience, education, and health for children, youth, and families in Washington, with a specific focus on the populations for which we are responsible. Work has been done in the past year to further operationalize the Strategic Priorities so it is easier to monitor change and progress toward a set goal.

Information about progress is available on the [Agency Performance Page](#). DCYF has [nearly accomplished](#) Priority 2 – Safely Reduce the Number of Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care by Half and is prioritizing work that supports similar progress on the other priorities.

In addition to the work underway to accomplish these priorities, the Strategic Priorities were used to inform the development of the DCYF Operating Principles (developed in 2024), the 2024 single-year priorities of the DCYF Leadership Team, and will be an essential element of the 2025 single-year priorities.

### Child and Family Services Review | Program Improvement Plan

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is a review conducted by the federal Children's Bureau or through a state-led review with federal oversight. The review examines the delivery of child welfare services and the outcomes for children and families served by child protective services, foster care, adoption, and other related programs. The review is structured to help states identify strengths as well as areas needing improvement within their agency and programs. Ultimately, the goal of the review is to help states improve child welfare services and achieve positive outcomes for families and children who receive services. Washington completed its round three CFSR in 2018 and the round four CFSR will occur in 2026.

Washington completed its round three Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Dec. 31, 2023. The PIP responded to the results of the 2018 CFSR final report from the Children's Bureau. Washington's PIP was approved by the Children's Bureau in June 2020, and strategy implementation was completed June 30, 2022. Washington continued to measure performance improvement until Dec. 31, 2023, and were required to show measurable

improvement on specified CFSR outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being. Washington met three of the four improvement outcomes. Since the improvement outcome related to well-being was not achieved, DCYF paid a financial penalty to the Administration for Children and Families in the amount of \$1,243,162. This was a one-time penalty and not a recurring penalty as previous rounds of the CFSR required. Washington continues to make enhancements to its child welfare system in order to improve outcomes for children and families.

### Permanency from Day One

In the Fall of 2018, DCYF was awarded a \$7.7 million, five-year grant from the federal Children's Bureau to conduct a project, Permanency from Day One (PFD1), to support the agency to achieve better permanency outcomes for children and youth. Two key strategies were collaboratively established to enhance earlier and consistent engagement of youth and families, in alignment with the CFSR/Program Improvement Plan. The first, Enhanced Permanency Planning Meetings (PPMs), was implemented in January 2021 in 22 targeted offices to promote successful teaming with families, youth, Tribes, and other key case participants in the case planning process and to address systemic issues that have been identified as barriers to permanency. A few key differences were implemented that increased family and youth participation. These were:

Enhanced PPMS	Business as Usual Practice per Policy
Scheduled by the grant facilitator	Scheduled by a facilitator, case worker or supervisor
Invitations to meeting sent by facilitator	Invitations to meetings typically sent by case workers
Meeting documentation by facilitator	Meeting documentation by facilitator or case worker
Pre-Meets with parents, youth, caregiver	No pre-meets
Meetings every three months, starting 30-45 days after dependency fact-finding order.	Meetings every five to six months, starting from Original Placement Date (OPD)
Assignment of facilitator to family to ensure consistency for family.	Facilitators are not assigned to families.
Meetings continue until case dismissal.	In general, meetings stop for youth if the youth becomes legally free.
All meeting types consolidated if possible.	Meeting types not consistently consolidated, specifically FTDMs are often held separately.
Action plan is checked between meetings to determine if items are being addressed before next meeting.	Action plan is not checked between meetings by facilitator.

This intervention continued through March 2024. While the in-depth evaluation of this intervention will not be available until December 2024, the following highlights some of the information gathered from OIAA data;

- A total of 5,459 PPM's were facilitated on Treatment (PFD1) cases utilizing 11 facilitators. This is compared to 2,503 meetings that took place on Control cases, utilizing far more facilitators, or staff acting as facilitators, during this same timeframe.



- Preliminary data shows that participants in the Treatment group received almost six meetings, on average, compared to 2.6 meetings for the Control group.
- Participation of youth in Treatment meetings was between 5.5 and 6.7 times greater, for other extended family between 2.6 and 3.1 times greater, and for fathers between 2.25 and 2.66 times greater than meetings held in the Control group. The likelihood of mothers attending was also between 2 and 2.3 times greater in Treatment meetings.
- Child/youth attendance per case in Treatment cases was 3.5 times higher than in non-project offices statewide.
- In all Control and non-project regions, average attendance by youth, mothers, fathers, relatives, and caregivers was much lower than in Treatment offices.

The second strategy, Enhanced Youth-Directed Recruitment, was implemented statewide in April 2021 for all legally-free youth not in permanent placements, and encourages youth-directed recruitment strategies for placement and youth voice in case planning and decision-making for placement and recruitment decisions. Grant funding ended for this intervention on Sept.30, 2023, and it is now sustained for continued implementation under the Washington State Adoption Recruitment contract.

## Performance Improvement Infrastructure

OIAA maintains the data infrastructure for aggregating and reporting data from the FamLink system to support performance improvement activities in child welfare offices across the state. In addition to providing daily updated reports on health and safety checks and CPS response time (initial face-to-face report), OIAA is developing interactive dashboarding tools to support staff's access to information. OIAA continues to work to develop a new integrated data analytic environment to support integrated performance improvement data aggregation, reporting, analysis, and research, as envisioned in HB 1661.

In addition to our internal performance improvement infrastructure efforts, OIAA continues to work with the Department of Social and Health Services, Research and Data Analysis division, to enhance the Priority Performance Measures for those key performance indicators that analysis demonstrated to be significantly associated with child safety and permanency. DCYF will use this as an example of a robust empirical process that may be replicated to identify additional priority performance metrics across the agency.

## Conclusion

As the public child welfare agency for Washington state, DCYF is held to very high standards for improving outcomes for children, youth, and families.

In addition to continuous quality improvement efforts designed to meet the requirements of federal, state, and judicial oversight entities, DCYF engages in ongoing self-appraisal. DCYF workers are dedicated to doing the best work possible for vulnerable children, not because of mandates, but because it is the work to which the agency and its many dedicated employees are committed.

DCYF will continue to engage in continuous quality improvement efforts and to increase research-based efforts to protect children and strengthen families, so they flourish.