

Department of Family and Protective Services Agency Strategic Plan

Mission

Improving the health, safety, and well-being of Texans through good stewardship of public resources, with a focus on protecting children, older adults, and people with disabilities, and preventing child abuse and neglect.

Agency Goals and Action Plan

Many of the action items related to all the goals represent ongoing, mission-critical functions that will continue during the five-year period of the strategic plan and beyond.

Goal 1: Protect children, families, older adults, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and exploitation through quality investigations.

Action Items

Action Item 1: Implement a new Child Protective Services (CPS) practice model, Signs of Safety, to engage families and their support networks to ensure child safety remains the primary focus by 12/31/2017.

Action Item 2: Use the Special Investigator positions statewide to mentor CPS investigations staff and provide consistent training on proper forensic investigation techniques by 8/31/2021.

Action Item 3: Use the Special Investigator positions to strengthen relationships with law enforcement entities by 8/31/2021.

Action Item 4: Provide thorough and timely investigations in the expanded number of settings within which Adult Protective Services (APS) conducts provider investigations through 8/31/2018.

Action Item 5: Improve staff retention to develop a professional and tenured workforce that can conduct thorough and timely investigations.

How Goal 1 and Its Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

Accountability

The Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is accountable to the citizens of Texas by fulfilling its statutory obligation to protect vulnerable citizens through timely and thorough investigations of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. DFPS promotes policies and initiatives that protect the best interests of children, families, people who are 65 and older, and people with disabilities.

Efficiency

DFPS makes use of existing investigative staff resources to maximize coordinated efforts in conducting quality investigations and thorough assessments to ensure the safety and well-being of children, families, people who are 65 and older, and people with disabilities who are subject to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. These efforts include cross-program coordination with key stakeholders, such as law enforcement entities and other agencies.

Effectiveness

CPS and APS have integrated practice models that include tools and strategies to help staff make accurate, timely, and consistent decisions. These practice models require staff to explore strengths and protective actions as rigorously as they explore safety and risk, resulting in more accurate assessments and aligning clients who need more intensive levels of intervention with appropriate services that are designed to reduce the risk of recidivism.

Both CPS and APS track and monitor program performance through the use of the agency's executive dashboard that captures data on key metrics. Both programs have quality improvement teams that help define measures of success. Programs use data to identify problem areas and implement plans for continuous improvement.

Both APS and CPS have investigation timeframes in place and will be evaluating these timeframes in light of an updated work measurement study.

Excellence in Customer Service

CPS and APS strive to conduct thorough investigations within appropriate time frames. For children who cannot remain safely with their families, CPS works to ensure that children are placed in the most appropriate setting that guarantees their safety and well-being. Strengthening oversight of the conservatorship program and the children under its care is essential to improving customer service. APS is taking on an expanded role in conducting provider investigations in an array of settings which will allow APS to ensure the safety of a greater number of vulnerable Texans.

Transparency

DFPS posts an overview of the agency's programs, services, measures, and accomplishments on the public website. Visitors to the website are able to see data on investigations and services at county, regional, and statewide levels. DFPS is working to automate this information into an online data resource that is interactive and accessible to the public. This will help lead to greater transparency on the part of DFPS.

Other Considerations for Goal 1

DFPS has no other considerations to report for Goal 1.

Goal 2: Work with community partners to strengthen family systems and improve outcomes through effective service delivery.

Action Items

Action Item 1: Reduce the average time to achieve permanency for children in CPS conservatorship by 25 percent by 8/31/2020.

Action Item 2: Reduce the number of youth who exit CPS conservatorship without a permanent home to five percent by 8/31/2020.

Action Item 3: Improve placement resources and services through staged implementation of redesign of the Texas foster care system and targeted capacity-building efforts across the state by 8/31/2021.

Action Item 4: Improve the quality of services to CPS clients by implementing performance-based contracting and testing, and evaluating the use of brokered services by 8/31/2021.

Action Item 5: Improve APS In-Home service delivery practice by providing services at the appropriate time, with the appropriate number of contacts based on Safety Assessments, risk findings, and the service plan through 8/31/2021.

Action Item 6: Improve quality of assessment of children and family needs and outcomes for children in care by implementation of Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths, Family Strength Needs Assessment starting 9/1/16.

How Goal 2 and Its Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

Accountability

CPS and APS are accountable to the citizens of Texas by providing appropriate, timely, and effective services that address the root cause of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Reducing incidences of abuse and neglect minimizes waste of taxpayer funds.

Efficiency

DFPS fulfills its core function by working with communities, stakeholders, and other agencies to maximize resources to provide quality services to clients. CPS collaborates with Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas to reduce trauma for children during the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases. This process results in efficiency as information is obtained for both the CPS investigation and for a potential criminal investigation; therefore, children do not have to repeat talking about difficult subjects. APS local boards in many parts of the state support resource rooms and make purchases to address specific needs of APS clients. This supplements and enhances APS use of Purchased Client Services funds.

Effectiveness

Both CPS and APS track and monitor program performance through the use of the agency's executive dashboard that captures data on key metrics. Both programs have quality improvement teams that help define measures of success. Programs use data to identify problem areas and implement plans for continuous improvement.

DFPS leverages and coordinates existing community and state level resources to ensure medical and behavioral health needs are met.

Excellence in Customer Service

CPS provides excellent customer service to clients by providing effective services that allow children and families to remain together whenever that is a safe, viable option. CPS makes efforts to place children who have been removed from their families due to abuse and neglect with other family members whenever possible. In the event that a placement with a family member is not possible, CPS strives to place children in the least restrictive setting that is appropriate to meet the child's needs. APS works with stakeholders and clients to provide services in the least restrictive manner to help improve a client's quality of life.

Consumers who have concerns with how DFPS treated them may call the DFPS Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) who will conduct an independent, objective review of how their case was handled. Feedback from OCA helps programs identify areas to strengthen policy compliance.

Transparency

DFPS carries out its work through interactions with clients, stakeholders, and the general public. In addition to information about program services that is posted on the agency's public website, DFPS also holds stakeholder forums to obtain input from the public when rules that impact services are created or amended.

As mentioned, consumers who have concerns with how DFPS treated them may call the DFPS OCA. Transparency is ensured through the independent, objective review of how their case was handled.

Other Considerations for Goal 2

DFPS has no other considerations to report for Goal 2.

Goal 3: Work with Texas communities to provide services that prevent child abuse and neglect and promote positive child, youth, and family outcomes based on analysis of community risk and protective factors as well as local needs assessments.

Action Items

Action Item 1: Develop a strategy for the administration of Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) contracts to enhance positive outcomes for children and families through the required use of community needs assessments by 8/31/2020.

Action Item 2: Report annually the progress of PEI-funded services and plans for improvements through 8/31/2021.

Action Item 3: Expand technical assistance and support to communities to help them plan, assess, choose appropriate evidence-based programs, collaborate in the community, leverage private dollars, and sustain their efforts by 8/31/2020.

Action Item 4: Promote public awareness of protective factors for children, including topics such as safe sleep for infants, supervision to prevent drowning and hyperthermia deaths in cars, effective ways to nurture children, safe ways to manage the stress of parenting, and the need for early childhood immunizations through 8/31/2021.

Action Item 5: Fully engage fathers through caseworker training and tools as CPS works with children and families through 8/31/2021.

How Goal 3 and Its Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

Accountability

By developing a strategy for contract administration that allows more flexibility and helps contractors increase the amount of dollars available for services, PEI will be maximizing the use of funds it has been appropriated and minimize waste of taxpayer funds.

In addition to providing technical support to county contracts, PEI can also provide technical assistance to help communities expand their reach and impact on families.

Efficiency

Developing a strategy for contract administration that is both more flexible and helps contractors to increase the amount of dollars available for services will help to maximize program results.

To improve efficiency in services, the Texas Home Visiting Program previously at the Health and Human Services Commission was merged with PEI.

Effectiveness

PEI has contracts with several research partners to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs to determine whether contractors are meeting their performance measures and whether improvements are needed. PEI currently has research partners conducting independent evaluations of the following programs:

- Healthy Outcomes through Prevention and Early Support (HOPES),
- Texas Home Visiting,
- SafeBabies initiative,
- Military and Veteran Family Services,
- Fatherhood programs and initiatives,
- Services to At-Risk Youth, and
- Community Youth Development.

PEI has formed a roundtable of these research partners to review the current outcome measures and to suggest improvements to track the effectiveness of programs so that PEI can be as transparent as possible about its programs and their effects on families and communities.

Excellence in Customer Service

PEI demonstrates excellence in customer service through the following:

- Contracting with culturally-competent programs that have organizational experience with child and family services and provide professional development for staff;

- Requiring contractors to collaborate with community partners, to support the community, and to reach as many target clients as possible;
- Offering a public awareness campaign, Facebook page, and a website with parenting support information and resources at HelpandHope.org;
- Offering technical assistance to PEI contractors and community providers throughout Texas to improve their services to children and families;
- Involving stakeholders to make recommendations for improving contract relations to the internal Contract Improvement Workgroup that implements input when feasible; and
- Holding an annual conference, Partners in Prevention, to facilitate learning among service providers and professionals working with children and families.

The DFPS Texas Youth and Runaway Hotline provides prevention services to youths, parents, siblings, and other family members who are in need of a caring voice and sympathetic ear. Trained volunteers are on call to provide guidance on youth-related concerns, to offer referral information, or simply to listen. Services are provided over the phone, and through online chat, similar to instant messaging.

Transparency

The PEI pages of the agency website are updated on a regular basis and include resources for finding additional information about PEI programs. Regular updates on PEI activities are sent out through the Texas Prevention Network. PEI is working to annually produce a program-specific strategic plan to speak to its efforts as directed by the Texas Family Code (Tex. Fam. Code) Chapter 265. PEI is dedicated to reporting the progress of its programs by sharing their outcomes, outputs, and plans for making improvements.

Other Considerations for Goal 3

DFPS has no other considerations to report for Goal 3.

Goal 4: Provide 24/7 operations to capture vital intake information needed to respond to vulnerable Texans.

Action Items

Action Item 1: Decrease Statewide Intake (SWI) call hold times and rate of abandoned calls by 8/31/2018.

Action Item 2: Expand operational capacity to maximize service availability by establishing a satellite location and increasing the use of telework by 8/31/2021.

Action Item 3: Maintain or reduce staff turnover by 8/31/2021.

How Goal 4 and Its Action Items Support Statewide Objectives

Accountability

SWI is the DFPS program that operates the Texas Abuse Hotline that is available 24/7/365 to the general public for reporting incidents of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children, people who are 65 and older, and people with disabilities. By providing 24/7 coverage and ensuring operational capacity, SWI is accountable to the tax and fee payers of Texas.

SWI is in the process of establishing satellite locations beginning in El Paso to ensure continuity of operations in the event of an Austin area emergency or disaster. The goal is to hire and train a few staff by 9/1/2017 with 24-hour satellite coverage by 8/31/2021.

Efficiency

All calls to SWI are handled by an automatic call distributor (ACD). When a person calls SWI, the ACD offers recorded information and several options to help route the call to appropriate staff in the shortest possible time.

There is never a busy signal, and all calls are counted to enable constant scheduling improvements. Each call is held within the system until answered or abandoned by the caller. SWI calls are electronically recorded. In addition, SWI has a designated telephone line for law enforcement, an administrative line for field staff, and a line for APS Provider Investigations to efficiently handle and report data about each type of call.

Reporters are encouraged to use the online reporting system for concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation that do not require an emergency response.

Effectiveness

SWI is developing staffing targets to reduce hold times which will, in turn, reduce the abandoned call rate. SWI is also making improvements to reduce the amount of time to process reports that are routed to field offices located throughout the state.

The SWI Retention Initiative empowers staff and leadership to continuously improve the workplace by fostering communication and collaboration through the Retention Initiative Steering Committee. SWI continues to evolve the Retention Initiative each year so it too undergoes continuous improvement.

Excellence in Customer Service

SWI remains committed to providing exceptional customer service. SWI has won several awards for its commitment to customer service and for efforts to develop and

keep qualified staff. In 2015, SWI won a Stevie award for exceptional customer services for a large call center, a Texas Distance Learning Association Award for the Employee Development Unit, and a "Best Place to Work" award from the Austin American-Statesman. Investment in staff development and positive working environments helps to ensure excellent customer service.

Transparency

Contact information for SWI is posted on the agency's public website. The Data Book, also posted on the website, is a descriptive statistical resource of DFPS services provided to Texans. Information in this book covers the most frequently asked statistical questions and serves as a continuous resource. The Data Book provides county, regional, and statewide data, and contains data by fiscal year on such SWI measures as number of contacts received per fiscal year, contacts by program and type of contact, percentage of calls that are abandoned, and average call hold time.

Other Considerations for Goal 4

DFPS has no other considerations to report for Goal 4.

Redundancies and Impediments

Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation	Why the Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation is Resulting in Inefficient or Ineffective Agency Operations	Agency Recommendation for Modification or Elimination	Estimated Cost Savings or Other Benefit Associated with Recommended Change
Tex. Fam. Code § 261.301 . Investigation of Report.	Subsection (g) imposes a burdensome documentation duty on the front-line casework staff and has not led to increased child safety. Unnecessary documentation takes the focus off child safety. If caseworkers or management have concerns regarding the inability or unwillingness of local law enforcement to conduct a joint investigation, they document the concerns in the narrative of the case.	DFPS recommends repealing subsection (g) of the statute.	As stated above, the recommended change would allow caseworkers to expend more time on critical tasks such as focusing on child safety issues.

Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation	Why the Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation is Resulting in Inefficient or Ineffective Agency Operations	Agency Recommendation for Modification or Elimination	Estimated Cost Savings or Other Benefit Associated with Recommended Change
Tex. Fam. Code § 261.311 . Notice of Report.	While notifying a parent that a preliminary investigation of allegations was conducted and closed is appropriate, providing the notice within 24 hours of case closure is a burdensome requirement on caseworkers that does not further child safety. To the contrary, it could negatively impact child safety by requiring caseworkers to postpone more crucial child-safety related tasks to fulfill the statutory notification requirement of a closed investigation.	Amend subsection (b) by removing the 24-hour time frame requirement for notifying parents of an administrative closure.	The amendment will allow caseworkers to focus on more crucial child-safety related tasks rather than on fulfilling statutory requirements that have no bearing on child safety.

Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation	Why the Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation is Resulting in Inefficient or Ineffective Agency Operations	Agency Recommendation for Modification or Elimination	Estimated Cost Savings or Other Benefit Associated with Recommended Change
<p>Tex. Fam. Code §§ 264.204, Community-Based Family Services; 264.301, Services for At-Risk Youth.; 264.302, Early Youth Intervention Services; and 265.003, Consolidation of Programs.</p>	<p>Tex. Fam. Code §§ 264.204, 264.301, and 264.302 are overly prescriptive and do not allow the PEI program the flexibility to determine what services are needed and to appropriately utilize grant funds for those services. Repealing the three statutes from Chapter 264 and expanding section 265.003 to incorporate any necessary language from the repealed statutes would be highly beneficial for ensuring effective delivery and implementation of PEI services. Having one general provision rather than three specific grant programs/contracts, would allow PEI to better serve the at-risk population at any given time based on current identified needs and priorities.</p>	<p>DFPS recommends repealing Tex. Fam. Code §§ 264.204, 264.301, and 264.302, and expanding Tex. Fam. Code § 265.003 as indicated below in Recommendation 1.</p>	<p>The recommended change would allow PEI to perceptively spend funds on the specific services identified as priorities for the at-risk population at any given time, which could effectively result in cost savings and wiser spending as well as stronger, more targeted service delivery.</p>

Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation	Why the Service, Statute, Rule, or Regulation is Resulting in Inefficient or Ineffective Agency Operations	Agency Recommendation for Modification or Elimination	Estimated Cost Savings or Other Benefit Associated with Recommended Change
<p>Tex. Fam. Code § 266.004. Consent for Medical Care.</p>	<p>While it is necessary for the court and parties to be updated with information on the medical consentor, the requirement that DFPS provide initial notification to each party in addition to the court and the requirement that the caseworker provide subsequent notification within five business days every time the medical consentor changes is unnecessary, as the court and the other parties do not need that information for any specific purpose at that time. In addition, these requirements interfere with the ability of caseworkers to efficiently carry out other necessary duties by creating an extreme paperwork burden, especially in situations when a child's medical consentor changes often.</p>	<p>DFPS recommends amending subsection (c) of the statute to model the amendments made to Tex. Fam. Code § 263.004 during the 84th Legislative Session regarding notice of the child's education decision maker to the court and other parties. Specifically, DFPS recommends amending the subsection to require the caseworker to provide initial notification to just the court within five business days and to include updated information regarding any changes concerning the child's medical consentor in the permanency progress reports filed with the court, rather than requiring the caseworker to provide the court and each party notice of any change within five business days of the change.</p>	<p>The recommendation would allow caseworkers to expend more time on their critical tasks such as focusing on child safety issues and visiting families rather than handling ministerial notice requirements, particularly since the court and parties would still be provided information regarding the medical consentor.</p>

Recommendation 1: Suggested Amendment to Tex. Fam. Code § 265.003.

Proposed additions are underscored.

Sec. 265.003. CONSOLIDATION OF PROGRAMS.

- (a) In order to implement the duties provided in Section 265.002, the department shall consolidate into the division programs with the goal of providing early intervention or prevention of at-risk behavior that leads to child abuse or neglect, as well as to other negative outcomes for children such as social emotional challenges, being unprepared to start school, juvenile delinquency, running away, truancy, and dropping out of school. These programs may include:
- (1) crisis family intervention;
 - (2) emergency short-term residential care for children 10 years of age or older;
 - (3) family counseling;
 - (4) parenting skills training;
 - (5) youth coping skills training;
 - (6) advocacy training;
 - (7) mentoring;
 - (8) home-visitation; and
 - (9) community education programs designed to improve participation of the general public in preventing, identifying, and treating cases of child abuse or neglect, including parent education programs.
- (b) The division may provide alternative and/or additional prevention and early intervention services in accordance with Section 265.002 through competitive grants or procurements.
- (c) Any services provided through subsections (a) or (b) must be included in the strategic plan for prevention and early intervention services. The strategic plan must:
- (1) report on the effectiveness of past programs and include measures to ensure the effectiveness of planned programs;
 - (2) present a strategy for targeting specific programs to specific geographic areas based on risk factors present in the communities; and
 - (3) present a strategy for awarding grants for primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and early intervention services.