



Children's Residential Care

October 2024

Evaluation request

In March 2023, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee directed our office to evaluate the state's role in ensuring the safety and welfare of children living in residential care facilities in Idaho.

Some of Idaho's most vulnerable children live in residential care facilities. The Department of Health and Welfare has multiple roles in overseeing and managing these facilities. The Division of Licensing and Certification issues licenses and ensures that facilities carry out "programs in an environment that is safe, accessible, and appropriate for the needs of those served."¹ The Division of Children, Youth, and Family Services directly manages one facility and oversees contracts for placements of children in foster care in facilities in and out of state. In some cases, the Division of Medicaid pays for residential treatment.

Study requesters identified three concerns with the department's oversight:

- 1) insufficient handling of incidents
- 2) inconsistent practices in monitoring facilities
- 3) placement of children in unsafe environments

The requesters asked us to determine whether these concerns are valid and to develop recommendations to improve the department's ability to effectively oversee and manage children's residential care.

The department in transition

In our preliminary interviews, department officials reported that policies and practices are in a state of transition.

Licensing & Certification is

- validating a risk assessment matrix to help surveyors make consistent decisions about facility deficiencies and licensure; and
- performing an additional unannounced survey per year at each facility.

Children, Youth, and Family Services is

- restructuring how it oversees case management for children in residential care placements; and
- implementing state-run children's residential care facilities.

Medicaid has established a new Idaho Behavioral Health Plan administered by Magellan Healthcare, Inc. in July of 2024 that may affect how treatment is covered and monitored in children's residential care facilities.

Our evaluation will describe and assess these transitions as they relate to the concerns of the study requesters.

1. Idaho Admin. Code 16.04.18.207 (2023).



Evaluation scope

This evaluation will

- define Idaho's current regulatory framework for children's residential care facilities;
- assess the department's handling of incident reports, monitoring of facilities, and placement of children;
- identify and consider best practices for regulation of children's residential care from other national and state entities;
- assess the distribution of responsibilities across department divisions;
- assess the department's approach to making policy and practice changes;
- develop findings and recommendations to promote continuous improvement.

Projected completion date:
Spring 2025