Tennessee Department of

Human Services

2025 Annual Report







TN Department of Human Services



Tennessee Department of Human Services Annual Report 2025

"As we look ahead, we remain grounded in our mission. We will continue to listen, innovate, and partner with communities across Tennessee to ensure that every person—regardless of circumstance—has the opportunity to thrive."

-Commissioner Clarence H. Carter



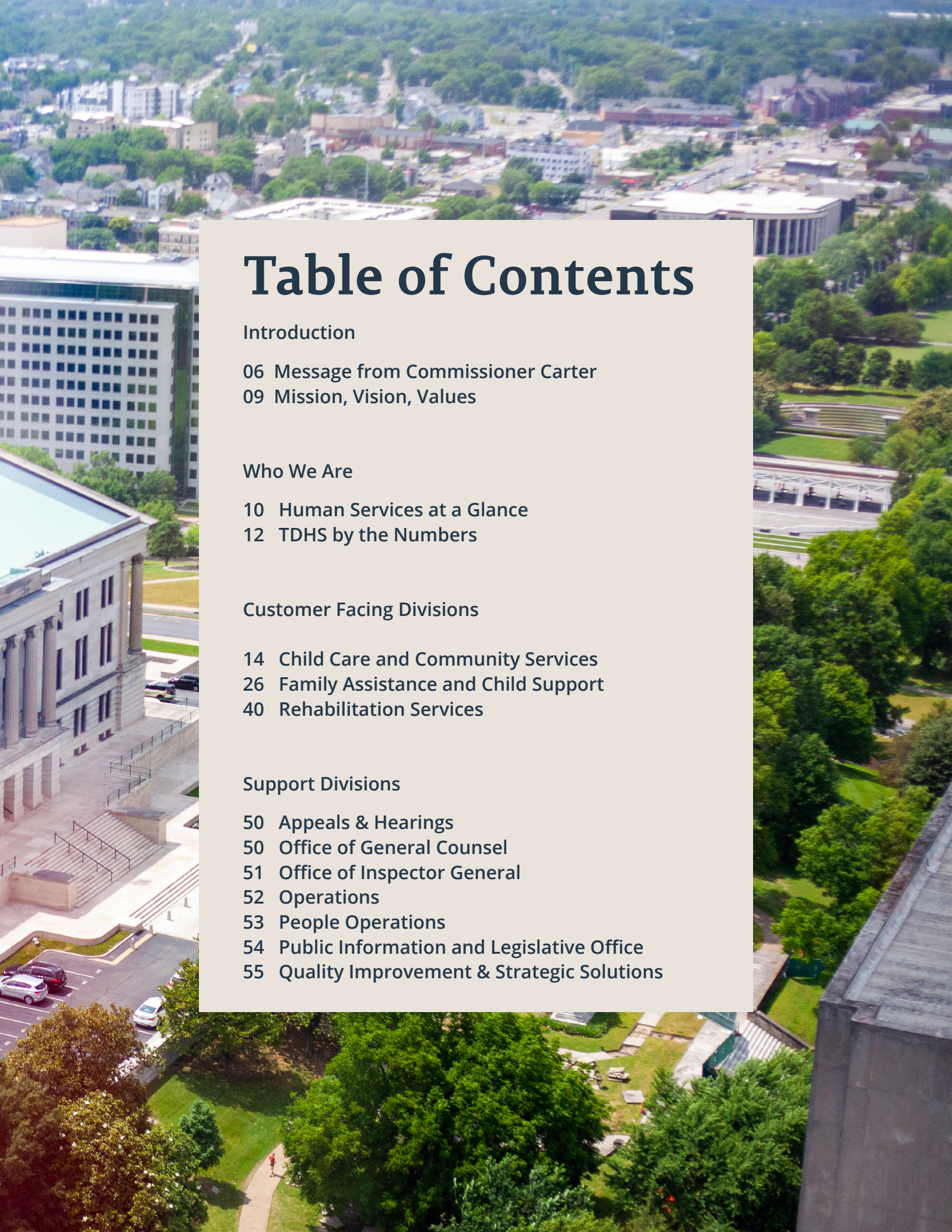


Table of Contents

Introduction

06 Message from Commissioner Carter
09 Mission, Vision, Values

Who We Are

10 Human Services at a Glance
12 TDHS by the Numbers

Customer Facing Divisions

14 Child Care and Community Services
26 Family Assistance and Child Support
40 Rehabilitation Services

Support Divisions

50 Appeals & Hearings
50 Office of General Counsel
51 Office of Inspector General
52 Operations
53 People Operations
54 Public Information and Legislative Office
55 Quality Improvement & Strategic Solutions

A Message From Commissioner Clarence H. Carter



Dear Fellow Tennesseans,

At the Tennessee Department of Human Services, our mission is clear: to strengthen Tennessee by strengthening Tennesseans – by that we mean partnering with Tennesseans, leaders in various sectors, sister state agencies, community organizations, and employers to improve our overall quality of life.

This past state fiscal year, that mission came to life in transformative ways.

We placed fathers at the forefront of our work—recognizing their vital role in strong families and thriving communities. Through the implementation of 10 Fatherhood Grant partnerships, we expanded direct services and support that empower fathers to be present, engaged, and supported in their parenting journey. Events like our NFL Alumni Association partnership brought visibility and energy to this important work, reminding us that when we invest in fathers, we invest in families.

We also made important progress on the Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative (TOPI) and the Families First Community Grants. When we launched TOPI, we envisioned a future where families no longer had to choose between opportunity and stability. Today, that vision is becoming reality. In just two years, hundreds of Tennesseans have accessed life-changing supports—job coaching, financial literacy, transitional benefits, milestone payments, wellness resources, and more. This progress is the result of strong partnerships, innovative thinking, and a shared commitment to equipping families for success and less reliance on public services.

TOPI is more than a pilot—it's a model. A model of what's possible when we align around a common goal and work together with purpose. There is more to come in the year ahead, as our pilot programs wrap up, and focus shifts to evaluating the programs.

We continued to invest in child care, ensuring that child care providers and families have access to the resources they need to build bright futures for Tennessee children.

Our One DHS Contact Center and enhancements to the One DHS Customer Portal reflect our commitment to streamlining services and improving the customer experience through technology. We've now integrated more TDHS programs and services into both our call center and online portal so that Tennesseans can connect to our support services from central locations.

As we look ahead, we remain grounded in our mission. We will continue to listen, innovate, and partner with communities across Tennessee to ensure that every person—regardless of circumstance—has the opportunity to thrive.

To all who have contributed your time, effort, and care: thank you. Together, we are building a stronger Tennessee.


GEAR UP,
TENNESSEE!
NFL ALUMNI


GEAR UP,
TENNESSEE!
NFL ALUMNI

Executive Leadership Team



Commissioner

Clarence H. Carter



Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Services

Cherrell Campbell-Street

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



Deputy Commissioner of Operations and Chief Operating Officer

Melisa Cobb

- 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)



Deputy Commissioner and Chief of Staff

Whitney Page

- Public Information and Legislative Office
- Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions
- Senior Policy Advisor



Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Krisann Hodges

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



Inspector General

Todd McKinney

- Office of Inspector General

Mission

To Strengthen Tennessee by Strengthening Tennesseans.

Values

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

Vision

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









At a Glance | Strengthening Tennessee in 2024/25

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. Our customers include a broad spectrum of families, Tennesseans with disabilities, businesses, workers and community partners who share our desire to strengthen Tennessee. 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 Workforce

8,464

Pre-Employment Transition Services provided to more than 7,000 youth with disabilities

1,875

Workers with disabilities reached their employment goals and

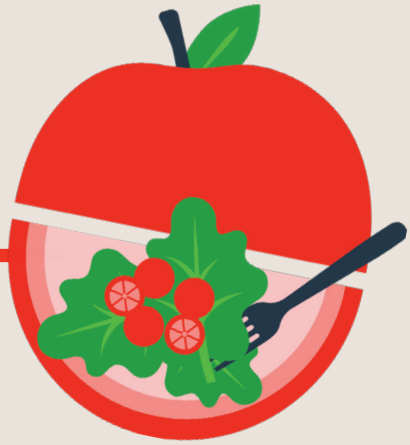
3,367

Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) formed for new customers

28,741 individuals representing **12,681** households received **$360 on average** to support employment and training goals

2,258 Educators

from 883 different licensed agencies served through the WAGE$® salary supplement program



Fighting Food Insecurity

720,658 Individuals representing 355,498 households served on average each month

through the Supplemental Nutrition Program with **$399 in benefits received per household on average**

30,300,000 meals provided in 2024 & **24,000,000 meals** provided in 2025 so far

by the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

4 Million

Meals provided by the Summer Food Service Program

**Note: The number of meals represents those submitted for reimbursement as of July 1, 2025 and does not include the months of April, May, or June 2025 and is consequently approximate. As a federal program, CACFP and SFSP operate on a federal fiscal year schedule.*

Empowering Families & Protecting Vulnerable Community Members

$563 Million

in Child Support collected with **97% going to 257,000 children**

27,756

Children served through **Smart Steps** and **Child Care Payment Assistance**

8,615

Quality **child and adult care spaces** created or continued

28,328

reports of adult abuse received with **10,821 reports** assigned for investigation

Building Effective Partnerships

8,724

Individuals served through Tennessee Opportunity Pilot partners since their launch in 2022.

$5 Million

invested in a collection of **10 organizations** that will provide direct services to fathers in **30 counties over the next two years.**

$13,597,476.93

Invested

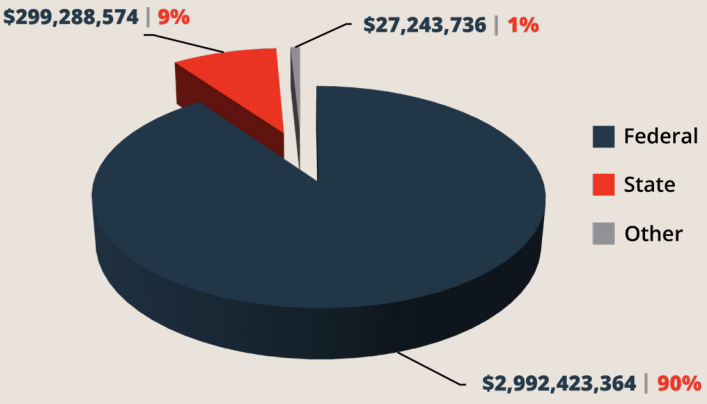
in **8,603 public and private community action agency partnerships** to remove economic barriers for Tennesseans with low incomes

72 Families First Grant Partnerships

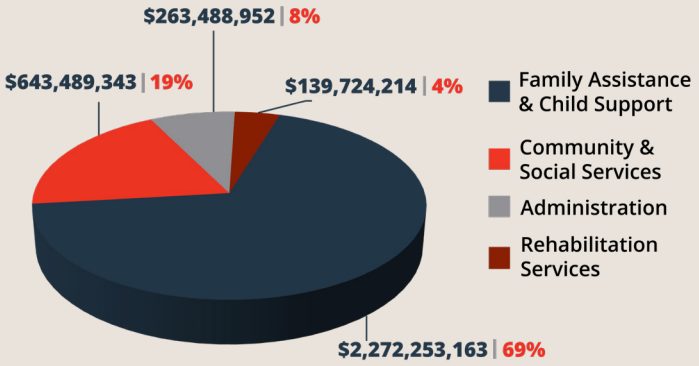
formed to break cycles of poverty for families

Investing in Tennessee 2024/25

TDHS FY 2025 Revenue

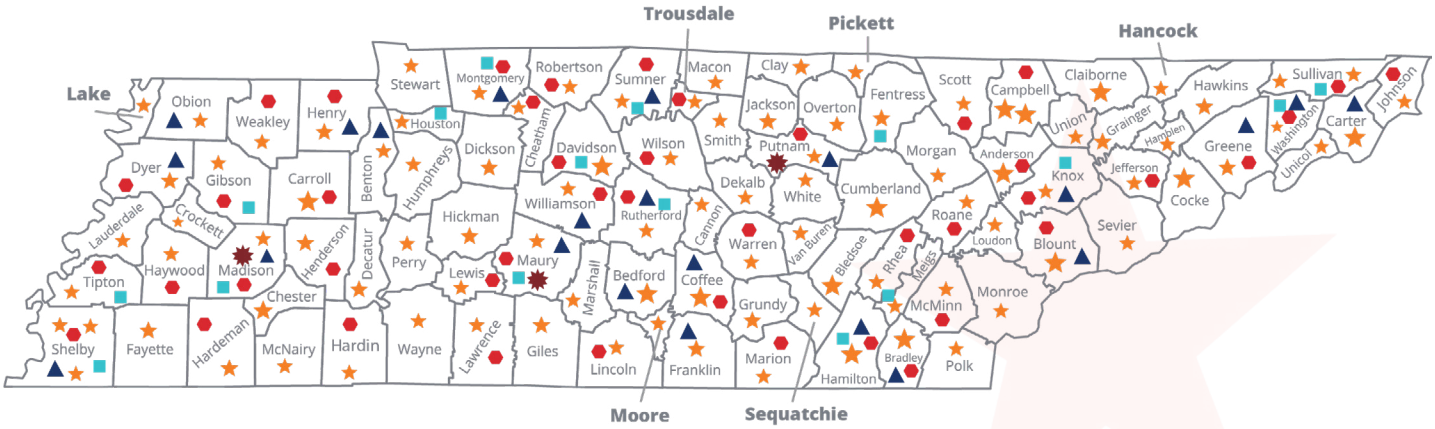


TDHS FY 2025 Expenditures



Service Access From 95 Counties

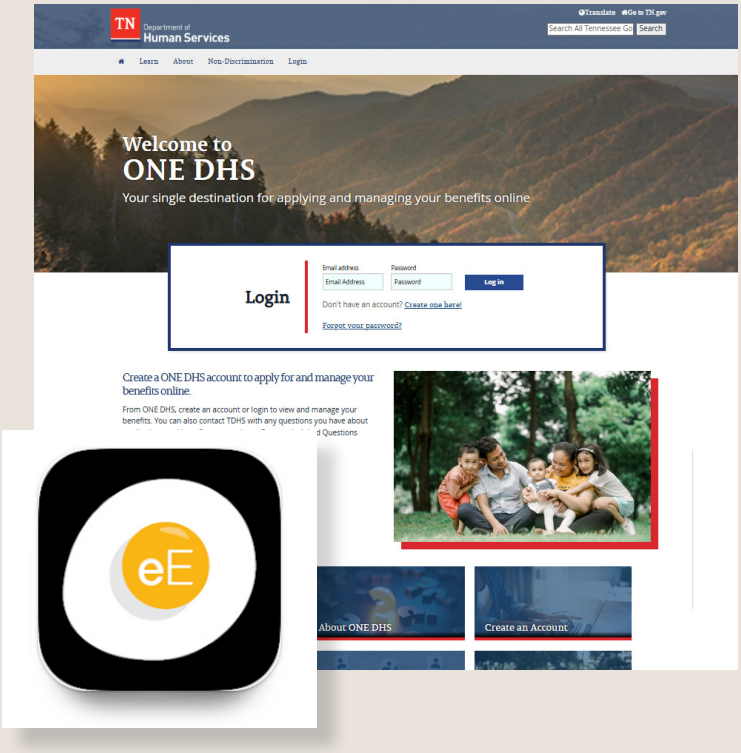
Our department serves Tennesseans in every county. Customers can access our department's services in person and many of our programs offer digital dashboards that enable customers to quickly and securely access information about their case from the convenience of their phone, tablet or computer.



- DHS Central and District Offices
- Child Support Offices
- Family Assistance and Child Care Offices
- Rehabilitation Centers and Offices
- Child Care Services

The One DHS Customer Portal & ebtEDGE

The One DHS Customer Portal is a secure online option for Tennesseans who wish to apply for services, submit an appeal, upload case documents, or file a report with TDHS. Customer who use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have the option to track and protect benefit balances using EbtEDGE, an FIS digital services product.



Our Department's Structure

Structurally, TDHS consists of two groups of divisions:

Customer-Facing Divisions with Programs that Directly Interact with People and Partners

- Child Care and Community Services
- Family Assistance and Child Support
- Rehabilitation Services

Support Divisions That Make the Work of TDHS Possible

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





Customer Facing Divisions

Each of the department's three customer-facing divisions specialize in particular areas that help individuals and families live safe, productive lives that impact our state as a whole. The following is a brief summary that offers highlights on the accomplishments of programs within these divisions during the last annual reporting cycle.





Child Care and Community Services

Led by Assistant Commissioner Jude White

The Child Care and Community Services Division encompasses several programs and partnership structures that ensure children and community members who are unable to safely care for themselves or flourish are protected, strengthened and connected to organizations that build solid foundations for wellbeing: Adult Protective Services, Social Services Block Grant Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Services and Community Services Block Grant.

Adult Protective Services

TDHS believes all adults should be safe, valued, heard, and treated with dignity. The Adult Protective Services (APS) team 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. The program collaborates with State Coordinated Community Response group members, civic, law, legal, healthcare and other community partners to examine and address the safety of Tennessee's vulnerable adults.

Program Leadership

Renee Bouchillon
Director, Adult Protective Services

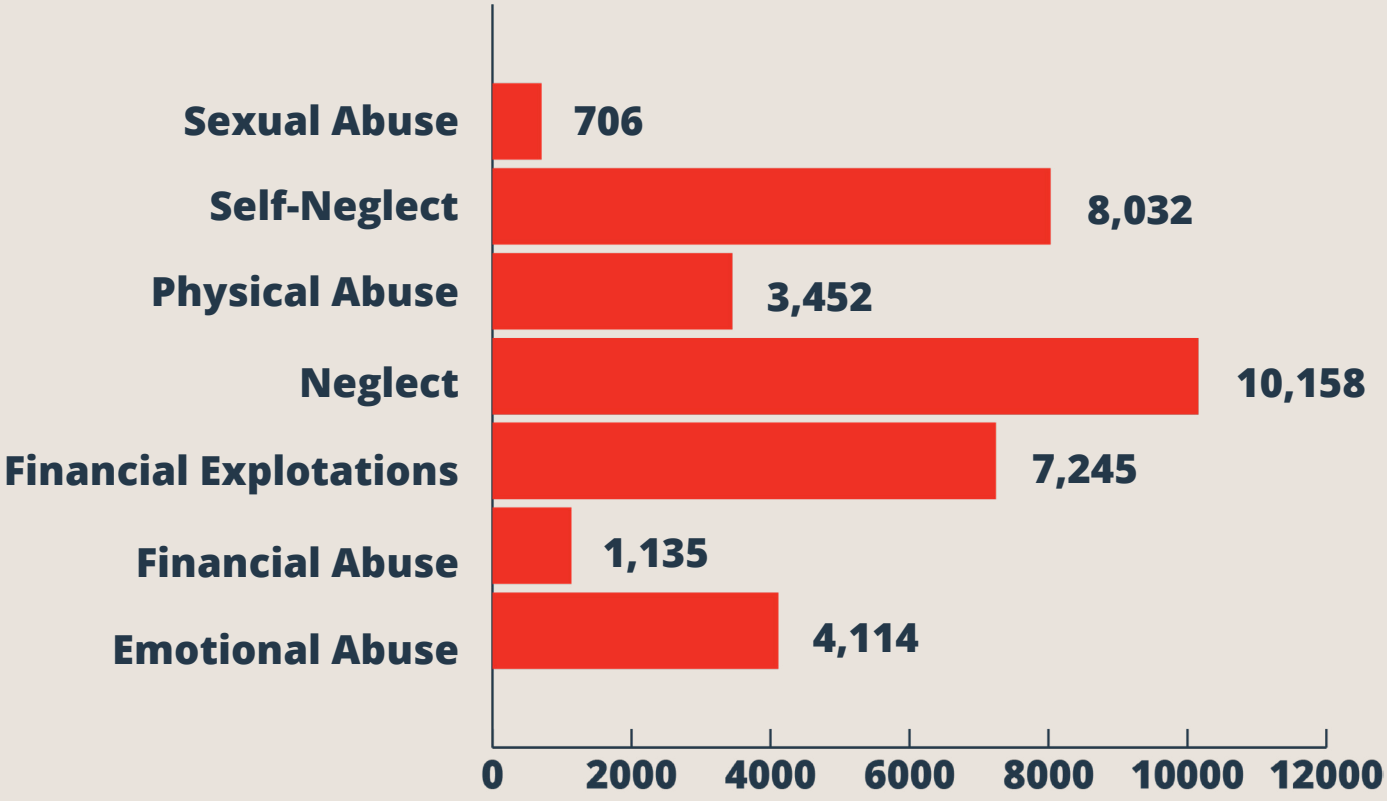
Rhonda Barnes
Director, Intake Grants

Joyce Reed
Director, Field Operations/APS Led Specialized Programs and Initiatives

Tennesseans Served Through APS in 2024/25

- 28,328 Reports of abuse received with
  - 52% Reports submitted by phone
  - 47% Submitted online
  - 1% of Reports submitted via mail/FAX/email/in-person
- 34,842 Allegations reported: *Note: A single report can include multiple allegations*
- 10,821 Reports assigned for investigation with 119 emergency assignments
- 5,903 Information and referral calls
- 78,800 Hours of personal support services provided to 2,177 vulnerable Tennesseans
- $42,592 In goods or services delivered to 85 vulnerable adults via the Social Services Block Grant Program
- 75 Community members participated in adult day services

Types of Abuse Reported



Specialized Programs Led by APS

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.

Collaborative Response to Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse (CREVAA)

APS assists elderly and vulnerable adult victims of crime by supporting the Collaborative Response to Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse (CREVAA) grant program. This program 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. This year, **1,512 community members were served through CREVAA.**

Collaborative Response to End Self-Neglect in Tennessee (CREST)

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. During 2024/25, **697 Tennesseans were served through CREST.**

Social Service Block Grant 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. During the 2024/25, the SSBG provided **$42,592 in goods or services** to **85 vulnerable Tennesseans** and **75 community members** received **7,555 days of adult day services** through the program.



A Focus on Healthcare

Health is a primary concern in APS investigations. Following a needs assessment, the APS-led Coordinated Community Response group added "healthcare" to its list of five focus areas. To accelerate access to critical services for APS clients, streamline processes for APS staff, and more effectively utilize taxpayer dollars to assist TennCare service recipients, this year, APS staff gained access to TennCare portals and began plans to conduct monthly meetings with Wellpoint, a TennCare managed care organization, to discuss complex cases.

Collaborating, Learning, and Listening

Bringing together stakeholders to share and spread information about best practices and resources for protecting community members is critical to APS goals. This year, a record **230 participants** attended the 2025 Center on Aging Research and Education Services Conference (CARES) co-hosted by the Social Work Program at Tennessee State University to build knowledge on "Financial Exploitation: Investigations and the Need for Collaboration" with experts that included former Iowa Assistant Attorney General Chantell Smith, JD, a U.S. Department of Justice Elder Justice Initiative consultant. The APS team connected with other national experts at the 2024 National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) Conference, where the team presented on CREST. Each exchange offered a strategic opportunity to build public and professional awareness about APS resources and learn about the needs of collaborators who play a role in promoting and protecting the health and safety of vulnerable adults served through APS.



Photo description: Attendees at the 2025 CARES Conference

Modern Tools that Serve Vulnerable Tennesseans

This year, APS continued modernizing systems and protocols to improve case management efficiency, accuracy, and responsiveness. CREVAA launched a centralized digital system for its service providers in December 2024. The portal improves data accuracy and reporting by replacing the need for manual spreadsheet management and report generation while offering checklists and value documentation features. A similar milestone with great impact happened in June 2025 when APS joined the One DHS Customer Portal. Now, Tennesseans who suspect abuse can submit a report at OneDHS.TN.Gov, on the same platform used for SNAP, Child Support, and many other TDHS-administered programs. The portal streamlines the intake process by collecting all data necessary for APS staff to assess the need for services and has worker/contractor features that allow APS team members to enter data when a secure network is unavailable, an in-person report is needed or office hours are closed. These developments combined with the new access to the TennCare portal reduce administrative burdens for staff and give APS team members the opportunity to focus on decision-making and efficient service delivery.

Building Public Trust and Awareness

APS and its partners rely heavily on the vigilance and awareness of community members to report abuse. This year Tennessee's program took action to ensure both the public and professionals are better equipped to recognize and respond to signs of harm. Tennessee's team partnered with NAPSA to develop and distribute resource sheets and communication materials and traditional media ads. With help from the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters, 5,642 TV and radio ads aired in April. The efforts were supported by social media campaigns and website content. The team also shared information and facilitated relationships through 22 educational presentations to community organizations and law enforcement across the state and hosted 221 participants for virtual "An Introduction to APS: Understanding and Partnering with APS" learning sessions with community members and providers. Each of these efforts aimed to build public awareness and trust in the work of APS and helped more Tennesseans recognize signs of abuse, neglect, and exploitation and know how to take action.



This program was supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $4,979,946.00 with 100 percent funding by ACL/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Nutrition Support Programs

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

Program Leadership

Allette Vayda
Director of operations, Food Programs

Anthony Couch
Program Manager

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The Child and Adult Care Food Program administers federally funded reimbursements to eligible child and adult care institutions to provide nutritious meals served to participants who meet age and income requirements. The program increases its reach to address child food insecurity by collaborating with the Community Block Grant Services, 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). **Approximately 30,300,000 meals provided in 2024 and 24,000,000 meals provided in 2025.**

The 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. **In SFY 2024 the SFSP provided approximately 4,000,000 meals. This significant spike of roughly 1,000,000 more meals compared to 2023 is attributed to the increase to rural non-congregate meals.**

**Note: The number of meals represents those submitted for reimbursement as of July 1, 2025 and does not include the months of April, May, or June 2025 and is consequently approximate. As federal programs, CACFP and SFSP operates on a federal fiscal year schedule.*

A New Model for Better Nutrition Program Service Delivery

This year the Child and Adult Food and Summer Food Service programs transitioned to an online portal to manage applications, claims submissions and related data. This update will expedite administrative tasks and make it easier for both team members and partners to know and understand case status and make decisions. With a reduction to the administrative burden, staff can spend more time building relationships through ongoing customer service to sponsors following a new case management model. This approach offers additional opportunities for program administrators to build knowledge that can be used to better address the needs and interests of current and potential partners.

Child Care Services

Our Child Care Services unit plans, implements, and coordinates activities and programs to ensure quality treatment, accessibility, and the health and safety of children and adults in care through three focus areas: Child and Adult Care Licensing, Child Care Payment Assistance and partnerships.

Program 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, Reliability and Compliance

Families Served Through Child Care Services in 2024/25

- 27,756 Children served through Smart Steps and Child Care Payment Assistance
- 2,258 Educators from 883 different licensed agencies served through the WAGE$® salary supplement program with 56,481 children impacted in programs with WAGE$® participants
- 8,615 Quality care spaces created representing 127 provisional licenses and 106 continuous licenses
- 76 Establishment Grants approved representing a $3,338,401 investment in child care options for Tennessee families
- 300 Additional licensed child care spaces created through NEW Care Partnership Grants

Child Care Certificate Programs

Child Care Payment Assistance and Smart Steps provide eligible parents with payment assistance for their children's care at licensed child care agencies. These income-based programs offer families who are working or attending post-secondary education programs a sense of security that allows them to concentrate on pursuing training or employment goals to improve their family's lives. In October of 2024, Child Care Services launched the new Child Care Assistance Record of Eligibility (C-CARE), an automated process that integrates with the established One DHS Customer Portal to streamline Child Care Payment Assistance for families who apply for services and child care providers who receive direct payments on behalf of families. This change improves the customer experience with an intuitive user-friendly centralized platform for multiple TDHS administered services.

Child Care Development Fund Quality Partners and Other Collaborative Initiatives

To support continuous improvement of early childhood environments, Child Care Services engages a spectrum of "quality partners." Services through the partners include but are not limited to training, technical support, coaching, modeling, professional development (tuition support, credentialing), guidance on business practices, developmentally appropriate best practices, language and literacy support, mental health and well-being, supplemental salary supports, program enhancement grants, shared services, outreach and awareness assistance. The Child Care Program also builds partnerships through grant programs that expand the number of licensed child care spaces available to families. The New Care Partnership Grant engages and fosters collaborative bridges between child care organizations and employers who are ready to implement innovative child care strategies that add more slots or spaces of child care capacity by expanding or establishing child care agencies. This year the initiative added **300 new spaces of licensed care** that lift the burden on working families.

Child and Adult Care Licensing Program

The Child and Adult Care Licensing Program is a regulatory body that licenses and monitors child and adult care facilities across the state and ensures compliance with health and safety standards that protect Tennessee children and adults in care. The licensing team provides outreach, consultation and recruitment within local communities to navigate codes and zoning regulations, provide information and forums on how to address building capacity and to build relationships that foster ongoing communication and innovative approaches in solving child care deficits.

Tools that Help Parents Make Informed Decisions | In October 2024, the first scores under the newly redesigned Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) were posted online. These scores help Tennesseans make informed decisions about care for their loved ones. For child care providers, the new evaluation structure takes a holistic approach to monitoring for compliance with rules and evaluates quality, through four quarterly routine visits throughout the year, using a comprehensive tool that monitors health and safety indicators as well as teacher/child interactions. Licensing consultants provide immediate feedback on what is working well and potential areas needing improvement and recommend resources available through child care quality partners.

Events, Training and Support for Child Care Professionals

The Child Care Services Program is proud to collaborate with child care providers and quality partners that facilitate child care solutions that benefit young Tennesseans in care, our state's workforce, employers and businesses. In 2024/25 our list of partners and supported partner resources included:

Tennessee Professional Archive of Learning (TNPAL) is the official system of record for qualifications, training, and professional development for child care providers licensed by TDHS. The free resource allows both child care professionals and their employers to track and verify credentials. In the past year, TNPAL users grew from **58,085** to total **75,926.** These users completed **855,000** hours of training for a record of **441,939.**

TrainTN is the official clearinghouse for external early childhood professional trainings recognized as approved by TDHS.

Tennessee Child Care Online Training System (TCCOTS) is a free online learning management system supporting early childhood professionals and high-quality child care services in Tennessee powered by ProSolutions Training.

Childcare Tennessee is a Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee-led resource for licensed child care program directors and owners that shares thousands of resources with early childhood educators and child care professionals. In 2024/25 Childcare Tennessee distributed **$2,137,154** through Enhancement Mini Grants.

Tech Goes Home Tennessee is a free training and one-on-one coaching resource that aims to reduce the digital divide and support a system of high-quality early care and education for children in Tennessee.

The Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee (AIMHiTN) supports infants, young children, and the adults who impact their early relational health through education, technical assistance, and resources.

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) provides free training, technical assistance, and coaching to early childhood educators and child care professionals as well as resources for parents, employers, and the community that support high-quality care and child development. Over the course of 2024/25, CCR&R pushed the quality of care in Tennessee forward with:

- **2,265** Training/coaching sessions attended by **2,508** providers to support care for children with diagnosed disabilities
- **236** Language and literacy focused trainings attended by **4,142** child care professionals with **4,989** technical assistance trainings for **6,162** partakers
- **590** Health and Safety training sessions for **7,316** participants with **2,888** related technical assistance sessions impacting **5,282** attendees
- **70** Small Business Academy learnings offered budgeting, projections, planning, reporting, internal controls, marketing, recruitment and retention tools and learning to **321** child care professionals

Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) offers a variety of tuition and academic supports for students completing Early Childhood Career and Technical Education programs and the Tennessee Early Childhood Program Administrator Credential (TECPAC) in collaboration with Tennessee State University.

Tennessee Family Child Care Network (TFCCN) offers free training, technical assistance, and peer-to-peer mentoring for licensed family and group home-based early childhood professionals, directors, and owners.

WAGE$® Tennessee, an initiative managed by Signal Centers, promotes high quality care by providing early childhood educators incentives based on their education and continuity of employment. In the past year, the program invested **$6,080,838.58** in supplement payments to **2,258 qualifying child care professionals at 883 licensed agencies** impacting **56,481 children.**

Community Services Block Grant Program

Program Leadership

Lindsay Whittin
Director, 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 local agencies that reach all 95 counties. Agencies conduct regular assessments of the needs in their 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.

Tennesseans Served by the CSBG Program

- 328,888 Individuals in 168,232 Households:
  - 328,888 Individuals without healthcare
  - 33,195 Individuals with disabilities
  - 113,434 Individuals with disabilities
  - 82,877 Adults over age 60
  - 4,877 Veterans and active military

Note: CSBG funding operates on a Federal Fiscal Year and information in this publication is for the period 10/01/2023 to 09/30/2024, as provided in the FY2024 CSBG Annual Report.



Photo description: CAC Housing Energy Staff Brandy Campbell, Nate Gardner and Lisa Cardona

Strengthening Tennessee Through 8,603 Organizations

Through 20 Community Action Agency partners (CAAs -- also referred to as eligible entities), the Tennessee's CSBG program helped power a broad spectrum of **8,603 public and private organizations** in their work to strengthen Tennessee.

- **2,138 Non-Profit Organizations**
- **1,127 Faith-Based Organizations**
- **536 Local Government**
- **294 State Government**
- **146 Federal Government**
- **2, 116 For-Profit Business or Corporation**
- **369 Consortiums/Collaborations**
- **261 School Districts**
- **225 Institutions of Post-Secondary Education/Training**
- **143 Financial/Banking Institutions**
- **1,127 Health Service Organizations**
- **121 Statewide Associations or Collaborations**

$13,597,476.93 in Investments that Strengthen Tennessee

This year, CSBG-funded agencies focused investments into 9 domains: employment, education and cognitive development, income infrastructure and asset building, housing, health and social/ behavioral development, civic engagement and community involvement, services supporting multiple domains and partnerships that support multiple domains. Poverty is a complex problem. 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.

- **Employment | $433,412.84**
- **Education and Cognitive Development | $630,892.96**
- **Income, Infrastructure, and Asset Building | $115,476.97**
- **Housing | $4,616,257.26**
- **Health and Social/Behavioral Development | $899,325.04**
- **Services Supporting Multiple Domains | $5,076,432.11**
- **Linkages (e.g. partnerships that support multiple domains) | $1,382,725.72**
- **Agency Capacity Building | $442,954.03**

Embracing Continuous Improvement and Accountability

Over the past year the CSBG unit worked to further improve the experiences of partners and community members served and worked to improve the processes that impact outcomes. In preparation for the 2026-27 State Plan, public hearings were held to direct the draft that would be presented to the Tennessee General Assembly on July 1, 2025. The unit also collaborated with the State Plan Workgroup, a collection of CSBG, Tennessee Association of Community Action, and Community Action Agency members, to review and update all current CSBG pieces and procedures and eliminated the policy and procedure manual in favor of 10 distinct policies to assist in administration. These actions and other tactics demonstrate the vision and feats that led Tennessee's CSBG program to score an **87 out of 100 on the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI)** survey that measures the satisfaction of CSBG eligible entities. In addition to demonstrating a significant improvement, Tennessee's program was one of **12 programs in the top quartile of scores** and one of the most significantly improved states between the 2021 and 2025 survey.

Consistent Engagement and Collaboration Across Tennessee

The work of the CSBG program relies on building strong relationships to enhance services for community members. This year, the CSBG spent time in the field and at events that enhanced these relationships. In September 2024, the CSBG Unit attended the National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSP) bi-annual fall conference titled "Beyond the Box" in Memphis and utilized the opportunity to visit agencies in the area. Staff also journeyed to the eastern part of the state to distribute commodity distributions to families in Kingston, recognized a national achievement of an agency in Chattanooga, and celebrated the kick-off of the Tech Ties program in Nashville. In celebration of Community Action Month, TDHS and the Tennessee Association for Community Action (TACA) hosted an event to bring together CAA professionals and share ideas on the theme of "Opening Doors to Brighter Futures." These visits combined with weekly and quarterly newsletters continued to encourage a healthy exchange of ideas, information and feedback in support of open communication and peer relations that benefit the households served by CSBG partners.



Pictured: The 2025 Annual TACA Conference, May 1, 2025 from Left to Right: Rebecca Fields-Santin, Block Grant Coordinator, Department of Human Services; Keath Nichols, Block Grant Coordinator, Department of Human Services; Nakisha Hicks, Conference Presenter; Kreda Yokley, Executive Director, Tennessee Association of Community Action; Lindsay Whittin, CSBG Program Director, Department of Human Services; Bentlee Gurley, Block Grant Coordinator, Department of Human Services

Family Assistance and Child Support

Led by Assistant Commissioner Charles Bryson

Split into areas aimed at addressing essential necessities and child support facilitation, 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 Program

Tennessee's Child Support Program has offices in each of the states' 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. Child Support professionals also connect families to other support services and coordinate with fellow state agencies to enforce orders, revoke applicable licenses and deduct payments from non-custodial parents receiving unemployment benefits. TDHS understands that Child Support can be a misunderstood and divisive topic and consistently works to help demystify services available through the program, help families know and understand their options and offer customer-focused solutions that benefit children.

Program Leadership

Robert Duck
Director of Operations, Policy and Services

Patti Wood
Director of Operations, Field Services and Contracts

Cost Effective Programing for 267,000 Children in Fiscal Year 2024

- $563 Million collected with 97% of child support collected going to families and 69% of collections done through income withholding
- $6.09 of Child Support collected for every $1 spent
- 267,000 Children served





Helping New Parents

The Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity, the Child Support area responsible for assisting unmarried parents in establishing a legal record of paternity, achieved significant milestones this year, marked by strategic outreach, process innovation, and measurable statewide impact. The program assisted more than **1,000 customers** through its Child Support Paternity hotline and participated in **35 community engagement events** including Kids and Family Resources Fairs held in Memphis and Clarksville that welcomed more than **300 attendees** to receive information and connect with TDHS and other community focused organizations. Consistent engagement with hospitals, health departments, and child support offices strategically enhances operational efficiency for both families and those who serve them. Digitizing the Voluntary Acknowledgments of Paternity (VAoPs), the document used to record paternity, and storing data in SharePoint reduced administrative costs and the need for paper storage while increasing document accessibility for all **32 judicial districts.** Digital transition is expected to deliver long-term savings and improve case processing times. These key innovations contributed to a record increase in Tennessee's Paternity Establishment Percentage (PEP), moving the score from **93.71 percent to 96.73 percent.** This achievement not only surpasses federal requirements and ensures compliance and penalty avoidance, it increases our state's eligibility for federal incentive funding.

Assisting Justice-Involved Families

When parents are involved with the justice system, it can complicate how they support their children during and after incarceration. The TDHS Child Support Division Re-Entry Team partners with the Tennessee Department of Corrections and Child Support offices to assist parents while they are incarcerated, during the pre-release period, and after release. Since its beginning in 2021, the re-entry team has modified **2,272 orders** and **served 2,180** incarcerated parents.



Reunited and Empowered

The Child Support Program collaborates with contract partners like the Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (TCSEPP) to help parents overcome barriers that compromise their ability to support their children. For Sonya Baxter, a mother in East Tennessee, the program led to stable housing that allowed her to be reunited with her son.

"In July 2024, I moved into a halfway house and Blount County. Someone who lives there told me about a program that if you had to pay Child Support they would help you find a job. I was paying Child Support because my son was in foster care and I was working to get him back," Baxter said about her introduction to the program. She began her journey forward with resume and job search services and later learned about assistance for gaining the records needed to secure a job at Hertz, but her personal vehicle needed serious repairs.

"I was working delivering auto body and was making decent enough money to save up to buy a vehicle. It got to a point where the Department of Children's Services told me in order for me to be reunified with my son, I needed to switch jobs so I would be more available to him. I was also making too much money to qualify for a housing voucher, so I did want to look for other employment" Baxter explained. With help from her case worker, she secured new employment that provided enough income for Baxter to get an apartment and leave the halfway house. With all of these significant steps forward, she still needed furniture to sleep on.

"My caseworker Dana came to the rescue and got me a new couch for the living room that I could sleep on and even pillows and sheets! Since then, my son and I have been reunited, and he lives with me now!! I did it!" Baxter shared about her experience with her case worker and TCSEPP.

Many parents, like Baxter, have the desire to care for and support their children, but may need assistance to achieve the stability required to provide for their loved ones. The Child Support program and its partners are here to strengthen these Tennesseans as they strive for this goal.

> My son and I have been reunited, and he lives with me now!! I did it!

Digital Solutions That Lead to Better Customer Experiences

TDHS consistently implements digital solutions that enable customers to get answers and connect with Child Support professionals from the convenience of their phone, tablet or computer. In addition to modernizing workflows through the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES) that enables workers to complete much of their daily work on one digital platform, this year, the Child Support Online Application joined the One DHS Customer Portal. Now, customers can securely access case specific information such as obligation amounts and find contact information for local offices on the same platform used for many other TDHS programs. The transition reduces data entry time for staff and allows team members across the state to view case information when needed and focus attention on more complex inquiries. Customers also have the option to get answers via online customer service forums.

Parents and Partners Connect is a free online event series open to any Tennessean that registers. Each month's session shares information on resources such as free diapers, free dental care, and supports available through organizations like Families Matter, Agape Fatherhood Program and the state's Department of Veterans' Affairs. Meetings focus on taxes, domestic violence, kindergarten preparedness, Child Support and other topics relevant to stakeholders with an interest in Child Support services. Attendees have the option to speak with Child Support team members in individualized breakout sessions hosted by Policy, Special Projects, Centralized Services, and the Central Registry/Domestic Violence or Shelby County Case Resolution team members who volunteer their time. Inquiries are tracked through the Service Now digital platform and used to guide future actions for the benefit of customers. In 2024/25, an average of **30 participants** attended each month. Every connection made at these sessions builds positive goodwill, public trust and awareness among families participating in the Child Support program.



Photo Description: Billy Walton, a participant in the Southwest Human Resource Agency program funded by the Fatherhood Initiative.

A $5 Million Investment in Tennessee Fathers

Family relationships can have a dynamic impact on the trajectory of children who will one day lead our state. The TDHS Fatherhood Initiative focuses on empowering fathers with tools that promote healthy involvement in the lives of their children. On February 1, 2025, the initiative awarded $5 million to a collection of 10 organizations that will provide direct services to fathers in 30 counties over the next two years.

Fatherhood Initiative Grant Partners

- **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





Boot Camp for Dad's hosted by the Tennessee Chapter of the NFL Alumni Association, a Fatherhood Initiative Partner



A Variety of Program Models for Tennessee Fathers

Each Fatherhood Initiative partner takes a different approach to promote coparenting skills, positive father-child relationships, financial education, and mental health that positively impact Tennessee families. On June 21, 2025, the Tennessee Chapter of the National Football League (NFL) Alumni Association hosted a “Boot Camp for Dads.” This free event held at Belmont University in Nashville welcomed fathers and their families to meet and greet former players and discover a broad spectrum of family resources.

First Things First, a Hamilton County based partner, is offering an “Epic Dads” program that teaches fathers ways to openly communicate with their children, strategies to effectively discipline their children, and how to lead and connect with their child’s emotions.

Southwest Human Resource Agency (SWHRA) offers classes to justice-involved fathers to help participants like Billy Walton manage parenting in their situation and prepare for post incarceration responsibilities. In a recent conversation with his son Walton, inquired about his son’s interests.

“Dad, I know you are going through a fathering class, and it is apparent that it is working but, I am your son. I like to do what you like to do and when you get out, I want your help in getting some food plots ready and deer stands built” was his son’s response.

"If this class is going to make me a better father, then it has to make me a better man first, and also make me a better husband" were Walton’s thoughts, when speaking to a SWHRA team member, Derek Bodiford, about his dialog with his son and experience in the program. He went on to share his appreciation with Bodiford saying “thank you so much for coming and teaching us this class. It has taught me so many things I wished I had known when I was younger. I truly believe that this program is changing me." Although programming differs among Fatherhood Initiative Grant partners, each program is an investment in fathers like Walton and children, like his son, who will grow into our state’s future.

Photo Description: Billy Walton, a participant in the Southwest Human Resource Agency program funded by the Fatherhood Initiative.

Family Assistance

Family Assistance programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Families First program and related partnership initiatives that help households overcome poverty by providing supports that address food insecurity and help families leverage employment and knowledge to break cycles of poverty.

Program Leadership

Lisa Francis
Director, Operations, Field Service

Keisha Thaxton
Director, Operations, Policy & Contracts

Sherron Brown
Director, Operations, EBMS/ TCSES Solutions

Michelle Joyner
Program Director, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Lakecia Peterson
Program Director, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Clyde Smith
Program Director, Families First Community Grants



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

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. In addition to providing SNAP benefits, TDHS also oversees SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP Ed) and SNAP Outreach programs that build skills and knowledge that can lead to wellness and self-sufficiency. 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.

Feeding Tennesseans in 2024/25

- An average of 720,658 individuals representing 355,498 households were served each month through SNAP
- Average monthly SNAP benefit per household: $399
- $1,703,777,403 SNAP benefits issued
- Stated application processing timelines improved from 85% to 96%
- SNAP Error Rate decreased from 12.56% to 9.47%

Application Features that Reduce Error Rates

Applying for SNAP is a multi-step process that includes submitting documents and follow-up interviews to determine eligibility. Creating a customer-centered experience for Tennesseans means community members achieve food security at time of need and reduces application error rates. In July 2024, TDHS introduced on-demand interview rescheduling options to make it easier for households to reschedule or complete a missed application appointment. In March 2025, new One DHS Customer Portal features made it possible for applicants to choose a convenient time for their interview. The Verification Navigator, another new feature, automates indexing for verification documents making it easier for both customers and staff members to review required documentation. Each of these developments improve efficiencies that benefit customers and reduce application errors.

SNAP Employment and Training Creates New Roads for Tennesseans

A collaboration between TDHS and the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program helps SNAP participants who qualify to increase self-sufficiency through education, skills training, and related supports. In 2024/25 Jessica Hardin was one of many Tennesseans who found new earning potential through the program.

As a young girl, Hardin was mesmerized by semi-trucks and dreamed of driving one someday, but her life took many turns. She became a mother at 20 and leaned on Tennessee's SNAP, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program, and housing programs for support. With their help, she learned parenting skills and eventually built a 19-year career in warehouse logistics, bought a home, and raised her daughters. After losing her job, she returned to SNAP and discovered a new path through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and SNAP E&T trucking school options. With unwavering support from program team members and the United Trucking School team, Hardin graduated with a 93 GPA, perfect attendance, and earned her Class A CDL. Now, at 40, She's living the dream she had at eight years of age-driving across the country, proud and free to explore new places.

Tennessee Summer Nutrition Initiative Delivers $2,192,880 in Benefits to Children

In 2025, Tennessee implemented its Summer Nutrition Initiative. Similar to SNAP, the program supplemented monthly food budgets but differed in its funding source and purpose. Powered by state resources, the program provided benefits to feed households with school-age children living in 15 counties with limited Summer Nutrition Food Assistance options. Benefits were automatically delivered to families with an open SNAP or Families First case as of May 31, 2025. A total of **$2,192,880 was distributed to 18,274** students who were automatically enrolled in the Tennessee Summer Food Initiative and each received **$120 in benefits.**

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.

Tennesseans Served Through Families First in 2024

- An average of 28,741 individuals representing 12,681 households served each month.
- Average monthly Families First benefit per household: $360
- $54,854,182 Families First benefits issued
- An average of 143 cases were closed each month because of new employment or increased wages.
- $7,161,750 in Emergency Cash Assistance (ECA) issued to 10,177 Tennessee families whose homes and/or businesses were damaged due to flooding caused by Hurricane Helene.
- 102 Families received transitional supports when exiting the Families First program.


N 13TH ST

TANF Opportunity Act Initiatives and Grants

Passed in 2021, the TANF Opportunity Act (TOA) created a framework for TDHS to launch a collection of strategic partnerships (grants) and programs that utilize a two-generation (2Gen) approach. Following research, the 2Gen method 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 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 outcomes aligned with one or more of the four federal TANF goals: promoting job preparation and work, reducing dependency on public benefits, encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families, and preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies. 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.

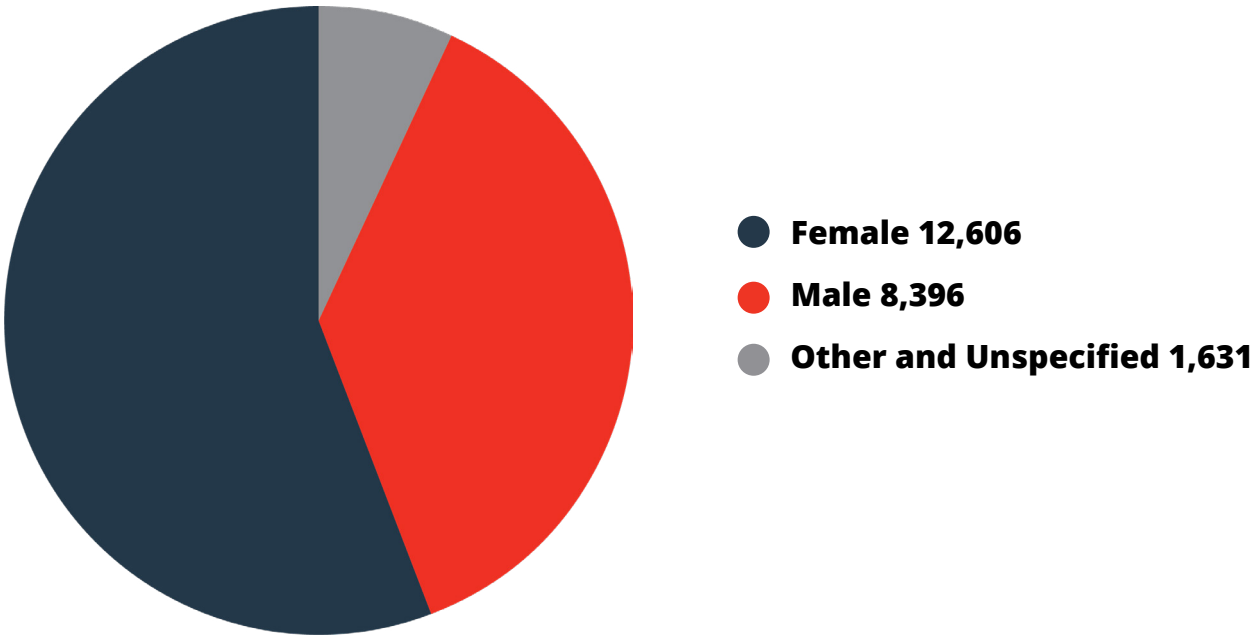
The Impact of the TOA Initiatives

- 970 Customers received an average of $373 per month over five months through the Pathways to Prosperity program for a program total of $1.89 million in extra support.
- 8,724 Individuals served through Tennessee Opportunity Pilots since their launch in 2022.

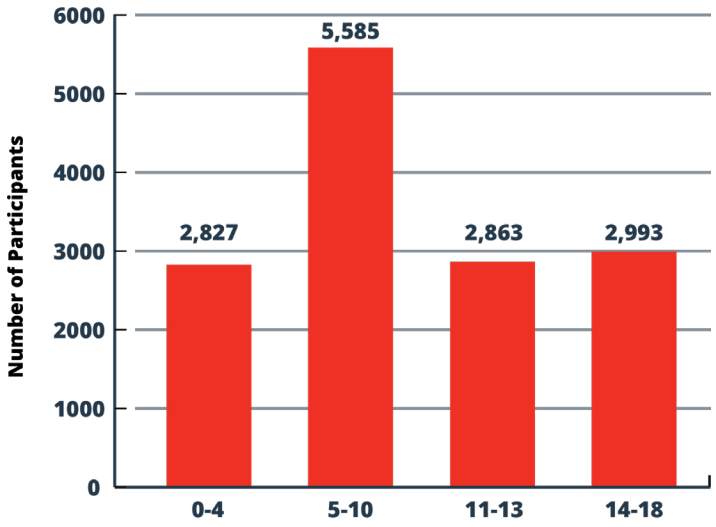
Tennesseans Served Through Our Grant Partners

Note: Data from the latest reporting period, October 2023 – September 2024

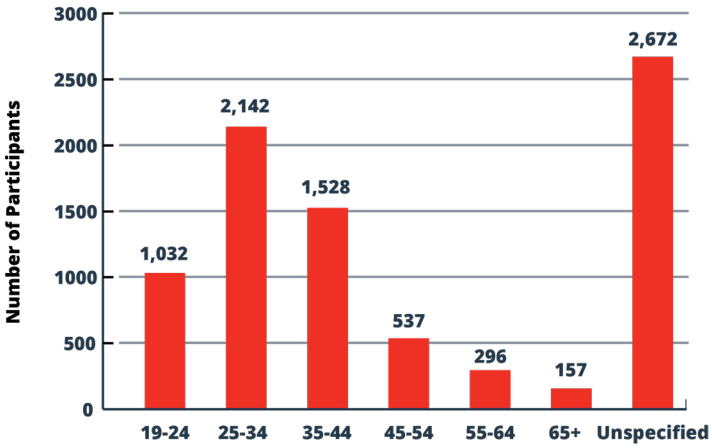
Monthly Average of Tennesseans Served | Sex



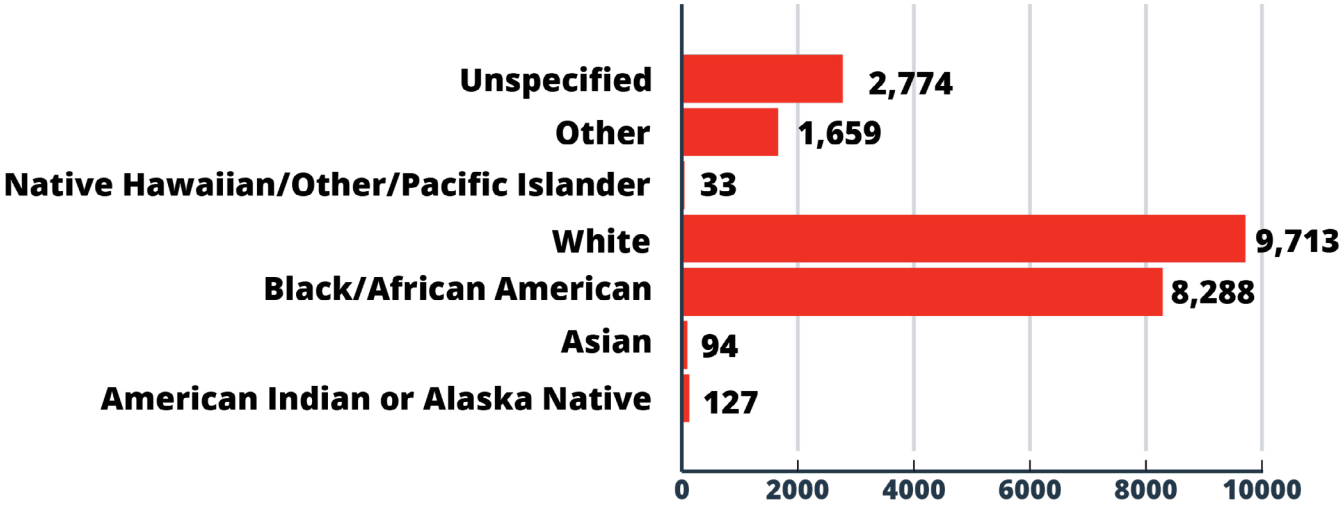
Monthly Average of Tennesseans Served | Child Age



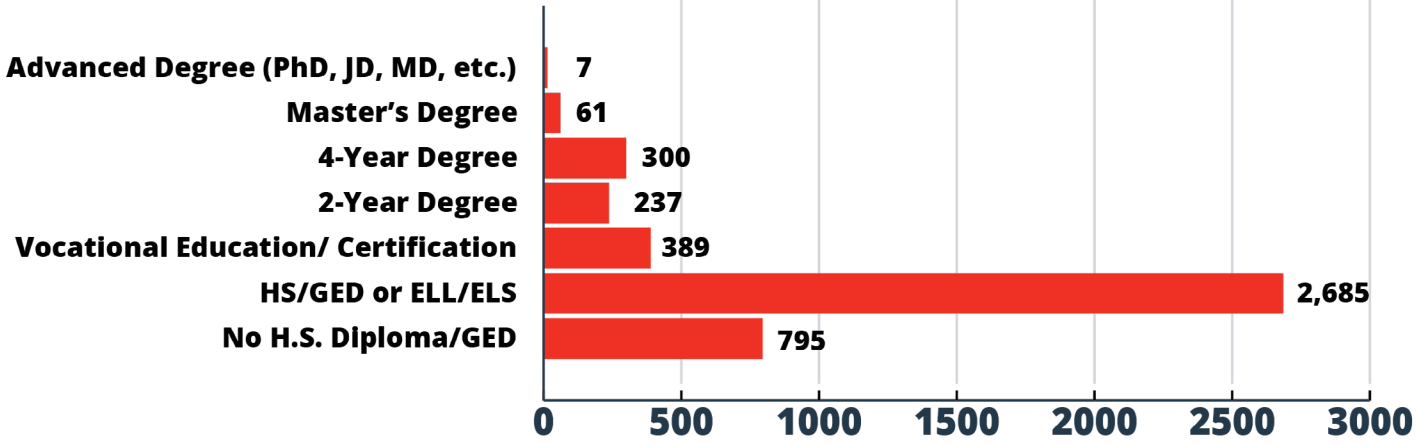
Monthly Average of Tennesseans Served | Adult Age



Monthly Average of Tennesseans Served | Race



Monthly Average of Tennesseans Served | Education Status at Program Entry





A Belief in Change and People

Led by Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency, Empower Upper Cumberland is a collective of regional partners funded by the TANF Opportunity Act. The collective is on a "region-wide mission to lift children and their families out of poverty by 2026." One of those moms is Elizabeth B. Nelson. This is her story in her own words:

"As a young child, I didn't realize we were poor. I thought food banks, paper food stamps, and government block cheese was the normal for all households. I thought fights and arguments happened within every child's home, and not just my own. In school, I always wanted the items other children had, but remember Goodwill shopping for second hand, and school supplies that we crossed the previous owners name off of.

After foster care, I continued down the same road because the opportunity to raise myself never really seemed to be in reach. I had always heard about other individuals being chosen for aid, or community support, but I was never that "lucky." Then in 2020, my parents passed, and I moved from Albany Georgia, to a small very quiet, (in comparison) town called McMinnville.

I got a job at first in Lebanon, Tennessee, but the drive was too much for 7 days a week, no time with my family. I then started back at Waffle House in town. This let me meet many people, and lead me to start going to First United Methodist Church (FUMC) on Wednesday nights for family dinner and activities and consider applying for a program that was a pilot program called "Empower." Empower was finding its path and I was too. Being a part of this program provided a meal every Tuesday night, which helps as a single mom, followed by planning and connections along the way for personal growth.

Empower had pastor Ryan Heatherly, from FUMC, do some financing classes. These classes lead to talks of change and growth. Through interacting with my Empower group, I began to network and grow. During this journey Empower aided me with a college course I couldn't afford that semester. Empower also helped me by using my lived experience as a guide for finding jobs that would better not only my family, but my belief in myself.

> Within a couple of weeks, I had done my interview and was given a start date! I now help others find their own paths when the world seems dark!

Empower sent me a job listing for a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist position within their own company (Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency), I followed the link and applied. Within a couple of weeks, I had done my interview and was given a start date! I now help others find their own paths when the world seems dark! Thanks to Empower, I not only have a job that I value, but I also have completed my bachelors in human services, graduated on the Honor Roll, and have been able to be a member of change throughout the community (as well as public speaking opportunities, that I absolutely cherish)!

Sometimes all it takes is a community, a program, a group of people who believe in change, and that same group believing in you! --Always, Elizabeth Bryanna Nelson.

Partners Powered by Tennessee's TANF Opportunity Act

Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative Grant Partners

- AFIRM (Families Matter)
- University of Memphis
- Family & Children's Service
- Empower Upper Cumberland (Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency)
- STRONG Families (First Tennessee Development District)
- United Way of Greater Knoxville
- Our Change (Martha O'Bryan Center)

Families First Community Grant Partners

- Agape
- A Step Ahead Foundation Chattanooga, Inc.
- A Step Ahead Foundation of East Tennessee
- A Step Ahead Foundation of Middle Tennessee
- Allied Behavioral Health Solutions LLC
- Angelic Ministries
- Belmont University
- Big Brother Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee
- Boys & Girls Clubs in Tennessee
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley
- Catholic Charities of Tennessee
- Center for Family Development
- Chattanooga Room in the Inn
- Childhelp, Inc. dba Childhelp Tennessee
- Cocke County High School
- Communities in Schools of Tennessee
- Daughters of Zion All Women's Bible College
- Dismas, Inc
- Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc.
- Eagle's Nest of Gastonia
- East Tennessee State University
- Families Free, Inc
- Family Center, Inc.
- Girls Inc. of Chattanooga
- Goodwill Industries--Knoxville, Inc.
- Greater Kingsport Family YMCA
- Hamilton County Coalition
- Helping Hands of Middle & West Tennessee
- Hope House Day Care Center Inc.
- Knowledge Quest
- Knoxville Academy of Medicine Foundation
- Knoxville Leadership Foundation
- Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee
- Legal Aid Society of Middle TN & the Cumberlands
- Meharry Medical College
- Methodist Le Bonheur Community Outreach **Memphis CHILD**
- Methodist Le Bonheur Community Outreach **Opening Doors Pilot Project**
- Mid-Cumberland Community Action Agency
- Morristown-Hamblen Child Care Centers Inc.; & Early Intervention
- (The Victor S. Johnson III) Nashville Children's Alliance, Inc.
- Nashville Diaper Connection
- New Life Center
- Operation Stand Down Tennessee
- Partnership for Families, Children, and Adults
- Persevere
- Porter-Leath
- Rooftop Foundation
- Rural Resources, Inc.
- Salvation Army, A Georgia Corporation, for Kentucky-Tennessee
- Save the Children Federation, Inc.
- Signal Centers, Inc
- TN Bureau of Investigation-TN Dangerous Drugs Task Force - TN Alliance for Drug Endangered Children
- TN Dept of Health - Home Visiting
- TN Dept of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services - Project Lifeline
- TN Dept of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services – System of Care Across Tennessee (SOCAT)
- TN Dept of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services - Therapeutic Intervention, Education, and Skills (TIES)
- United Way of Greater Nashville - Family Collective
- United Way of Rutherford and Cannon Counties
- United Way of the Mid-South
- United Way of West Tennessee
- Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency, Inc.
- UpRise Nashville (West End Community Church of Nashville, Inc. dba UpRise Nashville)
- Wesley House Community Center
- West Nashville Dream Center D/B/A Dream Streets
- Workforce Midsouth Inc
- YMCA of Memphis & the Mid-South
- Youth Villages, Inc.
- YWCA Knoxville and the Tennessee Valley
- YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee
- YWCA Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia

Rehabilitation Services

Led by Assistant Commissioner Kevin Wright

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) supports Tennesseans with disabilities as they strive to achieve employment and independent living goals. With a commitment to strengthening communities, the division utilizes a cross-section of vocational partnerships, transitional services, accessibility, self-advocacy promotion, and individualized services. Each program is designed to ensure that every Tennessean with lived experience of a disability has the opportunity to use their strengths, talents, skills, and interests to pursue their goals while leveraging their unique abilities and available resources to find the right setting to contribute meaningfully to our state's communities and economy. The division's program areas include Disability Determination Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP), Independent Living Services (IL), Tennessee Business Enterprises (TBE) and other services specific to blind, visually impaired, deaf, deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing customers.

Program Leadership

Julie Johnson
Director, Operations

James Standfield
Director, Disability Determination Services

Amy Radar
Director, Strategic Business Solutions

Tiffany Ramsey
Director, Vocational Rehabilitation

A'ndrea Leavy
Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation Director, Field Operations

Selina Kirkland
Assistant Vocational Rehabilitation Director, Business and Community Services

Wacovia King
Director, Tennessee Business Enterprises

Tennesseans Strengthened Through the Division of Rehabilitation Services

- 857 Independent Living customers achieved goals that increased their self-sufficiency
- 817 Assistive technology demonstrations reached 1,345 individuals with 213 devices loaned out and 1,095 devices were reutilized, saving customers $490,589
- 8,096 Vocational Rehabilitation applications received and 3,367 Individual Plans for Employment formed with 2,330 plans developed for transition age youth
- 1,875 Customers reached their employment goals
- More than 9,000 students received pre-employment transition with a monthly average of 7,730 pre-employment transition services provided
- 91,630 Social Security Disability Claims processed by Disability Determination Services

Disability Determination Services

Disability Determination Services 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 SOAR (Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, Outreach, Access and Recovery) 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 91,630 Social Security Disability claims** while maintaining faster processing times than the national and regional averages. DDS also achieved the highest allowance rate in the nation for SOAR claims, helping some of the most vulnerable Tennesseans access critical benefits. As a positive example for other states, Tennessee's program was asked to create training materials and lead Train the Trainers sessions for practitioners across the nation. Our state's program continues to serve as a prominent voice in the Disability Case Processing System (DCPS) community and regularly assists states around the nation with DCPS business processes.



Photo Description: photo of Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna Graduation

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. Students have the option to commute to or stay on campus to follow structured training paths to graduation. This year, **TRCS served 278 students with 50 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.



Making an Impression

Lydia Taylor is a 2024 graduate of Ravenwood High School, whose determination and talent are already paving the way for a bright future.

Initially waitlisted for the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Cosmetology Program, Taylor chose to pursue the Business Education Technology (BET) area of study at Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna (TRCS) while awaiting admission which quickly proved to be a perfect fit.

During her time at TRCS, Taylor passed her Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification at Middle Tennessee State University and obtained her driver's permit, reflecting her strong work ethic and commitment to personal and professional growth.

Taylor's achievements reached new heights when she was selected for a competitive Amazon Web Services (AWS) summer internship with TennCare, an opportunity typically reserved for college juniors, seniors, or graduate students. After impressing the director during her interview, she was offered the position on the spot. Her professionalism, enthusiasm, and adaptability have already made a strong impression while on the job. Taylor's success is a testament to her intelligence, motivation, and the valuable skills she gained through TRCS.





Photo description: 2024 ResourceAbility Fair

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 that they need to live independent, productive lives where and how they choose. This year, the team **completed 817 assistive technology demonstrations to reach 1,345 individuals. By sharing information with 1,438 customers and training 508 Tennesseans,** TTAP helped ensure customers who received one the 213 loaned devices or 1,095 reutilized devices could effectively use these tools to be more independent in everyday life. Using reutilized devices also **saved customers a cumulative $490,589** thanks to innovative resourcefulness.

Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Blind and Visually Impaired

TDHS has several units dedicated to assisting specific sensory impairments. Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) and Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing offer vocational rehabilitation services to individuals that empower them to live more independently in their homes and communities. The Independent Living Services Program provides options for eligible individuals of all ages who are blind or who have a severe visual impairment to care for themselves in their homes and communities. This year, **857 Independent Living customers achieved goals** that increased their self-sufficiency, showing how DRS supports independence beyond employment. Some Tennesseans with visual impairments or blindness enroll in the Tennessee Business Enterprises program and act as independent business owners.

Vocational Rehabilitation

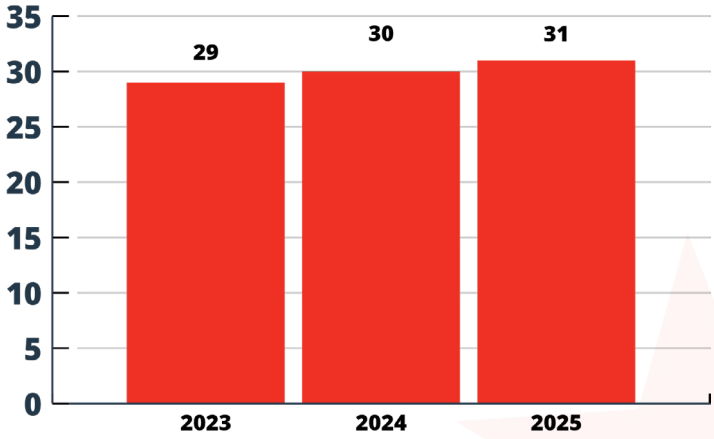
The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program connects workers with disabilities with resources and partners that help Tennesseans enter the competitive labor market and achieve employment goals according to each participant's capabilities and preferences. The program also supports businesses with disability employment topics through the Business and Community Services Unit. During the 2024/25 year, VR received **8,096 applications** reflecting the trust Tennesseans place in our services.



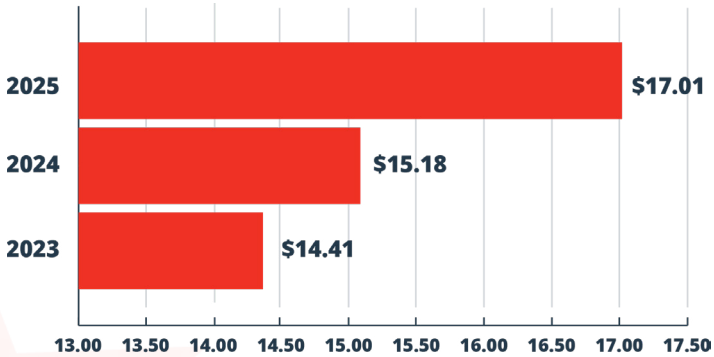
Improving the Customer Experience for 1,875 Job Seekers

Over the past three years, VR made significant advances in educating students, adults, families, and the community about the valuable services VR provides to Tennesseans with disabilities and continues to make it easier for customers to connect and manage program participation. In 2024/25, the Customer Experience unit handled a total of **19,939 total calls.** The unit tracks inbound, outbound, and answered calls and uses related data to make decisions and improve responsiveness. This year, a chatbot was added to the list of customer service tools to provide immediate, on-demand support that improves accessibility and ensures customers can get answers quickly and efficiently when needed. An online referral form, the form used for customer intake, was introduced as a more modern and accessible means of connecting customers to services and accelerating processing and navigation for both customers and partners. Community members can also access and view Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing (TCDDBHH) meetings via live stream options that were added this year. Each of the efforts builds public awareness about VR programs, elevates the customer experience and demonstrates our department's commitment to strengthening Tennesseans with disabilities. As a result, in 2025 **1,875 VR customers** reached their employment goals, working an average of **31 hours per week,** and earning **$17.01 per hour.** These numbers represent a three-year high and illustrate how VR transforms opportunities into sustainable careers that benefit our state's workers and employers.

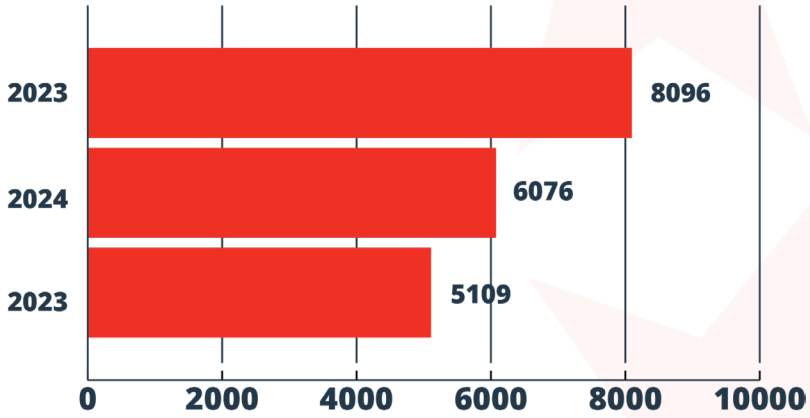
Average Hours for VR Customers Who Achieved Competitive Integrated Employment 2023-2025



Average Wages for VR Customers Who Received Competitive Integrated Employment 2023-25



Vocational Rehabilitation Applications Completed 2023-2025





Steps Worth Celebrating

Thomas Howard, a Jackson, Mississippi native with a passion for automobile racing, video games, and making tacos, saw employment as a distant goal due to the challenges life had placed in his path and his current disabilities.

Everything began to change for Howard after he relocated to Tennessee and enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Jason Chapman, referred Howard to the VR Business and Community Services Unit (BCSU) in Shelbyville to receive specialized services in preparation for employment. His journey included attending weekly BCSU work readiness training sessions.

During his initial assessment, Howard and his mother shared that he had been diagnosed with down syndrome, autism, and a learning disability and was born with a cleft foot that continued to impact his mobility after three surgeries. With these factors in mind, the BCSU team and counselor collaborated to create a personalized plan for Howard focusing on building confidence, developing fine and gross motor skills, and preparing for both employment and obtaining his driver permit.

Over the course of eight months, Howard participated in weekly training sessions designed to enhance his communication skills, work ethic, memorization, and ability to follow both single and multi-step instructions. He also engaged in job shadowing, mock interviews, and driver's test preparation using adaptive learning methods tailored to his strengths.

> We will recommend VR/CSU to everyone.

By June 2025, Howard achieved what once felt out of reach. He successfully applied, interviewed, and was hired at The Holy Crab Shack in Shelbyville as a Combined Food and Preparation Attendant, securing competitive integrated employment. He also earned his Learner Permit after five determined attempts at the written driver license test.

"I never heard of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, but this program is sent from God," said Howard's mother in reflection of the experience.

"We will recommend VR/CSU to everyone" added Howard proudly.

Howard's journey is a testament to perseverance, teamwork, and the power of tailored support. What began as a long-term goal became a reality, proving that with the right resources and determination, every step forward is worth celebrating.

Employment Awareness in October and Year-Round

By Proclamation 2726, Governor Bill Lee declared October 2024 as Tennessee Disability Employment Awareness Month in support of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). To commemorate and celebrate the contributions of workers with disabilities, the TDHS VR team hosted and joined several NDEAM events and celebrated partnerships that build our state's workforce.

In East Tennessee, the Business and Community Services Unit organized a celebration for Food City on October 9, 2024. A certificate of appreciation signed by Governor Lee was presented to Steve Smith, the CEO of Food City, a key partner that hired approximately 64 customers in the Grand East Region over the past year. In Middle Tennessee, the Human Resources team at CW Resources in Manchester received a certificate for their commitment to hiring individuals with disabilities and collaboration with TDHS to create inclusive workspaces. These were just a few happenings in addition to 10 DRS- hosted events.



Photo Description: Food City CEO Steve Smith, a key VR partner with staff holding a certificate of appreciation.

An Award Winning Approach

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is a nonprofit organization that promotes an evidence-based model of the same name to help people with behavioral health conditions secure meaningful jobs. The organization and model also promote the use of ongoing support to ensure long-term success for workers. In Tennessee, DRS collaborates with the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) to offer services in 14 of the 46 counties where IPS helps participants secure employment in a variety of job fields. This year, the **number of IPS participants rose by 11 percent.** At this year's IPS Conference our Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Director of Field Operations, A'ndrea Leavy, received the Bob Drake Founders Award, the highest award given by IPS. Vocational Support Coordinator, Lee Standfield, received the Vocational Rehabilitation Team Member of the Year Award.



Photo Description: Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Director of Field Operations A'ndrea Leavy, AIM Center IPS Director Theresa Ozborn, Vocational Support Coordinator Lee Standfield, Division of Rehabilitation Services Assistant Commissioner Kevin Wright

Transition Services

Within the VR program, Transition Services focus on helping high school and college-age students prepare for work and adult life through Pre-Employment Transition Services and other resources. This year, more than **7,000** students received Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), with students receiving an average of **8,464 services each month** during the school year, ensuring that the next generation is better prepared for work and independence.

A Monthly Look at Pre Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

Pre-ETS include job exploration, work-based learning, postsecondary, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy experiences and counseling services offered to students.

Month	Total of Pre-ETS Units Provided	Total of Students Served
July	1,016	1,016
August	6,331	6,331
September	9,207	9,207
October	10,022	10,022
November	9,308	9,308
December	8,791	8,791
January	9,299	9,299
February	9,821	9,821
March	10,743	10,743
April	10,986	10,986
May	7,583	7,583
June	*Not Reported at time of this report**	

Note: Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) data is reported by our contracted providers on a two-month delay. For example, data for June 2025 will not be available until the end of August 2025. The chart displays the number of students served and the service units provided for each individual month. Student count numbers are not unduplicated. Students are counted in the monthly total for every month they received services. Therefore, summing the monthly total for students served will not yield an unduplicated count of students served for the year.

Collaborations that Move Workers with Disabilities Forward

In addition to the **1,000 employers** that connected with Vocational Rehabilitation to expand the network of partners in 2024/25, DRS works with a number of businesses, educational institutions, service providers and other organizations that are committed to facilitating inclusive workspaces and opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities. Programs like Employment and Community First Choices, which brought together DRS with TennCare and the State's Department of Disability and Aging to reach **295 Vocational Rehabilitation customers** in 2024/25 helping to expand the number of customers achieving employment victories. The division also participates on several councils, advisory boards and committees that build better beneficial partnerships to serve the community. Together, these collaborations have broadened the scope of opportunities and created stronger pathways toward employment and independence for VR customers in our state.

DRS Partners and Collaborators Include (but are not limited to)

- American Job Centers
- City and county governments
- City Fields
- Direct Employers Association
- Goodwill
- Local Workforce Development Areas
- One-Stop operators
- Salvation Army
- State Rehabilitation Council
- Statewide Independent Living Council
- TennCare
- Tennessee Board of Regents
- Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology
- Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing
- Tennessee Department of Children's Services
- Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging
- Tennessee Department of Education
- Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
- Tennessee Tech University
- University of Memphis
- University of Tennessee Center for Learning Education and Employment
- Urban Leagues

Support Divisions

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

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 SNAP, 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.

Program 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

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.

Program Leadership

Krisann Hodges
Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Rebekah Parkhurst
Deputy General Counsel

Dezanne Russell
Deputy General Counsel

Office of Inspector General

Program Leadership

Todd McKinney
Inspector General

Richard Carr
Director Program Integrity

Doug Bodary
Director, Audit Services

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:

The **Special Investigations Unit** (SIU) conducts external and internal investigations and produces quality investigative reports. These reports are referred to the Office of General Counsel (OGC), TDHS Human Resources (HR), State and Federal law enforcement, and or State and Federal prosecutors for civil or criminal determinations. **Audit Services** conducts 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. Lastly, the general **Background Investigations** Group consists of two units, the Background Investigations and Child Care Licensing (CCL) units. These units work to confirm that individuals have the appropriate qualifying credentials and Federal Tax Information (FTI) for Child Care, Adult Care Food Program, Child Care Developmental Block Grant and other programs and initiatives supported by TDHS.



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 that when Tennesseans need assistance or protection, the Department's infrastructure systems and staff are ready and able to get community members the help they need to move forward. The Operations division also consistently works to improve TDHS processes and cost savings with data-driven solutions.

Program 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, Procurement

John Preisel
Director of Operations, Technology and Innovation

Mike Leitzke
Director of Operations, Procurement Strategy

Nupur Sashti
Director of Operations, Research and Analytics

Anthony Burwell
Chief Information Officer

Krysta Krall
Chief Financial Officer, Fiscal Services



People Operations

The People Operations Division not only ensures TDHS has qualified, well-trained staff, but also works to make sure these staff are treated fairly and evaluated on their contributions to the TDHS mission through the work of two subdivisions: Human Resources and Learning & Organizational Development. Each helps ensure our workforce is prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow and better strengthen the Tennesseans we serve.

Program Leadership

Dana Braxton
Assistant Commissoner

Morgan Williams
Director, Human Resources

Leslie Baker
Director, Learning & Organizational Development



Public Information and Legislative Office

Through its Customer Service, Legislative, and Communications teams, the Public Information and Legislative Office (PILO) facilitates internal and external communication to TDHS customers, staff, legislators, media contacts, and state residents to make sure Tennesseans have access to current information on TDHS programs. PILO also 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.

Program Leadership

Callon Baggett
Assistant Commissoner

Pamela Fusting
Director of Operations and Customer Experience

Devin Stone
Director of Communications



Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions

Program Leadership

Gary Wilson
Assistant Commissoner

Jeff Hayes
Management Director

Amanda McVay
Director of Continuous Quality Improvement

The Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions (QISS) division provides oversight and direction to the Department's program evaluation and continuous improvement efforts.



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.

TN Department of Human Services

710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37243

@TNHumanServices