

Oregon Can More Effectively Use Family Services to Limit Foster Care and Keep Children Safely at Home

Steve Bergmann, Audits Director

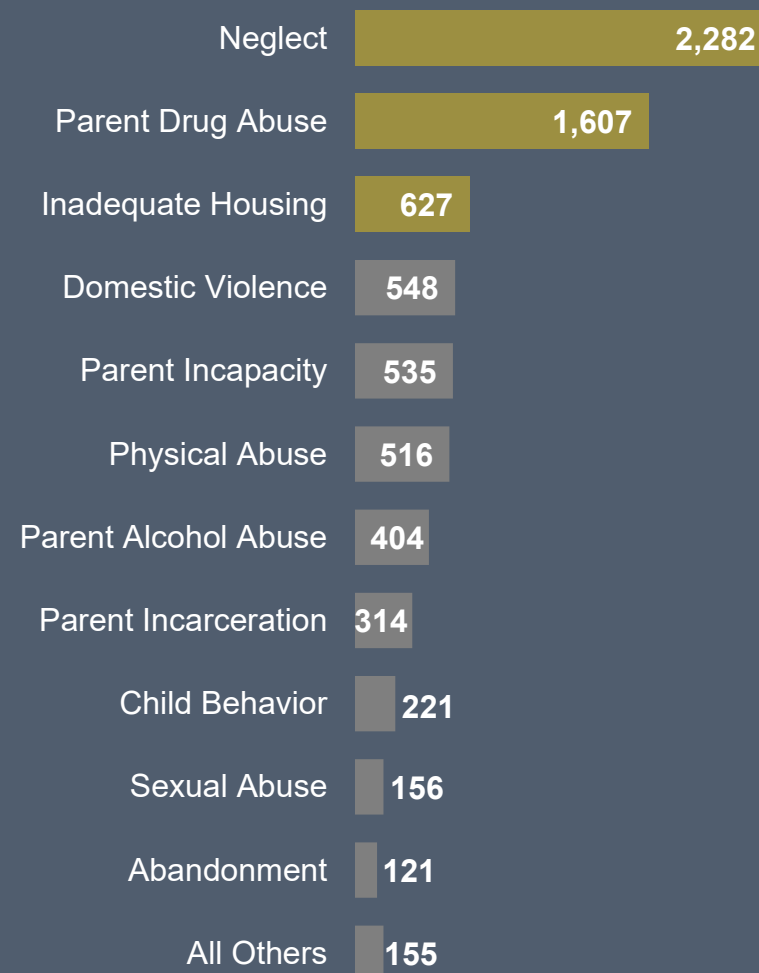
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Why this audit matters

- Keeping children out of foster care can prevent life-long harm, provided effective services can stabilize their families.
- Oregon removed children from their families at a higher rate than the national average, at the time of the audit.
- In 2020, the Office of Child Welfare had a biennial budget of \$1.3 billion and about 3,200 employees.

In 2019, neglect, drug abuse, and inadequate housing were the main causes for removal



Objective & scope

- Examine how Oregon can more effectively and economically use family services to safely prevent the placement of children into the foster care system
- 2019 to 2020
- Benchmarked Oregon to other states
- Visited 10 regions of the state
- Extensive interviews with key groups

What we found

1

Service Delivery

Effective family services lead to better outcomes for children and families

2

High workloads

Case workers faced high workloads and tight deadlines

3

Siloed System

The system design made it more difficult to access family services

Recommendations	Target Completion Date (as of Report Issuance)
1. Establish collaboration protocols with partner divisions and agencies that set common goals, procedures, and timelines for action on Child Welfare referrals and at the front end of open cases.	June 2021
2. Use data analysis and input from staff, parents, and other stakeholders to identify the types of services and providers that are most successful and cost-efficient, including alternatives for improving front-end family engagement, service coordination, and safety services.	December 2023
3. Identify and implement alternatives to reduce caseworker workload. Potential alternatives include reducing time spent on data entry and other administrative activities and making case procedures more accessible and user friendly.	June 2021
4. Develop contract measures at the district and central office level that set goals for provider timeliness, access, quality, and reporting of overall performance. Set clear performance management guidelines for contract administrators.	December 2020
5. Work with contracted providers to develop diverse delivery options that address service gaps in rural areas and other underserved areas, such as delivering services online or virtually when appropriate.	September 2020

Recommendations	Target Completion Date (as of Report Issuance)
6. Work with Oregon Health Authority (OHA), Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), and other stakeholders to quantify needs for mental health and addiction treatment services in underserved areas, ensure adequate coverage, and establish data sharing for CCO-provided services in Child Welfare cases. Also work with OHA to develop publicly reported CCO performance metrics that tie to Family First goals.	January 2021
7. Ensure that Office of Reporting Research Analytics and Implementation (ORRAI)'s efforts to account for racial bias receive an independent review, either through peer-reviewed studies or commissioned experts.	December 2023
8. Incorporate detailed information on services for Critical Instant Response Team (CIRT) evaluation of CIRT cases, including whether key services within or outside Child Welfare were effective or available.	December 2023
9. Provide biennial reports to state leadership and policymakers on service access, availability, and effectiveness throughout the state, drawing on improved performance information.	June 2021, annually thereafter

Questions?

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