

**Colorado Department of Human Services  
Division of Child Welfare  
Minority Over Representation in the Child Welfare Report  
Executive Summary  
September 19, 2002**

**Agency Overview**

The Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Welfare directs the development of the child welfare care system by providing resource and policy development, technical assistance, monitoring and oversight. Direct services to children and families are provided through the sixty-four county departments of human/social services. Three programmatic areas define the target populations served in child welfare.

***Youth in Conflict (PA IV)***

Services are provided to reduce or eliminate conflicts between youth and their family members or the community when conflicts affect the youth's well-being, the normal functioning of the family, or the well-being of the community. This program area includes delinquents court ordered into the counties' custody.

***Child Protection (PA V)***

Services are provided to protect children whose physical, mental or emotional well-being is threatened by the actions or omissions of parents, legal guardians or custodians, or persons responsible for providing out-of-home care, including a foster parent, an employee of a residential child care facility, and a provider of family child care or center-based child care.

***Children or Youth in Need of Specialized Services (PA VI)***

Statutorily authorized services to specified children and families when the primary focus of services is no longer protective or youth-in-conflict. These services include children with subsidized adoptions, children with Medicaid only services, and children for whom the disposition is no longer reunification.

**Statement of Problem**

Minority Over-Representation in Child Welfare is not unique to Colorado and there are many theories as to the causes and correlates of this condition. In order to examine critical issues which may be at the root of the problem in Colorado, the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), Division of Child Welfare (CW) proposed a research study to do an analysis of decisions made at key points in social services cases as well as the delivery of services for children and families of color in comparison to White children and families in the child welfare system.

The issue of Minority Over Representation in Colorado was previously highlighted in findings from two unrelated research projects.

In 1997, a Core Services study was initiated and two key findings included:

- African American children received proportionally fewer core services than other White or Hispanic children. They were also placed into out-of-home placements more often than these two groups.
- African American children had a different pattern of case reopening than the same population as a whole.

An Expedited Permanency Planning (EPP) study for FY 1999 had these findings:

- An African American child was 89.8% less likely to achieve timely permanency in permanent placement (within twelve months).

Our concern was that this disparity might reach farther than the two studies indicated and CDHS was committed to exploring this issue more deeply, including any possible correlation that may exist with the youth committed to youth corrections after receiving child welfare services. As a result, in May 2001, the Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council approved funding for the Colorado Department of Human Services' Division of Child Welfare's proposal to conduct a study of Colorado's child welfare system as it relates to decisions regarding placement, services and treatment of minority children.

A Minority Over Representation in Child Welfare Advisory Group was formed, comprised of staff from child welfare and other various state agencies, county departments of social services, and community providers. This Advisory Group met monthly to review national research, to collaborate on the research design and to oversee the project from data collection through interpretation. This group continues to meet to address findings in this report by completing a plan for disseminating this information and planning how Colorado can work toward addressing concerns raised through this study.

This summary and the report which follows will provide readers a rich resource of information about minority over-representation in Colorado's child welfare system. It will provide information regarding individual counties and regions, which significantly vary from one another. In order to fully interpret findings in this report and accurately address areas of concern in each of the findings we need to invite our county departments of human/social services, their local communities and families to look at and review their data to determine what local or regional factors come into play that may be uniquely different from one area to another.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Research was conducted on 6 years of child welfare data from the Child Welfare Eligibility Services and Tracking System (CWEST) consisting of 159,911 children's cases which were opened in the years 1995 through 2000. Because of the three very different populations (i.e. Program Areas) served in child welfare, the research looked at each population separately and at two levels:

- Comparing ethnicity of cases opened with the Colorado youth census rates (using 1997 census data), which could indicate differential referral into services, and parallels national trends in child welfare, juvenile justice, and special education.

Comparing target areas, legal status and service patterns which could indicate differential decision-making within child welfare.

Additionally, because of the vast diversity within Colorado we further refined our study to look at the 10 largest counties and geographic regions separately to determine if differences could be discerned.

### **Statewide Overview of Findings**

When looking at all child welfare cases, American Indian, African American and Hispanic children are over represented. Asian Pacific and White children make up less of the child welfare caseload than their census percentages. However, while over representation of minority children is evident across all 5 years of data, there is a steady reduction in the degree of disproportional representation across the years with the most decline for African American and American Indian children.

Other key issues have been raised statewide from this study:

Ethnicity is a powerful predictor of placement in out-of-home care as the first service offered for minority children and youth.

White and Asian Pacific children and youth are more likely to end their first case with a Core Service while American Indian, African American and Hispanic youth are more likely to end their case with a placement.

American Indian, African American and Hispanic youth are over represented in placement with the rate rising substantially for American Indian youth over time. There are considerable county and regional differences in minority over representation patterns and in what predictors there are for placement and second case openings.

African American, Hispanic and American Indian youth are more likely than whites to exit to DYCS, although these proportions are small.

Overall, the greatest disparities lie between American Indian youth and their White counterparts

If you have questions or want to order copies of this report, please contact Meg Williams, the Adolescent Programs Administrator with the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Welfare at [meg.williams@state.co.us](mailto:meg.williams@state.co.us) or 303-866-4706.