NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Division of Social Services
Child Welfare Services

North Carolina
A Home for Every Child
Pilot Program Improvement Plan

September 15, 2026

Minor formatting adjustments may have been made to this document for 508 compliance. Content is unaffected.

Introduction – *A Home for Every Child*

North Carolina has a county-administered, state-supervised child welfare system. State law gives local departments of social services the authority and responsibility to administer child welfare services for their county, while the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services (NCDHHS DSS) serves as the supervising and oversight agency. The state's *A Home for Every Child* Program Improvement Plan (PIP) outlines targeted areas of focus, strategies for improvement, and measurements designed to improve practice and outcomes for children, youth and families statewide.

Central to these efforts is a strong commitment to collaboration. NCDHHS DSS actively engages a wide range of stakeholders – including partners such as NC Medicaid and Healthy Blue Care Together; tribal partners; legal and judicial representatives; people with lived experience; placement and community providers; and medical, behavioral health, and education partners to ensure that improvement initiatives are informed, coordinated, and responsive to real-world needs. This collaborative foundation supports both the refinement of existing practices and the development of new initiatives.

To align work across North Carolina's child welfare system, NCDHHS recently released a list of values to reinforce the purpose and importance of permanency for children, youth and families:

Foster Care Is Not the Goal – Permanency Cannot Wait

Permanency means every child grows up in a safe, stable, and loving family. This includes both legal permanency (reunification, adoption, guardianship, or custody) and relational permanency (lifelong connections with family, siblings, and supportive adults). Children deserve timely, stable permanency.

Our Core Beliefs

- **Every child deserves a permanent family, and planning for permanency should start early, and occur without long delays.** A safe and loving home helps children grow and do well, and early support can keep families together.
- **Family connections matter, both maternal and paternal.** Every child has family and community. We must quickly find, engage, and support them to ensure children have connections and a sense of belonging.
- **Reunification is the best outcome when safe and timely.** When reunification is not safe or possible, we must quickly find permanent homes with relatives, kin, or foster families.
- **Parents and children have the right to be heard.** Parents are essential partners, and children's thoughts and experiences should guide the decisions adults make.
- **Trauma must be addressed.** Children and families need care, understanding, and the right supports to heal.
- **Caregivers need support.** Families who care for children must have the tools, resources, and services they need.

The *A Home for Every Child* PIP builds on this foundation to prioritize better permanency outcomes for children, youth and families in North Carolina. The plan emphasizes both ongoing efforts and emerging priorities – key focus areas include strategies to safely increase capacity, reduce demand, and improve quality in the state's foster care system.

About the Data

Data supporting the North Carolina *A Home for Every Child* PIP will be compiled from multiple sources – including the Child Placement and Payment System (CPPS) and the Partnership and Technology Hub for North Carolina (PATH NC). Effective early 2027, PATH NC will be fully implemented as the state's first

comprehensive child welfare case management and information system. With PATH NC fully implemented, all PIP-related data collection, reporting, and analysis will transition exclusively to PATH NC, establishing a single, unified source to enhance data accuracy. NCDHHS DSS does not anticipate any interruption in its ability to report consistent data; however, the data produced via PATH NC will be of better quality than the cross-system reporting process.

NCDHHS is requesting an implementation start date of October 1, 2026. To ensure data quality, NCDHHS DSS is requesting 75 days from the last day of the first reporting month to audit and reconcile any data discrepancies before submitting data to the Administration for Children and Families. NCDHHS DSS will then submit monthly the required Numerator, Denominator, and Chaser data – as well as the Lead Measures – with numbers current as of the last day of the month 75 days prior.

Additionally, North Carolina received a disqualification on the CFSR Data on *Reentry to foster care: Among children who discharged to permanency (excluding adoption) in a 12-month period, the percent who reentered foster care within 12 months of exit* – due to issues with data quality. North Carolina will address this within the PIP reporting period by utilizing data derived from PATH NC as the corrective strategy.

The following data will be submitted monthly throughout the two-year PIP:

Core Measures	**Lead Measures**
• **Numerator Data:** Data on the number of licensed foster homes* • **Denominator Data:** Data on the number of children in foster care* • **Chaser Measures:** - Data on maintaining family connections* - Data on congregate care - Data on recent maltreatment history* - Data on home disruptions	• Monthly entries and exits for foster care* • Percent of substantiated maltreatment with a prior substantiated maltreatment within six months* • Number of counties fully onboarded into PATH NC • Percent of children placed with kin* • Percent of exits from foster care through reunification • Percent of exits from foster care through adoption • Percent of exits from foster care through guardianship and custody • Monthly total of foster homes (licensed and unlicensed)* • Number of foster homes with a current placement* • Percent of children and youth who have been in foster care for 12-18 months • Percent of children and youth who have been in foster care for 18-24 months • Percent of children and youth who have been in foster care for 24 months or longer

* Data included in both Core Measures and Lead Measures

Key Initiatives

The following section outlines North Carolina's strategies for advancing the overarching goal of *A Home for Every Child*. To guide implementation and support measurable practice improvement, North Carolina has identified four areas of focus that address: (1) foundation of practice; (2) improving placement quality; (3) increasing placements available for children and youth in foster care; and (4) safely decreasing the number of children and youth in foster care through safe exits to timely permanency.

Focus	Strategy	Initiatives	Lead Measures
A Home for Every Child: **Foundation of Practice**	Get back to basics – strengthen child welfare practice to assess, monitor, and respond to safety and risk concerns while supporting a path to timely permanency throughout the case – from initiation to closure.	Provide enhanced technical assistance to ensure that: • **Safety Assessments** are timely and adequate to ensure safety. • **Case Plans** are behaviorally specific with tailored strategies that support pathways to timely permanency. • **Ongoing Contacts** are consistent and focused on ensuring ongoing safety throughout the case. • **Supervision** is content-specific and supports case resolution. Complete implementation of statewide child welfare information system, **Partnership and Technology Hub for North Carolina (PATH NC)**, to support consistent practice, documentation and data quality across the state.	**1) Monthly entries and exits for foster care*** **2) Percent of substantiated maltreatment with a prior substantiated maltreatment within six months*** **3) Number of counties fully onboarded into PATH NC**
A Home for Every Child: **Improving Placement Quality**	Focus on quality – improve placement stability in foster care by ensuring children and youth are placed in homes that meet their needs and support long-term permanency.	Implement **Adverse Placement Score** framework and develop dashboards to better measure quality and stability of foster care placements. Align child welfare practice with **Kin-First culture** to increase rate of children in foster care placed with kin, including: • Improving time-to-licensure for kinship caregivers • Strengthening family finding practices • Expanding support for kinship caregivers • Meaningfully engaging families throughout the life of a case Leverage **Medicaid managed care** to continue to optimize and expand wraparound services that support stable placement and permanency for children and youth in foster care through the NC Medicaid Children and Families Specialty Plan.	**4) Percent of children placed with kin*** **5) Percent of exits from foster care through reunification** **6) Percent of exits from foster care through adoption** **7) Percent of exits from foster care through guardianship and custody**

Focus	Strategy	Initiatives	Lead Measures
A Home for Every Child: **Increasing Supply**	Expand capacity – increase the number of children and youth placed with kin as well as the number of licensed foster parents.	Develop statewide **Structured Home Study** for kinship and foster parent licensure to improve consistency and accuracy of information included in home assessments and licensure applications across public and private agencies. Continue to implement recruitment and retention activities included in North Carolina's **2024-2029 Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan**, including targeted recruitment of resource families to meet specific needs of children and youth in foster care. **Reduce administrative barriers** for licensed and unlicensed kinship caregivers, including by aligning state and federal requirements for training hours for kinship caregivers.	**8) Monthly total of foster homes (licensed and unlicensed)*** **9) Number of foster homes with a current placement***
A Home for Every Child: **Decreasing Demand**	Expand capacity – decrease the number of children and youth in foster care through quality prevention services and safe, timely exits to permanency.	In partnership with courts, implement targeted efforts to expedite permanency for children and youth who are **legally eligible for adoption and residing in an identified adoptive home** who have been in foster care **more than 12 months**. Track and review cases of children and youth who have been in foster care **more than 24 months** to identify root causes, permanency planning opportunities, and tailored solutions. Ensure consistent use of periodic **Permanency Planning Reviews** for youth and families in foster care to support active efforts toward permanency, including ongoing assessment of primary case plans and timely transition to concurrent plans when necessary.	**10) Percent of children and youth who have been in foster care for 12-18 months** **11) Percent of children and youth who have been in foster care for 18-24 months**

Focus	Strategy	Initiatives	Lead Measures
[continued]	[continued]	Support post-permanency stability through the statewide **Success Coach** program, providing families with direct support and connection to services after reunification, adoption, guardianship, or custody. Continue to expand access to services available through the **Family First Prevention Services Act** to provide families who are at high risk for foster care with evidence-based resources to prevent out-of-home placement.	**12) Percent of children and youth who have been in foster care for 24 months or longer**

* Data included in both Core Measures and Lead Measures