

CHILDREN & YOUTH INVOLVED WITH CHILD PROTECTION

Federal, state, local, and tribal governments have entrusted child protection agencies with the authority to protect children and youth through the identification, assessment, and provision of services that support them within their families. This includes the power to remove a child or young person from the home only when essential for their protection. When such intervention is necessary, out-of-home care serves as a temporary, court-monitored resource to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth. The federal government further supports these state and Tribal efforts through specialized funding and legislation.

In 2024 In Nebraska...

27,860 children and youth were involved in an investigation due to alleged maltreatment

2,640 children and youth were involved in an investigation where maltreatment was confirmed

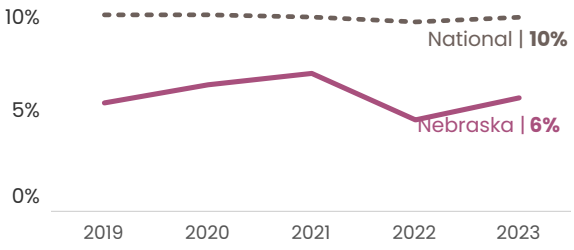
1,740 children and youth entered out-of-home care

ENSURING SAFETY IS A CRITICAL FUNCTION FOR CHILD PROTECTION

The data to the right illustrate the percent of children and youth who experience confirmed maltreatment again within 12 months of a prior report of maltreatment confirmed by the child protection agency. This should show a value as close to zero as possible to indicate children and youth do not experience maltreatment a second time - it's an indicator of system performance in safeguarding children and youth following a report of maltreatment.

There is no standard approach to reporting child abuse or neglect-related deaths, with both process and definition varying from state to state. In Nebraska, 3 children and youth were involved in a fatality due to maltreatment in FY2024. Not all of these children or youth were previously known to the child protection agency.

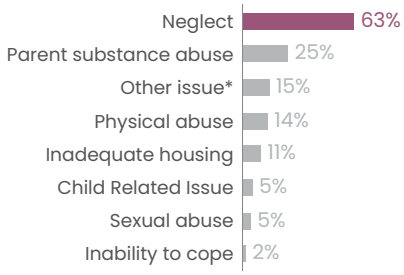
Percent of children and youth who experience **confirmed maltreatment within 12 months of a prior confirmed report**



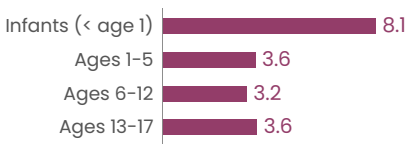
REASONS CHILDREN & YOUTH ENTER OUT-OF-HOME CARE

The number of children and youth entering out-of-home care has **been stable overall** over the last 5 years In Nebraska. Removal reasons are specific circumstances under which a child or youth is removed from their home or caregiver. The data below illustrate the removal reasons for children and youth as well as the rates of children and youth entering care, by age and by race/ethnicity. Definitions of these removal reasons vary by state.

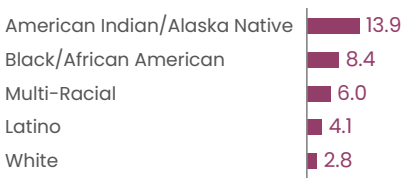
Children and youth **enter out-of-home care for a variety of reasons...**



Rates of children and youth entering out-of-home care vary **by age...**



and also **by race/ethnicity.**

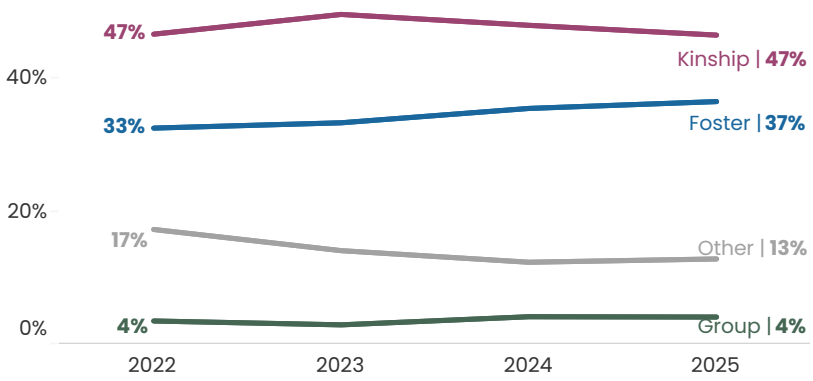


FY2025; Rates calculated per 1,000 children and youth in the general population and shown for groups of 50 or more.
*Other includes abandonment, death, incarceration, relinquishment; child related behaviors, disability, or substance abuse

WHERE CHILDREN & YOUTH IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE ARE PLACED

Placement type is the specific setting in which a child or youth in out-of-home care is placed. Research illustrates that children and youth achieve the best outcomes when they can be placed with their families, relatives, or chosen kin. Research also has raised concerns regarding the use of group and institutional settings only for placement purposes as they generally produce poorer outcomes for youth than family-based settings, including higher rates of delinquency, lower high school graduation rates, and delayed permanency.

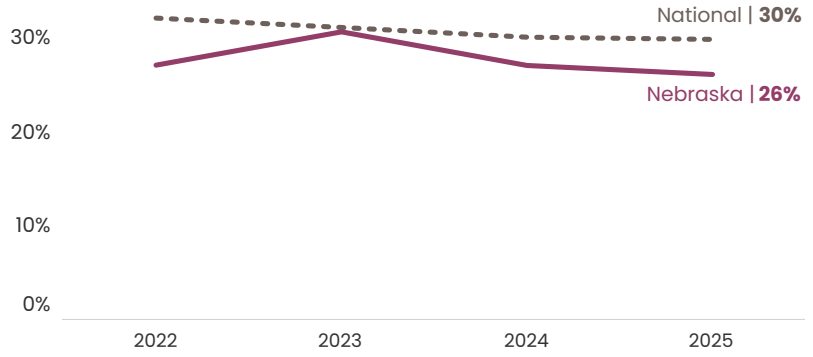
Trends in **placement settings** for children and youth in out-of-home care



TIME CHILDREN & YOUTH SPEND IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Evidence suggests that the longer children and youth remain in out-of-home care, the more likely they are to experience placement disruption and other challenges that impede permanency. The data below illustrate the percent of children and youth who have been in out-of-home care 2 years or longer at the end of each year.

Children and youth in out-of-home care 2+ years
(as percent of all children and youth in out-of-home care)

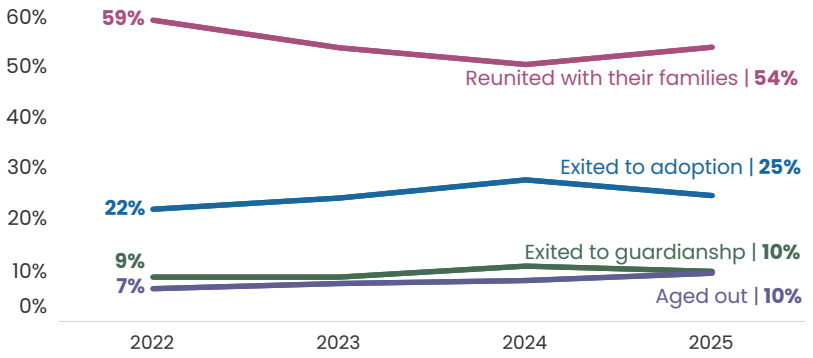


REASONS CHILDREN & YOUTH EXIT OUT-OF-HOME CARE

For those children and youth who do need to be removed from their parents or caregivers for safety reasons, placement in out-of-home care should be brief until permanency can be safely achieved through reunification, kinship guardianship, or adoption.

In 2025, 10% of children aged out of care without achieving legal permanency.

Exit reasons for children and youth leaving care

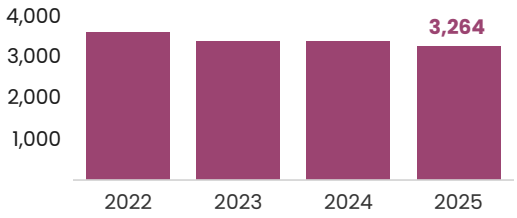


How to use this data for legislative oversight and inquiry in **Nebraska**

The legislative lens: 3 principles for effective oversight

1. Listen to people with lived experience: Engage directly with children and families to understand the real-world impacts behind these numbers.
2. Look below the surface: Ask for data disaggregated by county, age, and race/ethnicity to ensure policies and resources effectively reach every group.
3. Trace system dynamics & trade-offs: Treat changing trends as the start of an inquiry - evaluate how policy, funding, or practice shifts impact adjacent outcomes (e.g. rapid reunification vs. re-entry rates).

Total # of children in out-of-home care
(on 9/30 of each year; under age 18)



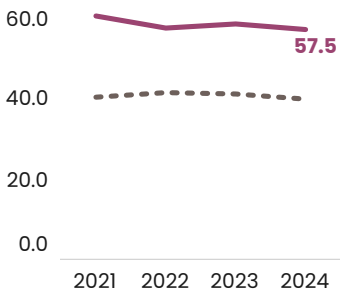
Strategic opportunities & oversight questions

Strategic Opportunity	Core Outcomes	Key oversight question
Increase safety in the context of children living with and within their family	1. Recurrence of maltreatment 2. Re-entry rate 3. Child maltreatment fatality rate	What family stabilization or post-permanency supports are provided to ensure children remain safe and avoid removal, or long after an agency case closes?
Reduce family separation as a primary strategy for government intervention for families in crisis	4. Screen-in rate 5. Substantiation rate 6. Entry rate	Are we intervening with community support early, or are we using child protection investigations to address issues that may not require that type of intervention?
Reduce time in care and time spent away from family	7. Kinship & group placements 8. Timely permanency 9. Permanency for children in care 2+ years	Where are the systemic bottlenecks - licensing barriers for relatives, court delays, or shortages of family-based foster homes?

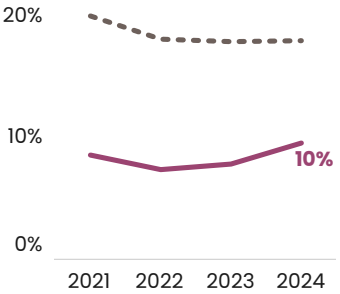
Nebraska within the national context (state trend vs. national)

The data below illustrates the broader trends of the child welfare system in Nebraska (solid line) alongside national comparisons (dotted line). Understanding this system-wide baseline is critical for contextualizing other outcomes.

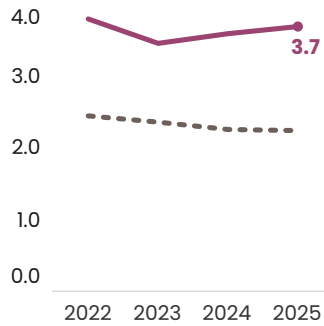
Rate of children screened-in for an investigation or assessment
(per 1,000 children in population)



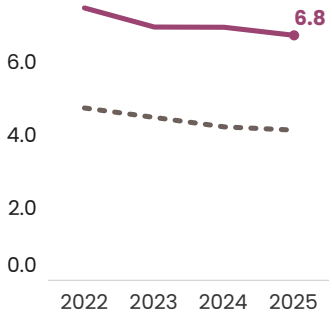
Percent of children substantiated following an investigation
(as % of all children screened-in)



Rate of children entering care
(per 1,000 children in population)



Rate of children in out-of-home care
(per 1,000 children in population)



Next steps for the work in **Nebraska**

Questions to consider:
After reviewing the data...
- What have you learned about the performance of your state's child welfare system?
- What do you want to learn more about?
- What findings from the data most stood out to you?
- What might you consider doing next?

"Behind every data point is a young person's life." - *Lupe Tovar, Casey Excellence for Children Awards Alumni*

Data alone doesn't give answers - it points to the right questions. Use these improvement opportunities to evaluate agency performance, track multi-year trends, and focus legislative inquiry.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What is a well-functioning child protection agency?
www.casey.org/what-is-well-functioning-child-protection-agency/

Sources:
Data derived from public AFCARS and NCANDS files available from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect Data (NDACAN). Data is presented for children and youth under the age of 18, except for data on exit reasons (which is presented for children and youth under age 21).

Key terms
Child Welfare - government services designed to protect children and youth and encourage family stability. These typically include investigation of alleged child abuse and neglect, foster care, adoption services, and services aimed at supporting at-risk families so they can remain intact.
Out-of-home care (also called foster care) includes family foster care, kinship care, treatment foster care, and residential and group placement.
Group placement – Foster care placement setting that consists of 24-hour supervision for children and youth in highly structured settings such as group homes for those with complex health needs, residential treatment facilities, or maternity homes.
Aged Out - Youth within a state's foster care system who are still in the system when they reach the age of majority (determined by states), and have not found permanency, such as reunification, relative placement or adoption.