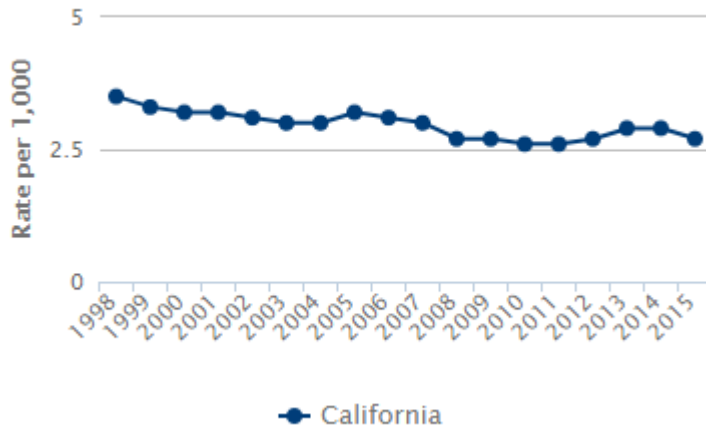


Foster Care in California

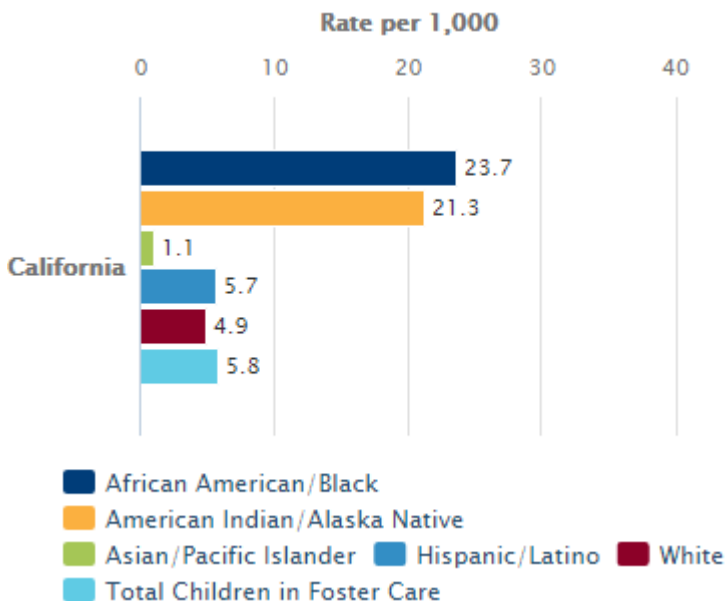
First Entries into Foster Care



Definition: Number of first entries into foster care per 1,000 children under age 18. Rates represent a three-year average of data; years presented are the final year of a three-year period (e.g., 2.7 per 1,000 California children entered foster care for the first time in 2013-2015).

Data Source: Webster, D., et al. *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*, U.C. Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (Jun. 2016); Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT Data Center* (Jul. 2016).

Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity: 2015



Definition: Number of children/youth under age 21 in foster care per 1,000 on July 1 of each year, by race/ethnicity (e.g., 5.7 per 1,000 Hispanic/Latino children/youth in California were in foster care on July 1, 2015).

Data Source: Webster, D., et al. *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*, U.C. Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (Jun. 2016); Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT Data Center* (Jul. 2016).

What It Is

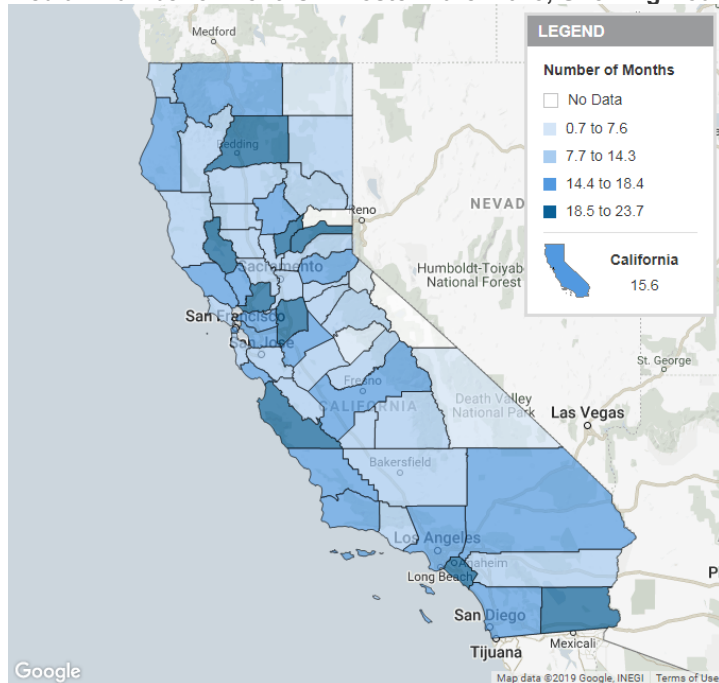
Foster care is measured in several ways, with each indicator illustrating a different aspect of this complex system. *First entries into care* reflects the incidence of children who are removed from unsafe home environments. *Children in care* provides a snapshot of actual children in foster care at a point in time. *Placement distance* describes the availability of local foster homes; it generally is preferable to place foster children close to home. *Placement stability* is important, as it is traumatic for children to be moved from one living situation to another. *Median number of months in care* gives an indication of how much time children are spending in foster care. *Length of time to adoption* describes how quickly the child welfare system is able to secure a permanent, safe home for a child who cannot return to his or her family of origin. *Exit status after one year in care*, and *after four years in care*, give a picture of what happens to children after being in foster care for each amount of time, while *re-entries into care* reflect repeated maltreatment.

Why This Topic Is Important

Foster care is intended to provide temporary, safe living arrangements and therapeutic services for children who cannot remain safely at home due to child maltreatment or for children whose parents are unable to provide adequate care. The U.S. foster care system aims to safely reunify children with their parents or secure another permanent home, e.g., through adoption. However, too often this goal is not achieved (1, 2). Instead, many children spend years in foster homes or group homes, often moving multiple times (1, 3). These children are at increased risk for a variety of emotional, physical, behavioral, and academic problems (3). Recognizing these issues, advocates and policymakers have made efforts to safely reduce the number of children living in foster care. While the number of children in care has decreased substantially in the U.S. and California over the previous decade, California continues to have the largest number of children entering the system (4, 5).

Nationally, about 10% of foster youth "age out" of the system (without being reunified with their families or adopted), and services often end abruptly (2, 6). Many states, including California, now extend services past age 18 up to 21. While the Affordable Care Act ensures that health coverage continues until age 26, "aging out" of the foster care system can create many challenges for youth (2, 6). A high percentage of these youth experience

Median Number of Months in Foster Care: 2013; Showing Counties



Definition: Median length of stay in foster care, in months, for children under age 18 (e.g., in 2013, the median length of stay in care among California foster children was 15.6 months).

Data Source: Webster, D., et al. *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*, U.C. Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (Jun. 2016).

inadequate housing, low educational and career attainment, early parenthood, substance abuse, physical and mental health problems, and involvement with the criminal justice system (3, 6). Much work is under way to help ensure that these vulnerable youth have the support, skills, and resources to successfully transition to adulthood (2, 6).

How Children Are Faring

In 2015, 62,035 children and youth in California were living in foster care, a rate of 5.8 per 1,000. After hitting a 16-year low of 5.1 per 1,000 in 2011 and 2012, the rate of children in care has risen in recent years. Since 1998, the rate of first entries into care has fluctuated but decreased overall from 3.5 entries per 1,000 children/youth to 2.7 per 1,000 in 2015. Among counties with data, in-care rates ranged from 1.5 to 24.9 per 1,000 and first entry rates ranged from 0.6 to 11 per 1,000 in 2015. In California, 86% of children who entered foster care for the first time in 2013-15 were removed from their families due to neglect, 8% due to physical abuse, and 2% due to sexual abuse. For children who entered care in the first half of 2014, 36% were reunified with their families and 61% were still in foster care one year later. The median length of time California children spent in foster care declined between 2001 and 2009 from 17.2 to 13.2 months, but then rose to 15.6 months in 2013.

Rates of first entry into foster care and in-care rates vary by race/ethnicity and age. Among groups with data, African American/black and American Indian/Alaska Native children in California consistently have the highest rates of children/youth in foster care—23.7 and 21.3 per 1,000, respectively, in 2015, compared to 5.7 per 1,000 for Hispanic/Latino, 4.9 for white, and 1.1 for Asian/Pacific Islander children. Of all age groups, infants consistently have the highest rates of first entry into foster care. In 2013-15, the rate of California infants entering foster care for the first time (12.2 per 1,000) was nearly 3 times the rate of children ages 1-2, nearly 4 times that of ages 3-5, and more 5 times that of older age groups.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic:

<https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/4/foster-care/summary>



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