

Child Welfare at a Glance

The Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is responsible for federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. ACF provides program oversight and funding to state child welfare systems.

The State Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families publishes program procedures and directives governing child welfare activities in Pennsylvania related to: the administration of public and private children and youth agencies, foster family care, adoption, child residential and day treatment programs, and child protective services. Pennsylvania is one of 12 states that has a county-administered and state-supervised child welfare system. The Commonwealth is a funding partner with the federal and county governments to deliver child welfare services.

A local County Children and Youth Agency exists in every county in Pennsylvania. These agencies are responsible for the investigation of child abuse, as well as the coordination and delivery of services to strengthen children and families. The county shares funding responsibilities with the state and federal government to deliver child welfare services.

Child welfare private provider agencies are private organizations that provide a range of child welfare services to children and families on a contractual basis with local county agencies. These contracted services include family support, case management, foster care, and adoption. Private child welfare services are funded with federal, state and local government funds.

Child abuse in Pennsylvania is defined as an act or failure to act which causes a serious non-accidental physical, mental, or sexual injury, or an imminent risk of such an injury. It is also defined as serious physical neglect, which can include either lack of supervision or a failure to provide the essentials of life.

A child abuse report is classified as substantiated when findings of an investigation are that child abuse has occurred.

A child abuse report is classified as unfounded when findings of an investigation are that child abuse has not occurred or not met the legal threshold of a substantiation.

A foster or resource home is a living arrangement for children in foster care who reside in a family setting. Foster or resource parents could be relatives of the child(ren) in their home, and may be willing to be a permanent resource for the child(ren) if reunification is unsuccessful. The total number of children in a foster home typically does not exceed six children.

A group home is a congregate care setting that is referred to in regulation as a child residential facility. Group homes differ from foster homes in that they are a non-family setting, have different licensing requirements, are staffed, and typically provide residential services for seven to twelve children.

An institution is a congregate care or child residential facility which is licensed similarly to a group home but typically provides residential services to more than twelve children.