

# Child Welfare Outcomes 2010–2014: Report to Congress

## Executive Summary



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*Child Welfare Outcomes 2010–2014* includes:

- ❖ **State data pages with:**
  - **Contextual data**
  - **Performance on original outcome measures**
  - **Performance on the CFSR composite measures**
  - **A state comment (if provided)**
- ❖ **A discussion of data issues and key findings of the data analyses across states**

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report is created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to meet requirements of Section 203(a) of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA).<sup>1</sup> ASFA created Section 479A of the Social Security Act (the Act) to require HHS to issue an annual report that assesses state performance in operating child protection and child welfare programs under Titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act.<sup>2</sup> *Child Welfare Outcomes 1998* was the first report created in the Child Welfare Outcomes series of reports. The present report, *Child Welfare Outcomes 2010–2014*, is the 15th report since the series' inception.

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report provides information on national performance as well as the performance of individual states in seven outcome categories.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the first report, HHS identified these outcomes in close consultation with state and local child welfare agency administrators, child advocacy organizations, child welfare researchers, state legislators, and other experts in the child welfare field. The outcomes reflect a consensus of these groups regarding important performance objectives for child welfare practice. The seven national outcomes established by HHS through this consultation process are:

**SAFETY**  
**PERMANENCY**  
**WELL-BEING**



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau



**Outcome 1:** Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect

**Outcome 2:** Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care

**Outcome 3:** Increase permanency for children in foster care

**Outcome 4:** Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry

**Outcome 5:** Reduce time in foster care to adoption

**Outcome 6:** Increase placement stability

**Outcome 7:** Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions

**Additional demographic data about child victims, including age, race, and ethnicity can be found on the Child Welfare Outcomes data site at <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/>.**

### Foster care information overview

- Nationally, there were approximately 415,000 children in foster care on the last day of 2014. During that year, an estimated 260,000 children entered foster care, and 238,000 children exited foster care. Among the states, the foster care entry rate ranged from 1.5 children per 1,000 to 9.8 children per 1,000 in a state’s population.<sup>9</sup>
  - Between 2005 and 2014, the number of children in care on the last day of the FY decreased by 18.8 percent, from 511,000 to 415,000.<sup>10</sup> The number of children in foster care hovered around 400,000 from 2010 through 2013 but increased to 415,000 in 2014.

- Nationally, 238,000 children exited foster care in 2014. Of these children, 204,000 (86 percent) were discharged to a permanent home (i.e., were discharged to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship).

Additional child welfare-related context data is presented on the Child Welfare Outcomes data site, available at <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/>.

### STATE PERFORMANCE ON OUTCOME MEASURES

This report includes a synopsis of key findings on the 12 measures established to assess performance on the seven national outcomes identified above, displayed in table 1. These measures are described in detail in appendix B.

All national medians for outcome measures referenced in this executive summary include only those states for which adequate data are available for 2010 through 2014. Tables of these medians can be found at the end of this executive summary.<sup>11</sup>

Change in state performance over time is assessed by calculating a percent change in performance on the measures.<sup>12</sup> Consistent

In addition to reporting on state performance in these outcome categories, this report also includes findings of analyses conducted across states and across time. Data for most of the measures in this report come from two national child welfare-related data systems—the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

### CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report presents data on child welfare-related contextual factors relevant to understanding and interpreting state performance on the outcome measures. Below is a summary of fiscal year (FY) 2014 data for these contextual factors.<sup>4</sup>

#### Characteristics of child victims<sup>5</sup>

- During 2014, approximately 702,000 children were confirmed to be victims of maltreatment.<sup>6</sup>

The overall national child victim rate was 9.4 child victims per 1,000 children in the population.<sup>7</sup> State child victim rates varied dramatically, ranging from 1.2 child victims per 1,000 children to 22.9 child victims per 1,000 children.<sup>8</sup>

**Longer range AFCARS data show that, between FY 2005 and 2014, the number of children in care on the last day of the FY decreased by 18.8 percent, from 511,000 to 415,000.**

with HHS's historical approach to the analyses in these reports, a percent change of 5.0 or greater in either direction (i.e., positive or negative) is used as a general indicator that meaningful change in performance on the outcome measures occurred. Therefore, for purposes of the analyses presented in this report, if the percent change in performance from 2010 to 2014 was less than 5.0 in either direction, the determination is that there was "no change" in performance.

**There is a moderate positive correlation between higher rates of child victims of neglect and higher rates of maltreatment recurrence.**

### ***Outcome 1: Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect***

- In 2014, state performance varied considerably with regard to the percentage of child victims experiencing a recurrence of child maltreatment within a 6-month period (measure 1.1; range = 0.7 to 13.9 percent; median = 4.9 percent).
- States with higher victim rates tended to have higher maltreatment recurrence rates within a 6-month period (Pearson's  $r=.66$ ).<sup>13</sup> In addition, consistent with previous reports, states with a relatively high percentage of children who were victims of neglect (as opposed to other forms of maltreatment) also had some tendency to have a relatively high percentage of maltreatment recurrence within a 6-month period (Pearson's  $r=.45$ ).
- Performance with regard to recurrence of child maltreatment (measure 1.1) showed little change between 2010 and 2014. The median went from 5.0 percent in 2010 to 4.9 percent in 2014, a 2.7 percent decrease (note that a lower percentage is desirable for this measure). Twenty-two states improved their performance on this measure, compared with the 21 states that showed a decline.

### ***Outcome 2: Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care***

- During 2014, state performance regarding the maltreatment of children while in foster care (measure 2.1) ranged from 0.00 to 1.42 percent, with a median of 0.27 percent.
- Between 2010 and 2014, national performance with regard to the maltreatment of children in

foster care (measure 2.1) generally improved. Twenty-two states improved in performance between 2010 and 2014, while 16 declined in performance. The national median exhibited a decline from .32 in 2010 to .25 in 2014, an overall decline of 21.4 percent (note that a lower percentage is desirable for this measure).

### ***Outcome 3: Increase permanency for children in foster care***

- In 2014, states were fairly successful in achieving a permanent home for all children exiting foster care (measure 3.1, median = 89.0 percent). However, states were less successful in achieving permanent homes for children exiting foster care who had a diagnosed disability (measure 3.2, median = 78.4 percent) and even less successful in finding permanent homes for children exiting foster care who entered care when they were older than age 12 (measure 3.3, median = 63.9 percent).
- In about half of states, 20 percent or more of the children emancipated from foster care were age 12 or younger when they entered foster care (measure 3.4).

### ***Outcome 4: Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing reentry***

- The 2014 data suggest that, in many states, a majority of children discharged to reunification were reunified in a timely manner. Across states, the median percentage of reunifications occurring in less than 12 months was 69.2 percent (measure 4.1).
- Between 2010 and 2014, more states declined in performance (14 states) than improved (9 states) related to achieving timely reunifications.
- In 2014, 7.5 percent of children entering foster care were reentering care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode.

### ***Outcome 5: Reduce time in foster care to adoption***

- In 2014, all but a few states struggled to achieve timely adoptions within 12 months of entering

care. Across states, the median percentage of adoptions occurring within 12 months of entering care was 4.1 percent. Moreover, 61 percent of states demonstrated a decline in performance between 2010 and 2014, while only 36 percent of states improved in achieving timely adoptions within 12 months.

- The median percentage of adoptions occurring at least 12 but less than 24 months from entering care is much higher, at 30.3 percent. Sixty percent of states (27 states) demonstrated improved performance in this indicator from 2010 to 2014.

### ***Outcome 6: Increase placement stability***

- In this report, adequate placement stability is defined as limiting the number of placement settings for a child to no more than two for a single foster care episode. Among children with less than 12 months of time spent in foster care, the majority remained in stable placements during that time (median = 85.6 percent in 2014).
- The proportions of children experiencing more than two placement settings increased with more time spent in foster care. The median percentage of children experiencing two or fewer placement settings across states was 66.1 percent for children who had been in foster care between 12 to 24 months, and 35.7 percent for children who had been in foster care for 24 months or longer.
- For children in care between 12 and 24 months, the percentage of children experiencing two or fewer placement settings (measure 6.1b) increased from 61.4 percent in 2010 to 66.0 percent in 2014 (a 7.5 percent increase). For this measure, 20 states improved in performance while only 4 declined.
- There was an even greater improvement in performance on measure 6.1c, the percentage of children in care for 24 months or longer who experienced two or fewer placement settings. For this measure, the median increased from 32.0 percent in 2010 to 35.3 percent in 2014, a 10.3 percent increase. Furthermore, 33 states demonstrated improvement on this measure, while only 4 declined in performance.

### ***Outcome 7: Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions***

- Of children entering foster care at under 12 years, 4.0 percent or less were placed in group homes or institutions in about half the states, in 2014 (measure 7.1). Data also indicate that there were only two states where the percentage of young children placed in group homes or institutions was greater than 10 percent.<sup>14</sup>
- Previous reports have shown significant improvements over time on measure 7.1, and this trend continued between 2010 and 2014 when the median decreased from 4.5 to 3.9 percent, a 12.7 percent decrease (note that a lower percentage is more desirable for this measure). During the 5-year span, 25 states showed improved performance on this measure, and 15 declined in performance.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION**

In reviewing the key findings in all seven outcome areas, it is clear that there are both areas of strength and areas in need of improvement for children who come into contact with state child welfare systems. All of these areas deserve additional investigation to move the child welfare field forward. Some areas needing additional attention are listed below. Note that the AFCARS data are too limited to provide insight into many of these issues, but they are presented here for the purpose of encouraging the field to further review and address the issues. These areas include the following:

- States continue to experience challenges finding permanent homes for children with disabilities and for children who entered foster care when they were older than age 12. Agencies should review their data and current practices to consider what additional barriers may be preventing these older youth and children with disabilities from being placed into permanent homes.
- Between 2010 and 2014, there was a decline in performance on the measure related to timeliness of reunification without increasing reentry. It is important to note that there may

be a variety of factors that contribute to lower performance on this measure, and these factors may vary considerably between states. However, for those states that struggle in this area, a careful review of specific barriers would be beneficial.

- Overall, national performance on timeliness of adoptions has remained relatively stable since 2010, and it continues to be a challenge for most states. States should continue to monitor performance on measures related to the timeliness of adoption and work to improve upon their efforts to ensure that children are placed quickly in secure, caring, and safe environments.

- The percentage of young children placed in group homes or institutions has continued to decline, but there are a few states that still struggle in this area. It would be useful to determine what specific strategies may have contributed to these improvements and share those practices with states looking for additional assistance.

Data and analysis presented throughout the full Child Welfare Outcomes Report offer additional details regarding overall national performance. New outcome-based visuals in the report display both single-year performance and performance over time from 2010 through 2014.

<sup>1</sup> See appendix A for the current specifications of Section 479A of the Social Security Act, as created by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and amended by P.L. 112-34 and P.L. 113-183. The Children’s Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families, HHS, is responsible for this report.

<sup>2</sup> The Title IV-E agency is the state agency authorized to use federal Title IV-E funds to support foster care, adoption assistance, and kinship guardianship assistance. Title IV-E has been amended on several occasions to provide federal funding to support foster care, adoption, and kinship guardian assistance. Title IV-B provides preventative and protective services for children. For a more detailed understanding of the history and changes over time, please see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/title-iv-e-legislation-policy>.

<sup>3</sup> In this report, the designation of “state” includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Therefore, the report provides information on a total of 52 states, depending on the number of states that submitted adequate data for a particular measure.

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the data used in this report are for federal fiscal year 2014 (October 1, 2013–September 30, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> This report uses a unique count for child victims, which tallies a child only once regardless of the number of times he or she was found to be a victim during the reporting year.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this report, a victim is a child for whom the state determined at least one maltreatment incident was substantiated or indicated, and a disposition of substantiated, indicated, or “alternative response victim” was assigned for a child in a specific report. This includes a child who died, and the death was confirmed to be the result of child abuse and neglect. A child may be a victim in one report and a nonvictim in another report. It is important to note that the Child Welfare Outcomes Report uses the total reported number of child victims as opposed to a national estimate of child victims, which often is reported in the Child Maltreatment Report. The total number of victims reported in this report is rounded to the nearest 1,000.

<sup>7</sup> The national child victim rate is calculated by dividing the total number of child victims (702,208) by the child population for all states that submitted NCANDS data (74,356,370) and multiplying by 1,000. This calculation includes children under the age of 18.

<sup>8</sup> A state’s rate of child victims is defined as the number of child victims reported to NCANDS per 1,000 children in the state’s population.

<sup>9</sup> Rate of entry is calculated by dividing the total number of children entering foster care in a state by the total child population in that state and multiplying by 1,000 [(N entering FC/child population) x 1,000].

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see *Trends in Foster Care and Adoption—FY 2005–FY 2014* on the Children’s Bureau website at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/trends-in-foster-care-and-adoption>. The data used in *Trends in Foster Care and Adoption—FY 2005–FY 2014* were updated as of July 2015.

<sup>11</sup> In the Child Welfare Outcomes Report, two separate national medians are computed for each measure for 2014. In the 2014 Range of State Performance tables, national medians are calculated using data from all states that had adequate data available for 2014 only. However, when looking at performance over time, a separate national median is calculated for 2014 that includes only data from the states that had adequate data available for all the relevant fiscal years (2010 through 2014). This is done to provide a more accurate calculation of change over time. Therefore, the number of states (N) included in each of these calculations may vary, and these two medians may vary slightly.

<sup>12</sup> Percent change is calculated by subtracting “old” data from “new” data, dividing that result by old data, and multiplying it by 100. For example, maltreatment recurrence was 5.0 percent in 2010 and 4.9 percent in 2014, so the formula is [(4.9–5.0)/5.0]x100=2.0 percent decrease.

<sup>13</sup> The strength of relationships in the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports is assessed using correlation coefficients, specifically Pearson’s *r*, which can range in value from –1 to +1.

<sup>14</sup> The two States were Arkansas and South Carolina.

**Table 1. Original Outcome Measures and Median State Performance, 2010–2014<sup>15</sup>**

Outcome Measures <sup>16</sup>	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Measure 1.1: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and/or neglect during the first 6 months of the year, what percentage had another substantiated or indicated report within a 6-month period? (N=51 states)*	5.0%	5.2%	5.1%	5.4%	4.9%
Measure 2.1: Of all children who were in foster care during the year, what percentage were the subject of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff member? (N=45 states)*	.32%	.28%	.27%	.34%	.25%
Measure 3.1: Of all children who exited foster care during the year, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=45 states)	86.8%	87.3%	87.7%	89.6%	89.2%
Measure 3.2: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were identified as having a diagnosed disability, what percentage left to either reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=41 states)	76.1%	77.7%	78.7%	79.3%	78.9%
Measure 3.3: Of all children who exited foster care during the year and were older than age 12 at the time of their most recent entry into care, what percentage left either to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship (i.e., were discharged to a permanent home)? (N=45 states)	65.2%	65.5%	64.8%	66.8%	63.9%
Measure 3.4: Of all children exiting foster care in the year to emancipation, what percentage were age 12 or younger at the time of entry into care? (N=45 states)*	23.8%	25.1%	23.3%	21.3%	20.0%
Measure 4.1: Of all children reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care during the year, what percentage were reunified in less than 12 months from the time of entry into foster care? (N=45 states)	68.3%	68.3%	65.5%	65.7%	66.1%
Measure 4.2: Of all children who entered foster care during the year, what percentage reentered care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode? (N=45 states)	8.1%	7.8%	7.8%	7.8%	7.0%
Measure 5.1a: Of all children discharged from care during the year to a finalized adoption, what percentage were discharged in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (N=45 states)	4.1%	3.7%	4.5%	3.9%	4.1%
Measure 5.1b: Percentage of children discharged to adoption at least 12 but less than 24 months from the date of entry into foster care (N=45 states)	28.2%	28.1%	29.2%	31.7%	30.2%
Measure 6.1a: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in care for less than 12 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=45 states)	85.3%	85.9%	85.2%	86.0%	85.4%
Measure 6.1b: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=45 states)	61.4%	62.9%	64.2%	64.8%	66.0%
Measure 6.1c: Of all children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 24 months, what percentage had no more than two placement settings? (N=45 states)	32.0%	32.8%	35.2%	34.2%	35.3%
Measure 7.1: Of all children who entered foster care during the year and were age 12 or younger at the time of their most recent placement, what percentage were placed in a group home or institution? (N=45 states)*	4.5%	4.1%	4.5%	4.0%	3.9%

\* For these measures, a lower number indicates better performance.

<sup>15</sup> The 2014 data included on this table may be different from the data included in the text of the chapter due to differences in the number of states included in the single year and multi-year analyses.

<sup>16</sup> Data for this table include all states for which adequate data are available.

## CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES REPORT DATA SITE

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report data site provides users with the ability to view and manipulate the state data in the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports and allows for significantly faster release of these data than is possible via the publication of the full report. The site features Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data. The data were reviewed and approved by the states for inclusion in the report. Data updates to the site occur annually.

In 2016, the Child Welfare Outcomes Report data site underwent a series of updates to improve user experience on the site and ease of searching and displaying data.

### *Take advantage of the data site's increased capabilities*

With the data site, users have the ability to:

- View one state's data or simultaneously compare data for multiple states, including by ACF region.
- Compare data for a single state across years or view data for one or multiple states from a single year.
- View state context, demographic, and outcome data in tables grouped by type of data.
- View additional context and demographic data for states not included in the report, including two distinct breakdowns of race and ethnicity data.
- View static state data pages, including state comments previously included in the full reports.

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report data site can be accessed at <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/>.

### *Use the search to find data of interest*

Users can dynamically search for data of interest by typing keywords into the search function to view the pages where the specific data are located.

### *Choose from a variety of data output formats for presenting your data*

Users may view the selected data as a table or as a graph. Users can also export the data into a variety of formats, including copying or printing the data directly from the site, exporting it to Excel or PDF, or saving data as a CSV file.

For questions or more information about the Child Welfare Outcomes Report data site, please contact the Children's Bureau at [CBDataTeam@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:CBDataTeam@acf.hhs.gov).

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### VISIT THE CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES DATA SITE

The Child Welfare Outcomes Report data site provides users with the latest data from the state data pages of the Child Welfare Outcomes Reports. Data for 2010 through 2014 are currently available. Features of the site include:

- The latest AFCARS and NCANDS data
- A custom report builder
- Quick Links to important indicators
- Flexible data output formats

Visit the data website: <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/>

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