



**NATIONAL
CHILD SUPPORT
STRATEGIC PLAN
for 2015-2019**

COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE



For over 40 years, the national child support program has shown a deep commitment to program innovation, continuous improvement, and performance measurement. Every five years, we engage in a consensus-building process to inform the

development of a new national strategic plan. The National Child Support Strategic Plan for 2015-2019 supports the strategic goals of the Department of Health and Human Services and Administration for Children and Families to promote economic, health, and social well-being for individuals, families, and communities, promote the healthy development and safety of children, and support underserved and underrepresented populations. The national plan reflects the collaborative efforts, major accomplishments, and diverse perspectives of the state, tribal, and county child support programs that, along with the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, help make up the national program.

The national plan highlights the importance of child support income to child well-being. The plan lays out the program's principles and goals for the next five years and identifies many strategies that are being put into practice around the country to meet those goals. State and tribal use of the national plan is voluntary. Yet many jurisdictions start with the national plan to build their own plan.

The child support program operates in a complex environment and is widely recognized as an efficiently managed government program. The national plan highlights the relationship among program resources, technology, and performance. We depend on technology to carry out our mission,

whether we use it to identify a parent's available income sources, determine a parent's ability to pay, match the right tool to the right case, take automated enforcement actions, provide mobile-friendly customer service, or measure performance. However, the plan also acknowledges the sobering fact that most state computer systems are obsolete, and a few are at risk of failure. At the same time, the need for technology in tribal programs is growing. The national plan identifies strategies to address aging systems, tribal technology, and limited resources.

The national plan also recognizes that we are in the people business. Modern families, the low-wage labor market, and customer expectations have changed in the last 40 years. The plan focuses on a range of evidence-based and locally-tested strategies to collect more support payments by strengthening both the ability and willingness to pay support. The fact is that family self-sufficiency depends on regular payment of child support, and regular payment depends on a steady job. Further, children need more than money from their parents—they need parents who love them and cooperate with each other to care for them. The national plan identifies strategies used by states, tribes and counties to enforce and facilitate payment without undermining family relationships so that more families can do better economically and more children can thrive.

Many people contributed to this national plan. Thank you for your commitment and passion for doing what is right for families.

Sincerely,

Vicki Turetsky
Commissioner
Office of Child Support Enforcement

MISSION

The purpose and mission of the national child support program derive from title IV-D of the Social Security Act:

To encourage responsible parenting, family self-sufficiency and child well-being, the national child support program provides assistance in locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing, modifying, and enforcing support obligations, and obtaining child support for children.

VISION

Children can count on their parents for the financial and emotional support they need to be healthy and successful.

PRINCIPLES

1

FAMILIES FIRST

A family-centered child support program partners with parents to promote consistent support payments.

2

CASE-SPECIFIC TOOLS

An effective child support program uses the right tools to meet the needs of the specific case.

3

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

An efficient child support program incorporates modern technology.

4

RESOURCEFUL LEADERSHIP

An enterprising child support program leverages sufficient resources to meet its mission.

5

EVIDENCE-BASED

A high-performing child support program is evidence-based.

PRINCIPLES

GOALS

FAMILIES FIRST

A family-centered child support program partners with parents to promote consistent support payments.

1. Pay collected child support to the family.
2. Partner with parents to help children.
3. Set income-based orders that reflect the parent's ability to pay.
4. Address barriers to payment.
5. Address the changing needs of modern families.

CASE-SPECIFIC TOOLS

An effective child support program uses the right tools to meet the needs of the specific case.

1. Enforce and facilitate regular payment.
2. Intervene early to build compliance and payment consistency.
3. Develop tools that distinguish between parents who are unable and unwilling to pay.
4. Improve intergovernmental case processing.
5. Increase health care coverage for children and their parents.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

An efficient child support program incorporates modern technology.

1. Replace obsolete state technology.
2. Increase technology in tribal programs.
3. Enhance online customer service.
4. Increase child support system interoperability.
5. Expand federal technology support.

RESOURCEFUL LEADERSHIP

An enterprising child support program leverages sufficient resources to meet its mission.

1. Educate the public about the child support program.
2. Incorporate sound management practices.
3. Reallocate existing resources to support current program needs.
4. Expand program capacity through strategic partnerships.
5. Increase community and advocacy support for the program.

EVIDENCE-BASED

A high-performing child support program is evidence-based.

1. Examine existing policies and practices to determine whether they result in consistent payments for families.
2. Identify and test promising approaches to build the evidence base.
3. Share findings from research with the child support community, and incorporate findings into policy and practice.
4. Dedicate needed resources for research.
5. Continuously review program performance and how it is measured.

FAMILIES FIRST

A family-centered child support program partners with parents to promote consistent support payments.

Goal

Strategies

Pay collected child support to the family.

- Encourage state adoption of family distribution and pass-through options authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.
- Conduct training to increase awareness of federal distribution options.
- Accompany policy changes with parent and community outreach so parents know that more of their child support payments are going to their children.
- Ensure accurate distribution, including prompt payment to families when TANF or foster care ends.

Partner with parents to help children.

- Emphasize a culture of service within the child support program, and provide customer service training for child support staff.
- Ensure procedural fairness in all child support processes.
- Respect cultural and family differences, and effectively communicate with all parents.
- Revise notices and other informational materials for parents using behavioral economics research and plain language principles.
- Use evidence-based family-centered innovations, such as early intervention, which start obligors on the right track to avoid delinquency.
- Use evidence-based family-centered innovations, such as referrals to employment programs and debt compromise programs, which allow parents with child support debt to get back on track.
- Develop targeted initiatives to reach out to specific groups within the community (e.g., domestic abuse survivors, veterans, teens, homeless parents, criminal justice-involved parents, ethnic communities).

Goal

Strategies

Set income-based orders that reflect the parent's ability to pay.

- Identify best practices related to child support guidelines and order establishment.
- Base support orders on income and other evidence of ability to pay, and limit the routine use of imputed income and presumed orders.
- Increase case investigation efforts to identify income sources and assess the parent's ability to pay.
- Develop caseworker protocols for developing a factual basis for child support order amounts.
- Use quarterly wage information and any other data that is accessible to the caseworker to inform the case investigation, such as Social Security earnings records, incarceration and arrest records, and public benefit records.
- Conduct authorized data matches with other programs, such as state corrections agencies, using the data to help set appropriate evidence-based orders.
- When income information for the parent who owes support is limited, use zip code level data based on the parent's address and the parent's broad occupational category to better understand the local labor market for this parent.
- Limit interest, fees, and other add-on costs to support orders that are charged to parents with limited means.
- Set nominal or noncash accountability obligations for very young parents; for example, an obligation to stay in school and help provide child care.
- Simplify and expedite the review and adjustment process.
- Use technology to detect changes in a parent's circumstances that trigger an order review, such as the NDNH quarterly wage indicator that alerts staff when income increases or decreases from the last quarter, an application for unemployment insurance, or entry into prison.
- Coordinate order establishment and review across multiple cases involving the same parent.

Goal

Strategies

Address barriers to payment.

- Address unemployment and limited job skills through work-oriented programs in partnership with TANF, SNAP, workforce agencies, community colleges, and community-based programs.
- Develop partnerships with agencies and programs that address other barriers to payment, such as providing substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing assistance, or financial counseling, and make referrals to these agencies as simple and straightforward as possible.
- Address child support policies and practices that create work disincentives.
- Encourage and support work through collaborations to allow parents to benefit from Earned Income Tax Credit programs.
- Expand partnerships with courts, community corrections agencies, and reentry programs to help formerly incarcerated parents obtain and maintain employment, reconnect with their children, pay child support, and avoid recidivism.
- Treat incarceration as involuntary unemployment and a substantial change in circumstance warranting a review of the support order.
- Address barriers to positive parent involvement through coordination with parenting time, co-parenting education, responsible fatherhood, and domestic violence programs.
- Address child support policies and practices that exacerbate conflict between the parents, and support case conferencing, alternative dispute resolution, administrative hearings, and problem-solving courts.
- Expand collaborations with courts and legal services programs to assist *pro se* child support litigants.
- Use specialized staff to serve parents with multiple barriers to payment.

Address the changing needs of modern families.

- Treat all families equally and with respect.
- Increase no-cost access to genetic testing and identify other best practices related to genetic testing policies and procedures.
- Review voluntary paternity acknowledgement procedures to improve accuracy, accessibility, informed consent, and safety.
- Support healthy co-parenting in the best interest of children.
- Increase coordination between child support and parenting time procedures.
- Ensure computer system capacity to accommodate complex family structures.

CASE-SPECIFIC TOOLS

An effective child support program uses the right tools to meet the needs of the specific case.

Goal	Strategies
Enforce and facilitate regular payment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate an expectation that both parents will support their children and that the child support agency will help them access employment services and manage their child support case. • Focus on stable employment and income withholding as the most effective tools for collecting regular child support. • Conduct employer outreach and update employer information. • Increase the use and efficacy of existing locate sources and data matches. • Identify new locate sources to identify self-employed and contingent workers. • Keep orders accurate through timely review and adjustment, and implement debt management programs to prevent and manage the accrual of unpaid child support.
Intervene early to build compliance and payment consistency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage parents early in the establishment process to allow the caseworker to explain the process, build relationships, obtain information about the parents' circumstances, make needed service referrals, and avoid default orders. • Contact both parents to obtain more information about the paying parent's financial circumstances, and implement such strategies as case conferencing and "appear and disclose" procedures to increase available information. • Monitor compliance, identify changes in payment patterns, and take prompt steps to avoid missed payments and debt build-up, such as contacting the parent to ask about missed payments and to identify payment barriers. • Follow the parent's employment to ensure that income withholding orders are quickly put in place. • Screen cases for ability to pay before scheduling contempt hearings.

CASE-SPECIFIC TOOLS

Goal

Develop tools that distinguish between parents who are unable and unwilling to pay.

Strategies

- Use data analytics to identify parents at risk of nonpayment, distinguishing between parents who have the ability to pay but refuse to do so and parents who are financially struggling.
- Segment the caseload to identify categories of cases based on the strategies needed to work each case.
- Complement streamlined automated processes with more intensive investigation efforts in difficult-to-collect cases.
- Increase web-based technology to allow paying parents to handle business without coming into the office, while increasing hands-on case management for parents with barriers to payment.
- Develop tools to help caseworkers use case-specific strategies to increase compliance and consistent payments.
- Match enforcement tool to the case, and screen cases for appropriate use of contempt hearings, driver's license suspension, and other enforcement tools.

CASE-SPECIFIC TOOLS

Goal	Strategies
<p>Improve intergovernmental case processing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop effective and streamlined protocols and forms for intergovernmental case processing. • Increase the use of Query Interstate Cases for Kids and Electronic Document Exchange and other federal Child Support Portal applications to facilitate interstate communication. • Implement consistent interstate income withholding and payment processing policies and procedures. • Work with state child support and workforce agencies to develop a standard agreement or template to facilitate the acceptance of direct IWOs from other states for unemployment benefits. • Assess the benefits of establishing specialized staff to manage intergovernmental cases. • Deliver comprehensive training on UIFSA 2008 for child support agencies, private attorneys, and courts. • Establish lines of communication and cross-train between state and tribal staff. • Implement effective tribal-state case transfer policies and practices. • Institutionalize tribal-state partnerships through protocols, procedures, and technology. • Support the U.S. ratification of the 2007 Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance. • Strengthen the capacity of the U.S. Central Authority and states to handle expanded international case processing, including use of technology. • Develop technical assistance and training materials related to international case processing. • Develop protocols and tools to facilitate communication, currency exchange, and electronic payments.
<p>Increase health care coverage for children and their parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address parental responsibility for providing adequate health care coverage for children in the support order, including employer-sponsored, private, and public health care coverage. • Align medical support and health care roles and procedures. • Improve coordination between federal and state child support agencies and health care agencies to develop appropriate referral procedures. • Implement effective data-sharing protocols within existing statutory authority. • Provide parents and children with information sources about how to enroll for health care coverage.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

An efficient child support program incorporates modern technology.

Goal

Strategies

Replace obsolete state technology.

- Replicate promising state technology procurement practices and lessons learned regarding systems replacement and modernization projects.
- Encourage the formation of multiple state purchasing consortia and development of joint feasibility studies.
- Design modular systems that support modern case processing, including federal portal applications, simplified distribution, and automated review and modification.
- Make enhancements in existing state systems to meet modern business needs.
- Maintain a high priority on data security, increasing awareness and training.
- Encourage states to expand their use of data analytics and predictive modeling to accurately assess ability and willingness to pay.
- Develop systems that help caseworkers select the right tool for each case, and create flexible fields for indicators (e.g., veterans, participants in employment programs, SSI recipients) that will allow staff to segment out important groups of cases.
- Monitor operational integrity, federal compliance, and maintenance costs of old systems.
- Update the OCSE state certification guide, and ensure that existing state systems comply with certification requirements.
- Strengthen child support partnerships with state technology agencies.
- Review amortization policies related to the state share of systems acquisition expenditures and other large capital costs.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Goal

Strategies

Increase technology in tribal programs.

- Implement tribal access to the FPLS through the Child Support Portal.
- Maintain a high priority on data security, increasing awareness and training.
- Make appropriate state and federal system tools available to tribes.
- Modernize and modularize the Model Tribal System.
- Discuss and evaluate tribal technology needs and options.
- Increase tribal use of the Intergovernmental Reference Guide (IRG) and participation in the IRG workgroup.
- Include tribal affiliation case data in state systems.
- Provide capability for tribes to enter their cases on the Federal Case Registry.

Enhance online customer service.

- Continue to upgrade state interactive websites that allow customers to access and submit case-specific information through the internet, moving toward full-service customer portals.
- Create and expand the program's technical capability to communicate with customers through their mobile devices.
- Create and maintain communication modes that support appropriate language access.
- Make effective and appropriate use of social media to increase family awareness and engagement.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Goal	Strategies
<p>Increase child support system interoperability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop shared modules, and promote reuse of technology with state child support systems in other states and with other programs within the state. • Expand the use of NIEM to develop data standards to support data exchanges across programs and agencies. • Pursue opportunities to increase the use of OCSE’s data standards registry, as well as the National Human Services Interoperability Architecture, to bring greater standardization to state child support data systems. • Establish a repository for states and tribes to store and acquire updated NIEM-compliant interfaces. • Maximize authorized data sharing with other programs (TANF, SNAP, child welfare, Medicaid, CHIP, Unemployment Insurance), and identify additional data sources that could increase child support program effectiveness.
<p>Expand federal technology support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase federal training and technical assistance offered to states as they go through the process of evaluating, enhancing, or replacing their systems. • Expand the use of the Child Support Portal as a solution to help address state and tribal resource and technology issues. • Expand federal technology support, including the development of modular components available to states and tribes. • Develop alternatives for a national employer database. • Provide data cleanup and validation services. • Partner with the Department of Treasury Bureau of the Fiscal Service and the Internal Revenue Service to reduce erroneous tax offsets, coordinate business processes, and improve data sharing.

RESOURCEFUL LEADERSHIP

An enterprising child support program leverages sufficient resources to meet its mission.

Goal

Strategies

Educate the public about the child support program.

- Educate policymakers and communities about the critical role that child support plays in reducing poverty and costs in other government programs.
- Identify needed investments, including technology and staffing, to increase program effectiveness and efficiency and demonstrate return on investment.
- Show how the child support program can support the goals and strategies of emerging and major initiatives, such as prisoner reentry, veteran homelessness, economic stability, and procedural justice.
- Continue to educate other public agencies and nonprofit programs that serve child support families (e.g., child welfare, maternal and child health, adolescent health, home visiting, fatherhood, domestic violence, Medicaid, TANF, SNAP, WIC) about the benefits of partnering with the child support program.
- Provide child support program information to schools, youth engagement programs, and parenting prevention programs.

Incorporate sound management practices.

- Align business processes to increase performance and support families.
- Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of specific case management practices and collection tools to ensure efficient investment of resources.
- Consider matching employee skills with caseload and case-specific needs, for example, by establishing specialized units and offices.
- Adapt the workplace to accommodate multiple generations of workers, incorporating telework, work space, technology, and communication strategies.
- Plan for generational succession, and hire staff with the skills to work with families and meet the needs of the modern program.
- Manage funding, technology, security, operational, performance, and accountability expectations through cooperative agreements with courts, centralized IT offices, and other government partners that receive title IV-D funds to help carry out the program.
- Provide ongoing training to staff and partners about evidence-based and promising policies and practices to improve outcomes for families.

RESOURCEFUL LEADERSHIP

Goal	Strategies
<p>Reallocate existing resources to support current program needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the effectiveness of different staffing structures in improving program performance and positive family outcomes. • Combine caseload segmentation and differential caseload staffing ratios (e.g., assigning higher caseload-to-worker ratios for income withholding cases and lower ratios for nonpaying cases). • Determine the right balance between investigative and legal staff resources. • Establish caseloads with specialized staff and program liaisons for veterans, unemployed parents, domestic violence survivors, parent reentry, and cases requiring enhanced investigations. • Draw on Access and Visitation grants and child support incentive funds, and leverage the resources of other programs to develop pathways to needed services.
<p>Expand program capacity through strategic partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a network of partnerships in areas such as employment, parenting time, co-parenting education, mediation services, financial literacy, housing, food assistance, child care, domestic violence prevention, child welfare, responsible fatherhood, financial management, health care, and substance abuse – to increase the employment and parenting opportunities of both parents. • Bring partners with a common mission to the table, and leverage partnerships with other agencies that serve the same families. • Proactively reach out to community organizations and establish strategic service delivery partnerships. • Make effective referrals to partner agencies using data sharing protocols, IT solutions, and case managers. • Coordinate case management and enforcement actions while a parent who owes support is satisfactorily participating in community partner programs.
<p>Increase community and advocacy support for the program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly communicate and build trust with community stakeholder networks. • Develop and share messages about the goals and practices of the child support program and the value the program brings to families in the community. • Attend community events to engage with families and organizations. • Conduct community listening sessions. • Assign dedicated staff to community outreach.

EVIDENCE-BASED

A high-performing child support program is evidence-based.

Goal	Strategies
<p>Examine existing policies and practices to determine whether they result in consistent payments for families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a national cost avoidance analysis. • Analyze labor market trends affecting low-wage workers. • Analyze demographic trends affecting family formation, dissolution, and co-parenting arrangements. • Conduct a review of current child support guideline policies. • Study the effect of default procedures and standard use of income imputation in establishing obligations. • Examine how to improve state income withholding processes, and identify innovative state approaches to increasing collections. • Analyze state distribution and cost recovery policies to assess whether they are effectively delivering consistent payments to families. • Identify the impact of fees, interest, and other costs in the accumulation of debt. • Examine how noncash payments are used in the tribal child support program and how effective they may be in supporting parent engagement. • Study civil contempt practices and their effectiveness in increasing consistent payments.
<p>Identify and test promising approaches to build the evidence base.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look to research in other fields to inform child support policies and practices, such as employment, parenting education, procedural justice, debt management, and trauma-informed care. • Build evidence on the effectiveness of child support practices through evaluation, including family-centered approaches to child support. • Continue research on effective employment service delivery to parents who owe support, including formerly incarcerated parents. • Continue to introduce and evaluate new approaches to improve child support practices and policy development.

EVIDENCE-BASED

Goal	Strategies
<p>Share findings from research with the child support community, and incorporate findings into policy and practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training and technical assistance to states and tribes that incorporates research findings. • Facilitate cross-agency learning of promising practices to encourage program innovation. • Facilitate national dissemination of state child support research findings. • Disseminate research findings on cost-avoidance, behavioral effects, perceived fairness, state distribution policies, debt management practices, work-oriented programs, and the coordination of parenting time and child support orders.
<p>Dedicate needed resources for research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include strong evaluation components in section 1115 grants. • Continue to support research that examines the impact of the child support program and policies on poverty, family self-sufficiency, and child well-being. • Support creation of a national child support research fund. • Encourage other federal agencies to increase child support-related research. • Incorporate an evaluation component into child support business processes, for example, by adopting rapid-cycle evaluation methods. • Encourage child support research partnerships with state and tribal universities and colleges.
<p>Continuously review program performance and how it is measured.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the use of performance management data available to local child support offices and workers, for example, through dashboards. • Analyze performance trends and factors affecting performance, such as changes in the labor market, family formation and dissolution, program resources, and technological investments in the child support program. • Support the realignment of the Paternity Establishment Percentage incentive and penalty thresholds. • Continue to assess whether the performance incentive system drives performance.

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

This national child support strategic plan charts a path forward that will further strengthen the child support program and the families we serve. Every year, the program rigorously measures its performance using 5 measures, which together will reflect the program's successful implementation of this plan.

States receive incentive payments based on their individual state collection base and their level of performance on these measures. States must perform at or above the following levels for each measure to receive the maximum applicable percentage allowed.

80%

Paternity Establishment

This performance measure compares the number of children for whom paternity has been established or acknowledged to the number of children who needed paternity established or acknowledged in the prior federal fiscal year. States have the option to measure paternity rates for children in the child support caseload or for all children in the state who were born to unmarried parents.

80%

Support Order Establishment

This performance measure compares a state's child support cases that have established support orders to the total number of child support cases in the state's caseload at the end of the federal fiscal year.

80%

Current Support Collections

This performance measure compares the amount of current support collected and disbursed by the state in child support cases to the total amount of current support owed in child support cases at the end of the federal fiscal year.

80%

Arrearage Collections

This performance measure compares the number of child support cases with payments towards arrears to the total number of child support cases owing arrears at the end of the federal fiscal year.

\$5 to \$1

Cost Effectiveness

This performance measure compares the total amount of child support collected to the total amount spent on the program for the federal fiscal year.