

State of Rhode Island Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Prevention Plan – Executive Summary

Last updated October 17, 2022

Background

The mission of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) is to partner with families and communities to raise safe and healthy children and youth in a caring environment. At its core, DCYF’s primary goal is to promote child and family well-being, and that’s achieved by keeping children, youth, and their families safe and healthy at home, at school and in the community through a family-focused and community inclusive approach. Based on these principles, DCYF is excited to begin implementing the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) through a five-year Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan (FFY2022-FFY2026). This plan will allow the department to build upon its focus and mission of strengthening the capabilities and expanding the capacity of parents and caregivers to effectively care for their children and safely reduce the need for foster care where possible, keeping children and youth safe and healthy at home.

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was enacted by Congress on February 9, 2018, as part of Public Law (P.L.) 115-123. The FFPSA, is landmark federal legislation that offers a major opportunity for states to strengthen prevention services by allowing Title IV-E funding reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parent skill-based programs for children or youth who are at risk of entering foster care, pregnant or parenting youth in foster care, and the parents or relative caregivers of those children and youth.

<p>Family First Prevention Services Act Provisions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No income/AFDC test for child, parent, or kin recipients of prevention services. 2. Preventive services can be federally funded for up to 12-months at a time; additional 12-month periods are allowable. 3. All prevention services must be provided within a trauma-informed organizational structure and treatment framework. 4. A child-specific prevention plan is required for each child at imminent risk of foster care. 5. Federal reimbursement of 50% for services, training, and administrative costs. 6. Maintenance of Effort provision to ensure that Title IV-E spending does not replace historical spending on prevention Evidence-Based Prevention programs (EBPs). Rhode Island’s Maintenance of Effort is \$0.
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Family First Builds on DCYF Ongoing Efforts

DCYF is well positioned to put Family First into action thanks to the implementation of the Public Health Framework in 2009. Through this framework, which introduced a strong shift toward primary and secondary prevention, the Department developed a network of prevention-directed providers statewide known as the Family Community Care Partnerships (FCCPs). FCCPs provide high-fidelity, wraparound services and link children and families to home- and community-based services. Together DCYF and FCCPs deploy both primary and secondary prevention strategies. The Department's primary prevention efforts are achieved through the FCCPs and collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Additionally, in 2019 DCYF began working with a foundational practice model known as S.A.F.E. (Safety Assessment Through Family Engagement), which provides a central voice to youth, families, and communities, shifting Child Protective Services work from a solely incident-based investigative approach to a more comprehensive assessment of families' strengths, behaviors, and functioning. This model has empowered caseworkers to partner with parents to co-create plans that address behavioral changes to maintain child safety, permanency, and well-being.

Working in collaboration with DCYF stakeholders, the department set out to design and develop its own Family First Prevention Plan, which was initially submitted to the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) in September 2021. ACF approved the DCYF plan on October 17, 2022.

Outcomes DCYF Wants to Accomplish

Family First will give DCYF the ability to enhance its efforts with respect to prevention and early intervention services to keep children safe, strengthen families and reduce the need for foster care whenever it is safe to do so. This five-year plan will give the state the option to use these federal Title IV-E funding for evidence-based prevention services and programs (EBPs).

Why is the Family First Act Needed in Rhode Island?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Continuation of work to shift the focus from out-of-home care to prevention and increased family stability and well-being.2. Investing in evidence-based interventions.3. Applying a trauma-responsive lens to the continuum of prevention services.4. Partnering across systems (mental health, substance use disorder, juvenile justice, early childhood, health, etc.) to align prevention efforts.5. Expanding the evidence base in child welfare and spreading innovative practices.
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Rhode Island defines prevention candidates as children who may be at imminent risk of entering or re-entering foster care based on circumstances or characteristics of the family (parent(s), child, or relative caregiver). These children might be able to remain safely at home with the provision of mental health treatment, substance use treatment, or in-home parenting services for the child, parent, or relative caregiver. To be eligible, the child must be identified as a candidate in the child's prevention plan and have an identified need for mental health prevention and treatment, substance use prevention and treatment, or in-home skill-based parenting services to maintain the safety, permanency, and/or well-being of the child or to prevent the child from entering foster care. Pregnant or parenting youth in foster care are also eligible for prevention services when the service is designated in the youth's service plan.

Who Will Benefit from the Family First Act in Rhode Island?

Along with expanding access to prevention services and building stronger communities and families, an important way in which Rhode Island intends to leverage Family First is as a tool to redefine which families are eligible for Title IV-E preventive services and how DCYF plans to streamline their care. Rhode Island has developed a broad candidacy population (families eligible for Family First services) definition that includes two candidate population categories and eight candidate subpopulations which follow these pathways:

Candidate Pathways	Candidate Subpopulations
<p>Children and families that are connected to Family First Prevention Services through DCYF</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children & families open to DCYF’s Family Services Unit (FSU) for in-home services 2. Children & families that have reunified 3. Children or youth engaged in in-home juvenile probation 4. Children in-home with a sibling in foster care 5. Pregnant and parenting youth in foster care (categorically eligible for Family First services)
<p>Children and families that are connected to Family First Prevention Services through Family Community Care Partnerships (FCCP)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Children & families that are assessed by the DCYF Support and Response Unit (SRU) but receive services through the FCCPs. 7. Children who are post-guardianship and/or post-adoption at risk for disruption of placement and receive services through the FCCPs. 8. Children & families referred to the FCCP by another community-based organization or self-referral.

Identification of candidate subpopulations is based on analyses of child and family circumstances and characteristics completed by the DCYF Office of Data Analytics, Evaluation, and Continuous Quality Improvement (DPI).

What Process did DCYF Follow to Develop its Family First Plan?

DCYF is committed to ensuring diverse, community, and stakeholder engagement in their work by consulting and coordinating with partner agencies and other stakeholders throughout the development of the Family First prevention plan and will continue going forward into implementation. Meaningful and authentic engagement with a broad and representative group of community members, key partners, agencies, and organizations invested in the health and wellbeing of Rhode Island’s children and families ensures open dialogue and results in stronger, more thoughtful, and equitable family- and child-centered collaboration.

During planning and development of Rhode Island’s Family First Plan, DCYF established a Family First Advisory Team (Advisory Team) comprised of key stakeholders and partner organizations to consult and advise DCYF throughout the process. The Advisory Team was integrated into a governance framework made up of critical stakeholders throughout DCYF and its parent agency, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), to guide and shape goals, inform, and approve strategy, and make financially impactful decisions for DCYF and EOHHS.

The Advisory Team kicked off in February 2021 to communicate, advise, and serve as a formal stakeholder in the development and enhancement of the prevention vision for Rhode Island children and families. The Advisory Team is comprised of all relevant units of Rhode Island DCYF, Department of Behavioral Healthcare Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), Department of Education (RIDE), Department of Health (RIDOH), Early Childhood Education, EOHHS, Family Court, FCCPs, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, legislators, the Narragansett Indian Tribe, the Office of the Child Advocate, parents, Public Consulting Group (PCG), school districts, service providers, and the Trafficking Task Force, and is governed by the DCYF Implementation Team. Figure 1 below shows Rhode Island’s Family First governance structure.

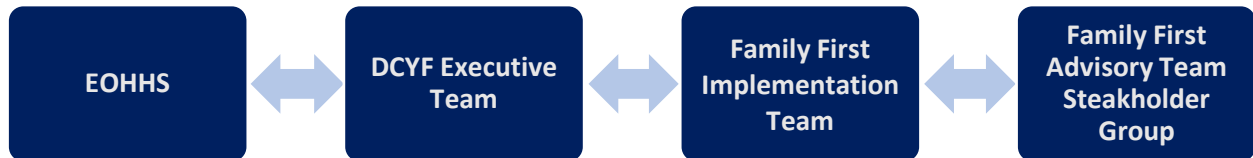


Figure 1 Rhode Island Family First Governance Structure.

Approach to Prevention Candidacy Eligibility and Service Needs

For children and families who are connected to Family First prevention services through DCYF, there are several divisions that engage children and families:

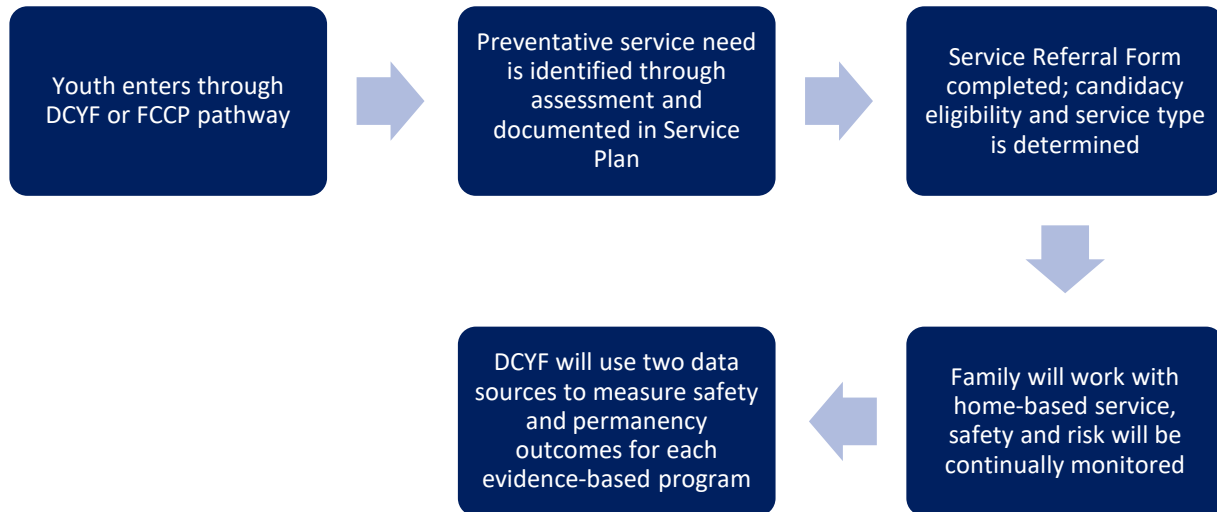
1. Child Protective Services (CPS) – The investigative division that receives, screens, and responds to reports of suspected child maltreatment.
2. Family Service Unit division (FSU) – FSU becomes involved with families after a CPS investigation is conducted and a determination is made that services are needed to address abuse, neglect, or dependency within the family.
3. Office of Juvenile Probation (OJP) – Provides supervision to youth who have been adjudicated wayward or delinquent by RI Family Court and are sentenced to a term of probation.

Depending on which division is working with the family, a DCYF caseworker in the Child Protective Services Unit (CPS), the Family Services Unit (FSU), or the Office of Juvenile Probation (OJP) will use designated assessment tools to inform candidacy for Family First prevention services or foster care. DCYF caseworkers assess children and families using safety and risk assessment tools to identify a child’s risk of entry into foster care and the child and family’s needs related to mental health, substance abuse, and/or parenting skills. After a child has been determined to be a candidate, the caseworker will create a child-specific service plan (prevention plan) that outlines the need for services, the types of services that will be provided and the anticipated timeframe for service delivery. When a foster care youth is identified as pregnant or parenting, DCYF will reassess the case and develop a case plan that includes prevention services.

Children and families who are connected to Family First prevention services through FCCPs, will be assessed by the FCCP Family Service Care Coordinator (FSCC) to identify mental health, substance abuse, and/or parenting skills needs. For children and families, the FSCC completes an assessment using the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Plus (CANS+), and / or the Functional Assessment and Action Plan (FAAP), and / or the Strengths, Needs and Cultural Discovery (SNCD) assessment tools to determine

the child and family’s needs and to inform which prevention services will best help the child remain safe at home with their family.

Below is an illustration of Family First candidacy eligibility and service needs:



Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs) Services and Selection Process

DCYF will provide evidence-based services or programs (EBPs) for a child and their parents or relative caregivers when the child, parent, or relative caregiver’s needs for the services or programs are directly related to the safety, permanence, or well-being of the child or to prevent the child from entering foster care.

As required by Family First, approved evidence-based mental health prevention and treatment, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and in-home parent skill-based programs and services will be provided by a qualified clinician to a child/youth or to the child/youth’s parent or relative caregiver for up to 12 months for each prevention period, beginning on the date the child/youth is identified as a “child/youth who is a candidate for foster care” or a pregnant or parenting youth in a prevention plan, also referred to as a prevention candidate. Services can also be provided for an additional 12-month period following a redetermination of candidacy. To select evidence-based services/programs for the initial five-year Title IV-E prevention plan, DCYF analyzed both the demographics, and the child and family population needs, of each candidate subgroup. After analyzing the needs of the target population, DCYF looked at how many service providers currently provide each EBP in DCYF’s service array, and how often the service is provided, to better understand Rhode Island’s existing capacity to provide each EBP.

The evidence-based services and programs for which Rhode Island’s DCYF intends to claim reimbursement for Title IV-E allowable services and/or administrative costs are as follows:

Evidence Based Programs by Category, Rating, Waiver			
Intervention	Category	Title IV-E Clearinghouse Rating	CQI (Evaluation Waiver)
Motivational Interviewing	Mental Health, Substance Use, Parenting	Well-supported	✓
Functional Family Therapy	Mental Health	Well-supported	✓
Multisystemic Therapy	Mental Health	Well-supported	✓
Parent-Child Interaction Therapy	Mental Health	Well-supported	✓
Homebuilders	Parenting	Well-supported	✓
Familias Unidas	Mental Health, Substance Use, Parenting	Well-supported	✓

In addition, below is a breakout for the number of providers available to deliver EBPs in Rhode Island.

Number of Providers in Rhode Island Delivering EBPs by EBP	
EBP	Number of Providers
Functional Family Therapy	2
Multisystemic Therapy	2
Homebuilders	1
Familias Unidas	1

Practice Improvement Opportunities

Family First requires that each program listed in a state’s prevention plan have a well-designed and rigorous evaluation strategy unless a waiver is granted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS may waive the evaluation requirement if they deem the evidence of the effectiveness of the evidence-based practice to be profound and the state is compliant in meeting the continuous quality improvement standard regarding the practice.

DCYF will be implementing several evidence-based programs that have been rated by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse as “well-supported.” Therefore, Rhode Island is requesting a waiver for conducting a rigorous evaluation for those services. However, DCYF will integrate fidelity and outcome monitoring of those programs and services into its current continuous quality improvement (CQI) programming.

Continuous Quality Improvement: The Department has a robust research, program planning, and evaluation and CQI infrastructure as part of the Division of Performance Improvement (DPI). Program evaluations will be conducted under the guidance and oversight of DPI, while the DPI will carry out contract monitoring and measure fidelity (sometimes called adherence or integrity) to the original practice model, and outcomes achieved for evidence-based programs and services granted a waiver. The fidelity component will help DCYF assess if providers have trained capacity to provide the program, if the program is reaching those it is intended to benefit and within reasonable timeframes, and if providers are adhering to program manual guidance.

Risk and Safety Assessments: The mission of DCYF is to “partner with families and communities to raise safe and healthy children and youth in a caring environment.” Children must also be protected from the compounding trauma of separation from their families when they can be safely maintained in their homes or that of a relative. DCYF uses a family-centered, strengths-based approach to case planning and management by engaging family members throughout the case to ensure services are administered to best address the family’s strengths and needs. Adherence to monitoring safety is a critical component of the prevention work outlined in Rhode Island’s Family First prevention plan. Risk and safety assessments are used to:

- Help determine which families are appropriate for prevention services,
- Assist with the development of safety and prevention plans,
- Identify the level of intensity needed for intervention with a family, including how frequently the family needs to be seen, and
- Determine when it is appropriate to recommend closing an in-home, prevention services case.

Workforce Support and Training: DCYF is committed to employing well-trained staff dedicated to providing quality services to children, youth, and families in Rhode Island. The Department’s Workforce Development Unit implements a non-biased, third-party evaluation program for all trainings provided. They are responsible for developing curricula that ensures employees participate in training that is appropriate to their job functions. Workforce Development follows the Safety Assessment Family Evaluation (SAFE) practice model approach to safety assessment and management. Training programs focus on the following:

- New Worker Training Program
- Ongoing Training Program
- Supervisory/Administrative Training Program

In addition to standard training programs, DCYF offers staff training programming with a focus on prevention and delivery of trauma-informed, evidence-based services. These prevention trainings target the development of service plans based on assessment of individual child and family needs and is continuing to grow and enhance offerings, these can include:

- Identifying prevention services candidates and creating child-specific prevention plans,
- Conducting risk and safety assessments,
- Engaging families in assessments of strengths, needs, and the identification of appropriate services,
- Connecting families with appropriate trauma-informed, evidence-based services to mitigate risk and promote family stability and well-being, and
- Oversight, evaluation, and determination of continued appropriateness of services.

Racial Equity Training: DCYF is also working on other training programs to support DCYF staff in understanding racial equity and how they can contribute to the goal of creating racial equity in services and programming within DCYF. Authentic Family Engagement is a training program developed by DCYF in collaboration with consultants from Ann E. Casey which focuses on better understanding the lived experience of BIPOC and their perception of child welfare. The goal of this program is to improve the relationship between DCYF, and the children and families served. A pilot program was launched in the summer of 2021 with plans for expansion to all DCYF staff.

Next Steps

As work gets underway for the department through Family First, DCYF hopes to see

- A reduction in the need for foster care by increasing the number of children and families safely sustained at home and in the community.
- Fewer children engaged with juvenile justice and a decrease in length of time for those involved.
- An increase in equity of services available for children/families ensuring culturally appropriate options are available.
- Improvement of parental capacity to care for and sustain their family by building their support networks.
- Increased array of prevention services.
- Faster reunification efforts by wrapping around children and their families.
- Greater collaboration and coordination across public and private departments/agencies in Rhode Island.

Additional Family First Prevention Services Act Resources

[Visit the DCYF Family First page](#) for additional resources and information.

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You can also access Family First information by visiting the following:

FamilyFirstAct.org |

[Family First Prevention Services Act - Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

[Title IV-E Prevention Program | The Administration for Children and Families \(hhs.gov\)](#)

[Family First Prevention Services Act - The Annie E. Casey Foundation \(aecf.org\)](#)