

Oregon Child Welfare Division

# Vision for Transformation



“We all know that infants, children, adolescents and young adults do best growing up in a family that can provide love, support, life-long learning, shared values and important memories.”

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Oregon Department of Human Services  
Child Welfare Director

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) is transforming the Child Welfare Division. ODHS seeks to create a Child Welfare Division that supports the individual needs of families and best serves Oregon's children and young people.

ODHS envisions a true transformation built on core values and a belief that children do best growing up in a family.

This Vision for Transformation came from a collaboration among diverse partners to create and implement a strategic roadmap for success. Our Vision for Transformation includes specific guiding principles, strategies and measurable outcomes.

As a result, ODHS will be better able to support Oregon families and children at home and in their communities. Transforming our child welfare system will support children, and young adults to be safer and healthier and to experience less trauma and greater well-being. Our children and families deserve nothing less.





## A Vision for Transformation

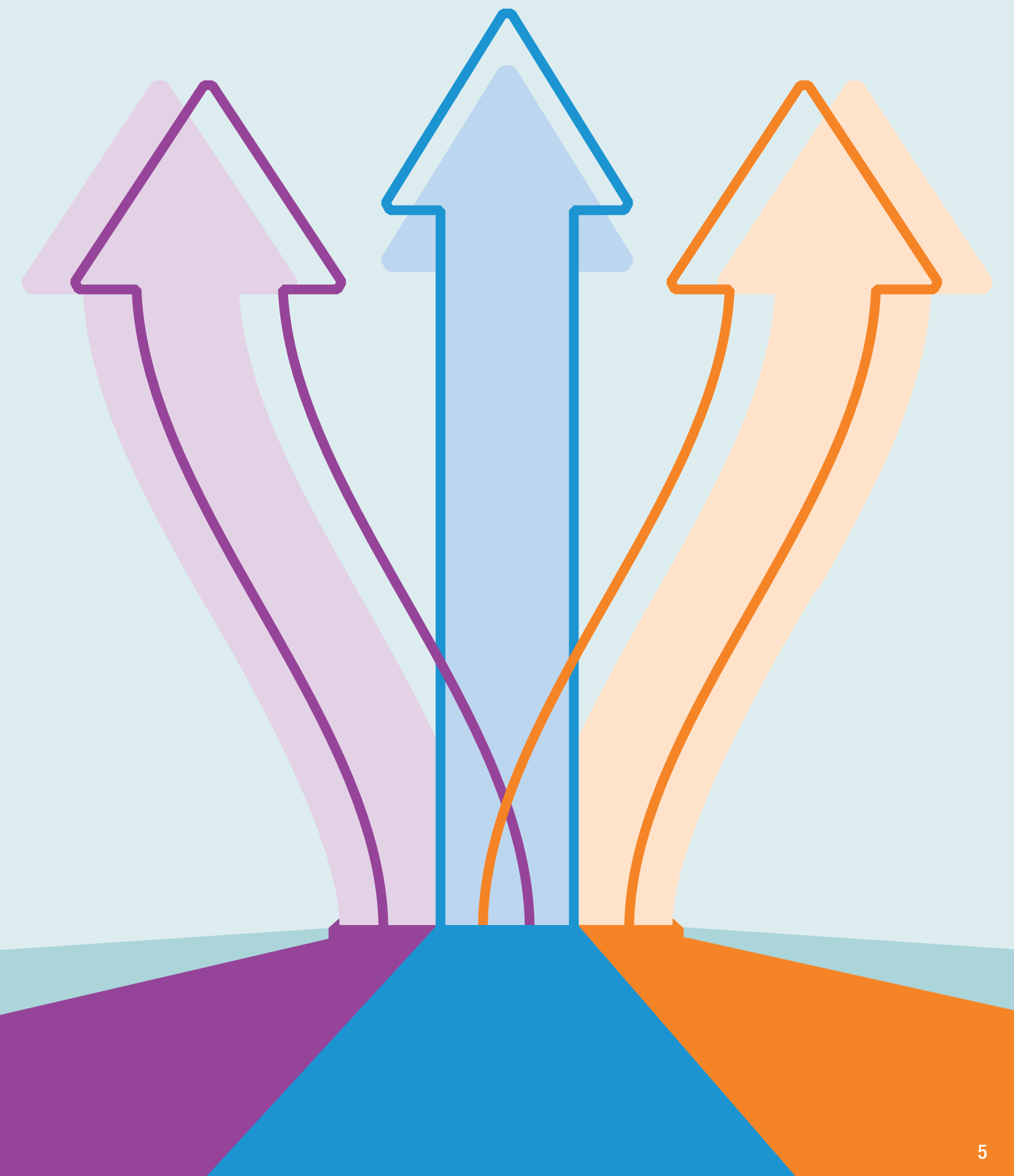
All children experience safe, stable, healthy lives and grow up in the care of a loving family and community.

The Child Welfare Division of the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) is part of a larger statewide social safety-net system that works to support families and communities. This safety net not only works during a life-threatening crisis but well beforehand, when small interventions can make an enormous difference in their lives.

Collectively, ODHS, public and private partners are working to support families and communities in myriad ways. This may include:

- Providing economic support
- Enhancing parenting skills
- Helping people with their housing needs and employment goals
- Providing health and behavioral services
- Helping treat alcohol and substance use disorders, and
- Ensuring child safety and family well-being.

We help families access resources within their natural support networks and the service provider community. This helps them address their own underlying needs and resolve the most common causes of stress and trauma linked to child maltreatment.



The Child Welfare Division's mission is to ensure every child and family is empowered to live a safe, stable and healthy life. This mission is based on a set of beliefs and core values:

**We believe** children, and young adults do best when they grow up in a family.

**We value** fairness, equity, inclusion, accessibility, diversity and transparency in our work.

**We value** the voices, experiences, cultures, intellect and uniqueness of the children, and families we serve.

**We believe** that communities often already have the wisdom and assets to provide safe, stable and healthy lives for their children. Thus, Child Welfare needs to partner, listen and lift up community voices and their decision-making powers. This builds on existing resources, creates pathways to new resources and promotes community interdependence rather than a system of dependence.

**We value** building authentic relationships and being accountable to communities of color and other marginalized communities by elevating their voices and proactively engaging with individuals, families and communities. This builds their power so Child Welfare and its partners can better ensure people's safety, health and well-being.

**WE . VALUE**  
**Believe**

**We believe** providing earlier, less-intrusive support for parents and families means more children can remain safe and healthy at home and in school. This helps children and young adults have better long-term outcomes and keep the bonds and connections critical to their well-being.

**We believe** families and communities working together in a more proactive, holistic way will allow ODHS and its partners to allocate resources where they have the greatest impact for children, young adults, parents and families. Comprehensive services outside of ODHS will decrease the need for costly foster care, residential placements and other crisis support. This will create opportunities for more innovation, creative solutions and new business models.

Our Vision for Transformation is based on a belief that children do best growing up in a family and on values related to honoring and supporting cultural wisdom, building community resilience and voice, and ensuring the self-determination of our communities of color. The goal is an absolute transformation.

**We believe** when families and communities are strong, fewer children experience abuse and neglect.

We recognize the importance of challenges and struggles of transforming the current system into one that is fair and just. Anti-racist principles guide us. We recognize that white supremacy and systemic racism are deeply embedded in the history, fabric and institutions of our country, including child welfare systems. Long-lasting social change comes from communities of color and other marginalized communities' leadership and power in social movements and systems transformation. To this end, we will leverage our resources, technical knowledge and role within the broader ODHS and child welfare systems to support transformation.

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Families will be strong and successful when everyone works together. ODHS Child Welfare will work collaboratively to uplift families, communities, Oregon Tribal Nations and partners.

ODHS Child Welfare will achieve this Vision for Transformation through its various functions to do the following:

- Assess child safety and provide in-home support to prevent placements away from parents, family, friends and community.
- Expand services to prevent unnecessary foster care placements and ensure that intensive interventions are as effective as possible.
- Ensure foster care is family-based, time-limited, culturally responsive and designed to better stabilize families rather than just serving as a placement for children.
- Establish that children, and young adults will be in the care of family, friends and neighbors whenever possible, and help children keep connections to their cultures, communities and Oregon Tribal Nations.
- Recognize that children who need higher-level physical or mental health services need short-term treatment programs customized to support the individual child's therapeutic needs. These supports should occur while children or teens are living in families with birth or adoptive parents, relatives, close friends or foster caregivers.
- Collaborate and build strong relationships with our partners.
- Strive for a supported workforce that has the resources, training, coaching and services needed to support our children, families and communities.
- Dismantle structural and systemic racism and move toward a more equitable and fair system of support for all families.

By honoring the diversity and lived experiences of our families, Oregon Tribal Nations, community and stakeholders, we will build meaningful, authentic and community-centered relationships that will build our collective knowledge, expertise, and education on child safety and support.



This transformation will not happen overnight. Some families will still experience crises, even with proactive engagement and support services. To meet this challenge, ODHS and its partners must create interdisciplinary and cross-system teams to support children and families to meet their individual needs. ODHS Child Welfare will also improve its use of data to inform decision making and activate correct levels of services and supports.

The world's circumstances have profoundly changed since ODHS first developed this vision. Many of this document's strategies require investment and development of resources and tools. The COVID-19 global pandemic has affected access to those resources. However, the focus and goals of transformation have not changed.

## The need to transform child welfare

Nationally, the current approach to child welfare is not working. Research shows the following:

- Preventable fatalities due to child abuse and neglect remain high. <sup>(1)</sup>
- Subsequent maltreatment remains high. <sup>(2)</sup>
- Poverty is often mistaken for neglect, resulting in increased rates of child abuse reports <sup>(3)</sup> and unnecessary foster care, group and institutional placements.
- Research shows placement in substitute care can cause further serious trauma. <sup>(4)</sup>
- Due to racial and discriminatory biases, practices and critical decisions result in racial, ethnic and tribal disproportionality in children of color. <sup>(5)</sup>
- Systemic racism results in the design and implementation of child welfare practices and policies that do not include communities of color and other marginalized communities. These communities are also often left out of decisions about the best use of resources and services.
- Children who stay in the child welfare system longer will have a higher risk of not finding permanency. Then, as young adults, they age out of the system without strong, permanent family connections and supports needed to become self-sufficient. <sup>(6)</sup>

- Inadequate training resources and professional support for child welfare staff create an unsupportive work environment and add to the lack of retention in the workforce, thus a constant strain on child welfare system. <sup>(7)</sup>
- Across the United States, between 7 and 30% of children and young adults crossover from child welfare into the juvenile justice systems. These trends are partly due to the lack of strong cross-system coordination and inattention to child well-being indicators. <sup>(8)</sup>
- Historically, the system has focused on removing kids from their families, homes and neighborhoods for safety reasons. Research, however, consistently shows that children and young people can have better outcomes when they remain safely in their homes while receiving services allows children to keep ties with their family, friends, schools and communities. <sup>(9)</sup>

By honoring the diversity and lived experiences of our families, Oregon Tribal Nations, community and stakeholders, we will build meaningful, authentic and community-centered relationships that will build our collective knowledge, expertise, and education on child safety and support.

To truly ensure the safety, good health and well-being of children and young adults, we must rethink our approach and our systems, processes and structures for serving and supporting them, their families and communities. More input and rethinking with our internal staff and community partners are critical to developing and realizing this Vision for Transformation. Short-term and long-term planning and actions will ensure that transformation efforts are nimble and adaptive to respond to the global changes in child welfare.

Families will be strong and successful when everyone works together. ODHS Child Welfare will work collaboratively to uplift families, communities, Oregon Tribal Nations and partners to make this transformation a reality, based on the guiding principles, strategies and measures that follow.



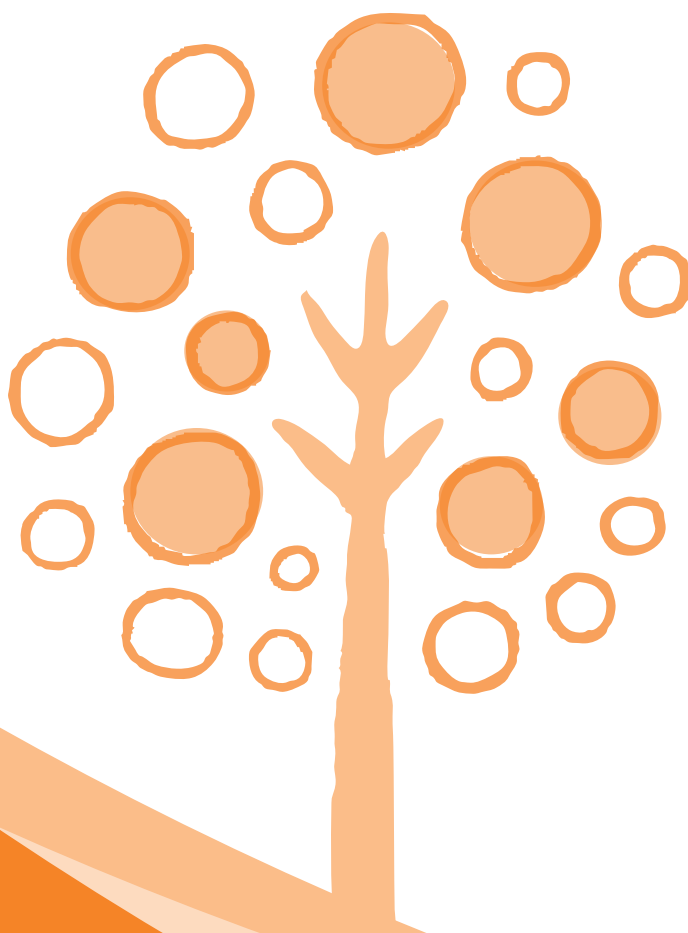


# 1

## Guiding Principle

### **Supporting families and promoting prevention**

Our Child Welfare transformation is built on trauma-informed, family and community-centered and culturally responsive programs and services focused on engagement, equity, safety, well-being and prevention.



# This means strategies with an approach that:

- ⦿ **Are centered on family support** focusing on individual needs and appropriate services.
- ⦿ **Value the voices**, experiences, cultures, intellect and uniqueness of the children, and families we serve.
- ⦿ **Are based on early support services** at a time when small interventions can make an enormous difference in people's lives, prevent a crisis and provide appropriate resources if a crisis occurs.
- ⦿ **Use a multi-generational approach** to meet families' needs and address factors that contribute to risk, trauma and safety concerns and the cycles of child abuse and neglect.
- ⦿ **Focus on strengthening and preserving connections to family and community** by keeping children and young adults safely in their own home and communities whenever possible; maintaining connections to family, culture and community when temporary substitute care is needed; and making permanency the priority, starting with safely reunifying families.
- ⦿ **Engage with the community** by integrating the voices of children, young adults, parents, families, Oregon Tribal Nations and partners to be more responsive to the needs of families and community partners.
- ⦿ **Honor and support the self-determination of communities of color** and other marginalized communities and aim to build their power.
- ⦿ **Are culturally responsive** by embracing the communities' lived experiences and the cultures of children and young adults in decision-making that affects their safety, health and well-being; as a result, delivering services aligned with the cultural context of children, young adults, family and community so they can live their lives with dignity, autonomy and equality.
- ⦿ **Are trauma-informed** to recognize the impact of trauma, including historical trauma, and promote a culture of safety, empowerment and healing.
- ⦿ **Strength-based** to support families and individuals with the tools to better handle mental health, substance use, domestic violence issues, and other factors that can contribute to child abuse and neglect.

# Strategic projects and initiatives

ODHS Child Welfare has several initiatives and improvement projects in a planning phase or underway. They align with this guiding principle to create a road map for transformation.

Area of focus	Description
Family support to prevent unnecessary foster care	This initiative is to improve support and remove barriers for families to become self-sufficient, prevent unnecessary foster care for children, and support those children and families that have experienced out-of-home care.
Response to community concerns and reports of child abuse and neglect	ODHS Child Welfare created a centralized hotline for screening reports and allegations of child abuse and neglect. The hotline was fully operationalized in 2019 and will need ongoing improvements to help reduce wait times, better manage workloads and address the correct number of assessments assigned to specific districts.
Safety and fatality review and prevention	This project improves the various aspects of the Safety Program and the Fatality Review and Prevention Program to better ensure the safety of children and young adults.
Foster family recruitment, training, support and retention	Oregon is making significant investments in recruiting, training, supporting and retaining foster families to mirror the needs of our children, young adults and communities we serve.
Equity and inclusion	This initiative improves the equity and inclusion of all aspects of the ODHS Child Welfare and provides anti-racist, inclusive, equitable and culturally appropriate services to children, young adults and families.
Timeliness to permanency and family ties	ODHS Child Welfare is working on several related initiatives to improve procedures for reunification, family engagement in case planning and coordination with court partners to improve time to permanency. These initiatives include setting deadlines that result in better outcomes for children and young adults in care.
Training, policy and practices related to Oregon's tribal children and families	ODHS, including the Child Welfare Division, is working to improve training, policy and practices that reflect a tribally responsive approach. By partnering with Oregon's Oregon Tribal Nations and honoring tribal history, ODHS Child Welfare can better serve tribal children and families.

2020–2022 strategic communications plan

A long-term strategic communications plan will guide how Child Welfare engages families and partners and communicates with both internal and external audiences. Its purpose is to take a proactive, strategic approach to communications by ensuring better clarity and transparency; providing opportunities to gather and incorporate input and feedback; and improving collaboration and coordination with staff and community partners.

## ***DESIRED OUTCOMES***

### **By following this principle, we expect to achieve these outcomes:**

- A more equitable system leading to better outcomes for children of color
- Fewer children in foster care
- Safer and more stable placements
- Stronger community partnerships
- Stronger tribal relationships
- Increased cross-system collaboration
- Decreased racial disproportionality and disparities
- More children served in their homes and fewer in substitute care
- Lower rates of child neglect and abuse



# 2

## Guiding Principle

### Enhancing our staff and infrastructure

Our Child Welfare transformation depends on a diverse, supported, skilled, respected and engaged workforce that reflects and embraces the communities we serve.





# This means strategies have:

- ⦿ A clear vision and purpose for transformation and a strategic direction that staff understand and collectively and individually see.
- ⦿ A commitment to fairness, equity, inclusion, accessibility, transparency and diversity.
- ⦿ An effective organization and implementation infrastructure driven by inter-and cross-program collaboration that facilitates shared decision-making and respect.
- ⦿ A culture of spiritual, social, psychological and physical safety across the workforce that values and enhances well-being.
- ⦿ A strong anti-racist approach committed to ending structural racism.
- ⦿ Approaches that actively work to dismantle systems of oppression and institutional barriers that have prevented women of color and LGBTQIA+ people of color from living their lives with dignity, autonomy and equality.
- ⦿ A recognition of the importance of struggle and the challenges to transform the system into a fair and just one.
- ⦿ High, clear expectations and accountability for all staff, managers and leadership that ensure staff have the direction, guidance and support needed for the challenging work they do every day.
- ⦿ Management structure that values staff input and feedback and ensures meaningful participation, engagement and inclusion, including many chances to share ideas and develop professionally.
- ⦿ A partnership-focused relationship between management and labor working toward common goals and outcomes.
- ⦿ Recruitment and hiring, workforce development, retention and succession-planning practices that attract, reward and promote high performing staff and represent the communities we serve with clear opportunities for career advancement.
- ⦿ An exceptional workforce developed and supported at all levels that is diverse, talented, dedicated, motivated, skilled, resilient and adaptable to change, and includes those with lived experiences to competently, confidently and compassionately apply what they are learning to their day-to-day work.

# Strategic projects and initiatives

ODHS Child Welfare has several initiatives and improvement projects underway or in a planning phase. These projects and initiatives align with this guiding principle to create a road map for transformation.

Area of focus	Description
ODHS Child Welfare organizational effectiveness	ODHS Child Welfare is improving the program's effectiveness by redesigning organizational infrastructures and systems to support the organization's core work.
A supported and engaged workforce	These initiatives seek to improve and transform ODHS Child Welfare's organizational culture and to develop a supported and engaged workforce through the following:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved training: Staff training will align best practices, build allyship, and reflect the overall goals and values of the organization.</li><li>• Improved employee onboarding: The onboarding process for all classes of new employees will ensure they have the needed training and other resources to effectively begin their work. This will lead to onboarding consistency and continuity.</li><li>• Implement RiSE: RiSE is an agency-wide effort to develop an intentional and positive organizational culture that helps employees thrive at work. It is both a direct response to employee input and a commitment from leadership.</li><li>• Improved recruiting and hiring practices: Hiring and recruiting will help ensure Child Welfare has the workforce, leadership and succession planning it needs to support its mission, vision and goals.</li></ul>

## ***DESIRED OUTCOMES***

### **By following this principle, we expect to achieve these outcomes:**

- Strong, consistent leadership with an effective organizational infrastructure.
- A clear and transparent implementation process of the agency's transformation.
- Increased teamwork in field offices with a team-oriented environment.
- Improved field and central office connection and clarity of roles and responsibilities.
- An effective, adaptive and responsive learning environment.
- Improved training and coaching at all levels.
- Fewer vacancies.
- Higher retention rates and longer tenures.
- Increased promotions from within.
- Reduced caseloads.
- Higher morale.
- Increased internal communications that improve engagement and morale through all levels of the organization.
- Staff are the respected and empowered as the experts in child safety and support that they are.



# 3

## Guiding Principle

### **Enhancing the structure of our system by using data with continuous quality improvement**

Our Child Welfare transformation is built on data-informed practice and is supported by continuous quality improvement and modernized information technology systems and tools.



## This means strategies have:

- ◎ **A holistic continuous quality improvement (CQI) system**, based on implementing evidence-based best practices to evaluate and improve child and family outcomes, as well as the ongoing delivery of services and supports.
- ◎ **Clear, uniform metrics** that align with the Vision for Transformation, measure progress toward key goals and outcomes, and provide metrics that are relevant to our children, families, partners and Oregon Tribal Nations.
- ◎ **Timely, accurate, useful and easy to understand data** to highlight progress, identify and close gaps, and to drive education, policies and strategies for change.
- ◎ **Managers to champion the use of data to ensure staff and partners understand its value**, have access to it, and use it effectively in decision making and their day-to-day work
- ◎ **User-friendly and effective information technology systems and tools** that make it easier to improve outcomes for children and families, keep them safely together, and provide insight and analysis into what's working and what's not to leverage advancements in research and technology.
- ◎ **Identify opportunities with our data** to drive education, policies and strategies.

# Strategic projects and initiatives

ODHS Child Welfare has several initiatives and improvement projects underway or in a planning phase that align with this guiding principle as to create a road map for transformation:

Area of focus	Description
CQI and quality assurance systems for evaluation of ODHS Child Welfare programs and initiatives	To become an evidence-based, data-driven and implementation-science-informed organization, ODHS Child Welfare is developing data collection and analysis processes to identify areas for improvement and to assess and measure our progress and outcomes over time.
The Child Welfare Research Agenda	This agenda will use data and research to help establish and assess further progress toward program goals and priorities, including the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices and the development of effective services.
Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) implementation	OR-Kids, the state's case management system, is being updated to meet the new federal CCWIS regulations and improve ODHS Child Welfare's infrastructure and processes to better enhance and support our workforce.
An array of treatment services based on evidence-informed data	These initiatives seek to improve the array of treatment services to better suit the individual needs of children and young people in care using data.
An array of prevention and family support services based on evidence-based data	ODHS Child Welfare will use evidence-based data to develop an array of services to support individual families and reduce the need for out-of-home substitute care.

## ***DESIRED OUTCOMES***

**By following these principles, we expect to achieve outcomes that include:**

- Aligned reports, metrics and measures across the child and family serving system.
- Focus on research that supports key goals and child and family outcomes.
- Use of data and data-dashboards in daily operations and decision making.
- Improve usability of information technology solutions that meet the needs of case management and data information systems.
- Increase usage of CQI systems across programs that are based on up-to-date technology, science and best practices.
- Increase of real-time, accurate data dashboards for key metrics.



# Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Children's Bureau Child Maltreatment. 2018. How many children die each year from child abuse and neglect? [cited 2020 Sept 27]. Available from: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatality.pdf#page=2&view=How many children die each year from child abuse and neglect?](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatality.pdf#page=2&view=How%20many%20children%20die%20each%20year%20from%20child%20abuse%20and%20neglect?)
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8. Stewart M, Lutz L, Herz DH. (2010). Crossover practice model. Washington, DC: Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy; and, Herz DH, Dierkhising C, Raithel J, Schretzman M, Guiltinan S, Goerge R, Cho Y, Coulton C, Abbott S. (2019). Dual system and their pathways: a comparison of incidence, characteristics and system experiences using linked administrative data. Journal of and Adolescence. 48. 10.1007/s10964-019-01090-3.
9. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Children's Bureau. In-home services in child welfare. Issue Brief 2014 March. [cited 2020 Sept 27]. Available from: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/inhome\\_services.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/inhome_services.pdf).

Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Division welcomes review, input and support for these ambitious transformation plans. They embrace our beliefs and core values. The plan is based on three key principles, supportive strategies and specific outcome measures outlined in this Vision for Transformation. For more information, contact [ChildWelfare.DirectorsOffice@dhsola.state.or.us](mailto:ChildWelfare.DirectorsOffice@dhsola.state.or.us)



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