



## Agency Highlights

### Division of Early Care and Education (DECE)

As part of our commitment to strengthening partnerships with Tribal Nations, in May 2025, we hosted a breakout session on child care at the Rejuvenating Tribal Communities Conference.

The 2025-27 Wisconsin Biennial Budget includes significant investments and policy change aimed at increasing child care **access** and **affordability**. Implementing these initiatives has been a significant priority for DECE. To learn more about these initiatives, including increased Wisconsin Shares rates, Child Care Bridge Payments, the new, state-funded Get Kids Ready program, and regulatory flexibility for child care providers, see the **Early Care and Education 2025-27 Budget Overview** document in your packet.

For more information on **access**, the [Child Care Provider Dashboard](#) provides data on numbers of regulated providers across the state, searchable by Tribal Nation and county.

We are dedicated to improving the **quality** of child care through YoungStar, which is currently undergoing a system analysis and update. In October 2025, we extended YoungStar rating timelines for new providers and began the [YoungStar Rating Stabilization Pilot](#) that will run until November 2027. We are identifying ways that YoungStar can be improved to work better for families, providers, educators, Tribal Nations, and communities.

In addition to supporting the child care **workforce** through *Child Care Bridge Payments*, in 2025 we launched a new Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance webpage based on feedback from child care providers about the challenges of finding training and technical assistance that meet their needs.

### Division of Family and Economic Security (DFES)

The Bureau of Child Support (BCS) continues to invest in creating a new automated, web-based system for maintaining child support case management records. In 2025, BCS terminated its prior contract and issued a notice of intent to award the contract for the design and development of the child support modernization system to a different vendor. Seven of the nine tribes in Wisconsin that operate child support programs will use this new system for case management and have been very active in developing business requirements.

BCS has been collaborating with the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe on the implementation of the Safe Access for Victim's Economic Safety grant to build awareness and provide training on the provision of supportive services for victims of domestic violence. A joint summit is planned for later in 2026.

The Bureau of Working Families (BWF) is negotiating new contracts for the administration of the W-2 program (Equus, Workforce Connections, Forward Service Corporation and America Works). The new contracts will begin in January 2027. The W-2 program has been operating with the same group of vendors since 2012 and is working to shift the focus of the program to meeting the needs of the whole family.

BWF reallocated federal Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funding in Milwaukee County to United Migrant Opportunity Services (UMOS).. UMOS is using CSBG funding to provide food and housing services on a temporary basis until a long-term Community Action Agency is selected.

### **Division of Milwaukee Child Welfare (DMCW) Formerly (DMCPS)**

DMCW underwent a reorganization to be more innovative and in alignment with the goals and outcomes we want to achieve as part of our strategic plan and our child welfare transformation. Over the past three years, DMCW has worked on our five-year strategic plan, focusing on four goals:

- A healthy, engaged, and knowledgeable workforce resulting in a high performing division
- Engage in consistent and quality practice for the betterment of children
- Keep children safe through innovative practices
- Cultivate meaningful partnerships to strengthen the community

The division has implemented strategies at all levels, from frontline staff to upper management, in order to ensure shared investment in these strategies once they are implemented in order to achieve our desired outcomes. Some of this work has been done through our efforts to engage the community in prevention conversations and how child safety is a shared responsibility with the support of the Division of Safety and Permanence. As part of the prevention work, DMCW is participating in the statewide Initiative First Placement Project where we are aiming to increase initial placement with relatives and like-kin when children enter out-of-home care. DMCW is looking to initiate family supports and family finding before Temporary Physical Custody (TPC) occurs as part of our project implementation. DMCW continued to expand our efforts to gather community feedback for our upcoming procurement of the case management contracts through community feedback sessions and surveys, which were shared with ICW Directors in February 2026.

### **Division of Management Services (DMS)**

We continue to focus on improvement of our state/tribal contracting practices and cycle. This includes distributing draft contract documents earlier to allow sufficient time to review and ask questions about proposed changes, and by consolidating funding into one packet, when possible, to increase ease and efficiency of review. We also aim to begin routing contracts to Tribal Nations earlier to ensure they are signed by the start date of October 1, 2026.

DMS staff and the DCF Tribal Liaison continued monthly tribal fiscal technical assistance sessions throughout 2025 and into 2026. A “reports due list” chart was developed to support Tribal staff knowledge and tracking of key reporting due dates, including the program, due date, and DCF contact. DMS also increased staff time dedicated to the Family Services Program (FSP) and technical assistance to Tribal Nations. With part of a new position specifically supporting FSP, DMS increased the ability to track, conduct outreach, and support utilization of FSP funds. DMS has restarted quarterly FSP meetings, provided individualized technical assistance, and completed the 2024 annual report.

DMS’ Bureau of Regional Operations (BRO) is changing its name to DCF Area Administration. This change reflects our shared purpose, services, and support to local partners across the state and aligns with our counterparts at the Department of Health Services.

## Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP)

In 2025, DSP issued a new appendix to the Access and Initial Assessment standards. This appendix provides guidance to county agencies on how to effectively fulfill their responsibility to collaborate with Tribal Child Welfare Agencies. DSP is extremely grateful to the Tribal Child Welfare professionals who generously volunteered their time and shared their expertise.

- Alebra Metoxen, Oneida Nation
- Juliet Pierce, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Tibissum Rice, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe
- Erika Traver, Ho-Chunk Nation
- Intertribal Child Welfare Committee

In response to feedback received from Tribal Nations, DSP has made an active effort to review and adjust the match requirements in several of our contracts. For some contracts and programs we have been able to determine that we can achieve federal match requirements through other sources so we have removed the match requirements from the contracts with Tribal Nations. We have also started looking closely at our statutory match requirements and have begun conversations internally as well as with Tribal partners to explore in-kind match. Please refer to the DCF Funding and Programs document in your packet for more information and updates to the match requirements.

**Changes to Chapter DCF 56** – Wisconsin’s Administrative Rule identifying licensing requirements for foster homes and foster parents was updated to reduce barriers to licensure for relative and like-kin caregivers and deliver equitable financial support. They reflect the definition of “like-kin” and provide a separate pathway for licensing relatives and like-kin. This pathway right-sizes requirements for caregivers who already know and love the child, while ensuring equal compensation and access to supports as foster parents. The revised rule incorporated feedback from ICW Directors specifically related to hair care and safe sleeping practices. The revised rule became effective in December 2025.