

## Agency Highlights

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



At DECE, we continue advancing our strategic priority of systematically increasing access to quality early care and education programs that support the needs of children and families statewide.

We bolster **access** to child care by supporting existing, regulated providers through the *Child Care Counts: Stabilization Payment Program*, which has been continued through June 2025. The [Child Care Provider Dashboard](#) was launched this year and provides data on numbers of regulated providers across the state, searchable by Tribal Nation and county.

Through Wisconsin Shares, we improve **affordability** of child care for Wisconsin families. We are making subsidy more family and provider friendly by changing to calculation on a full-time or part-time basis and paying registration fees. In July 2024, the initial eligibility for subsidy will increase from 185% of federal poverty level to 200%. We will also implement a statewide media campaign related to subsidy and are gathering input from Tribes to ensure campaign materials and outreach methods are meaningful for families in tribal communities.

We are dedicated to improving the **quality** of child care through YoungStar, which is currently undergoing a system analysis and update, in which we are identifying ways that YoungStar can be improved to work better for families, providers, educators, Tribes, and communities. One focus of this project will be ensuring alignment of YoungStar and regulatory standards, making it easier for providers to navigate early childhood requirements and systems in Wisconsin.

In addition to supporting the child care **workforce** through *Child Care Counts*, in July 2024 we will begin subsidizing the cost of Child Care Foundational Trainings, resulting in lower costs to individual participants.

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

The Child Support program has been busy preparing for a new automated web-based system that will be more user friendly, offer helpful resources to meet families where they're at and allow state and partner agencies to provide efficient service to our customers, while ensuring that children and families receive financial and medical support. Workgroups have been established to ensure that the voices of our stakeholders, including our tribal partners, are included in the design of the new system.

DFES continues to review its policies through a DEI lens with a goal of addressing inequities in the application of these policies and disparities in the delivery of our services to marginalized populations.

Our child support program has just launched a parent advisory group (PAG). The feedback drawn from the lived experience of participants will be instrumental in the development of policy

and other child support initiatives. Participation in PAG provides an opportunity for the diverse communities served by the child support program to share their opinions and concerns in a safe, inclusive, and trauma-informed setting.

We are also focused on using whole family approaches to service delivery by applying multi-generational approaches to our work. In preparation for the new Wisconsin Works (W-2) Program contract cycle in 2025, DCF contracted with Social Finance, a non-profit advisory firm that specializes in outcomes-based contracting to advise BWF during the W-2 re-procurement and contracting process for 2025. The evaluation process looked at all aspects of the W-2 Program in its current program design and delivered a report that informed the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the W-2 program. The RFP closed on April 26, and proposals are currently under review. Selected contractors will be notified later this summer, with onboarding occurring in the last few months of 2024.

Unlike the state, Tribal TANF can serve participants for a full 60 months and we will be encouraging our contractors to work with tribes to ensure that participants who are eligible are leveraging both programs, as able.

Over the past few years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of refugees seeking resettlement in the United States, including a significant increase in Wisconsin. In addition to receiving resettlement assistance through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) through local resettlement agencies, refugees arriving in Wisconsin may now receive services via Welcome Corps sponsor groups to help refugees transition to life in their new community supported by tools and resources from the Welcome Corps as well as ongoing guidance from resettlement experts.

### Division of Management Services (DMS)

This past year we worked on deepening and developing strategies to further advance the DCF vision. We met with Intertribal Child Welfare directors on procurement challenges in January 2023. As a result, we launched the [Anticipated Procurement Opportunities](#) website to address some of the timing challenges for grants and other procurement opportunities with DCF. The intent is to provide those interested with a list of procurements we anticipate in the near future to allow for more planning time. There is a signup feature for those who wish to be notified when new opportunities are posted on the page. In developing the page, we also adjusted our internal guidance to allow for more time in the posting process.

We have also launched a Procurement and Contracting Equity project. This will be a two year project with the purpose of reviewing DCF's contracting processes to look for ways to improve equity and diversity in contracting. Our objectives include reviewing our processes to understand gaps and opportunities for increasing equity and diversity in contracting, identifying best practices, and improving provider navigation of complex state contracting process. The project will include gathering of feedback from current, past and potential providers regarding their experiences with DCF's procurement and contracting process.

DCF is committed to meeting current and evolving cyber security privacy requirements and regulations through establishing clear policies, implementing robust processes, conducting regular risk assessments and fostering a culture of compliance within the organization through ongoing communication, training, and continuous improvement. We have completed and issued the [DCF Privacy Program Plan](#)

We've also updated contract language regarding NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) requirements. For more information on NIST requirements, we include the links below.

- [NIST Special Publication 1271: Quick Start](#)
- [Governmental Information Processing Association of Wisconsin \(GIPAW\)](#)

We are also focused on continuous improvement of our state/tribal contracting practice. We are working to consolidate tribal contracts for FFY25 contract. The FFY25 contract process was distributed to tribes May 15, 2024. We would like to finalize contracts by July and begin routing contract to tribes by mid/late August, for a planned start date of October 1, 2024.

### **Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS)**

We are working very hard to reduce our use of group care with youth through our Breaking Barriers initiative. DMCPS has roughly 180 youth who are placed in group care in Milwaukee County and we are working to find small and large scale strategies to support those youth being successfully placed elsewhere- ideally back at home or in other family-like settings. Increasing the use of relative and like-kin placements is a key strategy for that work. In the last 3 years we have reduced that group care population about 10%.

We are continuing to develop new and better contracts to deliver services to youth and families. This year we implemented a new Milwaukee Family Intervention Services contract to assist families who are struggling to care for teens. The new program includes in-home and clinical supports as needed to assist parents for caring for their youth inside of their family homes. We are also in the process of writing new procurements for assessment centers for our youth.

We continue to make efforts to modernize our workplace and our workforce. We have put significant efforts this past year into hiring and retention of our workforce to try and minimize disruption of service to families and ensure that we have experienced and well-trained staff to work with families. This year we also leaned into creating more opportunities for staff training and development including sending 10 staff to the National Indian Child Welfare Association Conference in Seattle in April.

### **Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP)**

In March 2024, the Like-Kin legislation (Act 119) was signed into law. This Act "includes individuals identified by the child's tribe according to tribal tradition, custom or resolution, code, or law" as a like-kin and kinship provider.

In 2023 Wisconsin Act 19, Tribal Subsidized Guardianship, was signed into law. This law grants statutory authority for the Department to enter into agreements with Tribes to administer subsidized guardianships ordered by a tribal court under a tribal law substantially similar to Wis. Stat. § 48.977(2) and be reimbursed by DCF for eligible subsidized guardianship payments.

We are partnering with the Department of Health Services, Department of Public Instruction, and the Office of Children's Mental Health in the Behavioral Health Policy Lab to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families with complex needs. It is important to meet the needs of younger children to set them up for a successful High School education. Therefore, we will be focusing on children 8-12 years of age.

We continue to prioritize keeping children with their families and will be administering a one-time, highly flexible, TSSF Family First funding to prevent the removal of children from their homes or reunify them with family. The funding cycle will be July 2024 through September 2025

### **Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board (CANPB)**

<https://preventionboard.wi.gov/Pages/Homepage.aspx>

This past year the Prevention Board focused on rolling out new programs and enhancing the professional development system.

Five for Families began as a public awareness campaign for families and community members. It was developed by the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board in partnership with parents and professionals, and features a website, [fiveforfamilies.org](http://fiveforfamilies.org). The curriculum has over 60 activities for parents and caregivers to explore and strengthen their protective factors. The Wisconsin Family Resource Center Professional Development System (FRC PDS) is designed to offer educational opportunities and trainings tailored specifically to meet the needs of family support program professional staff and leadership within FRCs as well as other family serving professionals.

The Prevention Board held listening sessions for Tribes, Family Resource Centers, community-based agencies and other partners to tell us about funding needs. We also gathered input from parents across the state about needs and strengths. We will be updating our strategic plan and announcing new funding opportunities.