Children and families: Provide culturally appropriate services, address needs of children at risk, promote stability

Although Minnesota ranks high overall for children’s well-being, children of color and American Indian children experience a different reality due to significant disparities.

More children are entering Minnesota’s child protection and foster care systems, increasing demand for well-trained county and tribal child welfare workers and flexible systems that meet federal guidelines. Demand for health care services for children in these systems is also growing.

For several years, the state, counties and tribes have been working to improve the child welfare system by implementing recommendations of the Governor’s Task Force on the Protection of Children and the Legislative Task Force on Child Protection. Significantly more needs to be done. Already vulnerable, children in foster and kinship care face barriers to health care that lead to gaps in coverage. Although most children in foster care qualify for Medical Assistance, the process of applying for and renewing coverage creates delays.

The basic cash benefit in the Minnesota Family Investment Program has not budged for more than 30 years, making it much harder for people to work their way out of poverty. A housing benefit enacted in 2013 helped some but not all families in the program.

To improve children’s and families’ well-being, Minnesota needs more funding and support for culturally appropriate child welfare services, training so that child welfare professionals can better serve families in crisis, and resources to implement federal requirements to place foster children in the most appropriate settings. All children in foster care need immediate access to health coverage, including behavioral health services, through automatic enrollment in Medical Assistance. Families in the Minnesota Family Investment Program and Diversionary Work Program need more stability and financial support to pay their bills.

Proposals:

To support the stability and well-being of children and families, Governor Tim Walz advanced these proposals for the FY 2020-2021 biennium:


- **Child Welfare Training Academy**: Invest in the Child Welfare Training System to support the creation of a Child Welfare Training Academy. Fund a study to review and recommend guidelines on the size of caseloads for child protection workers and supervisors.
• **Family First Prevention Services Act:** The infrastructure created in this proposal would enhance support to children and families and prevent foster care placements with evidence-based mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services, in-home parent programs and kinship services.

• **Health care coverage for foster children:** Enroll all foster children automatically in Medical Assistance. This aligns health care eligibility requirements, relieves burdens on foster parents, reduces barriers to care and ensures streamlined access to coverage for all Minnesota children in out-of-home placements.

• **Minnesota Family Investment Program grant increase:** For the first time since 1986, increase the cash portion of the grants for the Minnesota Family Investment Program and Diversionary Work Program by $100 per month for each household.

**Related information:**


• Child abuse and neglect prevention: Well-being for Minnesota's families: https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-3922-ENG

• Child protection in Minnesota: Keeping children safe: https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4735-ENG

• Foster care: Temporary out-of-home care for children: https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4760-ENG

• Diversionary Work Program: Emphasizing employment: https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-5848-ENG

• Facts about Minnesota Family Investment Program: https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-5830-ENG

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