

"Putting services for children and families in one agency is a smarter, more effective and more efficient way to deliver the help they need to not just succeed, but thrive."

Gov. Jay Inslee

TRANSFORMING AND STREAMLINING HOW WE SERVE FAMILIES AND HELP CHILDREN THRIVE

Those who advocate for children — especially infants and toddlers — are familiar with research showing that a strong foundation, laid in the early years, is critical to healthy development. Children who receive such a start in life are not just healthier in a medical sense, they do better in school, in relationships and ultimately in life. We know, too, that reaching children at critical stages in their lives — especially in adolescence — helps assure they grow into healthy adults.

Advancements in research and brain science have also helped us understand how traumatic experiences hamper child development and perhaps more importantly, how secure, nurturing relationships aid in healthy development. Much of that research has taken place in the past 25 years, long after many of our current systems were designed.

Today, we have the opportunity to put our new understanding of brain science and child development to use in designing better systems and programs. By integrating programs, getting smarter about the way we use data and reaching children and families before harm occurs, we can better serve Washington's children, youth and their families. Gov. Inslee wants to capitalize on this important opportunity.



BACKGROUND

Thousands of Washington families are challenged by poverty, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse, homelessness, and racial or other cultural inequities. When these issues are most acute, there are 20,000 people experiencing homelessness and 15,000 families involved in the child welfare system. Many families find support in their communities, through local or faith-based programs. Others find support through their school district or health care provider. And many others turn to the state for services.

Concerned that the state lacked a distinct focus on the welfare of children and youth, Gov. Inslee created the Washington State Blue Ribbon Commission on the Delivery of Services to Children and Families. The group was tasked with recommending the best ways to restructure services and create a new state agency whose sole charge is to improve programs and outcomes for Washington's children, youth and families.

The Department of Social and Health Services has long been the state's primary vehicle for serving children, youth and families. But DSHS also plays a major role in a number of other areas, such as long-term care, the state psychiatric facilities, nutrition services and vocational rehabilitation, to name a few. Other agencies also play a role: the Department of Health, the Department of Early Learning, the Health Care Authority, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Commerce among them. Putting the broad range of children's services offered throughout state government in one agency will concentrate our attention and resources on one imperative: improving outcomes, promoting more accountability and heightening the prominence of children's issues.

Other jurisdictions have tried this approach and report positive results. New Jersey, Wisconsin and Tennessee, for example, have set up departments dedicated solely to serving children and families. These agencies have displayed more accountability and more easily made policy improvements while they spotlight the importance of these services to reach more families in need. Washington's

Legislature has proposed this change several times, beginning almost a decade ago. Renewed interest from lawmakers, in concert with the governor's own interest, prompted him to issue executive order 16-03 in February 2016 to set up the commission.

BUILDING A NEW DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Gov. Inslee proposes creating a new Department of Children, Youth and Families, following the recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Commission. His plan recognizes the importance of stronger linkages across programs that serve children, youth and families. It builds on the strengths and infrastructure of the Department of Early Learning to realign programs now offered in DSHS' Children's Administration, Juvenile Rehabilitation section and the Office of Juvenile Justice. Restructuring these services will improve the effectiveness of how and when they are delivered, with a much stronger focus on prevention.

This change can't happen overnight, however, and the governor wants to ensure no family experiences a disruption of services while these changes take shape. Beginning July 1, 2017, a new Office of Innovation and Alignment, initially located in the Governor's office and eventually subsumed by DCYF, will lead transition planning efforts for the new agency. It will focus on children, youth and families most at risk of abuse or neglect and those who face trauma often linked with low rates of kindergarten readiness, dropping out of school, substance abuse and homelessness.

During the transition, the Office of Innovation and Alignment will lead systems reform efforts. The office will create better connections among state agencies to improve the collective impact of services to children, youth and families, regardless of which agency offers the service. The office will use data to link any agency involved with a family with the right services at the right time, regardless of where that assistance may be. It will also be responsible for facilitating connections with other innovators — researchers, philanthropic groups, other innovative states — to bring the most promising practices to Washington.

On July 1, 2018: Services now offered through the Children's Administration will move to DCYF, including Child Protective Services, the Family Assessment Response program, child welfare case management, in-home support services, adoption support, out-of-home licensing functions and extended foster care for youth up to age 21.

DCYF will continue its strong focus on early learning programs, prevention and early

intervention services, as well as child care licensing. Creating DCYF is intended to magnify the importance of early learning, not diminish it.

In July 2019, DCYF will begin administering programs offered by the juvenile rehabilitation office and the Office of Juvenile Justice in DSHS. These include juvenile rehabilitation institutions, community facilities and parole.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Vision: All Washington's children grow up safe and healthy, thriving physically, emotionally and educationally, nurtured by family and community.

Mission: DCYF – in partnership with state and local agencies, tribes and communities – protects children and youth from harm and promotes healthy child development and child, youth and family well-being with effective, high-quality prevention, intervention and early education services delivered in an equitable manner.

Priority population: Children and youth, from birth to age 21, and their families who are at highest risk of adverse child and family experiences. These experiences often lead to poor academic, social and emotional outcomes. They also increase the likelihood for involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Desired outcomes: The new agency will develop measures to track outcomes in these areas:

- » Improving the cognitive, social, emotional and health outcomes for high-risk children, youth, parents and families
- » Preventing child abuse and neglect
- » Improving child and youth safety, permanency and well-being
- » Improving child development and school readiness through voluntary, high-quality early learning opportunities
- » Reducing criminal justice involvement and recidivism
- » Reducing need for mental health and substance abuse treatment

This realignment will offer a number of benefits:

- » Focus on prevention: Supporting and strengthening families before crises occur. Every contact with the agency an opportunity to offer prevention strategies to give families the tools and assistance needed to develop appropriate and positive skills.
- » Focus on promoting child, youth and family well-being: Offering services that focus holistically on children, including their emotional, social, cognitive and physical health.
- » Ensure services are science-based, outcome-driven, data-informed and collaborative: Results will be tracked to ensure they are achieving measurable improvements.
- » Improve connections among children, youth, families and communities: Focusing on intergenerational issues.
- » Address racial and ethnic proportionality and disparities: Ensuring equitable access, supports and outcomes.
- » Ensure programs and services are effective and accountable: Making sure programs and services are achieving results.

From Improving the Well-Being of Washington State's Children, Youth and Families, Washington State Blue Ribbon Commission on the Delivery of Services to Children and Families, Nov. 8, 2016