

The State of Child Welfare and Foster Care in 2008

California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership

Children and youth in foster care are the most vulnerable population in the state.

- Approximately 75,000 children and youth are in foster care while the state and the counties work to provide services to reunify them with their families or identify permanent homes.
- Thousands more families have been identified as in need of services in order to maintain children safely in their homes. Even more children have been moved to permanent homes with their relatives and require support and services to sustain their placement.
- All of these children and youth have a multitude of education, physical and/or emotional issues requiring services from multiple state agencies.
- Too many of these children languish in a foster care limbo, experience multiple placements, are separated from siblings and schools, and get little consistent support from nurturing adults. Youth who grow up in foster care often leave ill-prepared: half are unemployed, a third become homeless and one in five ends up in jail.
- The complex needs of the children and youth entering foster care have outpaced the ability to generate the necessary resources to address their issues. A chronically under-funded child welfare system has been unable to absorb these growing caseloads and demand for services. This lack of resources has a devastating impact on the time social workers, attorneys and judges have to work with these families and their available service options.

Renewed focus, dedicated efforts and collaborative approaches aimed at accountability and outcomes have resulted in progress in child welfare improvements.

- California is engaged in numerous efforts to improve child welfare outcomes, including the implementation of the Outcomes and Accountability Act, the establishment of the California Blue Ribbon

Commission on Children in Foster Care and, most recently, the creation of the Child Welfare Council

- Outcome data show that California is improving on most performance measures. Although, the state has not achieved the federal minimum standard on the majority of targeted measures, data indicate that California is moving in the right direction.
- Counties are working to improve collaborative activities and building on current best practices as evidenced by a recent analysis of their System Improvement Plans.
- Results of these collective activities indicate that California has identified the appropriate strategies, but doesn't have the capacity to take these effective actions to scale.

There is much at stake and a long way to go before we realize our goals for children and families.

- The current state budget crisis has resulted in a proposal to cut 10% across the board in all departments. When including federal and county matching funds, this would result in a 16% cut to child welfare and foster care services alone. Equal cuts in health, mental health, and alcohol and drug have added impacts to foster children who often are served under multiple state departments.
- Reductions in federal, state and county resources directly correlate with an increase in the number of children who will stay in foster care longer, waiting to return to their families or find a permanent home.
- Failure to achieve required targets for improved foster care outcomes could result in costly federal sanctions (\$90 million in 2006).
- Most importantly, failure to achieve improved outcomes threatens the safety and permanency of our most vulnerable children and youth.