



NATIONAL CHILD SUPPORT STRATEGIC PLAN



FY 2010 - 2014

I am pleased to present the FY 2010-2014 National Child Support Strategic Plan.

Consensus-based planning process

This National Child Support Strategic Plan is the result of a dynamic consensus-based process led by a working group of federal, state, and tribal child support administrators. This is not just a federal strategic plan put forward by the Office of Child Support Enforcement alone, but a national plan hammered out by child support administrators from different levels of government and with diverse values, perspectives, and resources to achieve a consensus within the child support community on the vision and direction of the child support program during the five-year period.

The plan reflects a broader strategic planning process undertaken by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and strongly supports the ACF mission to foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services. Across ACF, our ultimate vision is that children, youth, families, individuals and communities are resilient, safe, healthy, and economically secure.

Program modernization

The child support program has an important role to play in supporting the economic security, health, and social well-being of children and their families—it serves one in four children nationally. Over the past several years, child support agencies have built upon partnerships within the community to improve family economic stability and to strengthen family ties in circumstances where children live apart from a parent. As the needs of families have changed, the child support program has evolved. Over the past decade, child support programs have developed a range of innovative strategies to make child support a more reliable source of income for families.

States and tribes are modernizing their child support programs, combining automated and law enforcement tools with family-centered case management strategies designed to engage both parents and intervene early to obtain reliable support for families.



As part of a balanced program designed to collect child support payments in a cost-effective manner, state and tribal programs are working collaboratively and effectively with other programs to prevent the need for child support enforcement, engage fathers in the lives of their children, increase the economic stability of both parents, strengthen family relationships, secure health care coverage, and help prevent family violence. These tools and strategies have contributed to measurable improvements in program performance, while providing real help to parents struggling to support their families.

Strong track record

Our program has an impressive history of accomplishment and is poised for a promising future, despite constrained resources. The last few years have been challenging, as many state, local, and tribal programs have responded to higher unemployment among parents at the same time that they have significantly reduced their own staffing levels. At every level of government, our community has worked together to identify additional areas where we can increase program efficiency, flexibility, and effectiveness through technology, data, and evidence-based practices.

A good strategic plan outlines the goals and direction of the program's work. The FY 2010-2014 Plan sets a strategic direction over this five-year period that continues to move the child support program toward an effective and balanced program that gives modern families the tools they need to support their children as they grow up.

The plan identifies our:

- primary customers, partners, and stakeholders
- mission, vision, and guiding principles
- goals, objectives, measures, and strategies

Many families depend on the child support program. By implementing the strategies in this plan, we continue to promote family self-sufficiency by making child support a reliable source of income.

Sincerely,

Vicki Turetsky, Commissioner
Office of Child Support Enforcement



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



OUR CUSTOMERS, PARTNERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS

CUSTOMERS

The primary customers and beneficiaries of the child support program are the children in need of support, together with both parents and/or custodians. Our program strives to make the financial, emotional and physical needs of children paramount in all that we do.

PARTNERS

The child support program is operated by a number of entities (overseen by a designated single state or tribal agency) that must work together in partnership to achieve results for the children and families we serve. The partners include:

- State, tribal, and local child support agencies;
- Courts, law enforcement agencies, public attorneys, and other entities operating under cooperative agreements with child support agencies; and
- The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement within the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Many other groups have an important role in helping us serve the families that interact with our program. Without the active cooperation of these additional partners, we would be unable to operate our program effectively. To administer our program, child support agencies collaborate with:

- Other federal, state, tribal, and local government offices that administer the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Child Welfare and Foster Care programs, as well as other offices such as workforce agencies, access and visitation services, bureaus of vital records, criminal justice agencies and correctional facilities; and related federal government agencies such as the Departments of Labor, Defense, State, Treasury, Veterans Affairs, and the Social Security Administration.
- Private sector partners, including employers, hospitals, financial institutions, the insurance community, program contractors, community- and faith-based organizations, family law practitioners and tribal court advocates.

STAKEHOLDERS

Many other groups have a legitimate interest in how our customers are served and provide us with valuable oversight and direction. In addition to our customers, these stakeholders make a contribution toward, and benefit from, a well-run child support program. They include the Congress, state and tribal legislatures, public interest groups, taxpayers, and the public in general.

MISSION, VISION, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Mission

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

To encourage responsible parenting, family self-sufficiency and child well-being and to recognize the essential role of both parents in supporting their children, the national child support program assures that assistance in obtaining support, including financial and medical, is available to children through locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing and modifying support obligations, and monitoring and enforcing those obligations.

Vision for the Future

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

Guiding Principles

These principles underlie our mission and serve as the basis for how we operate.

We value and respect our customers and our partners.

- Children come first.
- Child support should be a reliable source of income for children.
- A legal, financial, and emotional relationship between parents and their children is vital to child well-being.
- Parental employment is key to reliable support payments.
- All parents and custodians are treated fairly and kept informed, and their concerns are recognized.
- Services are most effective when cultural and economic differences are respected.
- Child support programs have a responsibility to reach out to educate partners, stakeholders, customers, and the public about the program and available services.
- We promote stable, safe, and healthy relationships between parents and children by participating in the larger community's efforts to strengthen families and encourage responsible parenthood.
- We honor and respect sovereignty and collaborate widely with flexibility to address and overcome jurisdictional and other barriers among countries, states, tribes, programs, cultures, and traditions.
- We promote collaboration and innovation as part of our program culture.

We value results, performance, and outcomes.

- Children have a right to expect financial, medical, and emotional support from their parents; parents have a responsibility to provide support to them; and we help those parents who are struggling to do so.
- We use early engagement and intervention strategies to complement traditional debt threshold-based enforcement actions to create a culture of compliance.
- Our prompt, proactive steps ensure that child support obligations are set at appropriate levels and are paid timely and consistently to prevent the accrual of unpaid child support.
- Reliable child support and health care coverage are crucial for families striving to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.
- Policy and technology decisions are interdependent and coordinated to achieve high performance.
- Performance results depend upon adequate program resources.

We value the use of data and research to support and guide our actions.

- We ensure the privacy and security of the personal information so critical to our mission.
- We exchange data with other programs to improve coordinated service delivery to families and reduce improper payments consistent with our statutory authority.
- We maintain a high standard of data reliability and completeness to measure our results.
- We use research and data to improve our processes and results.
- We use data to understand, analyze, and sort our caseload to respond to different case needs and demographic trends.



We value and support staff at all levels of the program.

- Training, tools, information technology, and skills are essential for our staff to be prepared and successful in serving our customers.
- We build trust and exhibit respect for our staff by being responsive, accountable, and ethical in all our actions.
- We achieve excellence through collaboration, transparency, and honoring the diversity of the workforce.
- We value the commitment our staff brings to the program, especially during difficult economic times.

We value responsible, innovative, and accountable leadership.

- The child support program advances through coordinated efforts of technology, research, demonstration projects, and innovation.
- We provide leadership, along with our stakeholders, in advocating for improvements and efficiencies in our program.
- We are accountable to the public, our stakeholders, and our customers, and we measure our performance.
- We facilitate learning and promote the use of research to inform our policies and practices.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND MEASURES

The child support program has a long tradition of setting high standards and measuring our performance. We are committed to innovation and continuous improvement. We measure our performance and hold ourselves accountable for achieving meaningful results. State child support programs receive performance-based incentive payments based upon the five performance measures below. Data for each performance measure are audited. In addition, state child support programs conduct annual self-assessments. Our goals include:

- All children have established parentage.
- All children in child support cases have appropriate support orders.
- All children in child support cases receive timely and consistent financial support from parents as ordered.
- All children in child support cases will receive payments on overdue support.
- The child support program will be efficient and responsive in its operations.

Goals

1 ALL CHILDREN HAVE ESTABLISHED PARENTAGE

Objective

Increase the percentage of children with a legal relationship established with their father.

Performance Measures

The percentage of IV-D children born to unmarried parents with paternity established or acknowledged (State caseload percentage).

The percentage of all children in the state born to unmarried parents with paternity established or acknowledged (State statewide percentage).

2 ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES HAVE APPROPRIATE SUPPORT ORDERS

Objective

Increase the percentage of IV-D cases with support orders.

Performance Measure

The percentage of IV-D cases with support orders.

3 ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES RECEIVE TIMELY AND CONSISTENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM PARENTS AS ORDERED

Objective

Increase the percentage of current collections in IV-D cases.

Performance Measure

The percentage of current support collected in IV-D cases.

4 ALL CHILDREN IN IV-D CASES WILL RECEIVE PAYMENTS ON OVERDUE SUPPORT

Objective

Increase the percentage of cases that receive payments on arrears.

Performance Measure

The percentage of IV-D cases with arrearages due that receive arrears payments.

5 THE IV-D PROGRAM WILL BE COST EFFICIENT AND RESPONSIVE IN ITS OPERATIONS

Objective

Operate a cost effective program.

Performance Measure

Total dollars collected per dollar of expenditure.

STRATEGIES

We implement a range of strategies to carry out our mission and improve our program impact and effectiveness.

1 Collaborate to improve services to our customers and strengthen families.

- Build and strengthen partnerships through collaborations to promote healthy family relationships, such as through programs and services that support:
 - Employment
 - Responsible fatherhood
 - Health care coverage
 - Parenting time
 - Family violence prevention
 - Parenting and co-parenting education
 - Prevention of unplanned pregnancy
 - Military and veteran parents
 - Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents
 - Financial education and services
- Educate the public about the child support program and its services. Everyone, including parents and young people who are not yet parents, benefits from a better understanding of the child support program.
- Establish and standardize data sharing to achieve program purposes and improve outcomes among:
 - Federal, state, and tribal child support offices
 - Courts
 - Means-tested programs and other agencies, such as child welfare agencies, that serve our customers, promote our mission, and help carry out our program responsibilities
 - Workforce-related agencies
 - Employers
 - Insurance providers and financial institutions
 - Other agencies authorized by law to access the data
- Establish policies that authorize child support program access to needed data and information exchanges, for example:
 - Tribal access to federal tax refund offset procedures
 - Federal and state tax information
 - Utilities and communications providers
 - Financial institutions
 - Public and private entities that provide health care coverage
- Use research to inform our policies and practices.

2 Deliver timely, clear, and accessible services adapted to customer needs and circumstances.

- Deliver accessible and culturally appropriate services to the families in our caseload.
- Use case stratification techniques to identify appropriate establishment and enforcement strategies and service needs.
- Address obstacles to payment, including access to children, matters of procedural justice, and affordability of orders.
- Provide pathways to reliable child support payments, including setting realistic orders and modifying them as needed, increasing access to employment and health services, and developing other strategies to help parents support their children.
- Provide understandable program information to our customers.
- Ensure prompt payment of collections to families and promote electronic payment options for parents, employers, and among jurisdictions.
- Provide information and referrals to other programs and services available to parents and custodians.
- Provide intensive child support services for families who need them, including families receiving public assistance.
- Involve both parents in all aspects of child support and related access and visitation services to increase financial and emotional support of children.
- Focus on families that have lost employment, receive unemployment insurance benefits, and/or are no longer eligible for unemployment insurance.
- Reach out to veterans and military families experiencing extended deployments or returning to the workforce.
- Adapt child support services to the special needs of parents who have experienced domestic violence.
- Develop targeted, specific initiatives to serve special populations, including strategies to encourage successful reentry of incarcerated and recently released parents.
- Use specific customer service protocols to provide time-sensitive, effective, and fair services.



3 Emphasize early intervention and proactive case management to ensure reliable payments of support.

- Provide easy access to genetic testing for parents of children born outside of marriage.
- Update child support guidelines regularly, ensuring that the guidelines are used to establish appropriate orders that reflect the needs of the children and the ability of parents to pay them.
- Communicate with customers about child support services early and consistently to ensure that they are kept informed and involved.
- Develop case management tools for early intervention to work with parents to ensure regular, consistent payments.
- Use automated systems to detect changes in circumstances and intervene early to review and modify orders.
- Streamline order review and modification.
- Strive for reliable payments and voluntary compliance in preference to debt-triggered enforcement action.
- Consider ways to facilitate regular and reliable payment of current support through debt leveraging strategies and other approaches to reducing uncollectible debt owed to a state.
- Use automation and proactive case review to manage case closure effectively.
- Implement the due process procedures identified in the U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Turner v. Rogers*, considering the role of case screening to reduce the routine use of jail for child support nonpayment by parents who lack the means to comply with their support orders.

4 Eliminate barriers associated with intergovernmental cases.

- Develop effective and streamlined protocols for intergovernmental case processing.
- Improve and increase data sharing of case information across state and tribal jurisdictions.
- Maximize use of caseload reconciliation tools and automation, such as Interstate Case Reconciliation, Query Interstate Cases for Kids (QUICK), Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet), or the Model Tribal System, to share data across jurisdictions effectively.
- Promote single-jurisdiction case management whenever appropriate.
- Emphasize and facilitate state and tribal collaboration, including the development of case transfer, case closure, and debt review protocols.
- Support the automation needs of expanding tribal IV-D programs.
- Respond to the growing international caseload through foreign reciprocal agreements and protocols to facilitate currency exchange and electronic payment.

5 Seek innovative ways to improve establishment and enforcement methods and performance.

- Develop more effective locate, service of process, and establishment tools.
- Increase use of expedited and administrative processes, including recourse to courts, ensuring that parents have access to procedural justice.
- Streamline intake processes for quicker identification and location of noncustodial parents and their resources.
- Evaluate and maximize the use of the most effective locate, service of process and establishment methods.
- Improve access to cell phone data.
- Increase the use of location resources to ensure timely disbursement of collections to families.
- Reach out to and educate employers about the importance of compliance with new hire reporting and income withholding requirements.
- Expand and improve enforcement and collection tools.
- Develop tools to identify and collect unreported and self-employment income.
- Customize and apply case strategies that distinguish between those who cannot pay and those who refuse to pay.
- Assess and evaluate enforcement strategies and tools to ensure effective use in all cases.
- Improve the effectiveness of bank account, asset, and insurance settlement seizure, passport sanctions, direct income withholding, and liens.
- Improve communication, education, and collaboration with employers and employer organizations regarding new hire reporting, electronic income withholding, and electronic payment options.
- Evaluate and improve the process for criminal prosecution of nonpayment of child support.
- Explore and evaluate opportunities for centralization and standardization of automated enforcement and collection tools.
- Evaluate and develop technologies to improve interfaces, data mining and analytics, data matching, imaging, web-based services, systems modernization, and data safeguarding.



6 Anticipate and implement changes in distribution of collections.

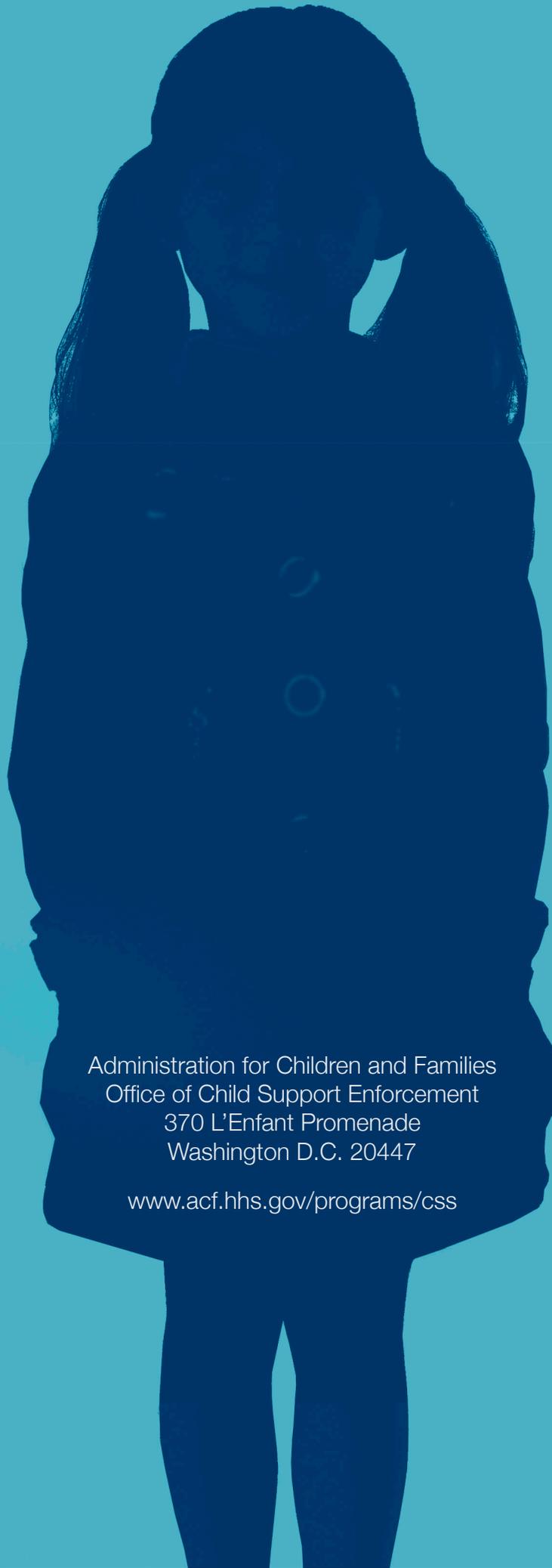
- Implement family distribution options in the Deficit Reduction Act as adopted by state legislatures.
- Analyze the impact of family distribution policies on families, means-tested program interactions, and government budgets.
- Analyze the impact of alternative uses of title IV-E collections for the benefit of children in the foster care system.
- Educate legislators and policymakers regarding the impact of different distribution strategies on families.

7 Secure access to health care coverage or medical support for children.

- Update medical child support policy and programmatic practices to improve access to health care coverage for children and their parents, and ensure child support agencies have the resources to meet their responsibilities.
- Ensure that child support agencies have efficient access to necessary and appropriate private and public health coverage data.
- Eliminate barriers and emphasize collaboration among child support, Medicaid, CHIP, state health exchanges, and Indian Health Services.
- Educate legislators and policymakers regarding the evolving role of child support in securing health coverage for children.

8 Identify sustainable and responsible fiscal practices and policies that benefit our customers.

- Ensure the program has the necessary resources to meet evolving responsibilities, strategies, and tools.
- Ensure the program has the capacity to meet the needs of families seeking child support services.
- Continuously seek to improve program productivity through efficiency measures and cost effectiveness, including assessing and tracking cost avoidance and cost savings to other means-tested programs.
- Update child support guidelines to recognize modern family dynamics and realities.
- Proactively assess and manage program data to identify trends in service delivery and identify promising practices.
- Establish human resource policies and practices, including succession planning to ensure continuation of effective service to customers.
- Analyze current audit processes to improve program accountability, management, and performance.



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www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css