



Characteristics and Service Use of Young Adults in Extended Foster Care

Findings from Washington State

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This analysis contributes to a multipart Extended Foster Care systems assessment for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families as required by the 2022 Washington State Legislature per Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5693 (2022) Sec. 227, 36.

EXTENDED FOSTER CARE (EFC) in Washington State allows eligible young adults who are dependent at age 18 to receive placement services and support through their 21st birthday. This report uses linked administrative data to measure characteristics and service use from ages 17 to 21 for three groups of young adults exiting foster care with different degrees of EFC participation (EFC-Full, EFC-Early Exit, No EFC) and a group of same-age young adults enrolled in Medicaid.

Key Recommendations and Findings

1. ENGAGE: Identify young adults in care who may need additional outreach to engage in EFC, such as those who are American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) or who have prior congregate care placements, on-the-run events, or Juvenile Rehabilitation involvement.

Findings

Among young adults who did not participate in EFC:

- 37 percent were AI/AN.
- 41 percent had a congregate care placement at age 17.
- 44 percent had an on-the-run event at age 17.
- 19 percent were involved in Juvenile Rehabilitation before age 18.

2. SUPPORT: Provide additional DCYF specialized supports for young adults in foster care with specific needs, such as those with health conditions, criminal legal system involvement, homelessness or housing instability, unemployment, or who are pregnant or parenting.

Findings

- Young adults exiting foster care at age 18 or later, regardless of duration in EFC, have higher rates of support need indicators compared to same-age low-income young adults (See Figure on Page 2).
- Young adults in the EFC-Early Exit group had higher rates of mental health treatment need, suicide or self-harm behavior, and significant health problems compared to the other foster care groups.

3. CONNECT: Ensure young adults in and exiting foster care maintain connections to supportive services, such as primary health care, mental health care, economic and housing programs, and independent living and transition services.

Findings

- The percentage of young adults using emergency medical services is much higher among all foster care groups from ages 17 to 21 compared to the Medicaid group.
- All three foster care groups experienced a sharp drop in continuity of care for mental health conditions at age 18.
- Homelessness was alarmingly prevalent among all foster care groups, even prior to exiting care.
- The percentage of young adults accessing independent living services declines sharply upon foster care exit even though eligibility extends until their 23rd birthday.

4. MONITOR: Regularly review EFC engagement and retention rates by race/ethnicity, gender, and region to inform strategies for addressing disparities and developing best practices. Improve data collection to understand why young adults exit EFC early.

- Findings**
- Among young adults in the EFC-Early Exit group, 57 percent were male and 34 percent were AI/AN.
 - 29 percent of young adults in Region 1 exited EFC early, compared to just 12 percent in Region 4.
 - 42 percent of young adults in Region 2 remained in EFC for more than two years, compared to 65 percent in Region 4.

Select Support Needs among Foster Care and Medicaid Young Adults

	EFC – Full	EFC – Early Exit	No EFC	Medicaid Comparison
Homelessness or housing instability Age 18	23% Yes 90 of 398	37% Yes 93 of 250	41% Yes 139 of 342	10% Yes 11,135 of 115,379
No reported earnings Age 18	39% Yes 155 of 398	52% Yes 129 of 250	45% Yes 155 of 342	34% Yes 38,866 of 115,379
Criminal legal system involvement Prior to 21 st birthday	34% Yes 136 of 398	53% Yes 133 of 250	58% Yes 199 of 342	14% Yes 16,193 of 115,379
Indicated MH treatment need Age 18 Among those with Medicaid enrollment	57% Yes 221 of 387	62% Yes 152 of 246	42% Yes 124 of 296	24% Yes 27,668 of 115,379
Substance use disorder (SUD) Age 18 Among those with Medicaid enrollment	18% Yes 68 of 387	25% Yes 61 of 246	28% Yes 83 of 296	6% Yes 6,493 of 115,379
Live Birth Ages 17 to 21 Among females with Medicaid enrollment	27% Yes 59 of 221	30% Yes 32 of 107	38% Yes 66 of 172	14% Yes 8,372 of 57,881