

Background

In California, there are more than 37,000 children and youth who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and placed in foster care.ⁱ Stable placements in nurturing family homes are foundational to helping them heal from the trauma they have experienced and thrive. Research shows children and youth in stable placements experience improved emotional well-being, health, and educational outcomes. They have a greater likelihood of building enduring relationships with caring adults. Children and youth in stable placements are also more likely to experience continuity in services, which is important as abuse and neglect can lead to complex physical and mental health challenges that can persist into adulthood.ⁱⁱ

Unfortunately, placement stability remains elusive for many children and youth in care, with many experiencing multiple placements. Youth in foster care move an average once every nine months.ⁱⁱⁱ require that caregivers, children, and youth have access to critical resources and supports that are designed to reduce trauma and strengthen relationships.

The foster care rate provided to support children and youth in family homes is an important component of ensuring their needs are met and that caregivers have the resources needed to ensure stability. In 2024, the Legislature enacted a new Tiered Foster Care Rate Structure^v under which payments will begin on July 1, 2027, or once automation is complete, whichever is later. Under this new rate structure, foster care payments will be based on the child's individual needs and strengths, as identified by the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment tool, rather than the placement type. This new structure seeks to ensure more children and youth remain connected to their families and communities by investing in family-based placements so youth do not have to enter congregate care to receive services. The new Tiered Foster Care Rate Structure includes a care and supervision component, a strength building component, and an immediate needs component.

Next Steps

Moving forward, it will be important to ensure that under the new Tiered Foster Care Rate Structure:

1. The CANS tool is utilized appropriately and with fidelity and all children and youth in foster care are assessed regularly and consistently;
2. Caregiver training, support, guidance, and accountability standards match the needs of the children in their care, particularly for children in Tiers 2 and 3 of the rate structure;
3. Critical supports, such as enrichment activities, respite care, and transportation, are funded appropriately and are easily accessed as needs arise; and
4. Youth in foster care are connected to peer navigators who can help them identify and access supports and activities.

For more information, contact Susanna Kniffen at skniffen@childrennow.org.

ⁱ Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Courtney, M., Eastman, A.L., Gomez, A., Guo, S., Zh Berwick, H., Lu, F., Hoerl, C., Yee, H., Ensele, P., Nevin, J., & Michel, J. (2025) CCWIP reports. Retrieved Dec 09, 2025, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: <https://cwip.berkeley.edu>

ⁱⁱ 2024 California Children's Report Card: A Review and Roadmap to Improve the Well-Being of California's Kids, available at [2024 California Children's Report Card - Children Now](https://www.childrennow.org/2024-california-childrens-report-card-children-now)

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^v <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/foster-care/foster-care-audits-and-rates/foster-care-rate-reform-proposal>