

Tennessee Department of **Human Services** 2026 Annual Report





**Tennessee Department of Human Services Annual Report
2025/2026**



2025/2026

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A Message from Commissioner **Clarence H. Carter**

As we mark the close of another year of service at the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), I am honored to reflect on the remarkable achievements, steadfast resilience, and enduring commitment that have defined our journey over the past state fiscal year. This year, TDHS

continued to advance its mission to *strengthen Tennessee by strengthening Tennesseans*, navigating both rewarding milestones and formidable challenges with unwavering purpose.

Our dedicated team of nearly 4,000 professionals forms the heart of TDHS. Their compassion and drive have made a meaningful difference in the lives of countless Tennesseans, especially during periods of uncertainty. Whether responding to the aftermath of Winter Storm Fern or ensuring families received vital nutrition and support during the prolonged federal government shutdown, their collective effort exemplified the very best of public service. I extend my deepest gratitude to each of them and to our committed community partners for your resilience, teamwork, and unwavering dedication.

Our work is guided by a core belief: human services are more than the delivery of benefits—they are a pathway to economic freedom and well-being.

This year, TDHS continued its transformative modernization efforts, streamlining operations and enhancing the customer experience. The One DHS Customer Portal now offers a single access point for all programs and services, making it easier for Tennesseans to find support and for our staff to manage cases efficiently. We expanded self-service options, improved case transparency, and connected additional programs to our call center and online portal, reflecting our commitment to innovation and accessibility.

TDHS continued strategic investments in reshaping programs to reduce intergenerational dependency, boost self-sufficiency, and foster economic mobility for families with children. Initiatives like the Fatherhood Grant Program, Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative (TOPI), and Families First Community Grants have provided resources, mentorship, and support to thousands, empowering communities across all 95 counties.

Our response to the government shutdown demonstrated TDHS's agility and commitment to continuity. Staff worked tirelessly to maintain essential operations, provide timely updates, and ensure families received SNAP benefits as soon as federal funding resumed. We prioritized clear communication, thoughtful planning, and responsible stewardship of public resources throughout every challenge.

Community partnerships remained central to our progress, from innovative collaborations with public and private entities to strengthening ties with local organizations and advocates. Together, we expanded food access, supported career pathways, and protected vulnerable neighbors. The launch of the Summer Nutrition Initiative and preparations for the Summer EBT program in 2027 illustrate our ongoing commitment to ensuring families have access to nutritious food when school-based meals are unavailable.

We find ourselves at a historic moment in the human services landscape. TDHS is actively preparing for this evolving environment, ensuring that Tennessee is well-positioned to meet the needs of families across the state with dignity, accountability, and excellence. At the same time, we remain committed to being responsible stewards of public resources and Tennessee taxpayer dollars, while keeping the needs of vulnerable Tennesseans at the forefront of every decision.

As part of the “One Big Beautiful Bill,” states will now cover 75% of administrative costs, as opposed to the previous 50%/50% cost share for the administrative costs of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). TDHS has made thoughtful budget adjustments to ensure the timely and accurate distribution of critical benefits to the individuals and families who depend on them. We will continue doing so going forward.

As we look ahead, TDHS stands ready to continue its work with dignity, accountability, and excellence. We are committed to building systems that empower Tennesseans, foster independence, and create lasting opportunities for success. I am deeply grateful for your partnership, dedication, and compassion—qualities that drive our mission forward and make Tennessee stronger every day.

Thank you for your extraordinary service and for joining us in this journey. Together, we will continue to uplift families, innovate for the future, and ensure every Tennessean has the opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,
Clarence H. Carter
Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Human Services



Introduction Figure 1: Pictured above: In solidarity with First Lady Maria Lee's Tennessee Serves Initiative, Commissioner Carter, TDHS team members, and executives participated in a coat drive at Cumberland Elementary School. Tennessee Serves aims to bring awareness and volunteer service to distressed counties across the state.

Executive Leadership and Department Structure

Led by our governor-appointed commissioner, TDHS consists of two groups of divisions.

Customer-Facing Divisions

Customer-facing divisions directly interact with community members, customers and partners outside of the Department.



Cherrell Campbell-Street

Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Services

Division of Child Care and Community Services | Division of Family Assistance and Child Support | Division of Rehabilitation Services

Support Divisions

Support divisions make the work of TDHS possible.



Melisa Cobb

Deputy Commissioner of Operations and Chief Operating Officer

Operations | Strategic Analysis | Budget Fiscal Services (In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration) | Information Technology (In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration)



Krisann Hodges

Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Office of General Counsel | Division of Appeals and Hearings | Division of People Operations



Todd McKinney

Inspector General

Office of Inspector General



Whitney Page

Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Staff

Public Information and Legislative Office | Office of Strategic Solutions | Senior Policy Advisor

Who We Are



Mission

To Strengthen Tennessee by Strengthening Tennesseans.



Vision

To revolutionize the customer experience by growing capacity to reduce dependency.

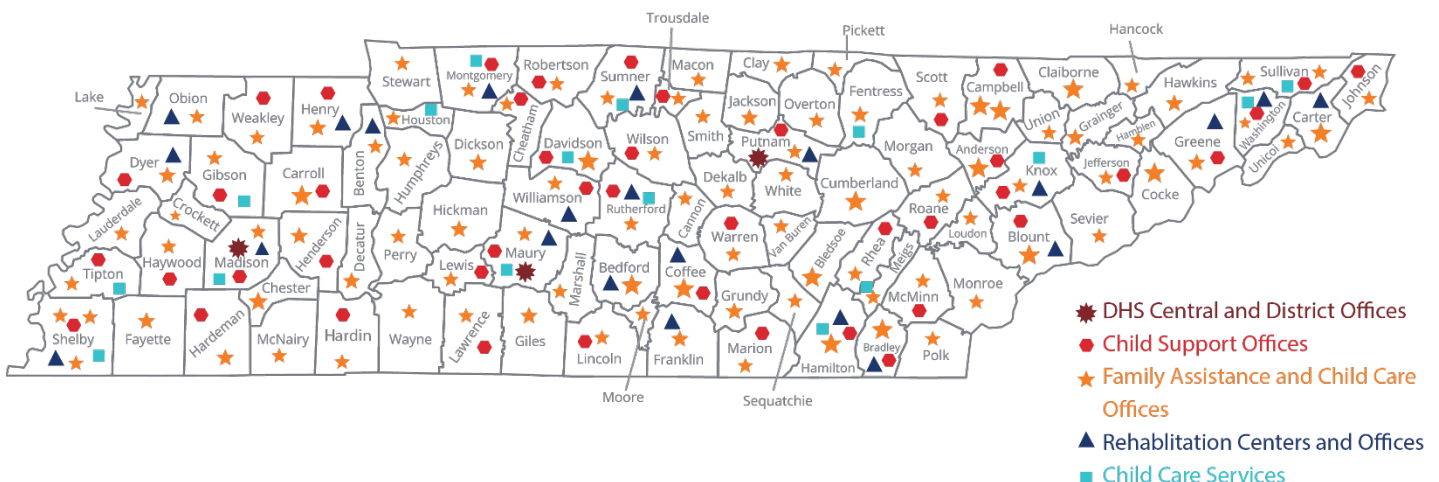


Values

- High Performance
- Collaboration
- Continuous Improvement
- A Shared Vision
- Customer-Centered Solutions

Where We Serve

Our department has offices in each of our state's 95 counties. Families, jobseekers, care providers, community organizations, people with disabilities and others can access our department's services in person, and many of our programs offer digital dashboards that enable customers to quickly and securely access information about their case from the convenience of their phone, tablet or computer.



2025/26

Strengthening Tennessee

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) operates on the belief that our state is better when all citizens are empowered to become self-sufficient and able to safely participate in our shared communities and economy. The numbers on this page offer a few highlights that illustrate our department's mission in action. Further details can be found later in this report.



Supporting Tennessee's Job Force and Empowering Workers with Disabilities

4,138 Individual Plans for Employment

developed for adults and **2,014 developed** for Transition Services eligible youth with disabilities.

2,524 Tennesseans with disabilities

reached competitive integrated employment goals

84,681 Disability Claim Determinations processed

28,488 Individuals representing 12,367 households received \$366 on average each month to support family needs, employment, and training goals

313 Child Care Professionals

attended 63 TDHS funded Small Business Academy sessions

3,246 Educators from 1,012 different licensed agencies served through the WAGE\$® salary supplement program



Partnerships that Strengthen Communities

10,115 Tennesseans served through TANF Opportunity Act Pilot grant partners since 2022

\$13,597,476 Invested in 17,040 Organizations through Community Services Block Grant programs to break cycles of poverty.

\$27 Million Delegated to Families First partnerships that help households find economic stability



Fighting Food Insecurity in Tennessee

\$792,000 in food benefits distributed to 6,600 children
through the Tennessee Summer Nutrition Initiative

32,027,000 Meals Served in 2025 and 27,000,000 Meals Served in 2026
through the Child and Adult Care Food Program

6,700,000 Meals Served
through the Summer Food Service Program

Note: As a federal program, CACFP operates on a federal fiscal year schedule and the number of meals reported in this publication does not include the months of April, May or June 2026.

638,993 Individuals representing 321,622 households
received \$428 in SNAP benefits each month on average.



Empowering Families and Protecting Vulnerable Adults

30,461 Reports processed by Adult Protective Services
with 11,822 Investigations assigned

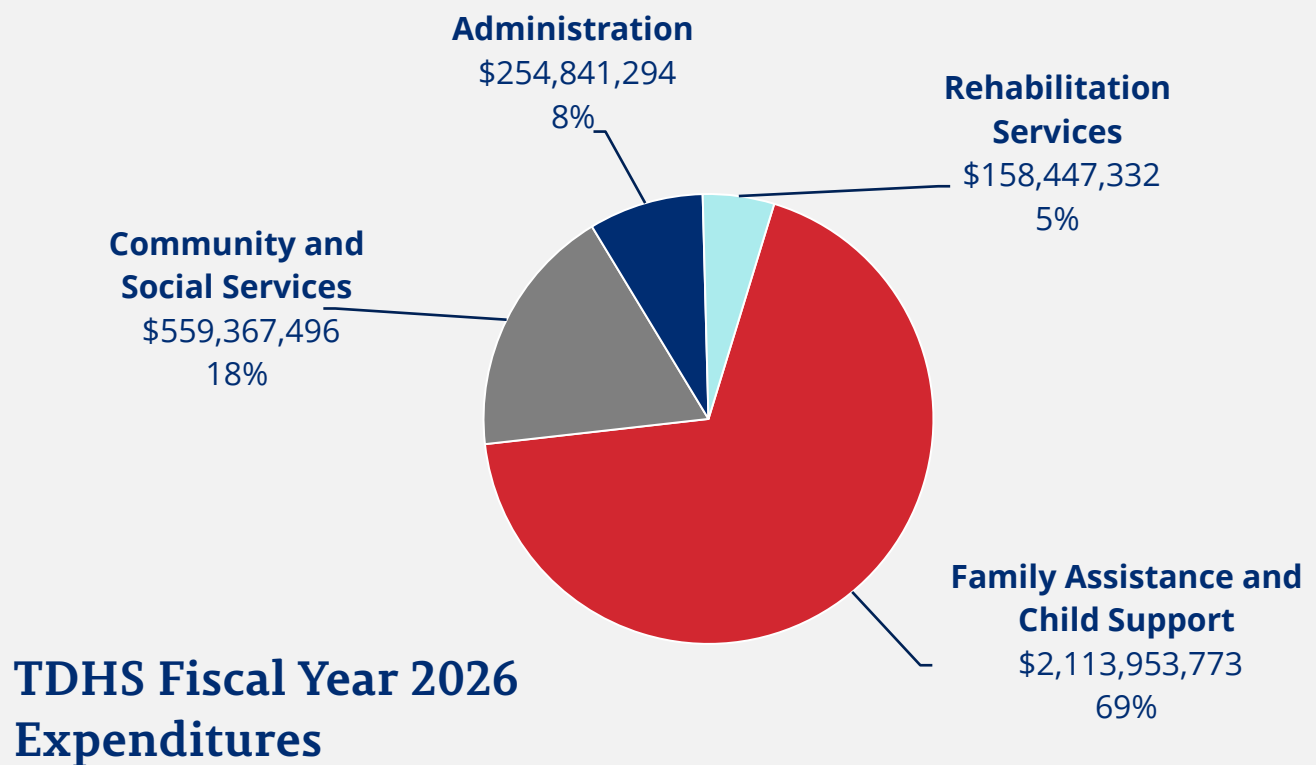
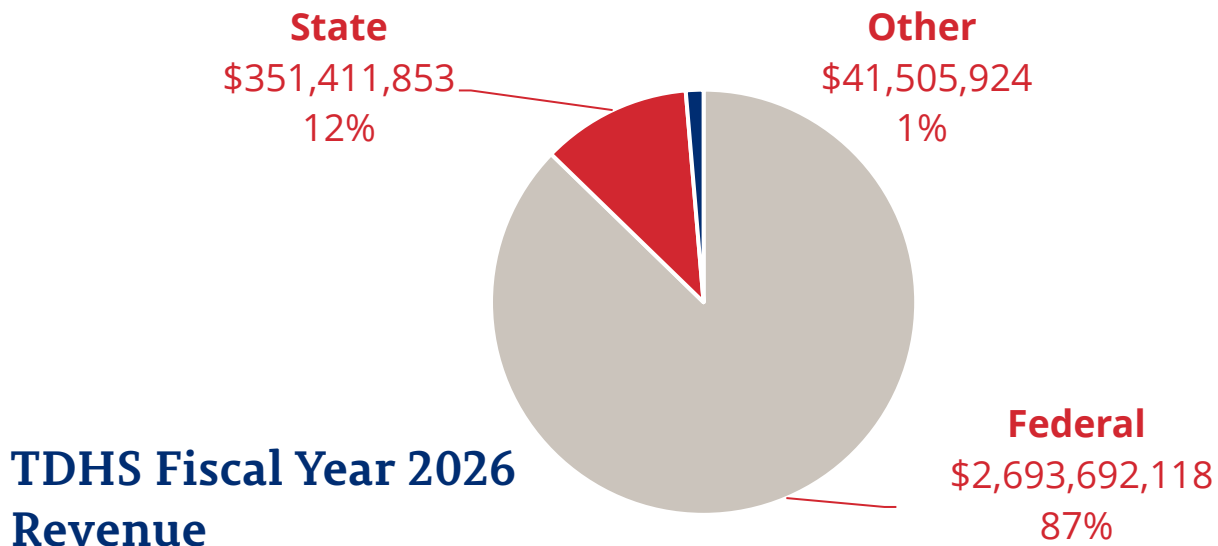
\$557 Million in Child Support collected
to meet the needs of 476,205 children

34,400 Children served
through Smart Steps, Smart Steps Plus and Child Care Payment Assistance
programs

9,062 New child care spaces created,
representing 137 newly licensed agencies

404 New Adult Day Services
spaces created in five agencies

Our Investment in Tennesseans



Customer Facing Divisions

Child Care and Community Services

Family Assistance and Child Support

Division of Rehabilitation Services

Each of the three customer-facing divisions specializes in fostering safety, economic and social wellness and empowerment for individuals and families across Tennessee. The following summary offers a snapshot of the inner workings and outcomes of



Division of Child Care and Community Services

Led by Assistant Commissioner Jude White

The Child Care and Community Services Division encompasses several programs and partnerships that protect and strengthen children and community members who are unable to safely care for themselves or need assistance to build solid foundations for well-being.

- **Adult Protective Services**
- **Child and Adult Care Services**
- **Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program**
- **Community Services Block Grant Program**



Adult Protective Services

TDHS operates from the viewpoint that all adults should be safe, valued, heard, and treated with dignity. The Adult Protective Services (APS) program investigates reports of abuse, neglect, self-neglect or financial exploitation of Tennesseans who lack the capacity or resources to protect themselves due to physical or mental limitations. APS collaborates with State Coordinated Community Response group members, community partners and civic, law, legal, and healthcare workers to examine and address the safety of Tennessee's vulnerable adults.

APS Leadership

Renee Bouchillon | APS Director

Rhonda Barnes | Intake and Grants Director

Joyce Reed | Field Director



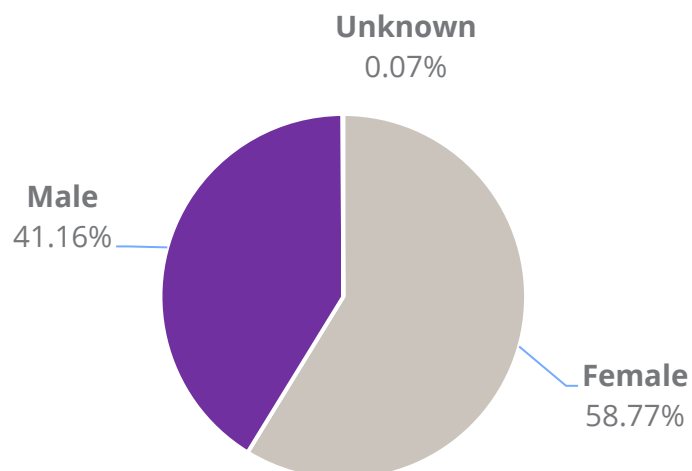
APS By the Numbers

11,822 Tennesseans Served by APS in 2025/26

APS focuses on protecting adults who are unable to protect themselves. The reports received by APS in 2025/26 led to 11,822 investigations, including 89 emergency investigations. More than half of the Tennesseans served through APS were older than sixty years of age. The table below describes the age segments.

Age Range	Number of Customers in Age Range Segments
Below 18	2
18-39	1206
40-59	1382
60-69	2495
70-79	3690
80-89	2467

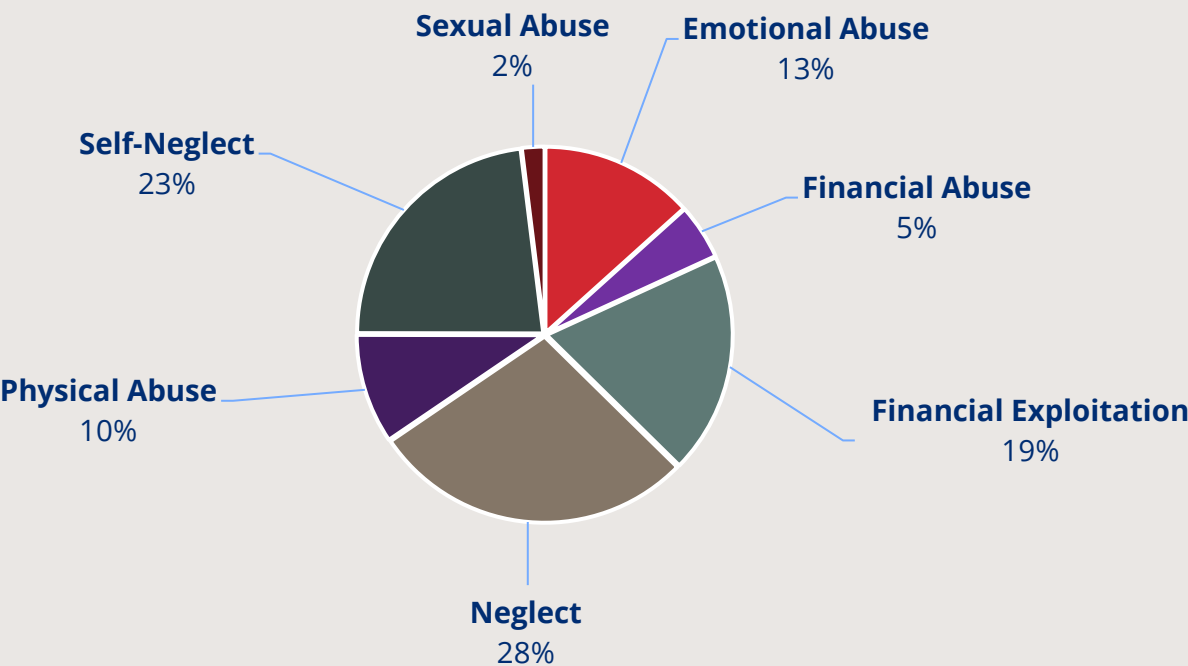
APS Demographics By Sex



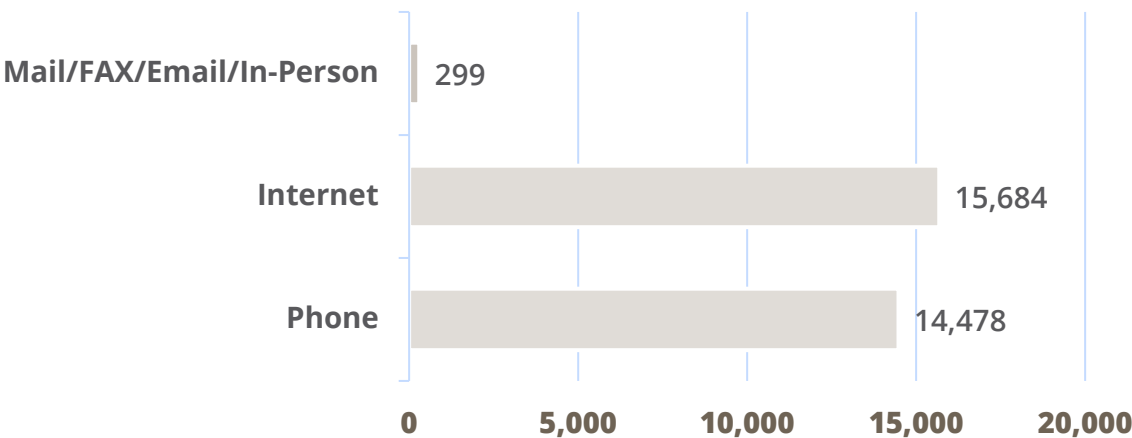
Receiving and Processing 30,461 Reports of Abuse

APS relies on community members to report suspected abuse. Any Tennessean can report abuse by phone, online form, fax or in person. Once a report is received it's evaluated and escalated as appropriate. In 2025/26, **APS processed 30,461 reports of abuse**. A single report may include multiple allegations of abuse.

Allegations in APS Reports 2025/26



How Tennesseans Contacted APS in 2025/26



Programs and Partnerships Led by APS

The programs and partners below utilize APS funds to address specific actions and areas that ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable adults.

CREVAA Program

APS assists elderly and vulnerable adult victims of crime by supporting the Collaborative Response to Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse (CREVAA) grant program. With funding from the Victims of Crime Act and a contract with the Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP), CREVAA enables advocates to facilitate emergency assistance, home repairs, personal care assistance, durable medical equipment, medication replacement, and emergency housing according to need. Each advocate is trained to conduct trauma-informed, person-centered interviews to assess clients without insensitive questions that could revictimize those who experienced a crime.



CREST Program

The Collaborative Response to End Self-Neglect in Tennessee (CREST) program is an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)-funded grant program administered through APS. The initiative allows TDHS to contract with human resource agencies and aging and disability focused organizations to provide person-centered advocacy, case management, and specific assistance to self-neglecting APS clients. Launched in 2022, the program covers all 95 counties in Tennessee.



SSBG Program

When appropriate, APS refers clients to Personal Support Services, Adult Day Services, and Specific Assistance options available through the federally funded Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) program. This APS administered initiative allows older community members and adults with disabilities or low incomes to maintain more independence and reside in their residences with assistance from 14 non-profit and government agencies.



State Coordinated Community Response (CCR)

APS leads the statewide Coordinated Community Response (CCR) initiative, a collection of 20 state agencies that regularly meet to address issues and develop efficient interagency processes related to improving service delivery and protection of Tennessee's vulnerable adults. CCR has four focus areas: Financial Exploitation/Fraud, Joint Investigations, Mental Health Services, and Safe and Affordable Housing.



Tennesseans Served Through APS Partners in 2025/26

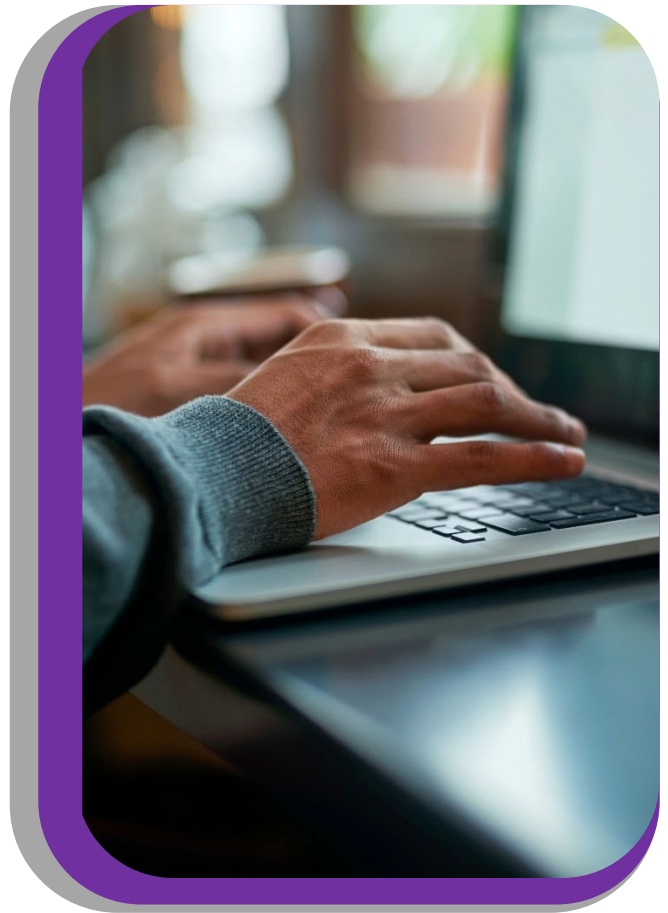
APS Community Partner Organization	Tennesseans Served in 2025/26
CREST	544
Social Services Block Grant Program	1,646
CREVAA	874

Learning, Modernization and Operational Improvement

Improvement is a key TDHS value. During the 2025/26 year, APS advanced internal capacity-building and system modernizations. The May 2026 launch of the APS Training Library provided staff with required and role-specific optional training, while also opening a channel for employees to suggest additional training needs. Services for vulnerable adults were further improved when Crest launched a centralized digital system for its service providers. This new platform replaced manual spreadsheet-based reporting with automations while improving data accuracy, streamlined documentation features, and more efficient case management workflows. Both the new training library and centralized system support APS's efforts to consistently, quickly, and appropriately to meet the needs of vulnerable Tennesseans.

In-Depth Perspectives on Safety

The work of APS has strong emphasis on safety, and many cases leverage collaboration and best practices from law enforcement professionals. This year, APS prioritized both safety preparedness and partner input to guide continuous improvement. In collaboration with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI), APS delivered statewide, in-person situational awareness and safety training for investigative staff across multiple regional sessions during 2026. In April, APS participated in the 2026 Family Violence Professional Panel Series hosted by the Middle Tennessee State University College of Social Work. This year, interest in the Elder Abuse Panel exceeded all other topics, with a **64% increase in attendance from the 2025** session. These trainings enhanced staff readiness and reinforced consistent safety practices that protect both APS customers and APS professionals.



“Our goal is to ensure all vulnerable adults in Tennessee are protected from further abuse, neglect, and exploitation.” --- Renee Bouchillon, APS Program Director

Protecting an Entire Community

Located in East Tennessee, Clinton Towers is an assisted living facility and home to residents who may need help with day-to-day tasks, but do not require around the clock care. Ms. Carmicita Snyder is one such resident. She came to the attention of the Collaborative Response to Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse (CREVAA), an Adult Protective Services partner, when concerns were raised about her son, Guy Snyder and his actions around her finances.



APS Figure 1 Pictured: Carmicita Snyder at her home.

APS and its partners often collaborate with law agencies. When the investigation launched to determine if Ms. Snyder was financially exploited, CREVAA partnered with the Clinton Police Department and Benevolent Client Services to gather evidence. With coordinated efforts, the investigation revealed Mr. Snyder financially exploited Ms. Snyder and it became clear that Mr. Snyder was “associating” with other vulnerable residents who lived in the building Ms. Snyder called home.

APS Investigator Lisa Roach engaged with these neighbors to assess harm, confirm their financial stability, and offer support. Although these residents declined to press charges, Ms. Roach and the APS team ensured they understood their options and had access to resources.

Mr. Snyder’s actions with his mother’s welfare led to his indictment on charges of financial exploitation of an elderly/vulnerable adult and theft over \$1,000, a felony offense. To safeguard the community, Mr. Snyder was removed from Ms. Snyder’s lease and formally barred from returning to the apartment building. This action significantly reduced the risk to Ms. Snyder and her neighbors.

CREVAA also reinforced Ms. Snyder’s support system by coordinating services through Your Home Team Care. With reliable caregiving in place that includes grocery shopping and errands, Ms. Snyder now has the stability she needs for her daily well-being.

This case represents a meaningful success: a vulnerable adult is safe, a pattern of exploitation was disrupted, and the broader community received attention and protection. It highlights the impact APS and CREVAA have when collaboration, persistence, and client-centered advocacy come together.

Engagement and Collaboration

Effective partnerships do not spontaneously happen: They are supported by work and intention. This past year, APS deepened statewide collaboration and fostered stronger partnerships through high-impact events and coordinated outreach. At the 2026 CARES Conference on Aging, **more than 200 stakeholders gathered** for multidisciplinary learning focused on improving outcomes for older and vulnerable adults.

Led by experts from the Department of Justice Elder Justice Initiative and Tennessee State University, the conference emphasized real-world case dynamics, agency intersections, and effective collaborative responses to abuse, neglect, and exploitation. APS also expanded public education through APS 101 sessions that help service providers and community partners better understand APS responsibilities and engagement opportunities. Since the sessions were introduced in 2025, interest in APS 101 surged, with **897 attendees from July 2025 through June 2026** and near-capacity registrations for most sessions. APS aims to be responsive to both its customers and the professionals that make its mission possible. APS 101 is the direct result of the program's Annual External Survey. This year, the same **survey received a 30–35% increase from the prior year**. Achieving the highest number of survey responses since the survey began can be directly attributed to APS' commitment to targeted outreach and coordination efforts.

APS Figure 2 APS Pictured: Images from the 2026 CARES Conference



Get Connected and Learn More About APS

To learn more about APS resources for Tennesseans, use the QR code to visit the APS webpage on the TDHS website.

Child Care Services

The Child Care Services Unit plans, implements, and coordinates activities and programs to ensure the quality treatment, accessibility, health, and safety of Tennessee children and adults in care. The division facilitates a combination of initiatives, resources and family-oriented support using three focus areas: Child and Adult Care Licensing, Child Care Payment Assistance and partnerships.

Child Care Leadership

Gwen Laaser | Director, Child Care Services and CCDF Co-State Administrator

Dana N. Glenn | Director, Child and Adult Care Licensing

Sarah L. Campbell | Director, Child Care Certificate Program

Christy Newman-Baker | Director, Program Reliability and Compliance

Families Served Through Child Care Services in 2025/26

- **9,062 New child care spaces** were created, representing **137 newly licensed agencies**
- **34,400 Children served** through Smart Steps (**22,562**), Smart Steps Plus (**181**), and Child Care Payment Assistance (**11,657**).
- **404 New Adult Day Services spaces** created in 5 new agencies
- **3,246 Educators from 1,012 different licensed agencies** served through the WAGE\$® salary supplement program with 63,144 children impacted in programs with WAGE\$® participants
- **47% of Educators** supported have an Associate of Applied Science degree or higher education or are continuing their education as documented by coursework since submitting original application.
- **255 Additional licensed child care spaces created** through Employer Partnership Grants



Child Care Services Goals

- To meet family and community needs and foster licensed child care spaces that are safe, healthy and developmentally rich.
- To grow and develop the state's child care workforce.
- To offer child care financial supports that allow parents and guardians a sense of security while they work or pursue educational goals.



Adding 56,000 Child Care Seats for Tennessee

The Child and Adult Care Licensing Program within the Child Care Services Unit is responsible for licensing, monitoring and ensuring compliance with health and safety standards that protect Tennessee children and adults in care. The licensing team provides outreach, consultation and recruitment within communities to navigate local codes and zoning regulations, provide information and forums on how to address building capacity, foster relationships, open communication, and innovative approaches in solving child care deficits. In recent years, the Child and Adult Care Licensing Program formed strategic partnerships, resource offerings, and team updates to elevate and expand the quality and availability of child care in Tennessee. This support helps care providers develop their skills as professionals to improve care quality and understand changes in their business sector.

Between November 2025 and February 9, 2026, a new set of TDHS licensure rules went into effect. To support Tennessee's child care providers, the Child and Adult Care Licensing Program **hosted 18 in-person regional events** in April 2026 to answer questions and help child care professionals understand the new rules that protect Tennessee children and adults in care.

The Licensing Program utilizes a Desert Mapping Tool and e-licensing system to understand and share data on licensed child care enrollments and capacities. As of June 30, 2026, report data showed **102,938 enrollments** utilized by families with a **capacity of 159,595 child care slots across Tennessee**. In the next fiscal year, the Child Care Services Unit will deploy strategies to help more families and find and utilize these open child care seats.

It is our philosophy to support child care spaces that are safe, healthy and developmentally rich where children may thrive. The child care workforce is vital to this foundation to encourage, guide and nurture overall development. In collaboration with our quality partners, we are committed to cultivating many supportive pathways for the child care workforce to grow, track, and be recognized for the skills and knowledge they bring to Tennessee children each day.” -- Gwen Laaser, Director, Child Care Services and CCDF Co-State Administrator

Child Care Partnerships are Good Business

The Child Care Resource and Referral Network Promotes Good Child Care and Good Operations

Having safe, quality child care is good business for children, parents who work, employers with parent workers, and our state's economy. Funded through the Child Care Program, the Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R) is a resource that serves these stakeholders by helping child care professionals and operators elevate their business and the quality of care offered to Tennessee families.



Good Operations

313 Child Care Professionals Attend 63 Small Business Academy Sessions |

The CCR&R Business Academy offers child care providers presentations on Budgets, Projections and Planning, Financial Reports and Internal Controls, Marketing for Child Care Programs and Staff Recruitment and Retention for Center-based Child Care Programs. This year, **313 child care professionals attended 63 Small Business Academy Sessions.**

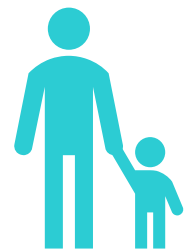
43 Child Care Professionals Complete Administrative Specialization Training | The Administrative Specialization (ADS) training offers child care directors or owners who are not ready for college course work an alternate path to develop their knowledge of small business practices. Through an elevated series of six trainings and in-depth coaching over a six-month period, participants learn to develop their management and leadership skills. This year, 43 participants graduated from Administrative Specialization training.

Good Child Care

Coaching 6,519 Educators | CCR&R offers coaching and classroom strategies for working with challenging behaviors, communicating with parents, developmental milestones, school system connections and community resources to strengthen provider capacity to include children with disabilities in early child care settings. This year, Developmental Support Coaches provided **4,298 technical assistance sessions with 6,519 educators and 161 trainings with 2,110 educators.**

112 Child Care Professionals Earn Early Language and Literacy

Specialization | The Early Language and Literacy Specialization offered through CCR&R provides an in-depth focus for educators who want to expand their knowledge. A series of trainings and one-on-one coaching sessions provide educators instruction on brain development, curriculum, and the importance of oral language in reaching developmental milestones. Upon completion of the courses participants receive a certificate for the Early Language and Literacy Specialization. This year, **112 graduates received the Early Language and Literacy Specialization certification.**



2,594 CPR Certifications | During this State Fiscal Year, **2,594 educators received free training and CPR certification** through 100 TDHS-funded sessions hosted by CCR&R.

Leveraging Technology and Partnership to Strengthen Child Care Professionals and the Quality of Care Available to Tennessee Families

In the past year, TDHS continued to utilize Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) and collaborate with the University of Tennessee, Social Work Office of Research and Public Services (UT-SWORPS). The UT-SWORPS partnership supports several training and professional development systems that strengthen the state's child care workforce and increase the quality of care available to Tennessee families.

Tennessee Child Care Online Training System (TCCOTS)

TCCOTS is an online learning management system that offers 73 web-based training courses to accommodate the busy schedules of early childhood professionals.



TrainTN

Relaunched on a new platform in February 2026, TrainTN is the official clearinghouse for early childhood professional training recognized by the Lead Agency for licensed and CCDF license-exempt child care providers and ECE professionals. Training content is evaluated using a standardized rubric incorporating state and national standards and practices. Currently, it recognizes 128 sources of training activities that include 2,572 training courses, 166 higher education academic courses, and seven CPR and First Aid age-appropriate certifications.



Training and Technical Assistance Management System (TAM)

TAM provides an online library of technical assistance, training, recorded presentations, referrals, and other quality improvement programs and service resources. It's a valuable solution for CCDF partners, Lead Agency Staff, CCR&R coaches and other childcare providers and professionals across the state.



Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning (TNPAL)

TNPAL is the official system of record for qualifications, training, and professional development for child care providers licensed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS). The system is accessible to early childhood education professionals, Child Care Child Care Resource & Referral Center (CCR&R) coaches, and Lead Agency staff. As of 2026, the system had approximately 91,000 users and offered options for license-exempt providers.



"Our companion learning systems are designed to welcome and encourage learning from college programs, professional development, and competency-based sources. Our goal is to offer user-friendly access to platforms that minimize the administrative burden for child care providers and enable them to focus on what matters most: caring for and supporting Tennessee's children and families."-- Gwen Laaser, Director, Child Care Services and CCDF Co-State Administrator



Child Care Figure 1: Assistant Commissioner Jude White and Director, Child Care Services and CCDF Co-State Administrator Gwen Laaser visit Renewal House, a child care facility and TDHS grant beneficiary.

Investing \$18.4 Million in Child Care for Tennessee Communities

This year, TDHS made major investments that benefit working parents, the child care workforce and business owners.



\$5.9 Million Launches Smart Steps Plus

Smart Steps is an income-based child care payment assistance program that offers help for working parents on their way to economic stability. When a family's income increases, they may no longer qualify for the program, but a sudden budgetary change can place families at risk of returning to financial instability. This year, Child Care Services **invested \$5.9 million** to launch Smart Steps Plus. This program offers transitional support for families when their household income increases and the household no longer qualifies for previous child care payment assistance options.



\$2.05 Million in Employer Partnership Grants

Most businesses understand the impact child care accessibility can have on their talent pool. The Child Care Improvement Fund supports partnerships between businesses and child care agencies that lead to increased child care access for Tennessee workers.



\$10.5 Million WAGE\$® Program

An initiative managed by Signal Centers, WAGE\$® promotes high quality care by providing early childhood educators incentives based on their education and continuity of employment. In the 2025/26 fiscal year, **3,246 educators from 1,012 different licensed agencies** were served through the WAGE\$® salary supplement program with **63,144 children impacted** in programs with WAGE\$® participants.

What does WAGE\$® mean for Tennesseans?



"I first heard about WAGE\$® through one of the coach representatives when I was just beginning my career in child care. After they told me about the program, I went to the website, read through the qualifications, and filled out the application.

It has been amazing. I was a teacher in the school system, so when I made the transition to child care, one of my biggest concerns was money and whether there would be incentives to keep growing in the field. WAGE\$® has been a wonderful incentive. It allows you to come into child care and still feel like you can grow, advance, and work toward something.

I'm actually using my WAGE\$® salary supplement to help me pursue my doctorate in policy and leadership studies. My center is considered a group, so we are small, and when you're just starting out as a business, you don't always make a lot of money, especially in the first few years. As a Level 10 recipient, I'm able to use the money I receive from WAGE\$® to continue my studies and further my education.

I truly appreciate this program because we need it. It makes me want to stay in child care, especially because during my first year, I had doubts because of the money. To be rewarded for work I'm already doing is amazing. I would just say: keep this program going, and keep encouraging others to join."—Nashanay Hopkins, Child Care Professional and WAGE\$® Participant, Memphis, TN



"I wanted to further my education, so WAGE\$® helped me go to Chattanooga State, where I earned my associate degree. It also helped me pay for books, supplies, and the time I needed to take off work to attend classes. WAGE\$® was there for me when I needed it.

I want to continue growing my career and my love for young children, so I'm going back to school to earn my bachelor's degree in early childhood education. I start at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in the fall, and I'm really excited to continue my schooling. With WAGE\$®, I know I'll have support to help pay for school.

WAGE\$® gives you the chance to better your education. The more education you have, the better your salary supplements can become, so it really encourages you to keep going. It feels like an incentive to do more.

It also makes you feel appreciated. We work hard to shape the lives of children. These children are with us eight to ten hours a day, and WAGE\$® makes you feel like someone is out there wanting to help you further your education, support you financially, and show that they believe in you.

I think WAGE\$® is a wonderful program, and I hope it continues helping educators better themselves in their education and in every area of their lives." —Heather Ritchie, Hixson, TN

Nutrition Support Programs

Nutrition is critical to the wellness of older community members who contributed to our economy over a lifetime and can impact the health, learning and development of young Tennesseans who will one day carry our state. Beyond the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TDHS fights food insecurity through the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program.



Nutrition Support Programs’ Leadership

Allette Vayda | Director of Operations, Food Programs

Anthony Couch | Program Manager

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Using federal funding, the Child and Adult Care Food Program provides reimbursement to child and adult care centers, child care homes, emergency shelters and afterschool care programs for at-risk children that serve nutritious meals to children and adults that meet income and age requirements. The program increases its reach to address child food insecurity by collaborating with the Community Services Block Grant, Child and Adult Care Licensing programs within TDHS and federal and state partners that include the Tennessee Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP). *Please Note: As a federal program, CACFP operates on a federal fiscal year schedule and the number of meals reported in this publication does not include the months of April, May or June 2026.*

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

Also known as SUN Meals, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) works with authorized school food authorities; state, local, municipal or county governments; residential nonprofit summer camps; nonprofit colleges and universities; Upward Bound programs; and private nonprofit program sponsors across the state to ensure children under 18 living in families or communities with low incomes receive nutritious meals during the summer when school meals are not available. The program also caters to adult Tennesseans who participate in school programs for youth with disabilities. Sponsors serve meals at authorized sites and offer “to-go” options in rural areas to ensure children in qualifying locations receive the nutrition they need to learn and grow during critical developmental stages.

State Fiscal Year	Program	Approximate Number of Meals Served
2025	CACFP	32,027,000
2026	CACFP	27,000,000
2025	SFSP	6,700,000

Lifting a Burden for Rural Tennesseans

The Summer Food Service Program operates by collaborating with organizations to offer meals during the summer months when school meals are not available. However, for some children in rural areas, navigating to the closest meal site each weekday could be a burden. Non-congregate Parent or Guardian Pick-up is an option that allows sponsor meal sites to distribute meals to parents and guardians to take home to their children. During the 2025 state fiscal year, the SFSP provided **roughly 2,700,000 more meals than in 2024**. This increase is attributed to the Non-Congregate SFSP option.

Community Services Block Grant Program

Made possible through a federally funded grant program created by the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program facilitates community-based contracts with local governments and nonprofit agencies to provide a wide range of support services that combat poverty by removing barriers to self-sufficiency. Tennessee administers the CSBG program through a network of 20 community action agencies (CAAs) that reach all 95 counties. Agencies conduct regular assessments of the needs in their local communities and develop responsive plans of action. CSBG services vary by community and range from “safety net” emergency services to job development, adult education, and financial management resources that aim to help participants find stability and move beyond the need for services.

CSBG Leadership

Lindsay Whittin | Program Director

Tennesseans Strengthened by the CSBG Program

- 294,904 Individuals served
- 147,416 Households served
- 886,085 Hours served by community action agency volunteers



Investing \$13,639,192 to Strengthen Tennessee

Poverty is a complex problem that requires a multi-angle approach. Concentrating funds across a spectrum of supports is an effective strategy for addressing the intersection of challenges contributing to economic insecurity of Tennesseans with low incomes. Through **17,040 organizations**, Tennessee **invested \$13,597,476** across eight domains that break cycles of poverty and promote economic stability for individuals and communities that strengthen our state. *Note: figures below rounded to lowest dollar.*

 **Employment** | \$350,331

 **Housing** | \$4,275,373

 **Education and Cognitive Development** | \$440,067

 **Health and Social/Behavior Development** | \$1,168,691

 **Income, Infrastructure and Asset Building** | \$102,714

 **Services Supporting Multiple Domains** | \$5,186,576

 **Agency Capacity Building** | \$592,986

 **Linkages/ Partnerships that Support Multiple domains**
\$1,522,451

17,040 Community Action Agency Partnerships

The network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) funded through the CSBG collaborated with **17,040 partners that** included nonprofit and for-profit, faith-based and school district-based organizations, and other entities across the state. Individuals volunteering with these organizations logged more than 886,085 hours of service.



4,825 Non-Profit Organizations



1,257 Postsecondary Education/Training Institutions



3,718 Faith-based Organizations



225 Health Service Organizations



652 Local Governments



455 Consortium/Collaborations



309 State Government



266 School Districts



160 Federal Government



185 Financial/Banking Institutions



4,837 For-Profit Business or Corporation



151 Statewide Associations or Collaboration

Planting Seeds to Grow Independence

Food insecurity is a common condition among households with low incomes and many specifically struggle with access and affordability of fresh produce that supports wellness. This year, CSBG partner Highland Rim Economic Corporation (HREC) used grant funds to address this need with a partnership that benefits families facing food insecurity and local farmers.

Launched in April, the HREC Spring Garden Voucher Program partners with local Farmers Co-Ops in county service areas to provide 100 eligible households with \$50 garden vouchers. Vouchers can be used to purchase seeds, plants, soil, and fertilizer that equips individuals and families to grow their own fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition to supplementing grocery costs, the program offers participant a sense of self-empowerment, pride and self-sufficiency that supports forward momentum and stability.



Strong Compliance and Data-based Decisions Strengthen Trust

The CSBG team recognizes its responsibility to the families and communities it serves and the taxpayers who fund its work. To better understand issues facing the state's Community Action Network and form tools and practices to transition to the Annual Report 3.0, the CSBG team developed a Data Workgroup. Comprised of CSBG State Office, Tennessee Association of Community Action (TACA), and six Community Action Agency representatives, the workgroup analyzes data and forms strategies to modernize CSBG operations and effectively share the work of CSBG partners. This and other efforts resulted in a significantly improved quality and accuracy of the CSBG Annual Report. **This year's report only had 23 federal review comments** compared to last year's 103. This drastic improvement garnered the praise of the Office of Community Services (OCS), the federal entity responsible for CSBG oversight. The OCS **recognized Tennessee as one of the states with the lowest number of required corrections.**



Statewide Guidance Reduces the Administrative Burden for CSBG Partners

Continuous improvement is a core department value and this year, the CSBG team followed preliminary work done by the CSBG State Plan Workgroup to replace the 75-page outdated policy manual with ten streamlined, easy-to-use policy documents. This collaborative work paved the way for formation of the CSBG Tennessee State Plan for the 2026/27 fiscal year. The State Plan was submitted and approved by the Office of Community Services in September 2025 with policies made effective on October 1, 2025. To ensure partners understand the new policies and plan, the CSBG team produced on-demand training modules and hosted multiple live training sessions. These improvements help agencies reduce administrative workload and spend more time serving families and communities.

Success for CSBG in Tennessee means giving our Community Action Agencies the support, tools, and guidance they need to help families thrive.”
-Lindsay Whittin, CSBG Program Director

Division of Family Assistance and Child Support

Led by Assistant Commissioner Charles Bryson

Split into areas aimed at addressing essential necessities and resource management for children, the Division of Family Assistance and Child Support offers programs and services that provide structure and support for families working to strengthen their households.

- Child Support and the Fatherhood Grant Initiative
- Families First and TANF Opportunity Act Initiative
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



Child Support

Tennessee's Child Support Program has offices in each of the state's thirty-two judicial districts to ensure children have the resources to learn, be well, and grow when their parents or guardians live in different households. The program works with the court system to locate parents, establish/document paternity, launch and enforce financial and medical support orders, modify child support orders, and collect and distribute child support payments. TDHS Child Support professionals also connect families to health care, parenting, justice system, employment, father-focused resources and support services that benefit families.

Child Support Program Leadership

Robert Duck | Director of Operations, Child Support, IV-D Director

Patti Wood | Director of Operations, Field Operations and Contracts

Sherron Brown | Director of Operations, EBMS and TCSES Solutions Delivery

Cost Effective Programming that Benefits 476,205 Children

- 476,205 Children served
- 1,037,809 Individuals served
- 276,191 Cases Processed
- \$557,286,741 Collected for children during Federal Fiscal Year 2025
- \$4.27 of Child Support provided to families for each administrative dollar spent
- 95.6 Percent Statewide Paternity Establishment
- 83% of Child Support Cases assigned a Child Support Obligation

Above National Average Trends

This year, Tennessee exceeded national averages in two areas that are key for children: paternity establishment and cases with ordered obligations. Documenting paternity for children born outside of marriage ensures children have a legal right to support from their father and establishing paternity is a core service for the Child Support team. This year, Tennessee had a **95.6 Statewide Paternity Establishment Percentage**, which exceeds the 90 percent federal requirement. When a Child Support case is opened, the state aims to progress the case to a point where a judicial or administrative order describes obligations for parents or case participants. The federal benchmark is 80%. In the 2025/26 fiscal year, **83 % of Tennessee cases had an ordered Child Support obligation.**



Child Support Figure 1: Held in Henry and Hamilton County in the spring of 2026, and hosted by the Paternity Program, the Kids and Families Resource Fair invited Tennessee families to connect with the Child Support team, other state agencies and family focused organizations at a free community event.

Modern Communication Lines that Serve Tennessee Families

This year, the Child Support team continued enhancing its operational systems and communication channels to efficiently ensure families can easily access details about their Child Support case and options. 2025/26 included a continuation of incremental improvements to the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System and steps closer to fully digital case management and imaging. This year's enhancements included updating user screens and laying the foundations to redesign customer notices and automate text messages for customers who have a One DHS Customer Portal account. Now, **customers automatically receive texts about appointments, missed payments, and links to office location and payment options.** The One DHS Customer Portal continues to offer Child Support program participants an online portal to find personal case information and general information about Child Support Services. Parents who have specific questions can attend *Parents and Partners Connect*.

Parents and Partners Connect is a free monthly virtual outreach hosted by state and local Child Support staff who host on a volunteer basis. Each meeting offers parents, caregivers, and partners clear information about the Child Support program and access to community resources and optional one-on-one meetings with Child Support staff. Feedback gathered during events helps identify trends, improve services, and guide future program initiatives. During 2025–2026, the series **averaged approximately 30 participants each month.** Every session strengthens relationships with families by increasing awareness of Child Support services, fostering public trust, and creating meaningful connections that support better outcomes for parents and children.

Resolving \$1,438,199.53 in Child Support Debt

In some Child Support cases, the non-custodial parent may be unable to consistently meet Child Support obligations or maintain financial stability if the payments in arrears become a barrier. In these instances, it may be in the best interest of the child to offer a short-term compromise for better long-term outcomes and consistency. The Child Support Debt Compromise Program allows parents to resolve Child Support arrears through a legal agreement in which the custodial parent voluntarily forgives some or all of the past-due support owed by the non-custodial parent. To initiate the process, the custodial parent contacts the local Child Support office to schedule an appointment for both parents to review and sign an Agreed Order. When family violence concerns are present, separate appointments are scheduled for each parent, and both parties are required to appear before a judge for approval. During fiscal year 2025–2026, **\$1,438,199.53 in Child Support debt was forgiven** through the program, helping families resolve longstanding debt, reduce barriers to financial stability, and move forward with the next chapter of their lives.

Success for our Child Support program means creating conditions where families can count on consistent, meaningful financial support to cover everyday costs of raising children: housing, food, school supplies, health care, and countless small needs that matter. When parents and guardians have a clear and enforceable support order in place, it helps ensure expectations and responsibilities are understood. It begins with establishing paternity so that every child has a legally recognized parent, giving each child access to emotional, financial, and medical security to grow and be well.
--- Robert Duck, Director of Operations, Child Support and IV-D Director

A Father's Journey to Restart

Raising a child is always a challenge. For justice-involved parents, there are additional barriers and complications especially when restarting life after incarceration. The Re-entry Unit within the Child Support program specializes in assisting parents like Johnathan Phelps, as they transition back into community and family life.

Mr. Phelps's journey to stability began when he left the Morgan County Correctional Complex in 2023. With no housing, job or transportation, he faced the daunting task of starting over while trying to reconnect with his children. He learned about the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Re-entry program through a Tennessee Department of Correction (DOC) Day Reporting Center (DRC). He recognized an opportunity to rebuild his life. "I knew I needed to be a better person for my children," he said. "I didn't have anything, and I didn't know what to do."

Before entering the program, Mr. Phelps struggled to meet even his basic needs. Without steady income, he often went without food. Because he had not made Child Support payments, he was not permitted to see his children regularly and felt he was not the father they deserved. After years of incarceration, he had few tools or plans to address these challenges.

Starting in 2023, the Re-entry Program began giving Mr. Phelps the structure and support he needed to move forward. Staff helped him find stable employment and secure affordable housing where his children could stay overnight. The consistency he gained allowed him to resume Child Support payments and create a healthier, more stable environment for his children.

A major factor in Mr. Phelps's progress was the guidance he received from Program Manager Monica Skeen, a Re-entry Program staff member who supported him at every step. He credits her with helping him regain confidence and navigate obstacles that once felt impossible.

During his time in the program, Jonathan learned practical skills, especially budgeting, which helped him achieve one of his proudest accomplishments—getting his own home. Mr. Phelps successfully completed the Child Support Re-entry Program in January of 2026. Having a stable place to live transformed his daily life and strengthened his role as a father.

Mr. Phelps still reaches out to Child Support Re-entry team members when he has questions or concerns. Looking ahead, he hopes to build a long-term career and return to school. His message to others considering participation in the TDHS Re-entry Program is simple: "Absolutely do it. This program gave me the confidence to be a better person and a better dad."



Child Support 1 Pictured: Monica Skeen and Joshua Phelps.

Child Support Partnerships

The Child Support program partners with other organizations to connect parents and guardians with additional services that ensure parents have the foundation they need to uplift and give their children a strong start in life.

Categories of Child Support Partners

- Contractors
- Court systems
- Other state departments
- County libraries
- Nonprofits
- Treatment centers
- Housing services providers
- Community panels

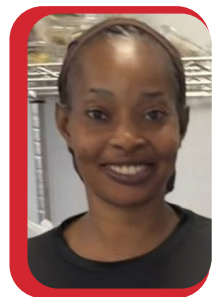
Two collaborations that are making a big difference are the partnership with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Social Work Office of Research and Public Service and the Fatherhood Initiative.

Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program Helps East Tennessee Parents Meet \$1,145,935 in Child Support Obligations

The Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (TCSEPP) is operated by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (UT SWORPS) in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Human Services Child Support Program. Since 2004, TCSEPP has helped parents overcome unemployment, underemployment, housing instability, transportation challenges and other barriers that make it difficult to meet Child Support obligations. As of December 2025, the program was **active in 19 of Tennessee's 32 Judicial Districts**.

TCSEPP provides targeted services, financial assistance, and connections to community partners that help parents build stability, strengthen parenting and life skills, and prepare for meaningful employment. These supports increase their ability to consistently meet Child Support obligations, contributing to stronger, more resilient families. From July through December 2025, parents enrolled in the program made **4,257 Child Support payments totaling \$1,145,935.82**. This investment is a meaningful step toward improved financial stability and healthier outcomes for Tennessee families.

"Gabby, my TCSEPP Coordinator, helped me so much, and I am very grateful. It is hard to list everything she has helped me accomplish. She helped me not starve by connecting me to resources and apply to SNAP. She empowered me to get a job and get my children back from custody of the Department of Children's Services. She helped me manage my financial distress when my electricity was in danger of being cut off. She helped guide me through public benefit applications as well as job applications. Gabby helped me apply to housing, daycare, and jobs. I appreciate these services very much, and it is hard to put into words how grateful I am for her and my supports."



-- Beathe Nyiraneza,
Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting program client

Fatherhood Initiative

Success for our Child Support program means building stronger families and expanding opportunities for parents to be fully engaged in their children's lives. In February 2025, the Tennessee Department of Human Services launched the Fatherhood Initiative Grant Program to strengthen responsible parenting, increase parental involvement, and promote family stability in communities across the state.

2025-2027 Partners

During the current grant period (February 2025–February 2027), TDHS is funding 10 organizations that provide parenting classes, co-parenting assistance, father-child activities, peer support groups, mentorship opportunities, legal guidance, and other supports that help fathers navigate challenges and stay engaged. Together, these efforts are helping fathers strengthen family bonds, build stability, and create brighter futures for Tennessee children. Since direct services began in February 2025, **more than 3,000 fathers have been served**, reflecting Tennesseans' strong commitment to nurturing healthy family relationships.

- **Agape Child and Family Services, Inc.** Serving Shelby County
- **Boys and Girls Club of Greater Memphis** | Serving Shelby County
- **East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Fatherhood Connection Initiative** | Serving Carter, Sullivan and Washington Counties
- **First Things First, Inc.** | Serving Hamilton County
- **National Football League Alumni Association - Tennessee Chapter** | Serving Davidson and Williamson Counties
- **New Vision, Inc. – Nurturing Fathers Program** | Serving Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, and Williamson Counties
- **Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services** | Serving Anderson, Campbell, Fentress, Morgan, Roane, Scott, and Union Counties
- **United Way of Rutherford and Cannon Counties** | Serving Cannon and Rutherford Counties
- **Signal Centers Inc.** | Serving Hamilton County
- **Southwest Human Resources Agency** | Serving Chester, Decatur, Hardeman, Haywood, Madison, and McNairy Counties

Scan the QR Code to learn more about TDHS Fatherhood Initiative partners via the TDHS website.





Child Support Figure 1: Joshua Redden and Samuel Coffman, participants in Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services operating the Rural Fatherhood Program (RFP). The program provides evidence-based fatherhood education and support to fathers who are absent from their children's lives or are currently incarcerated.

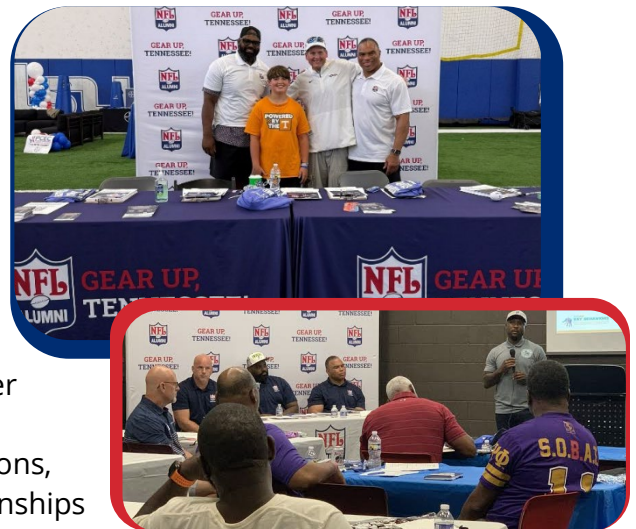
A Look at the Fatherhood Initiative in East, Middle and West Tennessee

The Rural Fatherhood Program | Ridgeview Behavioral Health Services' Rural Fatherhood Program (RFP) supports fathers who are separated from their children or currently incarcerated in seven east Tennessee counties. Using the 24/7 Dad® and InsideOut Dad® curricula, the program builds parenting skills, fosters healthy relationships, and promotes responsible fatherhood. Monthly peer events, such as coffee meetups and bowling, strengthen community connections. Graduates are encouraged to mentor others, creating a supportive network of fathers committed to positive engagement.

InsideOut Dad® | The Fatherhood Initiative program managed by Southwest Human Resource Agency (SHRA) initially focused on incarcerated fathers following the *InsideOut Dad®* curriculum. Building on the program's success and positive outcomes, Southwest Human Resource Agency expanded its services to include the 24/7 Dad® curriculum, broadening its reach and enhancing support for fathers throughout the region. One graduate of the agency's fatherhood programming, Quentin Mays, shared the following about the positive impact of participating in the 24/7 Dad® program:

"I attended the 24/7 Dad program. Before the program started, I had plenty days of frustration and confusion (but) I really had no one really to express my frustrations to or why I was confused. I wasn't a mad man with anger issues. I was a dad that had been at a point in life where I was experiencing growing pains. We aren't born great mothers and fathers. We have to become this through living. I learned this through the 24/7 Dad program. It allowed me to express my frustrations. But, not only express (feelings), I received positive feedback from my instructors. Mr. Derrick, with his pastor background and positive attitude helped me to rationalize my thoughts about myself. He helped me form a better view of what my children needed. The program is helpful. It should be required because many men as well as women can benefit from being a great parent."

NFL Alumni Association | The National Football League Alumni Association (NFL Alumni) – Tennessee Chapter administers the Fatherhood Champions Program in Davidson and Wilson counties. Through this initiative, the organization hosts monthly workshops and community events designed to engage, educate, and support fathers across Middle Tennessee. Signature events include the Fatherhood Festival 2026 & NFLA Training Camp for Dads and the Men's Breakfast Screening of *Fatherhood: Beyond the Frame*. Pictured on this page, these events bring together fathers from diverse backgrounds and life experiences to strengthen their parenting skills, build meaningful connections, and explore strategies for fostering healthy, positive relationships with their children.



Families First

Families First, the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, is a federally funded workforce development and employment program that emphasizes work, training, and personal responsibility, and offers a variety of financial, transportation, child care assistance, and educational support services. Beyond direct service delivery, Families First utilizes innovative initiatives and community partnerships to move eligible children and their parents or caregivers toward educational success, economic stability, social capital, health, and well-being.



Family Assistance Leadership

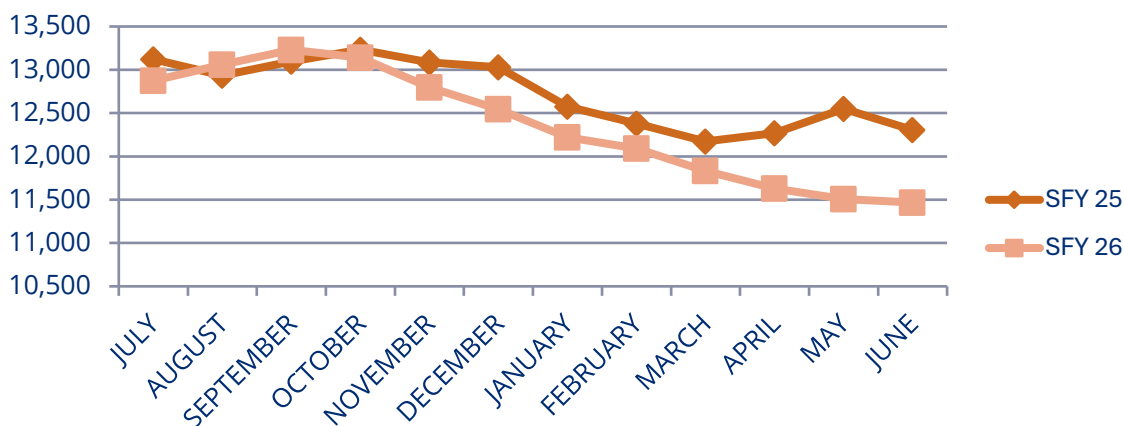
The SNAP and Families First programs are jointly referred to as “Family Assistance” and have some overlapping leadership positions.

- **Lisa Francis** | Director of Operations, Field Services
- **Keisha Thaxton** | Director, Operations, Policy, Contracts
- **Leanna Johnston** | Program Director, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- **Lakecia Peterson** | TANF Program Director
- **Rebecca Mungle** | TANF Policy Director
- **Rebecca Walker** | TANF Contract Director
- **Clyde Stith** | Program Director, Families First Community Grants

Tennesseans Strengthened Through the TANF Program 2025/26

- 28,488 Individuals representing 12,367 households served on average each month
- \$366.17 On average Families First monthly benefits per household
- \$54,319,897 Total Families First Benefits issued
- 159 Cases closed on average each month due to employment achievement
- 25.6% Overall Work Participation Rate
- 53.4% Two-Parent Work Participation Rate
- \$206,394 In work incentive payments issued to families in transition from the program
- \$3,316,146 Issued to 1,364 Pathways to Prosperity participants

Families First Caseload Data State Fiscal 2025-26



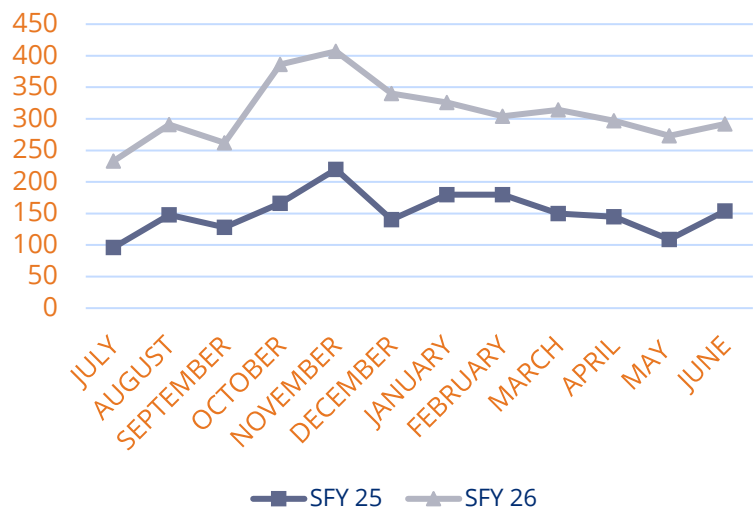
Helping Tennesseans to Keep Moving Forward

Moving families from short-term assistance to sustained independence through meaningful workforce participation is the goal for the Families First program. A critical step in the journey is the transition when one or more family members achieve employment and become ineligible for the program and a family's case is closed. To ensure families sustain self-sufficiency, the Families First Program provides transitional support via the Pathways to Prosperity program and incentive payments.

Established in 2021, the Pathways to Prosperity pilot program was implemented from March 1, 2024, through January 10,

2026, to offer enhanced support services for Families First participants who are enrolled in a degree or professional education program. A total of **\$3,316,146 in enhanced cash assistance was issued to 1,364 customers** during the pilot period. Participants averaged 6.5 months in the pilot program and received **on average an additional \$376 per month** in cash assistance. Outside of the Pathways to Prosperity program, **\$206,394 work incentive payments were issued for families in transition** during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Case Closures 2025 and 2026 State Fiscal Year



Moving each participating family from short-term assistance to sustained independence through meaningful workforce participation is the goal of our state's program.

Leveraging Firsthand Knowledge

First-hand knowledge is an asset. In 2025, TDHS launched the Families First Subsidized Employment program. Using TANF funds, the program created 12-month interim eligibility clerk positions in Family Assistance County offices across the state. These job opportunities were open to Families First participants who qualified. This initiative achieved two goals: 1) It provided an opportunity for Families First customers to meet program work requirements and gain vital work experience and 2) It

provided invaluable additions to the TDHS workforce, ensuring county offices run smoothly with great customer service for team members who have first-hand knowledge of the customer experience. Since the start of the program, **65 eligibility clerks have been hired. Six of those eligibility clerks have since been promoted to other positions within the state.**



Policy Adjustments that Meet the Moment

Families First participants are required to meet a combination of state and federal guidelines to enroll in the program. This year, through legislation, Tennessee eliminated several long-standing verification requirements. These included mandatory proof that children attend school, receive immunizations and health checks, and that parents participate in teacher conferences, parenting classes, and child support-related services. Removing these provisions streamlines program administration by discarding state-imposed eligibility conditions that often-created burdens for families and increased the risk of sanctions or loss of benefits. This modernization reflects the state’s intent to simplify access, reduce procedural barriers, and ensure that assistance is focused on helping families achieve stability rather than penalizing them for compliance challenges.

Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative and Families First Community Grants Partners

The 2021 TANF Opportunity Act (TOA) created a framework for TDHS to launch a collection of strategic partnerships (grants) and programs that utilize a research based two-generation (2Gen) method which places equal and intentional focus on services for the child and their parent or caregiver to break cycles of poverty and strengthen communities. Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative (TOPI) and Families First Community Grants invest in programs that promote education, health, economic stability, and family well-being advancing long-term self-sufficiency and transforming Tennessee’s safety net. Organizations selected for funding are expected to deliver measurable TANF-aligned outcomes that prioritize community-based solutions that reflect the unique needs of Tennessee families and foster sustainable impact. Legislation in 2024 extended programing through 2026 and in October, the Pathways to Prosperity pilot was an added TOA funded program. This initiative offers enhanced assistance to Families First participants pursuing education or certification. Since November 2022, **10,115 Tennesseans have been served through TANF Opportunity Act Pilot grant partners.**

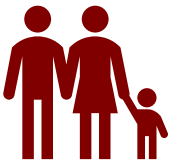


Age Group	Tennesseans Served
Children	88,331
Adults	39,618
Age unknown	1,438

77,526
Families served through Families First
Community Grants
July 2025-March 2026

High-Impact Areas Help Families Reach Long-Term Stability

Families First Community Grant partners strategically focus on areas that can change the trajectory of families with low incomes. The figures below offer a snapshot of cumulative progress across the contract term.



Social Capital | 11,616 Tennesseans Served

By expanding families' networks and connections to other families, community resources, outreach, civic engagement, mentorship, events and related services, grant partners build a reliable network and knowledge that strengthens relationships, shifts perspectives and changes the trajectory for families with low-incomes. To date, grant partners **reached 11,616 individuals**, meeting 81% of the target.



Health & Wellness | 25,841 Tennesseans Served

Wellness can impact academic and professional performance and influence household economics. Improving and promoting practices that support health, well-being, lifestyle behaviors and self-advocacy while reducing adverse childhood experiences are service focus areas for grant partners that reached **25,841 individuals to date**, meeting 76% of the target.



Education | 10,578 Tennesseans Served

Depth of education is often an influence on life outcomes. Promoting skill building, parental engagement and active involvement in children's academic performance can have a positive impact on both parents and children. To date, grant partners **reached 10,578 individuals**, meeting 85% of the target.



Economic Supports | 4,547 Tennesseans Served

Safe housing conditions, income, wage benefits, professional training, and financial literacy are intersecting factors for household economic stability. To date, grant partners reached 4,547 individuals with related supports, meeting 70% of the target.

Real Impact

"I truly know without their (GROWWTH) help I would never have had faith in myself to go back to school. It was a good leap of faith because I was not only helping me, but my daughter as well. I can say I once hated school but now I love everything about learning. That means the world to me. I learned a valuable lesson, never give up on your dreams, it's a big, beautiful world out there, and there are truly good people along the way to help you. I did a lot of growing and stayed clean and sober this year. I'm going further in my schooling, I'm there for people when I say I am going to be, and I can say I'm proud of myself, finally. I can say for once in my life I'm at a stable point." -- Ashley Underwood (pictured right),

Former Families First and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) customer who participated in the Growing Relationship and Occupational Wealth for West Tennessee Households (GROWWTH) program offered by the University of Memphis, a Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative partner.



Investing \$27 Million to Strengthen Tennessee Families

The Families First Community Grants program awarded grants totaling \$27 million to organizations and additional dollars to state agencies over the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Families First Community Grant Partners

- A Step Ahead Foundation of Middle Tennessee, Inc.
- Agape Child & Family Services
- Angelic Ministries
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee
- Boys & Girls Clubs in Tennessee
- Catholic Charities of Tennessee
- Chattanooga Area Food Bank
- Chattanooga Room in the Inn
- Childhelp, Inc.
- Communities in Schools of Tennessee
- Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc.
- East Tennessee State University
- Helping Hands of Middle & West Tennessee
- Knoxville Academy of Medicine Foundation
- Methodist Le Bonheur Community Outreach - Memphis CHILD and Opening Doors Pilot Project
- Mid-Cumberland Community Action Agency
- Morristown-Hamblen Child Care Centers Inc.; & Early Intervention
- Nashville Children's Alliance, Inc. (The Victor S. Johnson III)
- Nashville Diaper Connection
- Operation Stand Down Tennessee
- Porter-Leath
- Project Return
- Rural Resources
- Signal Centers, Inc.
- Tennessee Department of Health Home Visiting Program
- Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
 - Services Family Empowerment Initiative
 - Project Lifeline
 - Systems of Care Across Tennessee
- United Way of West Tennessee
- West Nashville Dream Center as Dream Streets
- YMCA of Memphis & the Mid-South
- Youth Villages, Inc.

Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative Grant Partners

- AFFIRM (Families Matter)
- GROWWTH (University of Memphis)
- Family & Children's Service
- Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency
- First Tennessee Development District Foundation
- United Way of Greater Knoxville
- Martha O'Bryan Center

Scan the QR to learn more about family focused community partners and services available in Tennessee counties.





Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Guided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered by TDHS, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) assists the monthly food budgets of eligible families and individuals with low incomes and empowers participants to direct more of their available income toward essential living expenses and other needs. TDHS also partners with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development in the administration of the SNAP Education and Training, or SNAP E&T program.

Family Assistance Leadership

The SNAP and Families First programs are jointly referred to as “Family Assistance” and have some overlapping leadership positions. A list of program leadership can be found within the Families First section.

Tennesseans Served Through SNAP in 2025/26

- 638,993 Individuals representing 321,622 households on average received SNAP benefits each month.
- \$428 Average monthly benefits per household
- \$1,650,368,808 Total SNAP benefits issued
- \$792,000 was distributed to 6,600 children through the Tennessee Summer Nutrition Initiative

Tennessee Summer Nutrition Initiative Delivers Benefits for 6,600 Children

Powered by state resources, the Tennessee Summer Nutrition Initiative provides benefits to feed school-age children living in select counties with limited Summer Nutrition Food Assistance options. In 2026, benefits were automatically delivered to families with an open SNAP or Families First case as of May 31, 2026. A total of **\$792,000 was distributed to 6,600 students** who were automatically enrolled in the Tennessee Summer Food Initiative and each received **\$120 in benefits**.



Division of Rehabilitation

Led by Assistant Commissioner Suzanne Carr

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) offers a cross-section of vocational partnerships, transitional services, accessibility, self-advocacy promotion, and individualized services that support Tennesseans with disabilities as they

strive to achieve employment and independent living goals. The division's program areas include Disability Determination Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP), and other services specific to blind, visually impaired, deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing community members.

Division of Rehabilitation Services Leadership

Beth Dunahee | Superintendent, Tennessee Rehabilitation Center - Smyrna

Linda Fisher | Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation Director, Field Operations

Amy Howell | Director, Vocational Rehabilitation

James Stanfield | Director, Disability Determination Services

Julie Johnson | Director, Operations

Wacovia King | Director, Tennessee Business Enterprises

Selina Kirkland | Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation Director, Business and Community Services

Kim Lilley | Director, Tennessee Technology Access Program

Amy Rader | Director, Strategic Business Solutions

Martina Stump | Assistant Director of Transition Youth and Employment Services

At the Division of Rehabilitation Services success is measured by the quality of customer service provided for timely disability decisions and the experiences of Tennesseans who achieve competitive integrated employment, long-term workforce participation, and increased economic self-sufficiency and community engagement through our services.

Tennesseans Served by DRS in 2025/26

- 84,681 Disability claim determinations processed
- 28,955 SSA disability benefits initiated or continued for Tennesseans
- 2,524 Tennesseans reached competitive integrated employment goals
- 292 Learners served through Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna with 119 students completing and graduating from occupational specific programs
- 8,652 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) applications received with 7,617 individuals determined eligible
- 4,138 Individual Plans for Employment developed for adults and 2,014 developed for Transition Services eligible youth
- 888 Assistive technology demonstrations
- 1,972 Reutilized devices were provided to Tennesseans resulting in more than \$523,000 in estimated customer cost savings

Programs and Partnerships Led by DRS

DRS is split into several resource areas and partnerships that focus on expanding options, opportunities, and experiences that help Tennesseans with disabilities strengthen their independence.

Councils and Collaborations

- State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)
- Statewide Independent Living Council
- Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing

Disability Determination Services (DDS)

Disability Determination Services (DDS) works with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to deliver prompt claims processing, accurate decisions, and related assistance to individuals applying for disability benefits. Tennessee's DDS has a collaborative and intentional relationship with the Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) program. The national program is designed to increase access to the disability income benefit programs administered by the SSA for eligible adults and children who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder. This year, DDS processed **84,681 disability claims determinations**.





Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers and the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center—Smyrna

TDHS operates several centers across the state to help Tennesseans with disabilities receive skills and work training. While the 17 Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers provide vocational evaluation, development, and placement-related services to Vocational

Rehabilitation program participants, the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna (TRCS) offers immersive experiences to students with various disabilities and traumatic brain injuries. This year, TRCS served **292 students with 119 students completing and graduating from training programs for specific job skills**. Both TRCS and CTRCs emphasize building job ready skills and certifications that lead to competitive wages.

“At TRC I learned to share, talk, to come out of my shell, to let people see the real me... TRC helped me achieve my dream.” –

Tabitha Pemberton (pictured right), Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna student



Blind Services

During the 2025/26 fiscal year, DRS established a dedicated Blind Services Unit to strengthen specialized services for individuals who are blind or have low vision. These services include Independent Living Services for eligible individuals of all ages who are blind or who have severe visual impairment to care for themselves in their homes and communities; the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program; and the Tennessee Business Enterprises (TBE) which allows Tennesseans with visual impairments or blindness to enroll in the program and act as independent business owners responsible for markets and vending inside state buildings. This year, TBE made a significant investment of **approximately \$3.8 million** to replace 380 vending machines and related equipment that had reached or exceeded 10 years of service. This investment reduces equipment downtime, lowers maintenance needs, and enhances customer service through updated technology and expanded capabilities. It also strengthens the TBE program’s mission to increase employment and economic opportunities for Tennesseans who are legally blind by providing modern, sustainable resources that support long-term success and growth.

Services for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing

Formed in 2005, the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing Services Unit focuses on the vocational needs of Tennesseans who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors within the unit are trained to collaborate and communicate with clients on their journey to enter, retain, or return to competitive employment.

Tennessee Technology Access Program

The Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP) is a statewide program designed to increase access to, and acquisition of, assistive technology devices and services. Through the aid of a network of assistive technology centers, the TTAP helps people with disabilities and their families find and acquire the tools they need to live independent, productive lives where and how they choose. This year, TTAP conducted **888 assistive technology demonstrations**, and **1,972 reutilized devices were provided to Tennesseans at no cost** to customers. The reutilized devices resulted in **more than \$523,000 in estimated customer cost savings** while increasing access to technology.

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program connects workers with disabilities with resources and partners that help Tennesseans enter the competitive labor market and achieve employment goals according to each participant’s capabilities and preferences. The program also supports businesses with disability employment topics through the Business and Community Services Unit. The 2025/2026 year marked another year of strong operational performance for VR and its service to Tennesseans. The program exceeded its application goal by **completing 8,652 applications, (1.8 percent above target), increased**

eligibility determinations by 11.5% compared to the previous year, and maintained an **average eligibility determination time of just 23.54 days**, well below the 45-day standard. The program also **exceeded its adult individualized plan for employment goal by 17.1 percent** while reducing the average time from **eligibility to plan development to 34.14 days**. The program's strongest outcome was achieving **2,524 competitive integrated employment placements**, surpassing the statewide goal by 26.2 percent and reflecting continued success in helping Tennesseans with disabilities achieve meaningful employment. Additionally, more than **1,150 VR participants received assistive technology** services that helped overcome barriers on the way to employment.

Metric	2025/26 Achievement
Individual Plans for Employment Developed for Adults (Age 23+)	4,138
Individual Plans for Employment Developed for Transition Age Youth (Ages14-22)	2,014
Customers who achieved competitive Integrated Employment through VR	2,524
Number of VR Participants receiving assistive technology related to employment goals	1,150

23.54 Days

Average Eligibility Determination Time

34.14 Days

Average Eligibility to Plan Development

Hands-On Learning that Leads to Independence

With a goal of becoming employed and gaining greater independence, Joanna Montero sought services from Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) for support. Living with Down syndrome and a learning disability, she faced significant barriers to employment, including limited literacy skills and English as her second language.

Working with her VR counselor, Ms. Montero was referred to the Business and Community Services Unit, where she received individualized training tailored to her learning style.

Through hands-on work readiness instruction, community-based work experiences, and ongoing support, she strengthened her communication skills, improved her workplace readiness, and gained the confidence needed to succeed.

After nearly two years of dedicated training and perseverance, Joanna successfully completed a hands-on assessment and interview and was hired as a Food Service Specialist at a local high school.

Joanna's parents celebrated this milestone alongside her, saying that they were both excited and happy in her accomplishments with VR.

**“We didn’t think actual employment or the reality of Joanna communicating with others was truly possible.”—
Joanna Montero’s Parents**

Today, Joanna is enjoying meaningful employment and greater independence. Her journey demonstrates how individualized services, strong partnerships, and determination can help Tennesseans overcome barriers and achieve their employment goals.



Outreach that Strengthens Tennessee Workers with Disabilities

During the 2025/26 year, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) hosted and co-hosted **more than 16 outreach events** across the state. These happenings ranged from employment fairs to help justice-involved individuals understand VR services and other resources that reduce barriers to employment, to camps that helped high-school and college-age youth understand their options and prepare for life and work after high school. Disability Mentoring Day (DMD), an annual event that helps participants build connections, explore careers, and engage with professionals across Tennessee State Government welcomed **182 students and vendors and approximately 40 TRCS staff** to DMD events held in person at TRCS and virtually during the fall of 2025. Other DRS outreach activities included training workshops and learning sessions to build knowledge for workers with disabilities and their advocates. Many of these events bring together American Job Centers, legal service organizations, other state departments, community organizations and employers to provide coordinated support and opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Innovative Tools Expand Pathways to Independence

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program invested in two immersive driving simulators to help new drivers build skills and confidence before getting on the road. Located at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna (TRCS), the simulators measure reaction time, track violations, and provide assessments to support VR customers pursuing jobs that require a driver's license. The program also introduced the Trasfr learning platform which offers more than 300 step-by-step training experiences focused on eight high-growth employment sectors. The virtual reality system allows learners to develop situational problem-solving and other skills in a safe, engaging environment in anticipation of real-world training or job pursuits. VR also launched training on Cognitopia, a web-based self-management platform that acts as a virtual job coach. The tool supports individuals in real time, strengthens workplace readiness, and promotes long-term employment success. Together, these resources advance VR's mission to expand independence and career opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities.





Promoting Inclusive Workspaces for Tennesseans with Disabilities

In addition to providing direct and coordinated services to workers with disabilities, DRS supports Tennessee businesses with a wide array of products, services, resources, and solutions related to disability employment. In October, the Business and Community Services Unit (BCSU), hosted statewide employer recognition events celebrating businesses that foster inclusive workplaces for Tennesseans with disabilities. Business employment consultants worked with employers, American Job Centers, workforce partners, and local leaders to present Governor Bill Lee's Certificates of Appreciation to companies showing strong commitment to hiring and supporting

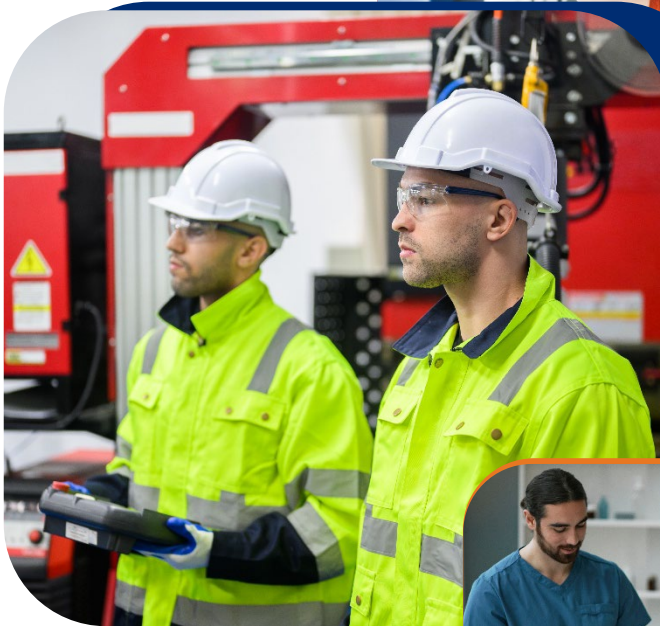
individuals with disabilities. These events strengthened partnerships, highlighted the value disabled workers bring to Tennessee's economy, and connected employers with job seekers and community organizations. The BCSU also partnered with workforce groups to deliver disability awareness and inclusion training, including Windmills workshops and presentations for HR professionals, chambers, and community partners. Together, these efforts expanded awareness of workplace accommodations and supported inclusive hiring across the state.

A Scalable Model for Remote Work Opportunities

DRS is always looking for scalable models that expand opportunities for employers and employees and remote work is a great strategic choice when mobility, transportation and like factors are barriers for workforce members with disabilities. What began as a regional effort and collaboration with AAA has expanded into a statewide partnership that provides remote competitive integrated employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities. Managed by the Community and Business Services Unit, this collaboration now connects qualified VR customers to remote positions including Emergency Roadside Assistance, Membership Sales and Service, bilingual roles, and part-time jobs. The partnership is supported by consistent communication, coordinated recruitment, and shared workforce goals. AAA also joined Tennessee VR's first Work-from-Home Computer Class, giving job seekers direct access to hiring managers and improving readiness for remote work. Since 2025, **18 Tennesseans with disabilities** have secured employment through this collaboration, many achieving long-term success and career advancement. AAA recognizes VR as a trusted partner, noting improved hiring processes, stronger candidate preparation, and sustainable employment pathways. Together, both organizations continue to expand meaningful career opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities. This model has the potential to be scaled or mimicked with other partnerships that benefit employers and workers.

Expanding Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Services for People with Mental Illness

In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Vocational Rehabilitation committed more than **\$5 million on expanding mental health-specific supported employment** from 49 to 56 counties. More than **1,300 Tennesseans with mental health diagnoses received IPS services from July through April**. This investment expands access to evidence-based employment services, particularly in rural and underserved communities.





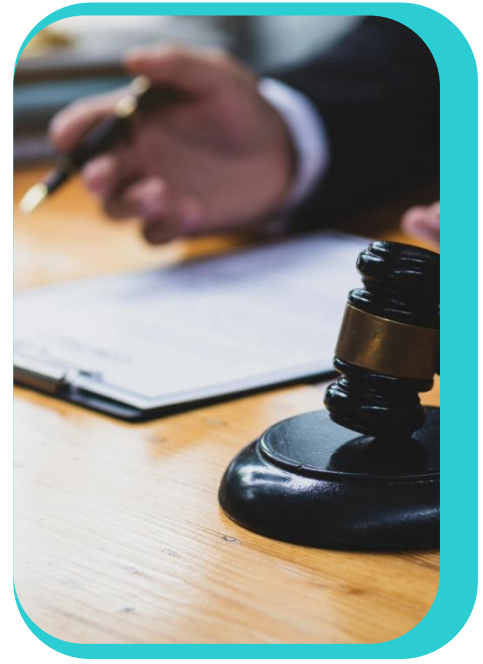
Support Divisions

While customer-facing divisions are responsible for interacting with the public and administering program benefits on a daily basis, their success is directly reliant on the work of seven support divisions:

- **Appeals and Hearings**
- **Office of General Counsel**
- **Office of the Inspector General**
- **Operations**
- **People Operations**
- **Public Information and Legislative Office**
- **Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions**

Appeals and Hearings

The Appeals and Hearings Division handles appeals for many of the programs administered by the Department. The division assists clients throughout the appeals process for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Families First, Child Support, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Staff initiate direct outreach to customers pre-hearing to discuss the client's case and resolve any issues, if applicable. Additionally, clients can participate in administrative hearings to present evidence, witnesses, and tell their side of the events to a neutral, impartial administrative judge. The division follows program standards to guide appeal timelines.



Appeals and Hearings Leadership

Mary-Glenn Hartup | Assistant Commissioner

Shawn DeHaven | Director of Operations

Daniel Koomen | Senior Associate Counsel, Commissioner's Designee Unit

James Daniel | Senior Associate Counsel, Case Prep Unit

Josh Eldridge | Chief DHS Administrative Judge

Office of General Counsel

The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) is responsible for providing legal advice and representation in judicial and administrative litigation affecting all TDHS programs. These efforts include developing departmental rules on program implementation, analyzing and preparing legislation affecting the Department, reviewing contracts, compliance oversight, and training on privacy, civil rights, and complaints.

Office of General Counsel Leadership

Krisann Hodges | Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Paul Helton | Deputy General Counsel

Dezanne Russell | Deputy General Counsel

Office of the Inspector General

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) works to ensure all TDHS programs are conducted in a structured ethical manner. The OIG provides departmental oversight including internal auditing, program monitoring, claims management, background checks, and investigations. This important work prevents fraud, waste, and abuse through collaboration with other state and federal agencies, and is conducted by three units: Special Investigations, Audit Services, and Background Investigations.

Program Leadership

Todd McKinney | Inspector General

Richard Carr | Director, Program Integrity

Doug Bodary | Director, Audit Services

The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) | External and internal investigations and quality investigative reports are the responsibility of the Special Investigations Unit. Reports are referred to the Office of General Counsel (OGC), TDHS Human Resources (HR), State and Federal law enforcement, and State and Federal prosecutors for civil or criminal determinations.



Audit Services | Team members within audit services conduct audits and monitoring reviews of the Department's external subrecipients, contractors, and internal programs' processes to bring accountability through its reporting and to aid departmental management in the assessment of operating effectiveness of its internal controls. By identifying and following up on potential fraud, waste, or abuse of the Department's administered programs and following up on internal or externally referred complaints, Audit Services helps ensure taxpayer dollars are appropriately invested in the best interests of the state according to state and federal guidelines.

Background Investigations | Within Background Investigations there are two units, the Background Investigations and Child Care Licensing (CCL). These units work to confirm that individuals have the appropriate qualifying credentials for other programs and initiatives supported by TDHS.

Office of the Inspector General by the Numbers 2025/26

- \$6,424,972.55 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program collections
- \$183,498.44 in Families First (TANF) total claim collections
- 246 Reports Processed
- \$260,655.59 Disallowed Costs
- \$863,856.85 Questioned Costs
- 32,993 Total Background Investigations

Operations

The TDHS Operations Division includes the following teams: Budget, Data Strategies, Procurement, Support Services, Fiscal, and Information Technology. The Budget, Procurement, and Fiscal subdivisions are responsible for managing the Department's expenditures while Support Services and Information Technology work to ensure that TDHS has the right tools to best serve customers. The Operations Division ensures the Department's infrastructure systems and staff are ready and able to get community members the help they need. The Operations division also consistently works to improve TDHS processes and cost savings with data-driven solutions.

Operations Leadership

- **Melisa Cobb** | Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer
- **Kevin Lauer** | Assistant Commissioner of Operations
- **Amanda Woody** | Director, Strategic Analysis
- **Winfield Shiers** | Director of Operations, Budget
- **Stephen Reksten** | Director, Support Services
- **John Preisel** | Director of Operations, Technology and Innovation
- **Mike Leitzke** | Director of Operations, Procurement
- **Nupur Sashti** | Director of Operations, Research and Analytics
- **Anthony Burwell** | Chief Information Officer
- **Krysta Krall** | Chief Financial Officer, Fiscal Services

Operations by the Numbers 2025/26

- 200 Projects completed by the Data Strategy Unit
- \$4 Million identified annual recurring savings from bringing contracted data, analytics, survey, and mapping work in-house
- 2,483 Purchase orders issued
- 165 Contracts prior to October 2025 and 158 contracts awarded prior to July 2026 (*Procurement reports contracts against both State Fiscal Year and Federal Fiscal Year deadlines*)
- \$104,698,069.45 In disaster assistance provided to 70,356 Tennesseans in 29 counties based on data provided by the Preparedness Unit

Reducing Costs and Space

The Division of Operations is committed to increasing the Department's efficiencies. This year the Data Strategy Unit identified \$4 million in annual recurring savings from bringing contracted data, analytics, survey, and mapping work in-house. The Procurement team **reduced the Department's office footprint by 62,560 square feet** through the relocation from the James K. Polk State Office Building to Andrew Johnson Tower.

People Operations

Through the combined efforts of Human Resources and Learning & Organizational Development teams, the Division of People Operations provides strategic workforce solutions, employee development, and organizational support that empower employees and strengthen organizational effectiveness. The division is guided by a commitment to facilitating supportive, empowering, approachable, and solution-focused work.

People Operations Leadership

Dana Braxton | Assistant Commissioner

Leslie Baker | Director, Learning & Organizational Development

People Operations in Numbers

- 983 Employee and leadership coaching consultations
- 34 facilitator-led compliance courses reaching 906 participants
- 3 Cohorts of the New Supervisor Academy with a total of 28 graduates
- 1,080 Team members reached through Performance Management and Education Sessions
- 567 Estimated staff hours saved through HR process automations and modernization projects
- More than 105 training sessions held for customer-facing divisions
- 1,587 Alternative Workplace Solutions forms processed
- 220 Electronic Personnel Action Forms processed
- 148 Electronic Position Change Request Forms processed
- 875 Reporting Structure Changes





Success for People Operations is measured by the success of our workforce. We strive to create an environment where employees and leaders are equipped to grow, perform at their best, and achieve meaningful results. By investing in our most important resource, our people, we strengthen the workforce that makes the Tennessee Department of Human Services' mission possible.

Unlocking Potential. Strengthening Service. Shaping the Future.

Following the theme, *"Unlocking Potential, Strengthening Service, Shaping the Future,"* during FY 2025–26, People Operations advanced workforce engagement and development to strengthen TDHS's culture and future readiness. One major milestone for the division was the enhancement of the HR Service Portal to include new self-service requests, implementing performance management automations that improved accuracy and consistency while **saving an estimated 567 staff hours** annually, and enhancing service delivery. Through strategic partnerships and cross-functional initiatives, coaching, consultation, and learning resources, People Operations continued to help shape a more capable, engaged workforce, unlocking potential and supporting TDHS's mission to serve Tennesseans effectively now and in the future. The Division supported employee growth and leadership development through several initiatives: performance management programs reaching **1,080 participants**, facilitator led compliance courses **serving 906 participants**, and "Fact or Fiction" training for Individual Contributors and Supervisors with more than **1,150 participants**.



Public Information and Legislative Office

The Public Information and Legislative Office (PILO) facilitates internal and external communication for TDHS customers, staff, legislators, media contacts, and state residents. These efforts ensure Tennesseans have access to current information on TDHS programs from multiple channels. The division is organized into three Units: Customer Service, Communications, Legislative.

Program Leadership

Callon Bagget | Assistant Commissioner

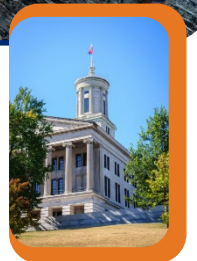
Pamela Fusting | Director of Operations & Customer Experience

Devin Stone | Director of Communications

Customer Service | The Customer Service (CuSe) unit within PILO serves as a centralized customer service operation, equipped to handle inquiries and escalations related to all TDHS programs and services and to provide appropriate referrals for misdirected inquiries. Customers access CuSe via multiple channels: telephone, mail, email, webforms, LiveChat, fax, and referrals from other agencies and political officials. The team is trained to care for customers seeking services or lodging concerns regarding service delivery. Inquiries are documented and tracked and utilized to improve customer experiences.

Communications | The Communications team helps TDHS team members foster public trust through communication tools and production such as the TDHS web pages, print media, social media and other channels. The team interacts with the media and other entities that share a vested interest in TDHS services and manages kidcentraltn.com, a customer-facing online information hub that shares an extensive collection of articles on child wellness, parenting and family resources for Tennesseans. During the 2025/26 year, the work of the Communications Team was critical to ensuring Tennesseans stayed informed about the impacts of the federal shutdown, emergency support and critical updates on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Child Care, Vocational Rehabilitation, and other initiatives that strengthened Tennesseans.

Legislative | The Legislative team works to represent the Department before the General Assembly and with any related external stakeholders. The team monitors legislative sessions, ensures passage of Department initiative and educates members on topics related to TDHS programs and offers related to assistance with constituent concerns. The team also handles rule review before the legislature's Government Operations Committee and contracts before the legislature's Fiscal Review Committee. Post legislative session, the Legislative team works with program and legal to develop legislative proposals for the upcoming year and plan outreach events for the Commissioner and Executive Leadership team.



Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions

Led by Assistant Commissioner Gary Wilson

The Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions (QISS) division provides oversight and direction to the Department's program evaluation and continuous improvement efforts through the Quality Management (QM) and the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) units. The CQI Unit provides direction to continuous improvement initiatives, policy management, and special projects such as grant application coordination and research. The QM Unit provides objective quality control case level examinations on the benefits and services that our customers receive.

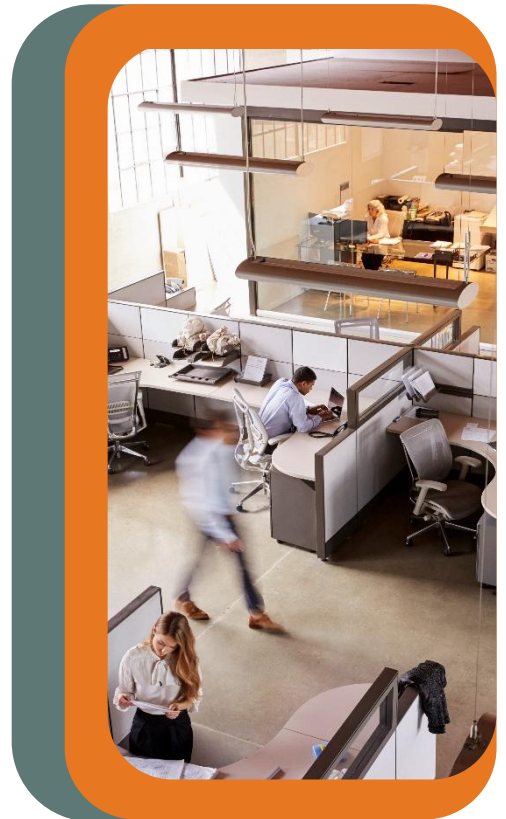
Program Leadership

Jeffrey Hayes | Quality Management Director

Amanda McVay | Continuous Quality Improvement Director

QISS by the Numbers 2025/26

- 92,070 Customers benefits and/or services reviewed
- 1,725 Cases reviewed for accuracy and adherence to state and federal policy.
- 6,018 Families First (TANF) cases reviewed to improve Tennessee's Work Participation Rate and customer work exemption accuracy
- 2,500 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) cases for accuracy and timeliness of services provided at different stages in the VR case lifecycle.
- 610 Independent Living and Older Blind cases reviewed, including customer satisfaction calls
- 492 Adult Protective Services Intake referral reviews
- 1,872 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cases reviewed to provide Payment Error Rate (PER) and negative action accuracy
- 29 Process improvement projects facilitated to save 15,519 work hours and avoided \$743,657 in costs.



A Brief History of the Tennessee Department of Human Services

Tennessee has long been known as the “Volunteer State” for its willingness to step in when help is needed. Since its founding in 1796, state administrators have understood that we are stronger when our most vulnerable are supported. For the first 31 years of the state’s life, the administration of “poor relief” was a responsibility of state counties and a court system that extended into the most remote sections of the state. In 1827, new legislation allowed counties to establish almshouses to provide for citizens who could not care for themselves due to disability or other factors. Almost a century later in 1925, the Welfare Division was created under the state Department of Institutions to license child care institutions, maternity homes, jails, workhouses, and almshouses.

The organization was also responsible for organizing county welfare committees. The Great Depression saw a larger number of Americans in need of assistance and the state utilized a Federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan to assist Tennessee families. This support was continued through the 1933 Federal Emergency Relief Act that established the Tennessee State Relief Administration (TSRA), an organization that later transitioned to become the Tennessee Welfare Commission before morphing into the Department of Institutions and Public Welfare in 1937 and subsequently, the Department of Public Welfare in 1939.

In May 1975, the agency’s name again changed to the Department of Human Services. Over the next forty years, the department’s services grew to include the Child Support program in 1977, Rehabilitation Services in 1983 and managed the transition of Aid to Families with Dependent Children to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program in 1996. Today, the department encompasses an extensive number of divisions all aimed to one purpose: Strengthen Tennessee by Strengthening Tennesseans.



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www.TN.Gov/HumanServices.html
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