



FACTS AT A GLANCE

Child Welfare in California

More than 75,000 children live in foster care in California today. This includes children whose care is overseen by both child welfare agencies (68,475) and probation departments (7,112).¹ This fact sheet focuses specifically on children in child welfare-supervised care.

- Nearly 650,000 children come into contact with California's child welfare system each year. On any given day, approximately 180,000 children are involved with the child welfare system.²
- Almost 20% of California's children are referred to child welfare services at least once during the first seven years of life. More than 3% will spend some time in foster care.³
- For Black children, the level of child welfare contact is very different. By their seventh birthday, almost 40% have been referred to child welfare services and nearly 10% placed in foster care.⁴
- Nearly 69,000 children are in child welfare supervised foster care in 2008. That compares to 109,000 children who were in foster care nine years ago.⁵
- Of the children in foster care, roughly 22,000 will reunify with their parents and nearly 8,000 will be adopted over the course of a year.⁶
- Most children entering foster care (79%) were removed from their homes for neglect-related reasons.⁷
- Of children who enter foster care for the first time, roughly 55% are age 5 or younger.⁸
- Many children cycle through the foster care system more than once and experience multiple placements:
 - About 12% of children who are reunified re-enter care within one year.
 - Nearly 18% of children who have been in care for less than one year have already experienced three or more placements. Of those children who have been in care for two years or more, more than 66% are in at least their third placement.⁹
- Of all children who first entered foster care five years ago, 58% have reunified, 21% have been adopted, 7% have exited to legal guardianship and 7% are still in care.¹⁰
- Nearly half (45%) of the children in California's foster care system have been in care for more than two years. The longer these children remain in care, the lower their likelihood of reunification. For these children, other forms of permanency such as adoption and legal guardianship are often required.¹¹
- Of all children first entering foster care in California, approximately 20% have a first placement with a relative caregiver. Of all children in out-of-home care in California, 36% are currently placed with a relative. Children placed with relatives are more likely to be placed with their siblings and less likely to have multiple placements.¹²



- Six percent of California’s children are Black, but this group constitutes 15% of referrals for child abuse and neglect, and 26% of children in child welfare supervised foster care. Once in care, Black children are less likely to be reunified than children of other races.¹³
- Of those children who emancipate or turn age 18 while still in foster care, more than 60% have been in care for three years or longer.¹⁴
- Research outside of California has shown that former foster youth do not fare as well as their peers. Former foster youth are more likely to face economic hardships, be arrested and spend time in jail or prison, and be without a high school diploma or GED. They also are less likely to attend college, be employed, or have a checking or savings account. Outcomes are improved somewhat for youth who remain in state custody until the age of 21, as compared to those who emancipate at age 18.¹⁵
- Over the last several years, California has made statewide improvements on a number of outcome measures. However, significant performance variation remains across individual counties.¹⁶
- Federal, state and county governments share in the cost of child welfare. Of the approximately \$4 billion that is spent annually in California for child welfare services, approximately half comes from the federal government and the other half comes from state and local governments.
- The federal system for funding child welfare services at the state and county levels provides open-ended entitlement funding for children and youth who are in foster care, but caps funding for services to children in their own homes, including prevention and early intervention efforts. These funding restrictions leave states and counties with significantly more funds available for placing children into out-of-home care – as opposed to funding programs that could reduce the need for child welfare services in the first place.
- Conservative estimates of the cost of abuse and neglect to U.S. society each year are staggering: \$25 billion in direct costs (i.e., hospitalization, mental health treatment and police services) compounded by \$69 billion for indirect costs such as juvenile delinquency, adult criminality and lost productivity to society.¹⁷

¹ Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2009). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [January 2, 2009], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Children in child welfare and probation supervised placements on July 1, 2008. This number may be inflated due to data quality issues surrounding the probation counts.

² Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2009). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [January 2, 2009], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

³ Magruder, J., & Shaw, T. V. (2008). Children ever in care: an examination of cumulative disproportionality. *Child Welfare*, 87(2), 169-188.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2009). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [January 2, 2009], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2009). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [January 2, 2009], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Based on a six-month cohort of children first entering foster care between January and June 2003 and remaining in care for at least eight days.

¹¹ Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2009). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [January 2, 2009], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Courtney, M. et.al, Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. Chapin Hall’s Center for Children, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL (http://www.iimcaseyouth.org/docs/ch_news_advisory121207.pdf).

¹⁶ Needell, B., Webster, D., et. al., (2009). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved [January 2, 2009], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

¹⁷ Fromm, Suzette (2001). *Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States*. Statistical Evidence.