

State of Alaska FY2019 Governor's Operating Budget

Department of Health and Social Services Children's Services Results Delivery Unit Budget Summary

Children's Services Results Delivery Unit

Contribution to Department's Mission

To work in partnership with families and communities to support the well-being of Alaska's youth and children.

Results

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

Core Services

- Safety
- Permanency
- Well-being

Measures by Core Service

(Additional performance information is available on the web at <https://omb.alaska.gov/results>.)

1. Safety
2. Permanency
3. Well-being

Major RDU Accomplishments in 2017

A decline in the rate of repeat maltreatment of children within a 12 month time span has been noted. Repeat maltreatment occurs if a child was subject to a substantiated incident of abuse or neglect and then receives a second substantiation of a new allegation within 12 months following the first. The current repeat maltreatment rate is **13.0 percent** (rolling year November 1, 2016 through October 31, 2017) which is continuing the decline that started in 2013. The division still has a ways to go to achieve the national standard of nine percent, but at this rate could reach that goal in a few more years.

Department of Health and Social Services, Office of Children's Services in partnership with Alaska Tribes and Tribal organizations continued implementation of the a five-year Strategic Plan to “Transform Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children.”

The plan includes the following six priorities:

1. **Continuum of Culturally Specific Services**
2. **Community Engagement**
3. **Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration and Partnership**
4. **Embrace and Implement the Spirit of Indian Child Welfare Act**
5. **Self-Governance**
6. **State Agency Alignment**

Progress was made in many areas of the Strategic Plan, and culminated in October with the historic signing of the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact which paves the way for further implementation of the plan. Members of the planning group continue to be excited and hopeful about the future of Alaska's child welfare system. The plan reflects a paradigm shift in the approach to child welfare as it relates to Alaska Native children, based on the understanding that “Tribes know what is best for their children and have for centuries.” This philosophy will be evident throughout the objectives and action items of the plan, and will respect the inherent authority and sovereignty of Tribal Governments for the welfare of Alaska Native children.

Key RDU Challenges

The Office of Children's Services provides a range of services that are heavily focused on responding to reports of maltreatment that have already occurred with a small portion geared towards preventing maltreatment. These services and supports include: prevention and early intervention services, child protective services safety assessments, foster care, family support and preservation services, adoption and guardianship, and permanency planning to ensure permanency is achieved and that children do not languish in the foster care system.

Every child welfare agency has challenges and no child welfare agency excels at every aspect of its mission. These challenges are due in large part to two reasons: The difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing levels to serve families and the complexities of issues family's experience. The ultimate challenge in an agency such as the Office of Children's Services is to provide services in the least intrusive manner possible, in the child's home whenever the division can safely do so. All too often, children in the child welfare system experience multiple losses and then multiple placements, adding to their trauma rather than stabilizing their circumstances so that long-term success can result. This results in adding to their Adverse Childhood Experiences which research has shown creates added risk factors following them into adulthood that can create a myriad of problems for them later in life. In cases involving Alaska Native children, the Office of Children's Services must comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act that provides federal guidance to help support cultural connections, family ties, and preservation of the family whenever possible.

The Office of Children's Services must teach, maintain, and adhere to the underlying philosophy of keeping children in their homes whenever possible and safe to do so. It must reduce foster care placements, and if it is necessary to remove a child from their home in order to assure their safety, the Office of Children's Services must strive to reunite that child with their family as soon as possible thereafter. When permanency through adoption or guardianship is the only option, it should be timely, and adoptive parents or guardians should receive the appropriate support from the state to ensure long term stability and reduces the chance of reentry into the foster care system later.

The responsibility is daunting and the job, while often times rewarding, is always emotionally taxing. The Office of Children's Services struggles to:

- Attract and retain qualified staff, particularly in rural office locations, that can meet the emotional and complex demands that are placed on them regardless of their workload.
- Direct available funds to invest in prevention and in-home services to keep families intact and prevent them from entering the system.
- Provide culturally relevant services statewide that meet families where they are at within their own communities.
- Adequately equip staff to work effectively, collaboratively, and sensitively with the 229 Alaska Native Tribes whose culture and values are not always well understood by staff.

Recruitment and Retention

Retention of staff is the number one challenge this agency faces. Without the necessary positions filled in so many offices statewide, the division's ability to meet state and federal requirements for family contact, worker visits with children, and worker visits with parents will and does greatly suffer. Those three requirements alone directly correlate to the likelihood of a family being successful or a child being reunified or achieving permanency in a timely fashion.

The Office of Children's Services turnover continues to be a challenge. The Office of Children's Services solicits feedback from staff about this issue through two primary methods: annual staff surveys and exit surveys. Reasons for leaving provided by outgoing staff are: lack of on-site supervisors at some locations, personal safety concerns, lack of access to available technology that would help improve success on the job, lack of office assistants and other support staff to assist with the vast amount of paperwork required by federal law, insufficient pay, high levels of stress, and in some cases just the nature of the work becomes too much to bear. Retention is not a challenge unique to Alaska, but one that has become "normal" for child welfare programs nationwide. The work requires uniquely qualified individuals with fortitude, and a diverse set of skills. Simply put, it is a job where the demands are high, the pay is low, the work is emotionally taxing, (as noted in staff exit surveys) and where staff face constant scrutiny.

Indian Child Welfare Act Compliance

The intent of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 was to "protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families" (25 U.S.C. § 1902). The Indian Child Welfare Act sets federal requirements that apply to state child custody proceedings involving an Indian child who is a member of, or eligible for membership in, a federally recognized tribe. Alaska Native children are over-represented in Alaska's child welfare system. They are more likely to be reported for alleged maltreatment, they are less likely to be reunified timely, and more likely to ultimately have poorer outcomes of well-being while in care.

The Office of Children's Services has diligently and collaboratively worked with Tribal partners in a systematic and structured manner for the past 20 years primarily, but not exclusively, through the ongoing efforts of the Tribal-State Collaboration Group which meets regularly both telephonically and in-person. The Office of Children's Services has increased the training efforts to support culturally appropriate practices, some of which are done jointly with Alaska Native representatives, and have in recent years been engaging Tribes in a practice model and policy development and implementation plans. Ultimately, however, the data has changed very little over time. At the front line caseworker level there is still a struggle to communicate effectively, understand the various cultural nuances and traditions, and are often unable to successfully recruit native foster homes.

Service Delivery

Prevention services are crucial to the success of the Office of Children's Services' mission and philosophy to keep children safe and to keep families together.

The Child Advocacy Center model of community-centered, multi-disciplinary team decision-making and child-centered service delivery has been a highly successful and cost effective strategy for combating abuse. This model provides a firm foundation for reducing the trauma associated with forensic investigations of abuse and provides an efficient service delivery for families. Alaska's Child Advocacy Centers continue to experience an increasing number of referrals.

Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2019

Following the Child and Family Services Review, the division will develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan in collaboration with community stakeholders designed to improve federally required outcomes involving the safety, permanency and well-being of children. The process for development is currently underway and the final plan is due February 2018 and expected two years to complete.

Through the department's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan to "Transform Child Welfare in Alaska," developed in partnership with Tribes and Tribal organizations, it is expected to further enhance collaboration with Tribes to help refer families to Tribal services whenever possible, aide the Tribes in creating enhanced or new infrastructure to grow their programs and to, whenever possible work in a government to government fashion that respects and defers to Tribe's inherent expertise when it comes to serving their families.

Contact Information
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**Children's Services
RDU Financial Summary by Component**

All dollars shown in thousands

	FY2017 Actuals				FY2018 Management Plan				FY2019 Governor			
	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds	UGF+DGF Funds	Other Funds	Federal Funds	Total Funds
Formula Expenditures												
Foster Care Base Rate	15,848.4	0.0	5,923.4	21,771.8	12,101.5	0.0	6,925.8	19,027.3	12,933.3	0.0	7,218.1	20,151.4
Foster Care Augmented Rate	1,247.5	0.0	296.2	1,543.7	1,037.6	0.0	638.5	1,676.1	1,037.6	0.0	368.5	1,406.1
Foster Care Special Need Subsidized	25,339.3	2,797.9	513.4	28,650.6	6,479.2	4,000.0	1,232.1	11,711.3	6,479.2	4,000.0	1,232.1	11,711.3
Adoptions/Guardians	20,562.0	0.0	14,687.1	35,249.1	18,654.6	0.0	18,602.0	37,256.6	21,561.2	0.0	15,484.3	37,045.5
Non-Formula Expenditures												
Children's Services Management	6,501.7	0.0	5,029.4	11,531.1	7,295.8	0.0	4,399.3	11,695.1	7,307.2	0.0	4,403.3	11,710.5
Children's Services Training	795.8	0.0	181.5	977.3	819.2	0.0	967.6	1,786.8	819.2	0.0	967.6	1,786.8
Front Line Social Workers	31,971.3	0.0	23,629.1	55,600.4	41,476.6	75.0	16,900.4	58,452.0	40,234.6	75.3	22,524.7	62,834.6
Family Preservation	3,218.1	3,585.0	7,104.2	13,907.3	5,065.9	3,100.0	6,205.1	14,371.0	3,686.4	4,045.9	9,592.8	17,325.1
Totals	105,484.1	6,382.9	57,364.3	169,231.3	92,930.4	7,175.0	55,870.8	155,976.2	94,058.7	8,121.2	61,791.4	163,971.3

Children's Services
Summary of RDU Budget Changes by Component
From FY2018 Management Plan to FY2019 Governor

All dollars shown in thousands

	<u>Unrestricted Gen (UGF)</u>	<u>Designated Gen (DGF)</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
FY2018 Management Plan	87,330.4	5,600.0	7,175.0	55,870.8	155,976.2
Adjustments which continue current level of service:					
-Children's Services Management	11.4	0.0	0.0	4.0	15.4
-Front Line Social Workers	-2,200.7	0.0	0.3	42.5	-2,157.9
-Family Preservation	-1,379.5	0.0	0.0	3,387.7	2,008.2
-Foster Care Base Rate	831.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	831.8
-Foster Care Augmented Rate	0.0	0.0	0.0	-270.0	-270.0
-Subsidized Adoptions/Guardians	2,906.6	0.0	0.0	-3,117.7	-211.1
Proposed budget increases:					
-Front Line Social Workers	958.7	0.0	0.0	6,981.8	7,940.5
-Family Preservation	0.0	0.0	945.9	0.0	945.9
-Foster Care Base Rate	0.0	0.0	0.0	292.3	292.3
Proposed budget decreases:					
-Front Line Social Workers	0.0	0.0	0.0	-1,400.0	-1,400.0
FY2019 Governor	88,458.7	5,600.0	8,121.2	61,791.4	163,971.3