# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCSAO Priorities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Ohio and County Profiles</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Definitions, Sources, and Notes</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Resources</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

May 2017

The Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) is a membership-driven association of Ohio’s county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for and supports child protection program excellence and sound public policy for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities. Our work is informed by data and information; therefore, we are proud to present this 13th edition of the PCSAO Factbook.

The Factbook is designed as a resource for policymakers and the media; for federal, state, and local partners; and for those interested in the safety and stability of Ohio’s children and families. This edition represents a significant departure and redesign from previous editions. In past years, PCSAO has presented a great deal of non-children services-specific data on topics such as poverty and employment, affordable housing, and child care. Now that those data are more readily available from other sources, PCSAO has elected to replace that information with more children services-specific program and fiscal information.

It is our hope that these data provide greater insight into and understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Ohio’s children and families and the important work that public children services agencies (PCSAs) do to protect and support them.

The PCSAO Factbook is a product of teamwork and many partners. We thank the county PCSAs that work every day to achieve child safety, well-being, and permanency, and that shared in documenting and reviewing the county data presented here. We are grateful for our partners at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Supreme Court of Ohio for their role in providing and analyzing data.

Special thanks are due to Factbook manager and PCSAO’s director of public policy, Mary Wachtel, and the Factbook team: Julie Cibulskas, Marla Himmeger, and Browning Design. And, to our colleagues Scott Britton, Jeed Jitprasert, and William Murray for their contributions.

Over the next two years, PCSAO will focus on addressing Ohio’s opioid epidemic and its impact on children services, meeting the complex needs of youth who are not able to access appropriate treatment, enhancing supports to foster and kinship caregivers, and monitoring the transition to Medicaid managed care for physical and behavioral health for foster and adopted youth.

The PCSAO team looks forward to working with you to achieve Ohio’s child protection mission: safe children, stable families, and supportive communities.

Angela Sausser, MA, MSW, LSW
Executive Director
Overview

Few systems compare to children services when it comes to complexity and risk. Protecting children from abuse and neglect while stabilizing their families remains one of the most challenging jobs in all of social services. Today, county children services agencies in Ohio struggle from:

- Years of disinvestment by the state.
- A flood of children into custody from the opioid epidemic and other social service systems unable to address their challenges.
- A traumatized workforce.

Without leadership and action, county agencies are at risk of being unable to find foster families where children can live safely, pay skyrocketing placement costs, provide necessary supports to maintain kinship placements, and appropriately ensure children’s safety.

Troubling Trends

The decade following 2002 saw Ohio gradually and safely reducing the number of children in out-of-home placement – leading the nation, in fact, with a 42 percent decline in children in care.¹ But that number is rising again. The ravages of the Great Recession, the scourge of the opioid epidemic, and the increasing complexity of children who need services from multiple systems have led to an 11 percent increase in the number of children in custody on any given day since 2010.² That means an additional 1,336 Ohio children were living away from their homes in 2016 compared to just six years earlier.

Of these, 31 percent are African American, even though black children make up only 15 percent of Ohio’s child population; another 12 percent are multiracial, meaning that 43 percent of children in custody are of a race other than white.³ Such racial disproportionality is up slightly from 41 percent in 2013.

Ohio’s overall population tends to be older than that of other states, with the number of children under 18 declining by almost 4 percent since 2010.⁴ Nevertheless, the rate of children removed from their homes and placed in county children services custody has increased by nearly 10 percent in the same period.⁵ Many of these children are quite young: 38 percent of children in custody are ages 5 and under; infants up to one year of age account for 8 percent of children in custody.⁶
Opioids Front and Center

A major contributor to these trends is Ohio's opioid epidemic. The state leads the nation in heroin and synthetic drug overdoses. A PCSAO survey showed that half of all children taken into custody in 2015 had parental drug use as a removal factor; of those, more than half had parents using opioids, including heroin. That means 28 percent of children in custody that year were victims of the epidemic, and that number has almost certainly risen. Placing these children with kin, while a top priority, is complicated by the fact that opioid use can become a multi-generational family addiction. Consequently, agencies must turn to foster care.

Maintaining these children in custody and addressing the trauma they experienced as a result of their parents’ neglect is increasingly expensive. Agencies spent $275 million in total placement costs in 2013; by 2016, costs had increased 20 percent to $331 million. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services estimates that $138 million of these costs were for substance abuse-related cases.

Because parents who are addicted to opioids are likely to relapse – some multiple times during their recovery process – their children linger in care. The length of time that children stay in temporary custody is up 19 percent, from 202 to 240 days, over four years. If parents cannot demonstrate sobriety within the children services system’s timelines, or if they fall victim to an overdose, then children come into the permanent custody of an agency. Not surprisingly, the number of children awaiting adoption is up, a trend many agencies attribute to the epidemic.

The impact of opioids reverberates through every stage of the children services system and creates a snowball effect:

- More children are removed from their home and placed into children services custody.
- These children remain in custody longer because their parents are likely to relapse, or end up in permanent custody.
- The number of available foster parents declines as existing caregivers keep children longer and may seek to adopt the children.
- Many child victims of opiates – particularly babies born addicted or children who experience significant parental neglect – must be placed in more expensive treatment foster homes or residential facilities.
- Kinship families struggle with trying to meet the needs of these children with very little support.

Ohio START

In March 2017, Attorney General Mike DeWine announced a $4.4 million grant to PCSAO to help children services agencies in 18 southern Ohio counties combat the opioid epidemic. The two-and-a-half-year grant is supplemented with $75,000 from Casey Family Programs and will pilot a research-informed model for improving child safety, permanency, and well-being when parents are addicted to drugs, particularly opioids.

Called Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma), the program gives children services agencies resources to partner closely with behavioral health providers and juvenile courts to form teams that will provide necessary supports to addicted parents and their children. The pilot will study how effective these teams can be in the parents’ recovery by providing timely, accessible trauma-informed treatment, intensive case management services, and recovery supports with certified peer specialists. Given similar experience in Kentucky, families engaged with Ohio START should experience less trauma and better child well-being outcomes. The children of these addicted parents will have the opportunity to live safely at home or return to their families sooner.

Initial counties participating in the grant include Adams, Athens, Brown, Clermont, Clinton, Fairfield, Fayette, Gallia, Highland, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, Scioto, and Vinton. The Ohio State University College of Social Work and Ohio University’s Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs will evaluate the program’s effectiveness.
• The increased cost is draining agency budgets, primarily local dollars from county children services levies or county general revenue funds.
• Caseworkers become frustrated with the lack of progress on cases, the long hours, and the secondary trauma of telling children that their parents have overdosed, leading to burnout and significant turnover.

Indeed, children are the invisible victims of the opioid epidemic. Public policy in Ohio has focused on expanding treatment services for addicts, prioritizing Medication-Assisted Treatment, limiting prescribing practices by physicians, and making naloxone available to first responders—all prudent steps by the Governor and General Assembly. But as of this publication date, other than the Ohio START pilot project through the Ohio Attorney General’s office, no policy or state investment has focused specifically on the children flooding into county agency custody as a result of the opioid epidemic. In addition, there has been very little attention to the long-term effects this epidemic will have on children and what Ohio needs to do now to prepare for the onset of behavioral issues, learning disabilities, and developmental delays as children age.

Multi-System Youth: Hot Spot for High Costs

Another source of the increase, particularly in placement costs, is children whose challenges relate primarily to mental illness, developmental disability, or juvenile delinquency. These “multi-system” youth account for a significant percentage of children in custody; in July 2016, 63 percent of youth in custody were there for reasons other than abuse or neglect. Often, they come into children services agency custody when a parent who is not abusive or neglectful is forced to relinquish custody in order to secure treatment or care for the child, or when a judge grants custody of a youth to children services to avoid juvenile incarceration. They primarily come into care deemed dependent, unruly or delinquent, or for reasons beyond abuse and neglect. In fact, neglect as a removal factor has decreased from 32 percent in 2010 to 24 percent in 2016. However, major metropolitan, Appalachian, and rural counties were all more likely to remove children due to neglect than the state average. This trend aligns with the severity of opioid dispensing and overdoses.

In 2016, 52 percent of agency placement costs was spent on just 33 percent of children in custody—children ages 12-17. When youth 18 and older are included, 63 percent of placement costs was spent on 37 percent of all youth in custody. By comparison, the birth through 5 age group, which makes up 38 percent of children in custody, accounts for 17 percent of total placement costs.

Placement Cost Expenditures by Age, SFY2016

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<th>Placement Cost Expenditures by Age, SFY2016</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age 0-5</td>
<td>Ohio children in custody 38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 6-11</td>
<td>% of placement costs 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 12-17</td>
<td>% of placement costs 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18+</td>
<td>% of placement costs 52%</td>
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Some progress has been made to address the needs of multi-system youth. A joint legislative committee convened in 2016 and made recommendations that would finally end the shameful predicament of a loving parent having to relinquish custody of a child in order to secure necessary healthcare services. Recommendations include establishing a crisis stabilization fund to meet the needs of such families, providing peer mentors for families and youth, and seeking Medicaid support for the evidence-based model known as High Fidelity.
Wraparound. Those recommendations, as of this publication date, have yet to be acted on by the Governor or General Assembly.

Kinship Caregivers Deserve More

With more than 100,000 grandparents raising grandchildren in Ohio, there are far more informal kinship arrangements, outside the purview of children services, than the more formal placements arranged by county agencies. However, tracking kin placement data in Ohio is complicated by county judicial practice. In cases where judges transfer custody directly to a grandparent or other relative, those children are not as readily captured by the data. Regardless of local judicial practice, when children must come into agency custody, caseworkers try first to place them with kin, rather than in foster homes, because they experience less trauma than those placed in unfamiliar foster settings.

Since 2010, Ohio has witnessed a 62 percent increase in children placed with relatives, where children services agencies maintain custody. However, kinship families rarely receive the financial benefits available to licensed foster parents. Ohio provides little support for these kinship families who offer a temporary refuge for children. Kinship caregivers, often caring for their own children as well, struggle in particular with additional child care costs, which can add up quickly, especially for multiple children.

For kinship caregivers who offer a permanent home to children, Ohio provides the Kinship Permanency Incentive (KPI), a modest payment intended to help stabilize the family for the first three to five years after legal custody is granted. The number of children supported by KPI increased 37 percent between 2013 and 2016.

Clearly, Ohio needs a proactive agenda to ensure that kinship caregivers at all stages have the support they need to care for these children. The agenda could include policies and investments such as child care assistance, kinship navigators to help direct Ohioans to the resources they need, and financial supports that prevent kin placements from disrupting – in the long term, a far less expensive solution than foster or residential care.

A Workforce on the Brink

Children services caseworkers are seldom recognized as the first responders they are. Their role is similar to that of law enforcement, firefighters, and paramedics. Every day, they knock on doors in response to reports of child abuse or neglect, not knowing what is on the other side. Sometimes it is a dirty home, sometimes a frightened child; more and more, it is a parent who has overdosed.

Within the strict guidelines of federal and state rules, caseworkers make critical decisions every day. Many work on call, making for long nights and weekends. Their satisfaction comes from reuniting children with their families, but the devastation of the opioid epidemic means that more and more children will never go home. In state fiscal year 2016, 1 in 4 caseworkers left their position, some to promotion or retirement (“positive turnover”), but 1 in 7 left with no performance concerns by their supervisor. This latter figure can be referred to as “negative turnover” – the type of turnover that hurts agencies and reduces positive outcomes. Burnout and secondary trauma lead many caseworkers to seek more traditional jobs that pay better. Regardless of the reason, such turnover costs agencies – in recruitment, training, and overtime. It costs the caseworkers who are left behind – in higher caseloads until a new worker can get up to speed. And it costs children – worker turnover is the leading contributor to young people getting stuck in foster care longer than they need to be.

Addressing these workforce challenges is daunting even for better-resourced county agencies and next to impossible for smaller, lower-resourced county agencies. The Ohio Child Welfare Training Program has improved training and support for supervisors so that they are better equipped to retain qualified caseworkers. The University Partnership Program offers the core child protection training in the classroom so that graduates can hit the ground running and receive an employment stipend when they go to work for a public agency. Metro agencies are looking to national models such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s On the Frontline initiative. But when agencies lose their entire casework staff in one year – as happened
in a couple counties – their ability to meet even basic mandates suffers.

The cost of turnover to county agencies is staggering. A study cited by the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute estimates the cost of replacing a single caseworker at $54,000. That figure includes lost productivity, advertising and recruitment, training, and overtime for those who must pick up more cases. It equates to a $24.2 million impact on county children services agencies for the 449 caseworkers who left the job with no performance concerns last year, and as much as $40 million for the 745 who left for all reasons.

Another reason for workers leaving their jobs is caseload size. While statewide the average caseload only slightly surpassed a national recommendation of 12 cases per worker, some county agencies saw caseloads that were much, much higher. Due to the increased complexity of today’s children services cases, the national recommendation is being challenged by Ohio and other states with the recognition that when caseworkers have too many cases, children and families ultimately suffer. Caseworkers who are challenged with high caseloads are not able to provide timely visits with families, appropriately respond to reports of abuse and neglect, or complete required paperwork and documentation.

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Last in the Nation for State Funding Support

As challenges have mounted, Ohio’s state share of investment in children services remains at the bottom nationally. State funding has been virtually flat since 2010 even as the number of children in custody has increased. For every dollar spent on children services in Ohio in 2016, state dollars accounted for only 10 cents (only half of which is made available to county agencies) while local communities picked up 52 cents. And that represents an increase from 2011 when the local share was 44 cents of each dollar spent. By comparison, other states contribute on average 40 cents of each dollar spent. Even if Ohio doubled state spending on child protection, it would remain 50th in the nation.

Taking federal, state and local expenditures together, Ohio spends more than most states on child protection – to be expected given Ohio’s status as the seventh most populous state in the nation. Per capita, however, Ohio ranks 15th in total spending, and no other state relies so
heavily on local communities to shoulder the majority of children services costs.

### Children Services Funding Ohio (2016)

- Federal: 52%
- State: 38%
- Local: 10%

### Children Services Funding Nationally (2014)

- Federal: 43%
- State: 40%
- Local: 17%

In 2016, 46 of Ohio’s 88 counties maintained a voted property tax levy that supported children services, and one county (Mercer) succeeded in passing a brand-new levy. Still, 41 counties have no levy and can only rely on county general revenue funds from the county commissioners. It is important to point out that the existence of a levy does not guarantee a well-resourced children services agency. Over the years, some levies have only been renewed, rather than replaced, and therefore yield much less compared to the year in which they first passed. Meanwhile, some agencies that rely solely on the county’s general revenue fund are able to manage successfully without an additional property tax levy. The bottom line is that without a more significant foundation of state funding, agency resources can vary significantly by county, resulting in inequitable services across the state. Zip code should not determine the level of services available to abused and neglected children and their families.

### Some Good News

Despite these challenges, Ohio’s county children services agencies work hard to keep children safe, stabilize families, and ultimately ensure permanent homes for kids. Caseworkers assessed more than 80,000 screened-in reports of abuse and neglect in 2016; an additional 17,000 cases came into the system as dependency cases and those referred to as “family in need of services.” When caseworkers determine that child safety has been compromised, they work first to keep children in their homes rather than remove them into agency custody. The number of families served in the home increased 7 percent between 2010 and 2016.23 That’s fewer children who did not have to experience the additional trauma of being removed from everything that is familiar to them.

### 2016 Gayle Channing Tenenbaum Legislator of the Year Awardees

PCSAO is privileged to work closely with many members of the General Assembly to ensure that the needs of children, families, and public children services agencies are represented when decisions are made by the legislature. In 2016, two legislators in particular demonstrated outstanding leadership and advocacy to achieve these goals. PCSAO looks forward to continuing to work with these legislative champions.

**The Honorable Sarah LaTourette**  
Ohio House of Representatives, 26th District

**The Honorable Peggy Lehner**  
Ohio Senate, 6th District
More promising still, the length of stay of a child before custody is granted to a relative or guardian has decreased by 254 days, or 33 percent, since 2013. Every type of permanency outcome for children has increased since 2013, including reunification, guardianship, legal custody to relatives, and adoption, while the number of children emancipating, or aging out of care, has declined.

Ohio’s county children services agencies are embracing new practices designed to achieve better outcomes for children and families. Here is just a sample:

- Ten counties are implementing a promising practice known as Youth-Centered Permanency Roundtables to help move children who have been in agency custody for 17 months or longer toward a permanent placement.
- Six counties are pairing caseworkers with primary parents – parents who at one time had open cases and, now that their case has closed, work as advocates within the system to help other parents meet their case plan goals so that children can be reunified more quickly.
- Two counties will be piloting a new predictive analytics system designed to identify potential child fatalities and near fatalities before they happen and to use continuous quality improvement to identify areas in casework and supervision that need to be strengthened. The pilot will be rolled out statewide in the next year.
- Eighteen southern Ohio counties will work to replicate a national model for responding to drug-related cases.
- Fifteen counties were selected to participate in case reviews as part of the federal Child and Family Services Review.
- Over 30 agency staff will participate in a nationally developed Leadership Academy for Middle Managers in 2017, learning new skills for better managing agency supervisors in their efforts to support and retain caseworkers.

**Conclusion**

While Ohio’s county children services agencies pursue new strategies and lean more heavily on local taxes and resources to serve children and their families, they are being overwhelmed by increasing numbers of children coming into custody. Meanwhile, soaring placement costs are threatening their solvency. The needs of each county vary: some must shore up their workforce or recruit new foster parents, while others must pay the bill for rising placement costs or provide supports to kin caregivers. Local communities have stepped up to pay over half the bill for protecting children. What is needed now is additional support from the state, while maintaining the federal investment in children services, so that county agencies can continue to meet their local challenges, appropriately respond to the impact of the opioid epidemic, address the needs of multi-system youth, and recruit and retain a vital workforce.
**PCSAO Priorities**

The Public Children Services Association of Ohio provides daily support and advocacy services to its member public children services agencies (PCSAOs). This includes maintaining a focus on how federal, state, and county decisions impact children services policy, practice, and public resources to pursue positive child and family outcomes. Every two years, the membership of PCSAO establishes its biennial budget position and priority initiatives to be pursued collectively; below are the 2017-2018 priorities.

**Priority Initiatives**

**Secure additional resources and supports for the children services system to adequately respond to the crisis created by the opioid epidemic.** Ohio's children services system is in crisis due to the opiate epidemic. Children services agencies’ ability to provide essential services to vulnerable children – the silent victims of this opioid crisis – is at risk.

Ohio has experienced an 11 percent increase in the number of children in foster care and a 20 percent increase in placement costs since 2010 while state funding (State Child Protection Allocation) to county public children services agencies has remained flat during the same period.

- Increase the State Child Protection Allocation (SCPA) so county children services agencies can recruit additional foster homes, address rising placement costs, provide support to kinship caregivers, and maintain a vital workforce.

**Ensure children and families can access integrated physical and behavioral health services, and their needs are met through Medicaid managed care.** As children involved in the children services system transition to Medicaid managed care, Ohio must ensure that children's needs are met timely and seamlessly. In addition, as behavioral health services transition, the process must not lead to cost-shifting to PCSAs.

- Medicaid managed care plans should share responsibility for Child and Family Services Review measures, specifically those related to accessing physical and behavioral healthcare services.
- Improve electronic sharing between the children services information system (SACWIS) and the Medicaid information system (MITS).

**Pursue policy and resource assistance to meet the needs of multi-system youth – when possible, outside of the children services system.** Ohio's children services system spends millions of dollars on multi-system youth, often too late to help them be successful. By intervening early, costs to all systems can be reduced and custody relinquishment can be prevented.

- Establish a Youth and Family Crisis Stabilization Fund to address the unmet and uninsured needs of Ohio's multi-system youth who are in crisis and unable to access appropriate levels of care and services.

**Ongoing Commitments**

**Education and employment: Improve education, post-secondary education, and employment outcomes for current foster youth, youth emancipating from care, and former foster youth.**

- Ensure that Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is implemented in every county and at all school districts to ensure educational stability for foster youth.
- Provide former foster youth with post-secondary education supports on Ohio’s campuses through Ohio Reach and BRIDGES – Ohio's new program to extend certain supports to eligible youth 18-21 who aged out of foster care.
- Ensure former foster youth are connected to employment with support through BRIDGES and the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP).

**Permanency: Improve permanency outcomes for children by expanding best practices and building supports for parents, kinship families, and adoptive parents.**

- Expand the Permanency Roundtables model to more counties.
- Increase the availability of primary parents and recovery coaches to increase reunification.
- Increase supports provided to kinship families to maintain permanency.
- Support adoption strategies to increase permanency of children.
Membership support and program excellence: Support membership and enhance program excellence among the county PCSAs.

✓ Convene membership, district, and metro meetings to facilitate peer learning and networking.
✓ Disseminate strategic information via the PCSAO website, Weekly Update, executive listserve, and biennial Factbook.
✓ Produce a high-quality annual conference to train and inform children services professionals on best practices.
✓ Partner with the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) to ensure that children services workers and caregivers are trained and equipped for their roles.

Advocacy: Advocate for state and federal sound public policy and adequate resource investment in child protection.

✓ Ensure that the perspective and needs of children, families, and the children services system are considered when policymakers make decisions.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to the many partners who contributed to the redesign and production of this 13th edition of the PCSAO Factbook. This truly is a collaborative effort, relying on the advice, time, and effort of many. We especially wish to acknowledge:

The ad hoc PCSAO Data Workgroup who worked with staff to lead the redesign of this edition, ensuring that the Factbook remains relevant, accessible, and strategic.

The directors and staff of Ohio’s public children services agencies for their willingness to review data elements.

Partners at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Kristine Monroe, Jenni Watson, and the SACWIS staff provided leadership, insights, and creativity in producing program data. Donna Tucker, Gary James, Dan Shook, and the finance staff did the same for fiscal data. Their collective hard work resulted in an improved data set to educate and inform stakeholders about Ohio’s children services system.

Partners at the Supreme Court of Ohio. Brian Farrington provided court data as well as technical support for visual presentation of key data points.

Mission champions and community partners who supported this publication through promotional space.

And the PCSAO team: Julie Cibulskas for her dedication to detail and steadfast help in data management and producing the state and county profile pages; Marla Himmeger, our factbook data consultant without whose unflagging enthusiasm, determination, and insights this edition could not have happened; David Browning of Browning Design for his design overhaul, responsiveness, and dedication to the end product; Tara DeMello, intern, for help with the Data Workgroup; and colleagues Angela Sausser, Scott Britton, Jeed Jitprasert, and William Murray for their contributions and support throughout all stages of the process.

Sincerely,

Mary D. Wachtel
Director of Public Policy
Endnotes

2 Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), special data run. Received 10/19/2016. Additional calculations by PCSAO.
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