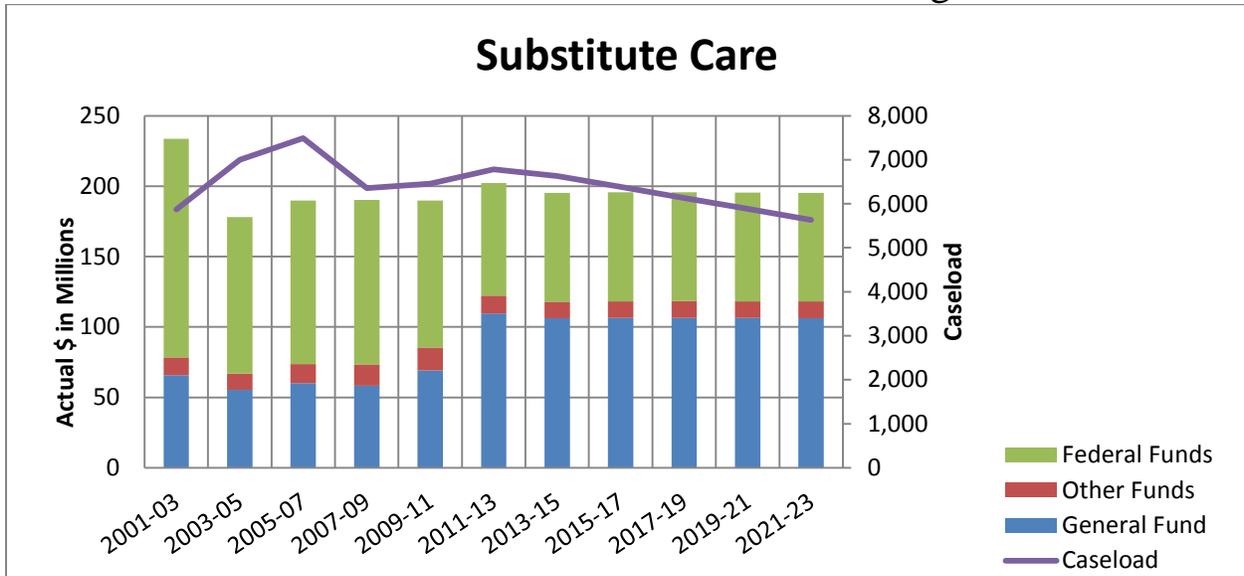


Department of Human Services: Substitute Care

Child Welfare Program

Primary Outcome Area: Safety
 Program Contact: Kevin George, 503-945-5987

Substitute Care Caseload and Funding



Note: On average, there are 8,778 children in substitute care on any given day in Oregon.

Executive Summary

The Substitute Care Program, also known as the Foster Care Program, is designed as a critical safety net for children with immediate safety needs. DHS is responsible for accepting and caring for children who cannot remain safely with their parents. These children are dependent, neglected, mentally or physically disabled, and placed in the legal custody of DHS by a court. A family, under limited circumstances and for a short time, may place a child in State custody on a voluntary basis; however, most of the children served in foster care are there involuntarily as a result of abuse or neglect they experienced in their family home.

Program Funding Request

	Substitute Care			
	GF	OF	FF	TF
LAB	109,605,004	12,553,403	80,101,050	202,259,457
ARB	106,151,628	11,877,694	77,240,947	195,270,269
Difference	(3,453,376)	(675,709)	(2,860,103)	(6,989,188)
Percent Change	-3.2%	-5.4%	-3.6%	-3.5%

Significant Proposed Program Changes from 2011-13

No significant changes are directly proposed for this program in 2013-15. Caseloads should be positively impacted with investments in Child Welfare staffing and the Family Supports and Connections program along with implementation of the differential response model.

Program Description

This program operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week to accept and care for children and youth who cannot remain safely in their family homes. The program serves approximately 13,000 children annually who are abused or neglected. The figure also includes about 50 percent of the developmentally disabled children in Comprehensive Care. DHS partners with community members and organizations representing diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives to deliver foster care services to children and youth across the State. The agency is mandated to provide reasonable efforts to return children to their parents. Currently, approximately 64 percent of children entering care return home to a parent. There are approximately 4,673 Oregon families who have stepped forward to be a foster parent. More than 50 percent are relatives or friends of families with children in foster care. There are approximately 45 licensed private child placing agencies in Oregon who are caring for children and youth, most often because the child or youth has a significant behavior or mental health need. An average of 8,778 children are in substitute care programs on any given day with 38 percent being cared for by relatives, a 15 percent increase in the last five years. Substitute care also responds to the overall well-being of the child or youth in care. Well-being is identified as caring and attending to child's behavioral, emotional and social functioning. This is best identified through meeting the core educational needs, physical and mental health needs, and needs for family and community connections.

To be successful in meeting the needs of the children and youth for their safety and well-being, we support current programs while expanding the available service array. DHS works in collaboration with multiple State and local governmental agencies such as the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Department of Education, and local law enforcement, community programs, schools, the faith community and volunteer programs. The Child Welfare Program has a strategic plan to safely and equitably reduce the number of children that enter the foster care system, and provide for the care and well being of children who enter the system. Those children who must enter the foster care system generally have greater needs than those who can remain at home or with relatives. The ability of staff to meet the needs of these children and adequately support the foster families caring for them is directly related to staffing levels in the program.

There are multiple cost drivers to this program area including the number of children entering the substitute care system due to abuse or neglect, and the number of children who remain in the substitute care system due to the inability to be reunified or transitioned to an adoptive family. Another cost driver is the growing cost of living within the community and daily expenses for providing food, clothing, shelter, education or other support services for children and youths. As an example, the foster parents caring for the children are currently compensated \$21.53 a day to care for a 10-year-old child. This is meant to cover the costs of providing food, clothing, shelter, etc. Often the additional costs for the child are paid for by the foster parent or a private agency which remains a barrier for many families and private agencies across the state.

Some of the efficiencies to improve performance range from planning and implementation of Differential Response, described in the Safety Programs, and a reinvestment of local community services to strengthen families. In addition, for children who are in care, an increase in their educational support and school placement continuity, and increased access and continuity of comprehensive health care (physical, mental and dental), increased financial and structural support for the foster families, and private agencies who care for the children and youth.

This program is also responsible for the certification and support of families that care for children in the Department's custody. This includes the recruitment, retention, training and support of 4,673 families currently fostering 6,480 children. Training of these families is conducted both by agency staff and through contracted providers. Families participate in a Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) home study, designed to evaluate a family's readiness to meet the needs of children that enter the system. Through deliberate attention to these structures and supports, our abuse in foster care is less than one percent. We take abuse in foster care seriously and expect zero tolerance for abuse of children in our care.

Program Justification and Link to 10-Year Outcome

The Child Welfare Substitute Care Program is embedded within the 10-Year Plan for Oregon as a state policy vision for the Safety Outcome area. Substitute Care programs are necessary to ensure safety for children if and when they are unable to remain safely in their families. The reliance on the substitute care system over the years has reached a capacity that is no longer sustainable in Oregon. Capacity of this system has been reached in financial support for the system, limited availability of foster parents, and ongoing research that indicates if substantive preventive services can be immediately put into place to divert the removal of children from families and into the substitute care system. Re-directing resources away from the removal of children from families and increasing the capacity of families who currently have children in the substitute care system by reinvesting in upfront and in-home services within communities will pay far greater dividends to Oregon in meeting the outcomes identified in the 10-Year Plan. This reinvestment will support a Substitute Care Program that will only be necessary if preventive services are not successful for some families and children.

Of utmost importance is the safety of children who must be placed in substitute care. DHS continues to track the rate of abuse in foster care with a goal of no abuse of a child in foster care. One major program improvement has been the implementation of the SAFE home study model. This method of comprehensive psychosocial evaluation identifies a prospective foster family, relative caregiver or adoptive family's strengths and identifies and addresses issues of concern to promote the best fit between the needs of a child and the family.

This program directly connects with the 10-Year Plan in the following ways:

Strategy:

- Increase family stability and child safety.
- Implement social reinvestment in the foster care system.

Outcomes:

- Reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect throughout Oregon on a per capita basis.
- Reduce the number of children entering the foster care system while maintaining and reducing Oregon's low re-abuse rate.

- Ensuring equitable outcomes to reduce the over-representation of Native and African American children in Oregon's foster care system.
- Better education outcomes for children and improved employment and prosperity outcomes for their parents.
- Improved school readiness and academic performance.

Program Performance

Program performance is measured in the following ways:

- The number of children who enter care, which has remained relatively stable over the past five years with a slight increase in 2010 when 4,736 children entered care.
- The cost per foster care case is increasing each year, going from \$29,924 in 2006 to \$31,367 in 2011.
- The duration of a foster care stay has decreased from an average of 18.5 months in 2007 to 15.5 months in 2011. African American children and Native American children are exiting the foster care system at a rate higher than their entry, reducing the disproportionate representation of these children in the system.
- The rate of abuse in foster care is less than one percent.
- Tracking educational measures for children in foster care has increased from 51.6 percent in 2007 to 72.9 percent in 2011. The new OR-Kids information technology system will allow for new measures on educational outcomes, school readiness and educational achievement in the future.
- The number of children who have been prescribed psychotropic medications has decreased from 21.6 percent in 2007 to 14.3 percent in 2010. DHS is one of five states participating in a National Technical Assistance project supported by the Centers for Health Care Strategies and the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improve appropriate use of psychotropic medication among children in substitute care.

Enabling Legislation/Program Authorization

There are a number of Federal acts that are centered on the care for children through substitute care programs. Some of the more prominent Federal acts and Federal regulations are noted below.

- *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act P.L. 96-272.* To establish a program of adoption assistance, strengthen the program of foster care assistance for needy and dependent children, and improve the child welfare, social services, and aid to families with dependent children programs.
- *Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) PL 95-60.* To establish standards for the placement of Indian children in foster and adoptive homes and to prevent the breakup of Indian families.
- *Adoption and Safe Family Act PL 105-89.* To promote the adoption of children in foster care by placing limitations and timelines.
- *Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoption Act PL 110-35.* To support and connect relative caregivers, improve outcomes for children in foster care.

Title IV-E, The Federal Foster Care Program, helps to provide safe and stable out-of-home care for children until the children are safely returned home, placed permanently with adoptive families or placed in other planned arrangements for permanency. Title IV-B provides grants to

States and Indian tribes for programs directed toward the goal of keeping families together. They include preventive intervention so that, if possible, children will not have to be removed from their homes. Finally, the Social Security Act contains the primary sources of Federal funds available to States for child welfare, foster care and adoption activities.

Oregon Revised Statutes that specify which children are involved in the Substitute Care Program can be found under ORS 418.015 Custody and Care of Needy Children by Department and ORS 418.312 When Transfer of Custody Not Required; Voluntary Placement Agreement; Review of Children Placed in Certain Institutions.

Funding Streams

There is a combination of funding sources in the Substitute Care Programs. Leveraged funds include: Title IV-E, 36 percent; Medicaid, 25 percent; Title IV-E Waiver, three percent; Independent Living, three percent; Other Federal Funds, three percent; TANF, two percent; Chafee, one percent; Social Service Block Grant Federal Funds, one percent; Title IV-B, one percent The remaining funding is General Fund State Only, approximately 25 percent.