

Chapter DCF 57 Frequently Asked Questions

Need Determination

How will the Department of Children and Families (DCF) determine when there is a need for a new group home?

At least every two years, beginning in 2027, DCF will assess group home capacity and issue a statement indicating whether additional group home capacity is needed. If additional capacity is needed, the statement will identify areas of need, such as specific geographic regions or populations, and will include a deadline for submitting a Need Determination Application.

Anyone interested in opening a new group home or increasing the bed capacity of an existing group home may submit a Need Determination Application by the specified deadline. The department will review all applications to determine whether the proposed placement resources meet the identified need. As part of the review the department may request additional information from applicants.

What criteria will be included in DCF's capacity assessment?

As part of its group home capacity assessment, DCF will review information from existing data sources and consult with community partners and counties to determine the need for new group homes. DCF will consider data pertaining to current availability of resources and projected needs by geographic region, demographics, underserved populations, availability of specialized programming, and other information as deemed appropriate by DCF, (moving forward DCF will be referred to as "the department") informed by system partners.

Who will be on the Need Determination panel?

The administrator of the Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) will appoint a Need Determination Panel to review Need Determination Applications received by the department and make recommendations to the administrator. At a minimum, the panel will include county and provider representatives.

Would DCF consider provider-identified needs when conducting a capacity assessment? For example, if a provider identifies a service gap or wants to expand services in a particular area.

Although the department is required to conduct a capacity assessment at least every two years, it may assess capacity and identify needs more frequently. If a provider identifies a service gap or believes additional capacity is needed, they are encouraged to share that information with the department for consideration.

What if a licensed group home needs to move to a new location?

An existing provider may request a change in location through the license amendment process. When reviewing the request, the department will consider factors such as the proposed location, the impact on service availability, and whether the move aligns with identified placement needs.

A provider may not increase its licensed bed capacity as part of a location change unless it first obtains a Determination of Need, as required by state statute. Requests to increase bed capacity are subject to the Need Determination process and cannot be approved solely through a license amendment.

QRTP Certification

The new rule requires new group homes to be certified as a Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP). Do existing group homes need to become QRTP certified?

No. The QRTP certification requirement applies only to group homes that receive an initial probationary license on or after June 1, 2026. Those group homes must become certified as a QRTP within three years of receiving their initial probationary license.

Group homes licensed before June 1, 2026, are not required to obtain QRTP certification under this provision. However, the department encourages all group homes to pursue QRTP certification.

If a current group home is not a QRTP and the licensee wants to open an additional group home, will the new group home be required to become a QRTP?

Yes.

What is expected when something is not required by rule but is required by an accrediting body?

Both the department's requirements and the accrediting body's requirements need to be met.

Is there coordination between DCF and accrediting bodies? Sometimes accreditation standards appear to conflict with licensing requirements.

The department is aware that accreditation standards and licensing requirements are sometimes different. If your accrediting body requires something that appears to conflict with a licensing requirement or administrative rule, contact your licensing specialist as soon as possible. DCF will work with the licensee to understand the requirements and identify an approach that satisfies both licensing and accreditation standards whenever possible.

Fire Safety

What is required for fire safety training now that the requirement for using the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) or comparable entity has been removed?

Group homes may still choose to use fire safety training provided by the WTCS or another external training provider, but it is no longer required.

Licensees may instead develop and provide their own fire safety training for staff. The licensee must establish a written policy and ensure staff are trained on the policy. The policy should include things such as escape routes, fire extinguisher location and use, and the floor plan.

Are there specific requirements for what must be included in fire safety training?

The fire safety training should include how to use a fire extinguisher, the exit and evacuation plan, and other fire safety information the licensee deems necessary for staff to respond appropriately in an emergency.

Personnel Requirements

What training is required for a program director?

A program director is required to complete 24 hours of continuing education each year. The program director does not have to complete the orientation training or 80 hours of work with an experienced staff member.

What is the “traineeship” requirement and to whom does it apply?

All resident care staff, regardless of previous experience or education, must complete 80 hours of supervised work with an experienced staff member before working with youth alone. The group home is responsible for determining which staff members are considered sufficiently experienced to provide this supervision and training.

Are drug screens required?

Pre-employment drug screens are not required to comply with Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57. However, a group home may choose to require one.

Can group homes use relief help?

Resident care staff may be designated as “relief” by the licensee, but there is no relief staff designation in Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57.

Is there a list of training courses that are required under Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.12?

All required training will be on the orientation checklist and the personnel record checklist provided by DCF.

Background Checks

Do contractors, such as mentors and counselors, need background checks and fingerprinting?

It depends on the nature of the contractual relationship. Any adult who works in a group home is considered a “congregate care worker” and must complete the required background checks, including fingerprint-based checks. The licensee should contact their licensing specialist with questions.

Why aren’t volunteers required to complete fingerprint-based background checks?

Fingerprint-based background checks are required for congregate care workers under state and federal law. Volunteers are not included in the definition of a congregate care worker and therefore are not subject to the fingerprint-based background check requirement.

Because fingerprint-based background checks may only be conducted for individuals who meet the criteria established in Wis. Stat. ch. 48, licensees cannot request fingerprint checks for volunteers who do not meet those requirements.

Do off-site employees need background checks? What about employees who work in other programs but occasionally come to the group home?

Employees, such as administrative staff, who work exclusively off-site and do not work in the group home or have contact with residents are not considered congregate care workers and are not required to complete background checks, including fingerprint-based background checks.

Employees who work on-site or have regular and direct contact with residents, even if they do not work in the group home every day, must complete the required background checks, including fingerprint-based background checks. Please contact your licensing specialist with questions.

Discharge

If a resident's discharge summary indicates that they were discharged with clothing, but the resident arrives at the new group home without clothing, is the receiving group home responsible for providing clothing?

Yes.

Will the receiving group home receive a copy of the discharge summary from the previous group home?

Not automatically. For a planned discharge, the discharging group home is required to provide a copy of the resident's treatment plan to the placing agency, resident, and the resident's parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian.

The receiving group home may obtain the treatment plan through the admission and placement process, and it may request a copy from the placing agency as part of the intake process.

What if the group home and placing agency disagree about the timeline for a resident's removal? Is there an exception for safety concerns?

The discharge provisions in Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 apply to group homes and do not govern how or when a placing agency must arrange for a resident's removal. The group home is encouraged to work with the resident's treatment team, including the placing agency, to establish a discharge timeline that is in the best interests of the resident being discharged and the remaining group home residents. Contact your licensing specialist for assistance or questions.

What happens if a 30-day removal request has been submitted to the placing agency, but the resident has not been removed within 30 days?

The group home should continue to work with the placing agency to address safety, crisis management, and support while the youth is still in placement. If there are ongoing concerns about safety, the group home should contact its licensing specialist for guidance and assistance.

What should a group home do if a placing agency is not actively expediting the search for placement?

If repeated attempts have been made to communicate with the placing agency with no response, contact your licensing specialist and request assistance.

Treatment Plans

If a licensed group home has an exception allowing someone other than the program director to complete treatment plans, does that exception remain valid under the new rule?

The licensee must submit a new exception request that references the applicable provision of the current rule. If the department previously approved the same exception under the prior version of the rule, and the circumstances supporting the exception have not changed, the department expects that the new exception request will be approved.

Why does the rule require program directors to complete treatment plans? Can other staff qualify to do them?

Program directors are generally considered the most qualified group home staff member to oversee treatment planning and make sure that plans are developed and implemented properly. A licensee may request an exception to allow another qualified individual to complete treatment plans.

Do existing treatment plans need to be rewritten to comply with the new rule?

Licensees may continue using their current treatment plans until the next scheduled treatment plan review or update. When a treatment plan is due for an update, the revised plan should be completed using the new form and should comply with the requirements of the new rule.

What do the “Preferences” and “Post-Discharge Plan” sections of the treatment plan mean?

The Preference section of the treatment plan is used to document preferences the youth may have while at the group home. Examples may include morning showers, quiet music for sleep, or other preferences residents have, to help the group home feel like home and support their treatment during their placement.

The Post-Discharge Plan refers to any services, transitional living, independent living, or other arrangements made to help the youth be successful after discharge.

Do all eleven goals need to be listed on the treatment plan?

The treatment goals identified in Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.18(3)(b)2.a.-f. are required to be in the treatment plan.

Updating Forms and Policies

Will there be new forms for communication logs, treatment plans, and discharge plans?

Yes. They are available on the DCF licensing website.

When updating policies and procedures, do we need to reference the previous rule citation?

No, cite the new rule.

How long does a group home have to make changes to current policies and procedures once Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 revisions become effective?

Group homes should make any necessary changes to policies and procedures as soon as possible following the effective date of June 1, 2026. Communicate with your licensing specialist to ensure appropriate progress is being made.

Pregnant and Parenting Teens Questions

Does Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.38 apply only to group homes who are licensed to serve expectant or custodial parents, or to any group home that serves a pregnant resident? For example, what if a resident becomes pregnant while placed in the group home.

Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.38 applies to group homes that are licensed to serve expectant parents or residents who are custodial parents of children residing in the group home. The additional training, service, and program requirements in that section are intended for group homes that provide ongoing residential services to pregnant residents, and to residents who are parenting their children in the home.

If a group home is not licensed to serve that population and a resident becomes pregnant while placed there, the requirements of Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.38 do not automatically apply. In those situations, providers should consult with their licensing specialist to discuss training expectations and possible license amendments.

Does Wis. Admin. Code § 57.38 allow for voluntary placement of pregnant and parenting teens in group homes licensed to serve that population?

An expectant or custodial parent under a voluntary placement agreement may not be admitted for longer than 180 days from the date the resident was removed from their home under the agreement. A voluntary placement agreement may be extended under Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.38(3) if statute and rule requirements are met.

Resident Rights and Searches

Is there a definition of “prevent harm” for purposes of conducting a search?

Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 does not specifically define “harm.” Generally, harm may include physical injury, emotional injury, or other risks to health, safety, or well-being of a resident or others.

When conducting a search, the group home should be able to identify and document the specific harm the search was intended to prevent. The decision to conduct a search must be based on the individual resident and the circumstances at the time. Searches may not be conducted as a routine practice for all residents or based solely on generalized concerns.

Medications

Can a youth request melatonin, Tylenol, or other over-the-counter medications?

Yes. Youth may request over-the-counter medications. FDA-approved over-the-counter medications, such as Tylenol, may be administered if they are not contraindicated with any other medication prescribed to the resident.

Dietary supplements, natural supplements, and vitamins that are not approved by the FDA, such as some melatonin products, require approval from a medical provider before they may be administered.

In all cases, staff must follow the group home's medication administration procedures and review the medication instructions before administering any medication.

Is there a list of DCF-authorized medication drop-off locations?

Visit the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' (DHS) [website](#) for more information about medication disposal options. Any law enforcement office should also accept them.

Can medications be destroyed or deactivated instead of taken to an approved drop-off location?

A group home licensee may submit an exception request for an alternative medication destruction option for DCF's consideration.

Allowance

Is there a minimum allowance that must be provided to residents?

Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 does not specify a minimum base amount of spending money. However, any spending money provided to a resident should be appropriate for the resident's age, developmental level, and individual circumstances.

Can the group home set aside a resident's allowance money to pay for property they damaged?

No.

If a resident's allowance cannot be withheld as a disciplinary action, can the allowance be conditioned on completing tasks such as cleaning their room?

A resident's allowance may not be withheld, delayed, or conditioned on behavior, compliance with rules, or completion of chores or tasks.

Physical Plant

Have the square footage requirements been removed from Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57?

Yes. Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 no longer includes specific square footage requirements for group homes. However, licensees are still expected to comply with all applicable local ordinances, zoning requirements, and building codes, including any square footage requirements imposed by those authorities.

Can a group home lock its pantry or other food storage areas?

A group home may lock a pantry, freezer, or other food storage areas when it is used solely to store food for future meals or snacks.

Food can be expensive, and some residents may overeat, misuse, or take food without permission. Can the main refrigerator or kitchen cabinet be locked?

No. The main kitchen refrigerator and cabinets that contain food available to residents may not be locked. Group homes should provide a home-like environment, including access to food throughout the day. A secondary refrigerator or freezer used only to store food for future use may be locked. Food-related behaviors should be addressed in the youth's treatment plan and managed through staff guidance, support, and supervision.

Please be more specific about what "dietary preferences" means.

To support a home-like environment, group homes should make reasonable efforts to offer food choices that reflect residents' typical eating habits and preferences.

Can the kitchen door be locked? Residents have been accessing forks and using them inappropriately.

A group home may not lock the kitchen if that restricts a resident's access to food; however, the group home may secure eating utensils or other items when necessary to address a documented safety concern involving a current resident. Any restrictions should be individualized based on the resident's specific behavior and risk of harm and addressed through the resident's treatment plan to promote appropriate use.

The new rule limits bedrooms to no more than two residents. Will I have to adjust my licensed capacity?

For group homes licensed before June 1, 2026, no more than two residents may share a bedroom. If complying with this requirement reduces the number of residents the facility can accommodate, the licensee will need to request a reduction in your licensed capacity.

For example, if your group home is licensed for eight residents but can only house eight residents by placing three youth in one bedroom, the licensee would need to reduce your licensed capacity to seven residents to comply with the rule.

Group homes that receive an initial probationary license on or after June 1, 2026, must provide each resident with their own bedroom.

General Questions

Will there be any exceptions approved for Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.19, specifically regarding ratio?

A licensee may request an exception to any requirement in Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 that is not required by the statute. Requests must be submitted to the department on the prescribed form and include a justification for the exception.

The department will review each request on a case-by-case basis and may approve an exception if it determines that doing so will not jeopardize the health, safety, or welfare of any resident, child of a resident, or youth receiving respite services. Approval of an exception request is not guaranteed.

Are there new curfew requirements under Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57?

Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 does not establish a curfew or require group homes to adopt a specific curfew policy. A provider may create policies and procedures to establish a curfew.

Instead, Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.36 addresses situations in which a resident is absent from the group home without permission or fails to return at the expected time. In those situations, the group home must notify law enforcement, the placing agency, and the parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian within the timeframes specified in the rule. In certain circumstances where the resident may be at immediate risk of harm, notification must occur within one hour.

Is a Serious Incident Report (SIR) required when an incident requiring medical care occurs away from the facility?

It depends on whether the youth was under the immediate care and supervision of group home staff at the time of the incident.

If the incident occurs while the youth is under the supervision of another entity, such as at school, an SIR is not required. However, if the incident occurs during a group home activity, outing, or other situation in which group home staff are supervising the youth, a SIR is required if the incident otherwise meets the reporting requirements.

Can a resident visit another group home under the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS)?

Yes. A resident may visit another group home under the RPPS when the purpose is to support normalcy, such as participating in a social event, spending time with peers, or engaging in age-appropriate activities.

However, RPPS may not be used to move residents to another group home, even temporarily, to address staffing shortages or other operational needs of the resident's designated group home.

Can internet access be restricted for youth based on safety concerns? Can a library be used as an alternative?

Group homes must ensure that residents have access to the internet to complete school assignments. However, developmentally appropriate restrictions on internet access may be implemented when necessary to support a resident's safety.

If internet access is limited, the group home must still ensure that the resident can access the resources needed to complete school-related assignments. This may be addressed through community resources, such as the library.

Must law enforcement be contacted when a youth is missing from care for eight hours? What if law enforcement does not respond?

Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 requires a group home to notify law enforcement, the placing agency, and the youth's parent, guardian, legal custodian, or Indian custodian within eight hours after a youth has been absent without permission or has not returned by the expected time.

The group home's responsibility is to make the required notification within the timeframes established by the rule. Neither DCF nor the group home have authority over how law enforcement responds to a report.



Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 57.16(5)(a)4. requires residents to receive the name and contact information for the group home manager. What contact information must be provided?

At a minimum, each resident should be provided with a phone number where the group home manager can be reached. Licensees may also provide additional contact information, such as an email address or other appropriate method of communication.

Is an intern considered a volunteer? Can an intern be counted toward staffing ratios?

An intern who does not receive compensation is considered a volunteer. An unpaid intern may not be counted toward the staffing ratios required by Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57.

An intern who is compensated is not considered a volunteer. Instead, the intern is considered a resident care staff and may be counted toward staffing ratios, provided the intern meets all applicable qualifications, training, and other requirements for resident care staff under Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57.

Is there a minimum age for admission to a group home?

Wisconsin statutes and administrative rules do not establish a minimum age for admission to a group home.

What is considered “waking hours?”

Wis. Admin. Code ch. DCF 57 does not define “waking hours.” Generally, waking hours refers to periods when residents are awake and excluding hours when residents are normally sleeping.