

Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families Strategic Plan

2025–2028



June 2025

Introduction to the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families



On July 1, 2024, Minnesota officially launched a new cabinet-level agency reimagining how the state can support its youngest residents and their families. The purpose of creating Minnesota's DCYF is to unify and streamline a broad range of programs and services previously split across multiple state departments, recognizing that the well-being of young people is shaped by interconnected proactive systems, not silos.

Many Minnesota families face barriers to receiving services, especially if they have to navigate across multiple agencies. For example, a youth involved in the justice system would require integration of services from the state justice department, as well as the department of education. The burden of navigating these systems falls on the families who are often already underserved, such as those living in poverty. Building a smaller agency focused on children, youth, and families with intentional coordination within the agency and across other state agencies creates an opportunity to remove barriers to services and produce better outcomes.

Minnesota's journey toward child-centered governance has deep roots. In 1995, legislation briefly consolidated programs into the Department of Children, Families, and Learning, which was later disbanded in 2003. Subsequent milestones include the creation of the Office of Early Learning in 2011, the Preschool Development Grant strategic plan in 2019, and the 2022 Early Childhood Governance Report, which created a roadmap for enhanced coordination.

This evolution reflects a national trend, with more than half of all states reorganizing their governance structures to better serve children. Other states have reported great success in creating consolidated departments to improve outcomes through early intervention, trauma-informed care, and coordinated wraparound services. Minnesota's approach aligns with families and stakeholders who have consistently advocated for more coordinated, culturally responsive programs that support children throughout their development.

Learn more about the Department of Children, Youth, and Families at dcyf.mn.gov.

Strategic plan summary

The establishment of Minnesota's Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) represents a transformative step toward placing children at the center of state government. This new cabinet-level agency, launched on July 1, 2024, consolidates and coordinates programs from multiple agencies to better serve Minnesota's children, youth, and families. This first strategic plan for years 1-3 was created with multiple rounds of engagement, and ideation from staff and community leaders during the transition year. Designed from the shared values of community and staff, the plan provides of overview of the priorities, goals, and actions for how the agency intends to build, operate, and implement the strategic vision within DCYF.



Vision: An equitable Minnesota where all children, youth, and families are valued and thriving.



Mission: To center children, youth, families, and communities to advance positive and equitable outcomes.

Guiding principles

1. Strengths-based, whole family, multi-generational programs and services that center the lived experiences of children, youth, families, staff and communities.
2. Transparent and trustworthy decision-making and accessible, clear communication both internally and externally.
3. Integrated and collaborative internal and external partnerships that share knowledge, resources, and expertise.
4. Programs and services that are delivered in a compassionate, flexible, and respectful manner to produce positive, equitable outcomes.
5. Innovation and technology that improves efficiency across all agency systems and processes.
6. High standards of integrity, ensuring that actions and decisions are driven by the best interests of individuals and families.
7. Data-based continuous improvement, using data and feedback to share agency successes and challenges.
8. All voices are heard and services are accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive to the diverse needs of those served.

Values

- Human/ place-centered
- Equity
- Collaboration
- Data-informed
- Accountability
- Innovation
- Culturally responsive

Strategic priorities

- Grow a strong agency culture.
- Integrate cross-agency service coordination.
- Modernize technology, systems, and data practices.
- Adapt and implement a whole family approach.
- Cultivate dynamic and effective partnerships.



Grow a strong agency culture.

Goals	Actions
Cultivate a culture of continuous evaluation and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster a culture where staff have the tools to ensure system improvements for greater efficiency and to serve Minnesotans better through proactive questioning, coaching, technical assistance, reflection, and application of lessons learned. Define a research and improvement strategy that is aligned across each administration with key questions and identified data sources.
Strengthen internal collaboration to break down silos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance agency structures, processes, and protocols to cultivate opportunities for shared work (including aligned policies, practices, budgeting, funding, and working groups). Create opportunities for cross-departmental staff connection, engagement, reflection, and learning



Integrate cross-agency service coordination.

Goals	Actions
Reduce barriers to services by implementing a "no wrong door" approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure DCYF staff have the skills, knowledge, and resources to actively and effectively perform their roles to meet community needs. Develop structures and processes that enable the sharing of information for coordinated services and alignment of policies and practices.
Apply practices informed by data, research, and lived experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include community voices (county, Tribal, non-profit, school, provider, and family) in an advisory capacity to guide the direction of agency initiatives. Drive cross-agency continuous improvement efforts based on ongoing engagement with individuals who use our services.





Modernize technology, systems, and data practices.

Goals	Actions
Integrate technology and modernize systems to enhance service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Create a comprehensive roadmap that outlines existing digital services and capabilities, goals for the future, and timelines for achieving goals.▪ Implement effective change management strategies to increase technology adoption.
Eliminate current and reduce future backlog in DCYF systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Develop an agency-wide comprehensive plan for data and IT governance that prioritizes modernization and improvement activities.▪ DCYF and MNIT create processes for resource identification and prioritization of projects, so that staff have the ability to employ external partnerships/tools to make progress.



Adapt and implement a whole family approach.

Goals	Actions
Integrate a holistic approach within and across administrations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Build whole family approach capacity with all staff (including fiscal and operations) and integrate into agency processes and structures, such as work plans, strategic plans, legislative proposals, and procurement.▪ Conduct a whole family approach analysis to inform program planning and proposal development, including the identification of success indicators and accountability mechanisms for implementing and sustaining outcomes across teams.
Ensure programs and services are culturally responsive, strengths-based, and trauma-informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Build staff knowledge and capacity around strengths-based programming, cultural responsiveness, and trauma-informed care to better serve children, youth, and families.▪ Identify and collaborate with partners to incorporate strengths-based, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive approaches in our collective work (funding, policy development, program practices, etc.).



Cultivate dynamic and effective partnerships.

Goals	Actions
Strengthen consistent feedback loops with partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Proactively engage with Tribes, counties, schools, and communities to build strong, collaborative relationships.▪ Develop policies and protocols for compensating community involvement and engagement, with a particular focus on lived experience.
Ensure that partners are meaningfully engaged in decision-making spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ensure partner representation is prioritized on DCYF managed task forces and councils.▪ Build practices for identifying, gathering, and analyzing data in collaboration with communities to inform practices, policies, and tools used in service of our work.