



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Agency Highlights

Division of Early Care and Education (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](#) 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 increased from 185% of federal poverty level to 200%.

We are dedicated to improving the **quality** of child care through YoungStar, which is currently undergoing a system analysis and update. We are identifying ways that YoungStar can be improved to work better for families, providers, educators, Tribes, and communities. In addition to supporting the child care **workforce** through *Child Care Counts*, in July 2024 we began subsidizing the cost of Child Care Foundational Trainings, resulting in lower costs to individual participants.

We remain committed to strengthening our partnerships with Tribal Nations to ensure these strategies are implemented in ways that specifically promote quality care for children in tribal communities. In October 2024, we partnered with the Forest County Potawatomi Community for a community engagement session to talk about YoungStar, state regulation of child care, and Wisconsin Shares. We have also been invited to host a breakout session on child care at the Rejuvenating Tribal Communities Conference in Green Bay in May 2025.

Division of Family and Economic Security (DFES)

Child support Automated System This past year the Bureau of Child Support brought a contractor on board to begin the design and development of a new automated, web-based system for maintaining child support case management records. Seven of the nine tribes in Wisconsin that operate child support programs will use this system for case management and have been very active in developing business requirements.

The Supporting America's Children and Families Act (H.R. 9076), cosponsored by U.S. Congresswoman Gwen Moore, provides the needed statutory fix for states to use contractors to administer their child support enforcement programs without being in violation of IRS rules. The act also expands direct access to Federal Tax Information (FTI) to Tribes and Tribal child support agencies, ensuring they can provide much-needed resources for the families they serve. The legislation was also supported by the four national associations representing state and Tribal child support agencies. Two of the tribes in Wisconsin use the Model Tribal System

(MTS) for case management. MTS is not currently designed to provide tribal child support programs with access to FTI. With the passage of H.R. 9076, Wisconsin will be able to design its new automated system to assist those tribes in certifying cases in arrears for federal tax intercept.

Emergency Assistance/Family Stabilization Payments The Bureau of Working Families (BWF) modified its policies this year to encourage the use of emergency payments for participants with short-term financial needs in the time period before their first scheduled Wisconsin Works (W-2) payment. In addition to the updated policy, BWF continues to encourage W-2 agencies to meet participants' needs as part of a whole family approach to service delivery. These payments can be used for shelter, food, work-related expenses, insurance, toiletries/household items/diapers, phone payments, short-term childcare, and legal fees. There is no monetary limit, and payments can be made once per W-2 episode up to four times in a 12-month period. The Emergency Assistance (EA) program aims to alleviate a family's crisis due to a housing-related emergency. Based on application data and a cost-of-living analysis, BWF determined that existing rates were not adequate to meet the needs of families and increased the rates to more closely align with the current cost of living in Wisconsin. Changes were also made to verification requirements to reduce the applicant's verification burden and remove barriers to approval.

BWF also plans to award new contracts for the administration of the W-2 program later this year. The W-2 program has been operating with the same group of vendors since 2012. We are establishing a new narrative for the Wisconsin Works program, focused on meeting the needs of the whole family.

Division of Management Services (DMS)

We continue to promote the website. 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 continue to focus on improvement of our state/tribal contracting practices and cycle. This includes distributing draft contract documents earlier so there is sufficient time to review and ask questions about proposed changes and consolidating funding into one packet, when possible, to increase ease and efficiency of review. We also aim to begin routing contracts to tribes by earlier to ensure they are signed by the start date of October 1, 2025.

Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS)

We have concluded our Breaking Barriers initiative with Casey Family Programs, which was aimed at reducing the number of youth placed in congregate care settings. In January 2021, DMCPS had roughly 180 youth placed in congregate care settings, and at the end of 2024 we had 119 youth. This was a 34% reduction. Youth were placed back home or in other family-like settings. DMCPS will continue to focus on new and innovative ideas to reduce youth's placement in congregate care settings.

We continue to promote opportunities for staff training and development, including sending 10 staff to the National Indian Child Welfare Association Conference in Orlando this past March.

DMCPS is excited to announce The Lincoln Center (TLC) has been awarded the Intercept® contract which is a program developed by Youth Villages. The Intercept® program provides intensive and direct in-home services to families to develop the skills and capacity of the family to meet the needs of high acuity children/youth, using established evidence-based and trauma-informed interventions targeting the motivations and root causes of children/youth's behaviors. Intercept® is an evidence-based program and has documented success in keeping more youth in their homes with their families, reducing the length of time youth are in out-of-home care placement, reducing the number of youth placed in group care settings, and reducing the length of time youth remain in group care. This contract will allow TLC to work with our contracted case management agencies Children's Wisconsin and Wellpoint Care Network to serve 80 children, youth and families. Additional information regarding Intercept® can be found at <https://youthvillages.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Overview-of-Intercept-12132020-PDF.pdf>

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. The original effective date was scheduled for July 1, 2025. However, DSP was able to implement the Act on January 1, 2025.

In 2024, the Family Foundations Home Visiting Program received approval to cover doula services as part of the Red Cliff Tribe's Parents as Teachers (PAT) home visiting program with the federal Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. The doula/Family Support Specialist position will be offering doula services alongside the home visitor's caseload.

DCF is supporting meals and lodging expenses for eight adult supporters, and 10 young people served across five tribal Independent Living programs to attend the National Unity Conference. While this conference is not specifically for youth in out-of-home care, we know that connection to culture and positive youth development events are critical for all youth in their transition to adulthood.