

# Child and Family Well-Being

HENNEPIN COUNTY  
MINNESOTA

## Keeping families whole and intact

Hennepin County has stabilized, improved, and transformed our child protection system over the last five years, proactively supporting family and child well-being. Our vision for child and family well-being means reducing system disparities so families can thrive - families are safe and stable, with healthy bodies, healthy minds, and healthy relationships between children and caregivers. We'll know we've been successful when we:

- See a reduction in the number of reports to child protection on children of color and the number of children of color in out of home placement
- Increase the number of families served through prevention programs and subsequently, not seeing them in our child protection continuum
- See a reduction in staff turnover and subsequently, a stable workforce that can better support and engage families

Our three-pronged strategy is to:

- Reduce disparities in child welfare and out of home placement
- Increase emphasis on preventative services and programs
- Focus on recruitment and retention of staff

### Performance goals

Hennepin has sustained a positive trend over the last four years, but we need increased funding to continue that. Since 2018, we have seen:

- **23% decrease** in the number of reports received
- **50% decrease** in the number of children entering out-of-home placement

## Contacts

### Hennepin County Intergovernmental Relations

#### Liz Young

Health and Human Services  
Lobbyist  
Cell: 612-559-0447  
Liz.young@hennepin.us

#### Kareem Murphy

Director  
Office: 612-596-9711  
Cell: 612-559-5279  
kareem.murphy@hennepin.us

### Hennepin County Health and Human Services

#### Kwesi Booker

Director, Children and Family  
Services  
Office: 612-543-9245  
kwesi.booker@hennepin.us

## Website

hennepin.us

Our focus now is preventing a return to pre-pandemic out-of-home placement numbers. As the number of children entering care declines, we continue to shift our resources to preventative, upstream work with the families we serve. Our county Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) team has recently expanded and continues to grow, reflecting our commitment to reducing entry into the child protection system. PSOP served more than 2,000 individual residents in 2021, with more than half of those children under age 11. 53% of those served identify as Black or African American, 19.5% White, 11.3% Multiracial, 7.3% Asian, and 3.1% American Indian. For the third consecutive year, we saw an increase in the percentage of families who received PSOP services and do NOT have a subsequent screened-in child protection report. In fact in 2021, 82.3% of the families served by PSOP did not have a subsequent child protection report. This is significant and makes it clear: prevention works.

The path toward safer children is focusing on their well-being. That means identifying at-risk families earlier and providing practical help to prevent maltreatment or neglect from happening in the first place. Children who do not experience maltreatment have better health and success in school, less trouble with the law, healthier relationships, and are less likely to become teen parents.

### **Addressing racial disparities**

Child and families of color are disproportionately represented in the system. In 2021, we received a total of 13,874 child protection reports, with nearly 40% of those reports on Black or African American children. For example, Black or African American children make up 20.5% of the total child population in Hennepin County, but 36.5% of the case management population. American Indian children make up less than 1% of the population, but 13% of the children in out-of-home placement.

To improve race equity in permanency outcomes for families involved in the child protection system, we launched a 30-month project this year. We also have enthusiastic partnership with other system stakeholders: the Fourth Judicial District Court, the Guardian ad Litem Program, the Hennepin County Public Defender's Office, and the Indian Child Welfare Law Center. The project emphasizes family preservation and achieving timely reunification for families who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Our goal is to work better together, with families and as a team. We are further embedding Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) into our case continuum.

### **Increase funding for substance use treatment and prevention**

Parental substance use disorder and child protection involvement are often closely linked and disproportionately involve families of color. Parental substance use persists as the most common reason children enter care. This has been consistent since 2018, with 35-40% of out-of-home placement entries each year due to parental substance use. This percentage is even greater for children ages birth through five, ranging from 47% in 2018 to 57% in 2022. Given the complex intersection of substance use and child safety, we need multiple strategies and services in place to support families. The county is bringing behavioral health services closer to families involved with our system, testing several pilots. We also continue to work with Casey Family Programs and community partners to provide holistic healing responses for mothers and their infants with substance exposure. With increased state funding to improve behavioral health outcomes for parents, we can prevent deeper-end system involvement, reduce racial disparities in our system, and help children and families achieve long-lasting safety, stability, and well-being.

