



## How does turnover affect outcomes and what can be done to address retention?

A high rate of workforce turnover is common in the child welfare field. High turnover affects not only the agency, primarily through higher costs, but also the children and families the agency serves. Not all turnover is preventable, but agencies can be aware of the factors that are predictive of high turnover and implement strategies to mitigate those factors.

### Why retention matters

Investing in the child welfare workforce is an essential activity of any child welfare agency,<sup>1</sup> “because a well-trained, highly skilled, well-resourced and appropriately deployed workforce is foundational to a child welfare agency’s ability to achieve best outcomes for the vulnerable children, youth and families it serves. The workforce is the agency’s public face. ...The actions of the workforce are what stakeholders use most to judge an agency’s competence and effectiveness.”<sup>2</sup>

### Turnover rates

Annual turnover rates below 10–12 percent are considered optimal or healthy.<sup>3,4</sup> For the past 15 years, child welfare turnover rates have been estimated at 20–40 percent.<sup>5,6,7</sup> The available data currently reflect an estimated national



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average turnover rate of approximately 30 percent (with individual agency rates as high as 65 percent and as low as 6 percent). Even higher average rates of turnover have been noted among child welfare trainees: 46–54 percent.<sup>8,9</sup> The table in the appendix provides a snapshot of current turnover rates in 33 child welfare agencies.

## Turnover predictors and costs

A meta-analysis of 22 studies identified 36 variables that most affected caseworkers' intention to leave<sup>10</sup> (see chart below).

High workloads that accompany high caseloads have been associated with high turnover, given their impact on caseworkers' levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction,<sup>11,12,13</sup> and on key casework functions, including:

- Timeliness, continuity, and quality of service delivery;
- Family engagement and relationship-building; and,
- Safety and permanency outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families.

High workloads can have a domino effect: staff burnout and stress lead to staff attrition that can result in decreased worker-family contact and failure to meet professional standards for investigation response

and completion; case plan completion and updates, and service provision; as well as increased time to permanency, rates of maltreatment recurrence, and the number of foster care placements and re-entries into foster care.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

## High caseloads and workloads

High caseloads and workloads reflect an array of direct and indirect costs:<sup>14</sup>

- Direct costs related to overtime, worker separation, and hiring/training new staff
- Indirect costs for other workers (increased paperwork and case management, emotional exhaustion, supervisors redirecting time to providing direct service)
- Cost of processing changes in placement (staff meetings, new reports, identifying and placing a child in new placement, paperwork)
- Cost of increased time in foster care (whether a group or family home) as a result of reduced permanency and decreased chances of reunification
- Cost of recurrence of abuse and neglect, including the cost of investigation(s) and foster care placement(s)

### LOW EFFECT

- Racial group
- Gender
- Social work degree
- Other degrees
- Caseload size
- Spouse/other support

### MODERATE EFFECT

- Age
- Tenure
- Education level
- Job demand
- Coping
- Autonomy
- Financial reward
- Co-worker support
- Professionalism
- Salary
- Career development
- Worker self-efficacy

### MEDIUM EFFECT

- Well-being
- Safety concerns
- Depersonalization
- Role conflict
- Inclusion
- Role ambiguity
- Organizational support
- Perceptions of fairness
- Organizational culture
- Policy
- Supervisor support
- Professional commitment
- Organizational climate
- Human caring

### HIGH EFFECT

- Stress
- Emotional exhaustion
- Organizational commitment
- Job satisfaction

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- Cost of failure to meet federal performance standards, including potential loss of federal Title IV-E funding

Every time a caseworker leaves, the cost to the child welfare agency is 30–200 percent of the exiting employee's annual salary.<sup>15</sup> In Texas, this estimated cost to the child welfare agency was found to be approximately \$54,000 per departing staff member.<sup>16</sup> These figures reflect an array of direct and indirect costs.<sup>17</sup>

Given the costs associated with caseworkers' intentions to leave, strategies related to addressing variables most likely to affect turnover — stress, emotional exhaustion, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction — should be prioritized for legislative and agency attention.

## Strategies to support effective recruitment and retention

Research and practice have highlighted 10 essential components of workforce development, with an accompanying menu of strategies. Some states have made significant investments in comprehensive workforce development,<sup>18</sup> and several legislatures have mandated that jurisdictions assess workforce issues, meet identified standards, implement specific strategies such as hiring additional staff, and report on progress.<sup>19,20</sup>

The table below provides a range of potential strategies for consideration, along with links to related approaches and examples for further exploration.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION

ESSENTIAL COMPONENT	RELATED STRATEGIES	JURISDICTIONAL APPROACHES AND EXAMPLES
1. <i>Prioritizing Inquiry and Assessment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of turnover and organizational environment to identify strategies</li><li>• Caseload and workload assessments to ensure adequate staffing levels and realistic distribution of cases</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Turnover Toolkit</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Systems Analysis Tool</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Operational Review</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Workload Study</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Institutional Analysis</a></li></ul>
2. <i>Leading and Elevating Comprehensive Workforce Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comprehensive workforce development plan</li><li>• Dedicated “home” for workforce development, with workforce director/manager on senior/executive team</li><li>• Taskforce on workforce development</li><li>• Engaging the public, union, and other stakeholders to promote greater attention and shared investment in addressing recruitment and retention challenges</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Workforce Development Planning and Assessment Toolkit</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Workforce Plan</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Resiliency Task Force</a></li></ul>
3. <i>Identifying the Right Competencies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formal job analysis of essential knowledge, skills, and abilities</li><li>• Development of competency model for all positions</li><li>• Specialized positions to support effective casework (e.g., administrative, nursing, domestic violence, practice model, youth advocacy, mental health, substance abuse, organizational health/workforce development)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Competency Models</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Developing Competencies and Descriptions</a></li></ul>

(continued)

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## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION

ESSENTIAL COMPONENT	RELATED STRATEGIES	JURISDICTIONAL APPROACHES AND EXAMPLES
4. <i>Educating and Preparing the Right Students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University-agency educational partnerships with loan forgiveness/stipends, specialized coursework to address preservice training requirements, and incentives for current staff to obtain BSW/MSW degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">University-Agency Partnerships</a></li> </ul>
5. <i>Finding and Hiring the Best Applicants</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional caseworker and supervisory positions</li> <li>Recruitment/PR campaign with positive images and inspirational messaging</li> <li>Realistic job preview videos that reflect job and agency</li> <li>Behavioral/competency-based screening</li> <li>Predictive analytics for employee selection</li> <li>Incentives/bonuses for positions with unpredictable schedules or in specific geographical areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Competency-Based Recruitment, Screening and Selection</a></li> <li><a href="#">Children's Corps</a></li> <li><a href="#">Realistic Job Previews</a></li> </ul>
6. <i>Onboarding and Welcoming New Staff</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intentional onboarding process:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Phased training and orientation over 12–18 months</li> <li>» Field training units for new staff (before being placed in offices) where they receive mentoring, coaching, joint field visits, peer learning circles</li> <li>» Low-risk case assignment (not hotline or investigations)</li> <li>» Phased/gradual case assignment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Peer Mentoring From Retirees</a></li> <li><a href="#">Field Training Unit</a></li> </ul>
7. <i>Providing Incentives and Case Management Supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional positions to achieve manageable caseloads that reflect industry standards</li> <li>Equipping staff with smartphones and tablet devices</li> <li>Case management tools/applications to streamline paperwork and workflow</li> <li>Business process mapping</li> <li>Casework teaming</li> <li>Specialized telework units</li> <li>Alternative work schedules and job sharing</li> <li>Specialized programming to mitigate secondary trauma</li> <li>Safety awareness training and supports (office and field)</li> <li>Peer mentoring, crisis helpline, and onsite crisis response</li> <li>Administrative positions to support casework functions so that staff can be in the field</li> <li>Overhire/seasonal positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Casework Teaming</a></li> <li><a href="#">Alternative Schedules and Telecommuting</a></li> <li><a href="#">Telework Units</a></li> <li><a href="#">Worker-to-Worker Crisis Response</a></li> <li><a href="#">Modular Platforms &amp; Data Analytics</a></li> <li><a href="#">Building Staff Resilience &amp; Reducing Secondary Trauma</a></li> <li><a href="#">Administrative/Support Staff</a></li> <li><a href="#">Safety Manual</a></li> <li><a href="#">Mobile Case Management</a></li> <li><a href="#">Integrated Data Systems</a></li> <li><a href="#">Process Mapping &amp; Workflow Efficiencies</a></li> <li><a href="#">Web-Based/Searchable Consolidated Policy Libraries</a></li> <li><a href="#">Overhire/Seasonal Positions</a></li> <li><a href="#">Position Reallocation</a></li> </ul>

(continued)

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## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR CONSIDERATION

ESSENTIAL COMPONENT	RELATED STRATEGIES	JURISDICTIONAL APPROACHES AND EXAMPLES
8. <i>Training and Developing the Team</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A comprehensive training system that includes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Assessment of training needs</li> <li>» Agency-wide training plan with staff learning plans</li> <li>» Robust catalog (pre-service, new worker, in service)</li> <li>» Benchmarks and policies for number of courses/ hours completed</li> <li>» Learning Management System</li> <li>» Multi-modal opportunities (eLearning, blended classroom, video/webinar, tools/job aids)</li> <li>» Simulations to support real world application</li> <li>» Trainer assessment and quality improvement</li> <li>» Evaluation of satisfaction, knowledge gain and impact</li> <li>» Specialized certificate programs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simulation Labs</li> <li>Training Competencies</li> <li>University-Agency Partnerships to Support Transfer of Learning</li> <li>Data Fellows</li> </ul>
9. <i>Managing and Supervising Effectively</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manageable supervisor-to-staff ratios</li> <li>Supervisory competency model</li> <li>Supervisory/managerial pre-service training or leadership academy</li> <li>Peer mentoring/coaching committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervisory Development</li> <li>Solution-Based Casework Coaching</li> <li>Mentoring Committee</li> <li>Supervisory Ratios</li> <li>Leadership Academy</li> </ul>
10. <i>Nurturing a Healthy Agency Climate and Culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Validated climate/culture assessments to better understand workforce and organizational issues</li> <li>Design teams with staff at all levels to identify and implement local retention solutions</li> <li>Data dashboard or website to showcase impacts/outcomes</li> <li>ChildStat to debrief casework and remedy agency barriers</li> <li>Stay Interviews</li> <li>Staff recognition/appreciation events and activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trauma-Informed Culture</li> <li>Design Teams</li> <li>ChildStat</li> <li>Data Portal</li> <li>Racial Equity</li> <li>Safety Culture Survey</li> <li>Assessing Safety Culture</li> <li>Stay Interviews</li> <li>Staff Rewards</li> </ul>

## Appendix

It is important to consider the figures in this appendix with the following caveat: all child welfare agencies do not define or capture attrition data in the same fashion. Some agency figures reflect both preventable (voluntary resignation) as well as non-preventable (termination, retirement, layoff, relocation, etc.) turnover, while others distinguish between the two. Some agencies include both internal (promotion, moving from one unit to another within the agency, or moving to another agency within a county) as well as external (leaving the agency turnover), while others differentiate between these various types.



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### SNAPSHOT OF CURRENT TURNOVER RATES

JURISDICTION	RELATED RESOURCES	TURNOVER RATE
Alaska	<a href="http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/CFSR.pdf">http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/CFSR.pdf</a>	34%
Arizona	<a href="https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/17-111_Report.pdf">https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/17-111_Report.pdf</a>	28.7%
Arkansas	<a href="http://dhs-staging.ark.org/images/uploads/newsroom/MovingBeyondCrisisDCFSReport.pdf">http://dhs-staging.ark.org/images/uploads/newsroom/MovingBeyondCrisisDCFSReport.pdf</a>	32%
California	<a href="http://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/CalSWEC/turnover_2011.pdf">http://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/CalSWEC/turnover_2011.pdf</a>	6.1% (external); 33% change in assignments (internal & external)
Colorado	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/03/25/lawmakers-pitch-fix-child-welfare-caseworker-crisis/99580524/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/03/25/lawmakers-pitch-fix-child-welfare-caseworker-crisis/99580524/</a>	Larimer County: 43%
Delaware	<a href="https://kids.delaware.gov/pdfs_archive/fs/fs-cfsp-apsr-2017.pdf">https://kids.delaware.gov/pdfs_archive/fs/fs-cfsp-apsr-2017.pdf</a>	34%
Florida	<a href="https://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/childwelfare/docs/2015LMRs/CPI%20and%20CPI%20Supervisor%20Workforce%20LMR.pdf">https://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/childwelfare/docs/2015LMRs/CPI%20and%20CPI%20Supervisor%20Workforce%20LMR.pdf</a>	30.48%
Georgia	<a href="https://gbpi.org/2017/overview-2018-fiscal-year-budget-human-services/">https://gbpi.org/2017/overview-2018-fiscal-year-budget-human-services/</a>	32%
Idaho	<a href="https://www.boiseweekly.com/boise/when-things-go-right-in-idaho-foster-care/Content?oid=3212037">https://www.boiseweekly.com/boise/when-things-go-right-in-idaho-foster-care/Content?oid=3212037</a>	17%
Illinois	<a href="http://www.wandtv.com/story/34985208/child-welfare-providers-face-retention-problems">http://www.wandtv.com/story/34985208/child-welfare-providers-face-retention-problems</a>	40% (Private providers account for 85%)

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JURISDICTION	RELATED RESOURCES	TURNOVER RATE
Indiana	<a href="https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2015/10/08/dcs-high-caseloads-lack-support-fuel-case-manager-exodus/73591516/">https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2015/10/08/dcs-high-caseloads-lack-support-fuel-case-manager-exodus/73591516/</a>	24%
Iowa	<a href="http://www.scottadvconsult.com/summary-of-government-oversight-hearing-on-child-welfare-june-5-2017/">http://www.scottadvconsult.com/summary-of-government-oversight-hearing-on-child-welfare-june-5-2017/</a>	17%
Kansas	<a href="http://kcur.org/post/about-quarter-social-workers-kansas-agency-children-and-families-left-2015#stream/0">http://kcur.org/post/about-quarter-social-workers-kansas-agency-children-and-families-left-2015#stream/0</a>	24.4%
Kentucky	<a href="http://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/gov-social-workers-turnover.html">http://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/gov-social-workers-turnover.html</a>	33%
Louisiana	<a href="http://www.wafb.com/story/36129785/audit-finds-high-caseloads-staff-turnover-hinder-dcfs-foster-care-program">http://www.wafb.com/story/36129785/audit-finds-high-caseloads-staff-turnover-hinder-dcfs-foster-care-program</a>	
Missouri	<a href="https://dss.mo.gov/cd/cfsplan/2015-2019/2015-2019-child-family-service-plan.pdf">https://dss.mo.gov/cd/cfsplan/2015-2019/2015-2019-child-family-service-plan.pdf</a>	29%
Montana	<a href="https://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/Documents/ProtectMontanaKids/PMK%20Commission%20Final%20Report%2005-31-16.pdf">https://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/Documents/ProtectMontanaKids/PMK%20Commission%20Final%20Report%2005-31-16.pdf</a>	54.4%
Nebraska	<a href="http://www.ketv.com/article/nebraska-chosen-to-test-child-welfare-work-force-strategies/12774153">http://www.ketv.com/article/nebraska-chosen-to-test-child-welfare-work-force-strategies/12774153</a>	32%
Nevada	<a href="http://dcfs.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/dcfsnv.gov/content/Tips/Reports/APSR%202012%20FINAL.pdf">http://dcfs.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/dcfsnv.gov/content/Tips/Reports/APSR%202012%20FINAL.pdf</a>	Clark County: 65% Washoe County: 27.63%
New Jersey	<a href="http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/exitplan/NJ.DCF.Workforce.Report_2015-2016.pdf">http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/exitplan/NJ.DCF.Workforce.Report_2015-2016.pdf</a>	6.97%
New Mexico	<a href="https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LFC/Documents/Early_Childhood_And_Education/Hearing%20Brief%20-%20Child%20Protective%20Services%20-%20September%202017.pdf">https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LFC/Documents/Early_Childhood_And_Education/Hearing%20Brief%20-%20Child%20Protective%20Services%20-%20September%202017.pdf</a>	25%
New York	<a href="http://www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org/annual-report/documents/2016_annual%20report.pdf">http://www.citizenreviewpanelsny.org/annual-report/documents/2016_annual%20report.pdf</a>	30%
North Carolina	<a href="http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:_eEVZV6sH9o-J:ncacdss.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NC-Statewide-CPS-Evaluation-02-26-16.pdf+&amp;cd=1&amp;hl=en&amp;ct=clnk&amp;gl=us#26">http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:_eEVZV6sH9o-J:ncacdss.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NC-Statewide-CPS-Evaluation-02-26-16.pdf+&amp;cd=1&amp;hl=en&amp;ct=clnk&amp;gl=us#26</a>	28%

(continued)

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JURISDICTION	RELATED RESOURCES	TURNOVER RATE
Ohio	<a href="http://www.mydaytondailynews.com/news/local/high-staff-turnover-burnout-puts-child-welfare-system-crisis/IDxydAqvyWqr3lNdDikMWM/">http://www.mydaytondailynews.com/news/local/high-staff-turnover-burnout-puts-child-welfare-system-crisis/IDxydAqvyWqr3lNdDikMWM/</a>	25%
Oregon	<a href="http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&amp;context=child-family_welfare">http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&amp;context=child-family_welfare</a>	30%
Pennsylvania	<a href="http://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_CYS_091417_FINAL.pdf">http://www.paauditor.gov/Media/Default/Reports/RPT_CYS_091417_FINAL.pdf</a>	17%
South Carolina	<a href="http://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/politics/2015/04/01/dss-child-welfare-caseloads-still-high-agency-says/70781344/">http://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/politics/2015/04/01/dss-child-welfare-caseloads-still-high-agency-says/70781344/</a>	39%
Texas	<a href="http://www.mystatesman.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/state-child-protection-agency-halts-hiring-citing-drop-turnovers/MvbWAlePp5jMUpEQaOrbSM/">http://www.mystatesman.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/state-child-protection-agency-halts-hiring-citing-drop-turnovers/MvbWAlePp5jMUpEQaOrbSM/</a>	26%
Utah	<a href="http://le.utah.gov/interim/2013/pdf/00000903.pdf">http://le.utah.gov/interim/2013/pdf/00000903.pdf</a>	19.9%
Virginia	<a href="http://www.fact.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Draft-CAN-December-2016-Minutes.-0217.pdf">http://www.fact.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Draft-CAN-December-2016-Minutes.-0217.pdf</a>	30%
Washington	<a href="http://realchangenews.org/2016/11/30/washington-combine-child-services-programs-one-department">http://realchangenews.org/2016/11/30/washington-combine-child-services-programs-one-department</a>	20%
West Virginia	<a href="http://www.legis.state.wv.us/joint/perd/perdrep/ChildFam_8_2013.pdf">http://www.legis.state.wv.us/joint/perd/perdrep/ChildFam_8_2013.pdf</a>	28%
Wisconsin	<a href="https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/budget/2015_17_biennial_budget/102_budget_papers/201_children_and_families_bureau_of_milwaukee_child_welfare_staffing.pdf">https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/budget/2015_17_biennial_budget/102_budget_papers/201_children_and_families_bureau_of_milwaukee_child_welfare_staffing.pdf</a>	Milwaukee County: 30%





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