

News Release

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Oregon Child Welfare Division continues to put its focus on prevention, ends 2021 with the lowest number of children in foster care in 16 years

(Salem) – Despite the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), Child Welfare Division continues to reduce the use of foster care by connecting families with resources and services that support children and young adults safely staying at home with their families.

On Jan. 1, 2022, there were 5,393 children in foster care, the lowest number of children in care in 16 years.

The Child Welfare Division is committed to supporting the individual needs of children and families to best serve Oregon’s children and young people. [The Child Welfare Division Vision for Transformation](#) is the roadmap and compass for the Oregon Child Welfare Division to transform itself and the greater child and family well-being system.

“We all know that infants, children, adolescents and young adults do best growing up in a family that can provide love, support, lifelong learning, shared values and important memories,” said Child Welfare Director Rebecca Jones Gaston. “That is why we are committed to doing everything we can to provide the necessary supports to help families safely stay together and decrease the use of unnecessary foster care.”

Key Child Welfare Division data for 2021:

- The number of children who experienced foster care decreased by approximately 11% compared to 2020.
- The Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH) received approximately 175,000 contacts, an 11% increase compared to 2020.
- Of the contacts received at ORCAH, about 46%, or 80,000, were reports of suspected abuse and neglect. This is an 8% increase compared to 2020.
- In 2021, 55% of the reports of child abuse resulted in a CPS assessment being assigned. In 2020 the assignment rate was 53%.
- Family reunifications in 2021: 1,699
- Adoptions finalized in 2021: 538
- Guardianships finalized in 2021: 365

- Oregon continues to serve all children in state. No children were placed in out-of-state residential treatment facilities in 2021.

Key accomplishments in 2021

In 2021, the Child Welfare Division committed itself to integrating the Child Welfare Division Vision for Transformation into actionable policies and practices to create a strong child and family wellbeing system. Some accomplishments include:

- Gaining federal approval of the [Oregon Family First Prevention Services Plan](#), with a phased demonstration in three diverse areas beginning in 2022. This will strengthen and support families to decrease the number of children entering foster care and is the first major federal modernization of the child welfare system in 30 years.
- Implementing the Oregon Indian Child Welfare Act (ORICWA), which codifies provisions from the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), into Oregon law to ensure Oregon's child welfare practices better serve Tribal families. In addition, ORICWA recognizes customary adoptions, which are adoptions that align with traditional Tribal child-rearing practices.
- Being one of the first states to distribute [federal pandemic aid](#) to support qualifying children and young adults who have experienced foster care. This pandemic aid included \$1.3 million to more than 300 young people to help them pay for higher education, housing, bills, access to technology and equipment, access to self-care and mental health support, and other important resources.
- Amplifying strategies to prevent child fatalities, such as developing a collaborative [safe sleep](#) guide for families used by providers and coordinating with community partners to end the sale of crib bumpers in Oregon.
- Joining the National Partnership for Safety collaborative, ensuring data sharing and a [focus on safety science](#).
- Expanding a mobile crisis unit to address the critical needs of children in foster care with 24-hour support.
- Building specific resource family recruitment and retention plans based on the unique needs of each ODHS district.
- Expanding the evidence-based [KEEP](#) program, to include affinity groups such as Spanish-speaking, LGBTQIA2S+ affirming, Native American, and transracial families to support resource families and relatives caring for children.

- Providing alternative childcare reimbursement during the pandemic to help families access care when childcare centers or schools were closed.
- Launching a [public data dashboard](#) on Oregon's performance of federal child welfare outcomes to increase transparency.
- Integrating All About Me books for children experiencing foster care into procedure, the first child welfare jurisdiction in the country to do so. These books are a way to help every child who enters care understand that their story, perspective, culture and identity matter.
- Taking steps to reduce structural racism within the Child Welfare Division by making rule and practice changes to reduce the oversurveillance of families of color, give power to communities, and address structural bias in decision making. These steps include:
 - Reviewing 27 policies using a racial equity impact assessment tool to assess the unintended consequences of policies that contribute to the marginalization of communities of color.
 - No longer requiring medical providers to report new mothers who test positive for substance use after childbirth to the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline. Medical providers are encouraged to instead use their training and expertise to determine and report when there is a safety concern.
 - Reducing requirements for parents to be eligible for gas vouchers.
 - Incorporating biological families and Tribal Nations into the decision-making process when making decisions about immunization of children in foster care.
 - Expanded training centered on equity and service delivery:
 - About 2,600, or 78% of Child Welfare staff, attended an equity focused training.
 - About 2,800, or 84% of Child Welfare staff, attended training on the American Disabilities Act and incorporating its protections into Child Welfare practice.

How to support children and families in Oregon

Support children and families in Oregon by [becoming a resource \(foster\) parent for children in foster care](#).

The MyNeighbOR program helps meet the essential needs of children, families, and young adults impacted by foster care. [Learn how to provide support](#).

There are many different resources and supports available in our communities to help children and families meet their needs. Sometimes, the best way to support child and family wellbeing is to help them get plugged-in to the resources they need:

Local community supports

- Dial 2-1-1, or text your zip code to 898-211 to get connected to local food, housing, child care and other supports in your community.
- Find a food pantry: foodfinder.oregonfoodbank.org

Mental and behavioral health supports in Oregon

- Youthline: Call 1-877-968-8491, text teen2teen to 839863, chat at www.oregonyouthline.org
- LinesForLife.org/get-help-now
- Lines for Life Suicide Lifeline: Call 1-800-273-8255 (24/7) or text 273TALK to 839863 (Monday through Friday, 2-6 p.m.)
- Oregon Behavioral Health Support Line: Call 1-800-923-4357 (24/7)
- Military Helpline: Call 1-888-457-4838 (24/7) or text MIL1 to 839863 (Monday through Friday, 2-6 p.m.)
- Resources to help educators provide mental health and social for support children and families are available at https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/Pages/Mental_Health_Students_Families.aspx.

Oregon Department of Human Services programs and support

- Learn about government programs and community resources for older adults and people with disabilities by contacting the Aging and Disability Resource Connection of Oregon at 1-855-673-2372 or www.adrcoforegon.org.
- Apply for government food, cash, child care assistance and the Oregon Health Plan online at ONE.Oregon.gov or by calling 1-800-699-9075.
- [Oregon Department of Human Services COVID-19 help center](#)

About the ODHS Child Welfare Division

The Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division is committed to transforming itself to better support the individual needs of families and to best serve Oregon's children and young people. [Read the Child Welfare Division Vision for Transformation to learn more.](#)

Report child abuse to the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline by calling 1-855-503-SAFE (7233). This toll-free number allows you to report abuse of any child or adult to the Oregon Department of Human Services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year.

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