

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Fiscal Year 2027 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR)

Submitted June 30th, 2026

Statement of Incorporation by Reference and Introduction

In accordance with [ACYF-CB-PI-26-03](#) and its definition of “critical updates,” Wisconsin incorporates by reference the information and data contained in its prior year [APSR](#) as if fully set forth herein. Accordingly, this submission provides only critical updates since the prior APSR, consistent with 45 CFR §1357.16.

Consistent with Wisconsin’s 2025–2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) continues advancing its *Putting Families First* child welfare transformation efforts focused on supporting families in their homes, keeping children and youth in family settings whenever possible, and strengthening the workforce.

Critical Updates: Progress, Accomplishments, and Material Changes

Supporting Families In-Home

In March 2026, Wisconsin implemented revisions to its Safety Intervention and Ongoing Services Standards related to in-home case planning. Responding to prior Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) findings, the revised standards strengthen family-centered decision-making, family voice and collaboration, and rename the case plan as the *Family Case Plan*. Updates reinforce child and family teaming, collaborative goal development, youth and family participation, engagement of natural supports, and inclusion of tribal child welfare partners when applicable.

Statewide guidance related to tribal engagement also expanded through a new *Local Child Protective Services (CPS) Agencies’ Responsibility to Engage Tribal Nations* appendix within the CPS Access and Initial Assessment Standards focused on county agencies’ responsibility to engage Tribal Nations. Developed collaboratively by DCF and a subgroup of the Indian Child Welfare Committee, the appendix provides best practices for meaningful engagement with tribal child welfare agencies and reinforces the purpose and intent of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act (WICWA).

Motivational Interviewing (MI) implementation planning began in January 2026 through a DCF workgroup composed of counties and lived experts exploring statewide implementation strategies, including title IV-E claiming and integration into Wisconsin’s 2026–2030 Prevention Plan. The effort builds on feedback from the 2025 Prevention Summit and follow-up surveys, which identified MI as a leading area of interest among

local agencies because of its emphasis on family-centered engagement, workforce development, and statewide implementation feasibility.

DCF established a new partnership with Family Connect of Wisconsin to expand community-based supports for families. In collaboration with the Division of Early Care and Education, the Division of Safety and Permanence is connecting child welfare, early childhood, and community support systems through Family Connect services and CarePortal resources designed to improve access to concrete supports, strengthen local coordination, and reduce barriers associated with poverty and crisis.

During Fiscal Year (FY) 26, DCF will operate a fourteen county Targeted Safety Support Funds (TSSF) pilot to test expanded eligibility for families with a documented case plan that resulted from a screened-in child welfare services report. Designed in response to longstanding agency interest in using TSSF more preventatively, the pilot will help inform future policy and practice considerations.

The Access Response Time Project advanced innovation in CPS response-time decision-making through participation by the Division of Milwaukee Child Welfare (DMCW) and ten local agencies, resulting in statewide implementation beginning in June 2026. Pilot agencies tested a simplified six-criteria approach for screened-in reports intended to support easier, more consistent response-time decision-making and allow initial assessment professionals to gather information before identifying danger threats. Early findings have been encouraging, with participating agencies reporting positive workforce experiences, strengthened critical thinking, and improved engagement with families.

Keeping Children and Youth in Family Settings

In December 2025, Wisconsin revised Ch. DCF 56 to create a separate licensing pathway for relative and like-kin foster caregivers aligned with federal changes and national standards. The updated licensing requirements and process improve access to equitable financial support, reduce barriers, and support timely licensing while maintaining child safety requirements.

DCF facilitated the First Placement Project as an effort to increase initial placement with relatives and like-kin when children and youth enter out-of-home care. Twenty-one county agencies representing diverse geographic regions and agency sizes began implementing local practice strategies in January 2026. Participating agencies are testing approaches intended to strengthen kin-first practice, supported by DCF data monitoring and cohort-based peer learning designed to support implementation and longer-term culture change around relative and like-kin placement.

Statewide implementation of the *Nurturing Connections* foster and adoptive parent training curriculum began in August 2025 in partnership with the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System. Replacing prior caregiver curricula, *Nurturing Connections* established a more consistent, trauma-informed, family-centered

training approach intended to strengthen caregiver readiness, improve understanding of child and youth needs, and support high-quality family-based care.

Supporting the Workforce and Continuous Improvement

The Youth Justice (YJ) Training Project responds to workforce and lived experience feedback regarding the need for stronger training and onboarding supports. Key efforts during the reporting period included continued implementation of WiLearn YJ and Youth Justice Philosophy and Case Process (YJPCP). Using web-based learning, cohort participation, and virtual supports, WiLearn YJ strengthens accessibility, consistency, and onboarding for new professionals. Developed with lived experience groups and the Youth Justice State Training Committee, YJPCP reinforces foundational YJ concepts, family-centered practice, and risk-need-responsivity principles and became a prerequisite for new YJ professionals in 2026 prior to advanced case planning instruction.

Technology and information-sharing tools supporting the workforce and service system advanced through enhancements to the Supporting Youth and Children (SYNC) platform. Updates expanded referral status visibility, provider functionality, and automated messaging, supporting more efficient referrals, clearer communication, secure transmittal of personal information, and improved statewide understanding of placement availability and unmet placement needs.

Updates to Ch. DCF 57, Wisconsin's administrative rule governing group homes, took effect in June 2026. The revised rule strengthens licensing, regulatory clarity, and quality standards supporting children and youth receiving services in group home settings, with updates emphasizing alignment with safety science and trauma-informed practice, youth and family engagement in treatment planning, staff flexibility, and resident protections.

Youth voice, transition planning, and access to information were further supported through enhancements to Independent Living (IL) supports and continued implementation of the Wisconsin Information and Support Portal (WiSP). February 2026 updates to the Independent Living Transition to Discharge (ILTD) framework strengthened individualized, youth-centered planning grounded in young adults' goals, support networks, and long-term transition needs. Launched April 6, 2026, WiSP provides eligible young adults ages 14–23 with direct access to selected information and tools connected to eWiSACWIS, including communication features, resource inventories, reminders, and transition supports.

Fiscal Year 2027 Priorities

A significant priority for Wisconsin over this reporting period is continued implementation of its first state-led CFSR, with the federal period under review beginning October 1, 2026. Building on preparation activities launched in 2025, Wisconsin will continue strengthening the quality assurance and continuous quality improvement infrastructure needed to support its state-led review approach and future Program Improvement Plan (PIP) efforts, including ongoing review activities using a random statewide sample of in-home and out-of-home care cases. These efforts reflect Wisconsin's commitment to continuous learning, family voice, and evidence-informed practice improvement.

In June of 2026, Wisconsin officially opted into the *A Home for Every Child* pilot and will look to incorporate this initiative within Round 4 PIP planning. Its focus on prevention, family and relative connections, family settings, and permanency outcomes aligns closely with Wisconsin's Putting Families First approach and may provide a complementary framework for ongoing transformation efforts.

Looking ahead, Wisconsin will also continue evaluating policy and practice opportunities to strengthen economic stability and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families involved with out-of-home care. This includes preserving Social Security benefits, including survivor benefits, and Supplemental Security Income benefits, as well as limiting child support collections associated with out-of-home care placements. National research and Wisconsin data indicate that reducing financial burdens on families may strengthen family stability, support reunification, and improve child and family outcomes.

Through these efforts, Wisconsin will continue advancing its vision that all children and youth are safe and loved members of thriving families and communities.