

Children and Family Services 2020 Annual Report

Safe children, stable families, here in our community.

Children and Family Services promotes the safety, stability, healthy development, and well-being of Hennepin County children and youth.

Our annual report features a broad set of data around important metrics, but of course these aren't just static numbers — this is about the real, living experience of children and families, right now. We know that overwhelmingly, the families we meet love their children and want to protect them. Yet in a society with systems that impact families of color differently, racial disparities in child welfare remain painfully clear. We track these outcomes in our system and share our progress over time because we know our community cares about this important work and its impact.

2020 taught us all: Where we've seen progress, we must aspire for more. When we see racial disparities, we must name them. We must ask ourselves hard questions and ask our community for partnership. Our children's future depends on the work we do today.

Unless otherwise indicated, this report contains 2020 year-end figures compared to the prior three years.

Child protection by the numbers

A steep drop in reports, and a slow climb back

With COVID-19 shutdowns of schools and other services and activities in spring 2020, mandated reporters had little to no direct access to children. That meant fewer reports, since typically most reports come from mandated reporters. This trend was seen across Minnesota and nationwide. Over the rest of the year, report numbers rose slowly, but not to pre-pandemic levels.

Fewer children exiting out-of-home placement

Court was also impacted by pandemic closures and suspension of hearings. Still, our court partners made efforts to keep things moving. Shifting to virtual hearings meant maintaining the integrity of the court process and preserving families' rights.

Note: To track complete intake volume, Hennepin County child protection report counts include all reports received. State reporting methodology excludes some of these to avoid duplication of reports across counties.

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total child protection reports (intakes)	20,470	18,005	17,361	13,850
% of total child protection reports coming from mandated reporters	83.0%	82.6%	81.9%	78.4%
Reports warranting investigation (total intakes screened in)	10,313	8,872	8,719	6,724
% reports warranting investigation (total % intakes screened in)	50.4%	49.3%	50.2%	48.5%
Intakes % screened in — Family Assessment track	43.7%	56.2%	60.9%	58.6%
Intakes % screened in — Family Investigation track	53.0%	40.7%	36.6%	39.1%
Intakes % screened in — Facility track	3.3%	3.1%	2.5%	2.3%
Out-of-home placement entries	1,487	1,208	1,078	815
Out-of-home placement exits	1,288	1,341	1,181	1,037
Out-of-home placement, unique child count	3,186	3,106	2,862	2,542

Child protection reports by allegation type

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total child protection reports	20,470	18,005	17,361	13,850
Neglect allegation	49.1%	46.7%	46.2%	48.0%
Physical abuse allegation	38.6%	34.8%	27.5%	26.3%
Sexual abuse allegation	14.1%	14.9%	15.1%	16.5%
Threatened injury allegation	4.0%	12.4%	22.6%	23.9%
Mental injury allegation	2.9%	3.6%	3.5%	4.7%

Out-of-home placement and preserving families

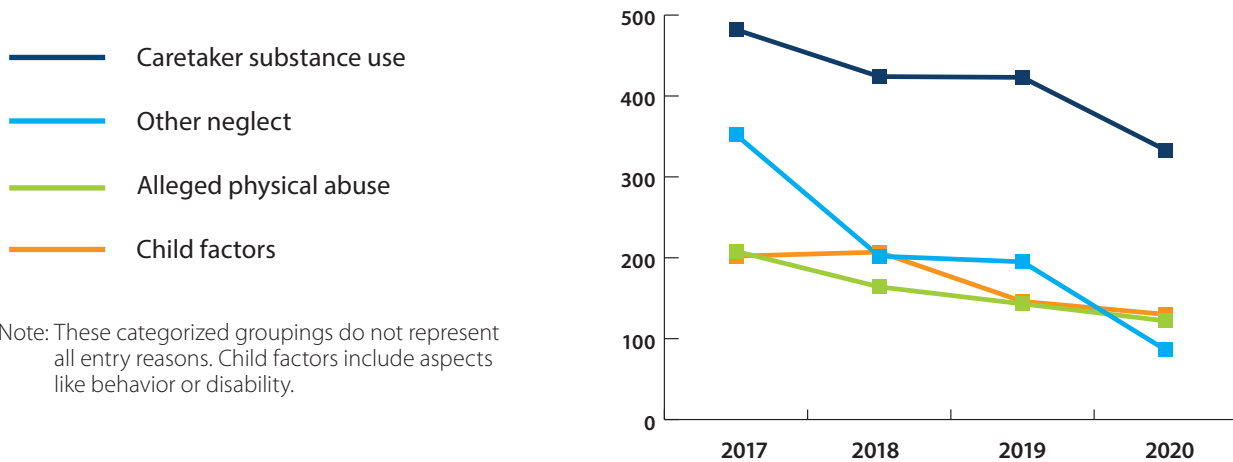
Substance-related issues continue to drive challenges for families

In our work, we see substance use show up in many ways, but it especially drives reports of alleged neglect. Overall, caretaker drug abuse is the primary reason given for out-of-home-placement, and those placements tend to affect the youngest children — from birth to age 5 — the most.

Reunifying and preserving families

Reunification is always our goal, and going home remains the most common way children leave their out-of-home placements. When that isn't possible, we seek other permanency resources within the family. Preservation of family relationships and racial and cultural identity supports children's well-being.

Reasons for entering out-of-home placement



Note: These categorized groupings do not represent all entry reasons. Child factors include aspects like behavior or disability.

Racial Disparities

Disparities magnified by overreporting communities of color and underreporting the White population. In 2020, American Indian children entered out-of-home placement due to caretaker substance use at a rate 72 times higher than White children. That disproportion is unsupported by national data on substance use, which shows similar rates by race.

Reasons for leaving out-of-home placement

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Reunification with parents/primary caretakers	63.9%	59.1%	53.6%	52.7%
Adoption finalized	13.9%	17.5%	19.0%	18.0%
Transfer of permanent legal and physical custody to a relative	5.8%	8.0%	9.1%	12.4%
Reached age of majority or emancipated	5.4%	6.0%	6.9%	8.2%
Living with other relatives	7.0%	5.7%	6.9%	5.0%

Note: These are the five most common exit reasons from 2017-2020.

Racial Disparities

Reunification rates vary by race. In 2020, 48.2% of American Indian children and 50.3% of Black or African American children were reunified, compared to 61.7% of White children.

Percentage of adoptions to relatives by race/ethnicity

Race	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Numbers less than 10 omitted to prevent identification of individual children. Totals include the omitted data.							
Asian/Pacific Islander								
Black or African American	29	38.7%	60	51.3%	67	69.8%	38	61.3%
White	18	60.0%	31	60.8%	38	70.4%	29	67.4%
Multiracial	26	54.2%	21	53.8%	26	56.5%	43	69.4%
Ethnicity	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hispanic	16	61.5%	19	70.4%	18	64.3%	14	63.6%
Not Hispanic/Unknown	66	45.2%	108	53.5%	130	66.7%	103	64.0%
Overall number (N) and percentage (%) of adoptions to relatives	82	47.7%	127	55.5%	148	66.4%	117	63.9%

Racial Disparities

More children of color adopted by relatives, more age out of foster care. From 2017-2020, the percentage of children of color adopted by relatives improved nearly 40%. Still, of the 86 children who aged out of foster care in 2020, 90.7% were children of color.

Racial disparities

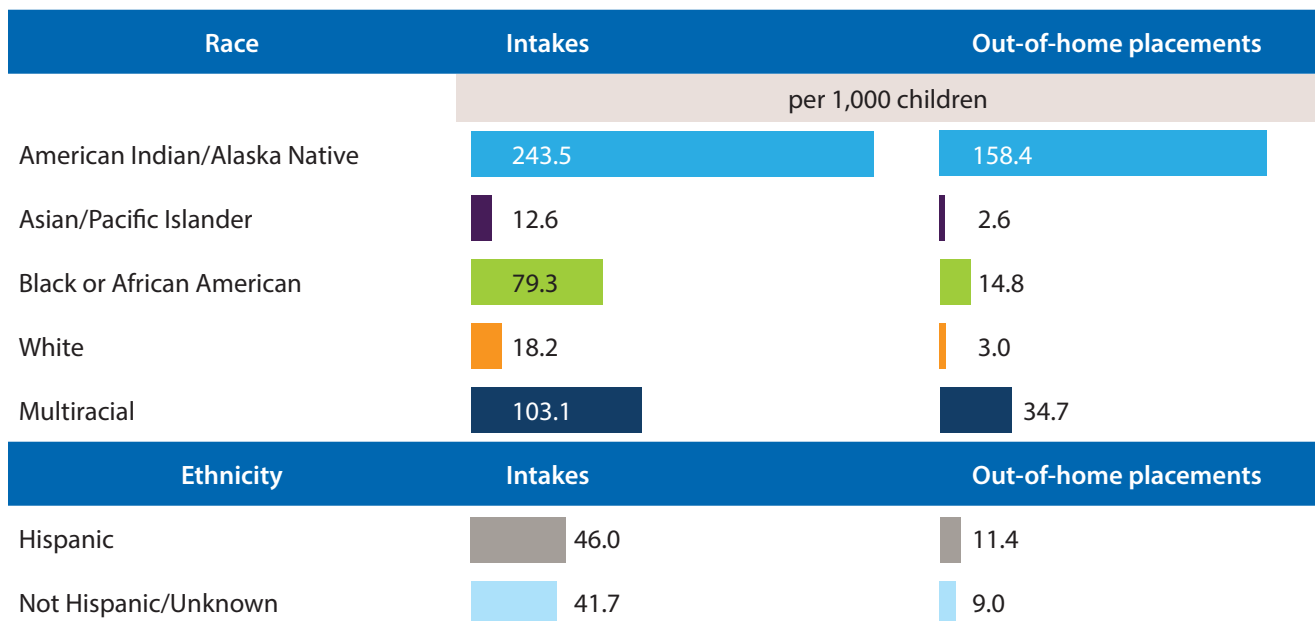
Race disparities persist, at both ends of the system

We continue to receive child protection reports that disproportionately represent children and families of color, and that disparity persists through to out-of-home placement.

Black and brown families clearly affected the most

A closer look at census-driven multiracial and Hispanic ethnicity categories reveals even further disparities. In the multiracial population represented in our system, nearly all include combinations of Black or African American or American Indian/Alaska Native identities. White children who are non-Hispanic make up an even smaller portion of our service population.

Rates per 1,000 children in Hennepin County by race/ethnicity, 2020



Races identified among multiracial children in table above

Race	Intake alleged victims	Out-of-home placements
Black or African American and White	42.1%	34.1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native and Black or African American	19.5%	25.7%
American Indian/Alaskan Native and White	18.3%	22.4%
American Indian/Alaskan Native and Black or African American and White	10.1%	12.6%
All other combinations of races	10.0%	5.2%

Caseloads

Lower caseloads

Healthy, manageable workloads help staff do their best work supporting and engaging with families. These point-in-time measures demonstrate progress on efforts to add staff and lower caseloads in recent years, but our 2020 numbers also reflect the reduced volume during the pandemic. We have more work ahead to keep caseloads where we want them to be.

Caseloads per worker

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ongoing child protection case management	15	13	13	10
ICWA ongoing child protection case management	16	11	12	9
Child protection assessment/investigations	7	9	12	7

Note: Caseloads in December of each year.

State and federal performance measures

Performance affected by the pandemic

Our work and our community were greatly affected by COVID-19. The peacetime emergency included several temporary changes to child protection requirements, intended to limit exposure in cases when child safety was not a concern. Tracking these measures over the months and years to come will help us see where we sustained improvements through the pandemic, and where we were set back.

Strategic work within standard measures

Within this standard set of state and federal performance measures, we have identified department-specific work and additional priorities that align with the county's strategic direction. For more on our approach, see page 8.

State measures	2017	2018	2019	2020	Performance standard
Overall timeliness	66.3%	83.3%	81.3%	77.4%	100%
24-hour response timeliness	82.8%	85.0%	80.9%	80.1%	100%
120-hour response: family investigation	65.8%	83.9%	84.5%	82.6%	100%
120-hour response: family assessment	58.8%	82.5%	81.0%	75.4%	100%
Caseworker visits	82.3%	90.2%	89.2%	89.5%	95% or greater
Relative care	59.2%	61.5%	64.7%	67.8%	35.7% or greater
Physical health	74.3%	75.3%	72.3%	64.3%	70% or greater
Maltreatment rereporting	25.6%	23.1%	20.1%	18.9%	15.2% or less
Aging out of foster care	62.4%	64.9%	75.6%	69.2%	70% or less
Federal measures	2017	2018	2019	2020	Performance standard
Maltreatment recurrence	13.7%	13.4%	7.0%	6.3%	9.1% or less
Maltreatment in foster care	19.7	10.5	11.6	7.0	8.5 victimizations or less per 100,000 days in care
Foster care reentry	15.5%	15.1%	17.3%	16.3%	8.3% or less
Permanency: 12 months	42.5%	42.0%	40.4%	40.5%	40.5% or greater
Permanency: 12-23 months	46.2%	54.0%	48.9%	48.8%	43.6% or greater
Permanency: 24 months	35.2%	35.0%	33.6%	36.7%	30.3% or greater
Placement stability	4.50	3.90	3.60	3.20	4.12 moves or less per 1,000 days in care

Note: Data as of June 22, 2021.

Hennepin County priorities

More family meetings, and increasing father involvement

We are committed to increasing our use of family meetings throughout the life of the case, increasing collaboration and centering family voices through this Minnesota Department of Human Services identified best practice. That includes fathers and paternal relatives. We are tracking our use of family meetings and father engagement with the goal of increasing both, because we know that including

family members in decision-making increases positive outcomes for children and families.*

* Casey Family Programs. "How can we better engage fathers in prevention?," 2019.

Family meetings

Family meetings and father involvement	2020
Total meetings that took place	306
Father/paternal relatives invited	72%
Father/paternal relatives attended	64%

Note: Data only available from 2020 going forward.

Relative care, in the eyes of the child

The relative care performance measure on page 7 is just one way to look at relative care at a system level. That percentage represents the percentage of days spent with relatives, out of all the days a child spends in foster care. But what about the experience of an individual child? With a child well-being focus, we can look at this another way: a point-in-time look at children in placement, and how many are in relative

placements at that moment. Supported by research, we believe that if children must be separated from their parent or caregiver, it is best when they can stay with people they already know.*

* Winokur M, Holtan A, Batchelder KE. "Kinship care for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children removed from the home for maltreatment," 2014.

Relative placements

Number (N) and percentage (%) of youth in relative placements	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
In relative placements	898	50.0%	995	52.4%	939	56.4%	949	58.0%

Note: Youth in relative placements on June 1.

Hennepin County priorities continued

Multifaceted focus on permanency — with urgency

A safe, permanent home is essential for children’s well-being.* When we slice our permanency data by age, length of stay, or other criteria, the racial disparities are staggering. This year, we also started identifying and tracking barriers to permanency for children legally free for adoption, meaning there was termination of parental rights. Hennepin County isn’t the only place that faces these challenges, but we simply must do better. These are our kids. With holistic, multidisciplinary efforts to address permanency underway, we will be watching these numbers in the years to come.

* The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center. “The Importance of Permanency,” 2016.

Racial Disparities

In 2020, more than 90% of children legally free for adoption were children of color.

Barriers to permanency

More than half of children legally free for adoption experience a mental health-related barrier to permanency.

For children legally free for adoption for more than four years, **more than 85%** experience such a barrier.



Hennepin County

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