



Minnesota CFSR Round 4 Program Improvement Plan (PIP): “A Home for Every Child”

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Content is unaffected.*

CFSR and PIP overview

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is a federal review conducted by the Children's Bureau (CB) to ensure states conform to federal child welfare requirements. It is a multiphase process that begins with a comprehensive Statewide Assessment and, if system improvement is needed, progresses to the creation and implementation of a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP is designed to create lasting and statewide systemic changes in key areas identified in the CFSR, while also addressing the practice and systemic areas in need of improvement found during the review that affect the system's ability to meet the needs of children and families served.

Minnesota is committed to developing a data-driven, collaborative CFSR Round 4 PIP grounded in the state's Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) framework. The state utilized multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative information, including CFSR findings, statewide performance data, case reviews and community input, to identify priority areas and understand underlying practice and systemic factors. Planning efforts emphasize partnerships with local agencies, Tribal partners, courts, community partners and individuals with lived experience to ensure strategies respond to local context and promote consistent outcomes. Minnesota's approach focuses on aligning the PIP with existing agency goals and ongoing system improvement initiatives to support sustainable, measurable improvements in safety, permanency and well-being for children and families.

Technical Bulletin 14: "A Home for Every Child"

On Nov. 13, 2025, Executive Order No. 4395, "Fostering the Future," directed the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to strengthen child welfare outcomes by improving the quality, transparency and usefulness of child welfare data while reducing duplicative and burdensome reporting requirements. In response, ACF released Technical Bulletin #14 (TB 14) on Dec. 19, 2025, establishing a pilot opportunity for states participating in CFSR Round 4. The pilot, developed under the broader "A Home for Every Child" initiative, allows states to focus program improvement efforts on strengthening child safety, permanency and well-being outcomes through more flexible and targeted improvement strategies, rather than through the traditional PIP development and measurement structure.

In collaboration with both internal and external partners, Minnesota determined that the priorities outlined within the pilot opportunity closely aligned with the state's existing strategic priorities and ongoing improvement efforts, including strengthening prevention and family well-being, improving engagement and partnership with families and communities, and enhancing safety, permanency and stability outcomes for children and youth. As a result, Minnesota elected to participate in the PIP Pilot option on June 29, 2026.

PIP collaboration and development

Minnesota engaged a broad range of partners in developing the PIP, including through the PIP Development and Implementation Team, workgroups, two statewide webinars, community engagement activities, case review and data analysis, and ongoing discussions with partners. Partners in PIP development included the following:

- **State and CQI partners:** DCYF/CSP leadership and staff, CQI Teams, CQI Champions and the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI)

- **County and Tribal partners:** County agencies, MACSSA and county and Tribal staff with expertise in child welfare and related service areas
- **Courts and legal partners:** Judicial officers, Court Administration, CJI, county attorneys, Guardians ad Litem, law clerks and Tribal representatives
- **Community and cross-system partners:** Community organizations and service providers, Children's Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, juvenile justice, truancy, PSOP and foster/adoptive parent training and certification providers
- **Individuals with lived experience:** Children and youth, biological parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, caregivers and relatives
- **Federal partners:** The Children's Bureau and regional representatives provided ongoing guidance and technical assistance throughout the PIP development process.

Minnesota's approach is intended to bring together system expertise, local and Tribal perspectives, community knowledge and lived experience to inform problem identification, strategy development and PIP implementation and monitoring.

Minnesota's priorities

The Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) is a federally required five-year strategic plan that outlines a state's vision, goals and priorities for improving child welfare outcomes. Minnesota's 2025–2029 CFSP envisions strengthening the child welfare system by shifting to a more proactive, prevention-focused approach that promotes child and family well-being. Rather than focusing primarily on responding after maltreatment occurs, the CFSP emphasizes strengthening families, preventing unnecessary involvement with the child welfare system, addressing gaps, and improving outcomes through collaboration, continuous quality improvement, and meaningful partnerships with families, communities, Tribes and system partners.

The Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Five-Year Strategic Plan provides the agency's long-term vision and priorities for improving outcomes for children, youth and families across the state. The plan serves as a guiding framework for aligning programs, resources and partnerships around a shared goal: helping children and families thrive. It emphasizes consistent access, coordinated service delivery, community partnership, system modernization and results-based accountability, while supporting continuous learning and improvement across DCYF programs.

Minnesota's Child Safety and Permanency (CSP) Strategic Plan (2026–2031) establishes the state's direction for strengthening its child welfare system within the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and its Whole Family Approach. The plan is grounded in a vision of children, youth and families are safe, stable and thriving in strong communities and emphasizes fairness, understanding family and community perspectives, partnership and continuous learning. CSP drives implementation through its core functions: setting direction, building capacity, connecting and supporting partners, using data for continuous quality improvement (CQI), aligning policy and resources, and strengthening government-to-government relationships with Tribal Nations.

Integrated priorities informing PIP development

Across these frameworks, common themes include strengthening prevention and community-based supports to reduce unnecessary system involvement; improving safety practice, family engagement and timely permanency; expanding kinship and family connections; ensuring access to individualized, responsive services; and reducing differences in outcomes through a family-centered, Whole Family approach. Collectively, these plans demonstrate a coordinated, data-informed CQI approach that aligns federal expectations with Minnesota's broader vision for a prevention-focused system that reduces barriers and responds to the needs of children, families and communities.

Learning processes

Minnesota's CQI System collects and analyzes qualitative and quantitative data through several review processes, including CFSR case reviews, fatality/near fatality case reviews, screening reviews, community engagement events, surveys and focus groups, ongoing data collection and workgroups. These processes provide multiple sources of information to assess system functioning and understand how state and local policies, practices and decision-making influence outcomes for children, youth and families.

Integrated systemic analysis informing PIP development

Findings from Minnesota's CQI processes, including CFSR case reviews, qualitative coding analysis, ongoing data collection and community engagement activities, identified four (4) priority areas that informed the development of the Program Improvement Plan (PIP):

1. Strengthening core casework practice and accountability

Findings across case reviews and qualitative analysis demonstrated the need to strengthen consistency and quality in foundational casework practice statewide. Opportunities for improvement were identified in areas including comprehensive safety assessment, timely and quality caseworker contacts, individualized case planning, documentation of required activities, and ongoing assessment of child and family needs. Qualitative coding findings also highlighted the need for clearer practice expectations, stronger supervisory oversight and enhanced monitoring systems to support accountability and consistent implementation of policy and practice standards.

2. Enhancing family engagement, relationships and shared decision-making

Review findings and community feedback consistently emphasized the importance of meaningful engagement with children, youth, parents, relatives and caregivers throughout the life of a case. Opportunities for improvement included family involvement in assessment and case planning, visitation quality and frequency, engagement of fathers and paternal relatives and incorporating youth and family voice in decision-making processes. Community engagement activities further reinforced the need for a relationship-centered and community-informed child welfare system that prioritizes collaboration and shared decision-making with families.

3. Improving permanency planning and placement stability

Case review findings identified the need for more timely and effective permanency planning practices to support stability and permanency for children and youth. Areas identified for improvement included concurrent planning, timely permanency decision-making, legal consultation, relative identification and engagement, and efforts to maintain family connections for children in out-of-home care. Findings also reflected the importance of individualized permanency planning and proactive efforts to reduce placement disruptions and delays in achieving permanency outcomes.

4. Advancing a prevention-focused system that reduces barriers and responds to the needs of children, families and communities

Community engagement findings highlighted the need for a child welfare system that is prevention-focused, responsive, fair, and accountable to the communities it serves. Feedback emphasized the importance of accessible, individualized and community-based supports that address family needs earlier and reduce unnecessary system involvement. Ongoing data collection and CQI processes also reinforce the importance of examining differences in outcomes and strengthening consistent service delivery practices across the child welfare continuum.

PIP strategies

Based on the four priority areas identified through Minnesota's systemic analysis and CQI processes, the state developed targeted strategies intended to strengthen safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. The primary strategies identified to be included in the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) include:

- (1) Improve outcomes for children with complex needs**
- (2) Reduce reentry into care**
- (3) Improve father engagement**

Strategy 1: Improve outcomes for children with complex needs

Minnesota will improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children with complex needs by strengthening cross-system coordination, family engagement and access to appropriate supports. Complex needs are defined as those crossing multiple services/systems, including but not limited to, child welfare, disability services, children's mental health, special education and juvenile justice/corrections. When children and families are involved across multiple systems, differences in requirements, practices, and available supports can create challenges in coordinating services and maintaining a consistent focus on family connection, permanency and least-restrictive placement. Efforts will focus on better understanding the systemic factors and barriers affecting outcomes for children with complex needs and use learnings to inform practice shifts and system improvements. This work will include strengthening coordination across the systems that serve children and families and partnering with local and/or state agencies to identify, implement and evaluate strategies that improve outcomes for children with complex needs. This strategy supports the goals of Minnesota's Olmstead Plan, which has set a goal to reduce the number of children and teens in foster care who may have a disability and who experience institutional placements. For purposes of this strategy, institutional placements include non-family settings such as children's residential facilities, group homes and correctional settings.

This strategy directly supports the A Home for Every Child 1:1 ratio by increasing the availability and use of appropriate family-based homes for children with complex needs. By strengthening cross-system coordination, family engagement and access to individualized supports, Minnesota will work to ensure that children have an available home that can safely and appropriately meet their needs, including reducing reliance on congregate care when a family-based option is available. The strategy also supports the A Home for Every Child chaser measures by increasing opportunities for children to live with relatives or kin, reducing the percentage of foster care days spent in congregate care, addressing factors that may contribute to placement instability and disruption, and strengthening supports for children and families with recent maltreatment histories.

Strategy 2: Reduce reentry into care

Minnesota will improve safety, permanency and well-being for children who experience foster care by reducing reentry after reunification. Efforts will build on work already underway within the department and court system to better understand the systemic factors and barriers that affect placement stability and children's and families' ability to maintain permanency over time. This work will also build on existing community engagement and lived experience efforts, including the focus groups conducted by the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI). Information and lessons learned from these efforts will help identify the practice and system changes needed to support lasting permanency and reduce reentry into foster care. This strategy is intended to strengthen placement stability and sustained permanency by using data, system knowledge and community and lived experience perspectives to better understand and address systemic barriers and inform practice improvements.

This strategy supports the A Home for Every Child 1:1 ratio by promoting stability and sustained availability of homes for children following reunification. Reducing reentry helps ensure that homes that become available through permanency remain available for children and families rather than children returning to foster care and requiring another placement. The strategy also directly supports the chaser measures by strengthening placement stability and reducing home disruptions, maintaining family connections and supporting children to remain safely with parents when appropriate. By identifying and addressing systemic factors associated with reentry, Minnesota can better support lasting permanency and reduce the need for children to reenter the pool of children requiring foster homes.

Strategy 3: Improve father engagement

Minnesota will work with local agencies to create innovation zones focused on improving early identification, needs assessment, service provision and engagement with fathers. These efforts will identify and test ways to strengthen policy, practice and system supports that promote earlier identification and meaningful, ongoing involvement of fathers and paternal relatives throughout the life of a case. This strategy is intended to improve family engagement, strengthen family connections and placement options, support timely permanency and advance consistent, family-centered practice across the child welfare system.

This strategy directly supports the A Home for Every Child 1:1 ratio by expanding the pool of potential family-based homes through earlier identification and meaningful engagement of fathers and paternal relatives.

Strengthening father and paternal-family engagement can increase the number of relatives and kin available to serve as placement and permanency resources, supporting a closer alignment between the number of children needing homes and the number of homes available to them. The strategy also supports the chaser measures, particularly maintaining family connections and reducing congregate care, by identifying family placement options earlier and supporting children's connections to their paternal family network. Earlier engagement and

better assessment of paternal resources may also contribute to placement stability and reduce home disruptions by ensuring that placement decisions better reflect the child’s family relationships, needs and available supports.

Alignment of Minnesota’s PIP with “A Home for Every Child”

Minnesota’s PIP strategies are aligned with the goals of the ACF’s “A Home for Every Child” initiative by focusing on the conditions, practices and systemic factors that help children experience safe, stable and lasting family connections. The initiative provides states with an opportunity to center program improvement on meaningful outcomes for children and families while providing flexibility to test innovative approaches and strengthen the systems that support those outcomes. Minnesota’s strategies build on this opportunity by addressing identified systemic and practice barriers that can affect whether children remain safely with their families, achieve and maintain permanency, and have access to appropriate family-based supports when they cannot remain in their homes.

The three strategies reflect Minnesota’s commitment to ensuring that children have access to safe, stable and supportive homes and that permanency is sustained over time. Together, the strategies address different points in the child welfare continuum. The first focuses on strengthening cross-system coordination, family engagement and access to appropriate supports for children whose needs span multiple systems. The second focuses on understanding and addressing the systemic and practice factors that can contribute to children returning to foster care after achieving permanency. The third focuses on strengthening the early identification and meaningful engagement of fathers and paternal relatives as important sources of family connection, support and potential placement and permanency options.

These strategies also reflect Minnesota’s use of continuous quality improvement (CQI) to identify barriers, test and evaluate approaches, learn from data and lived experience and use those lessons to inform broader system and practice improvements. Rather than treating home availability as solely a placement-capacity issue, Minnesota’s approach recognizes that achieving the goals of “A Home for Every Child” also requires strengthening the conditions that allow children to remain safely with their families, move to family-based placements when needed and maintain permanency once achieved. This approach is consistent with ACF’s emphasis on meaningful outcome improvement, innovation and building state capacity to manage and improve child welfare systems.

PIP measurement

Minnesota’s PIP priority areas

1. Strengthening core casework practice and accountability
2. Enhancing family engagement, relationships and shared decision-making
3. Improving permanency planning and placement stability
4. Advancing a prevention-focused system that reduces barriers and responds to the needs of children, families and communities.

Home-to-child ratio

The ratio of the count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month to the count of homes available to those children includes:

- The count of all children who were in foster care on the last day of the month

- The count of all licensed homes with an active license on the last day of the month plus all unlicensed homes with a child placed in the home on the last day of the month.

Chaser measures

1. Maintaining family connections: of all children in care on the last day of the month, the percentage of those children who were living with a relative or kin
2. Use of congregate care: of all days children spent in foster care during the reporting month, the percentage of days that were spent in congregate care (family operated group home, staff operated group home, shelter care group home, residential treatment center, qualified residential treatment program, child care institution, or child care shelter care institution)
3. Recent maltreatment history: of all children with a substantiated or indicated maltreatment report that reached disposition during the month, the percent who had a prior substantiated or indicated maltreatment report that reached disposition within the prior 182 days
4. Home disruptions: of all homes with a child placed in the home during the month, the percent of those homes with a disruption during the month.

Lead measures

1. Number of new entries into congregate care (“institutional”) settings during the month
2. Number of exits from congregate care (“institutional”) settings during the month
3. Average duration (in days) for ending congregate care (“institutional”) settings
4. Number of children that achieved timely permanency through reunification during the month, per federal benchmarks
5. Number of children that reentered care during the month whose most recent case closure was achieved through reunification
6. Percent of out-of-home cases in which a father is identified in the “relationships” tab of SSIS
7. Of the cases in which a father is identified, percent of completed monthly contacts by the agency
8. Of the cases in which a father was identified, the median number of days to face-to-face contact with fathers.

Strategy	Objective	Measurements
1. Improve outcomes for children with complex needs: Improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children with complex needs by strengthening cross-system coordination, family engagement and access to appropriate services.	1.1. Better understand the systemic factors and barriers affecting outcomes for children with complex needs to inform practice shifts and system improvements. 1.2. Strengthen coordination across systems serving children with complex needs to support consistent, family-centered practice. 1.3. Partner with state and/or local agencies to identify, implement and evaluate strategies that improve outcomes for children with complex needs.	PIP Priority: 1, 2, 3, 4 Chaser: 1, 2, 4 Lead: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Reduce reentry into care: Improve the safety, permanency and well-being for children who experience foster care by reducing reentry after reunification.	2.1. Better understand the systemic factors and barriers to maintaining permanency long-term to inform practice shifts/changes needed for improvement. 2.2. Partner with local service agencies to improve performance on reentry of children.	PIP Priority: 1, 2, 3, 4 Chaser: 1, 2, 4 Lead: 4, 5
3. Improve father engagement: Strengthen practice expectations, reduce systemic barriers and build workforce partnerships to improve fathers' participation in the case and service delivery, strengthen family networks and contribute to improved child safety, reduced time in foster care and increased timely permanency.	3.1 Partner with local service agencies to create innovation zones to identify and test ways to strengthen policy, practice and system supports that promote earlier identification and meaningful, ongoing involvement of fathers and paternal relatives throughout the life of a case. 3.2. Provide coaching and technical assistance to local service agencies on community engagement practices and continuous quality improvement (CQI) processes.	PIP Priority: 1, 2, 3, 4 Chaser: 1, 2, 4 Lead: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8