

Disproportionality in Child Welfare Fact Sheet

A publication of the National Indian Child Welfare Association

What is Disproportionality in Child Welfare?

Research and data from states tell us that American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children are disproportionately represented, or overrepresented, in state foster care systems nationwide. This means that higher percentages of AI/AN children are found in the state foster care systems than in the U.S. population. The overrepresentation of AI/AN children often starts with reports of abuse and neglect at rates proportionate to their population but grows higher at each major decision point in child welfare:

- 1) whether to order an investigation regarding abuse or neglect allegations,
- 2) whether to substantiate abuse or neglect allegations during or after an investigation, and
- 3) whether to remove a child from their home and place in foster care.

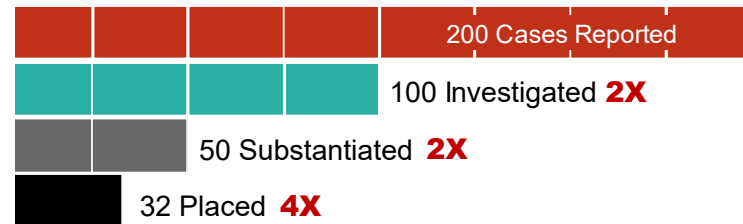
One national study found that, due in large part to systematic bias, where abuse has been reported AI/AN children are two times more likely to be investigated, two

times more likely to have allegations of abuse or neglect substantiated, and 4 times more likely to be placed in foster care than Caucasian/White children.¹

White/Caucasian Children



American Indian/Alaska Native Children



American Indian/Alaska Natives Disproportionality in Child Welfare Nationally

Nationwide American Indian/Alaska Native children are overrepresented in state foster care at a rate 2.6 times greater than their proportion in the general population.

This means that although AI/AN children are just 1% of all children in the United States, they are 2.6% of all children who are placed outside their homes in foster care.² By comparison, Caucasian/White children are underrepresented nationwide at a rate of 0.9 times lower than their proportion of the general population. Caucasian/White children make up 53% of all children in the United States but only 49% of all children placed outside their homes in foster care.²

The data used to create disproportionality statistics typically rely on a formula that compares the population rate of AI/AN children in a state, including AI/AN children both on and off tribal lands, to the rate of AI/AN children in that state foster care system. While these published rates are helpful in understanding where and at what level foster care disproportionality exists, AI/AN children are often undercounted in state child welfare systems, underestimating the actual number of AI/AN children who are in state foster care. Additionally, the population of AI/AN in some states include AI/AN children who would never appear in a state child welfare system because they are under tribal care. This inflates the actual number of AI/AN children who could enter a state child welfare system. By inflating the overall number of AI/AN children in a state that could be served by state child welfare agency and undercounting the number of AI/AN children who are currently in a state child welfare system, the disproportionality data can be assumed to be greater than the reported rate in many states.

Sources

¹ Hill, R. B. Casey-Center for the Study of Social Policy Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare, Race Matters Consortium Westat. (2007). An analysis of racial/ethnic disproportionality and disparity at the national, state, and county levels. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

² National Center for Juvenile Justice (2019). Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care Dashboard. http://www.ncjj.org/AFCARS/Disproportionality_Dashboard.aspx

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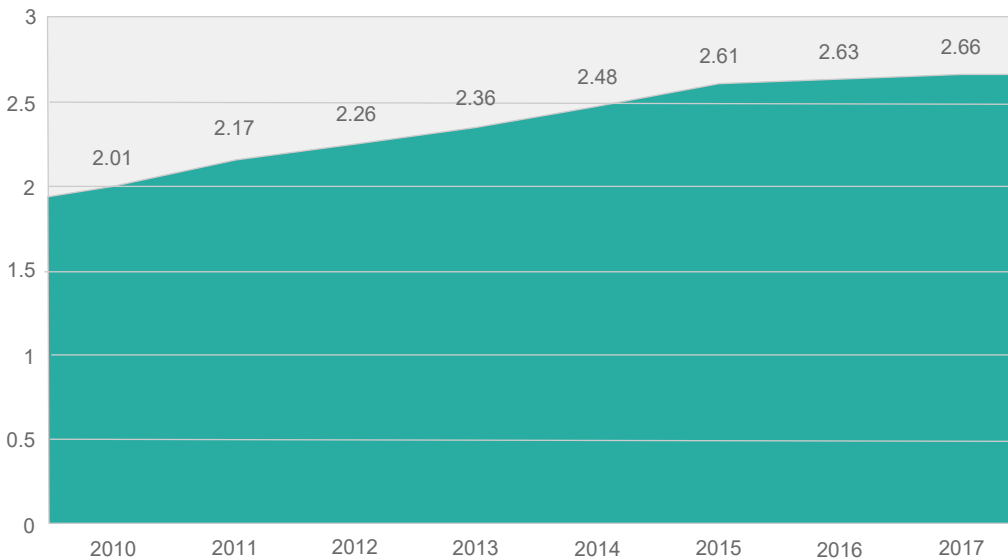
Disproportionate Foster Care of American Indian/Alaska Native Children

Although national data highlights the overrepresentation of AI/AN children in state child welfare systems as a whole, a closer look at individual state foster care data illustrates how specific state policies and practices can impact the care and placement of AI/AN children and families in state child welfare systems.

Disproportionate Foster Care of AI/AN Children:
15 States with the Highest Rates³

State	Disproportionality rate (2017)	% of children who are AI/AN	% of children in foster care who are AI/AN
Minnesota	16	1.7	27.2
Wisconsin	5.4	1.3	7
North Dakota	4.6	8.6	39
South Dakota	4.1	13.8	57
Nebraska	3.88	1.3	4.9
Oregon	3.53	1.6	5.6
Hawaii	3.5	0.2	0.6
Washington	3.2	1.8	5.7
Montana	3.2	10.7	34.2
Utah	3.1	1.1	3.3
Alaska	2.5	21.2	53
Iowa	2.1	0.4	0.9
North Carolina	1.8	1.3	2.4
California	1.8	0.5	0.9
Idaho	1.6	1.4	2.2

National Changes of Disproportionate Foster Care Placement of AI/AN Children Over Time⁴



While some states have reduced disproportionality of foster care placement of AI/AN children over time, others have not.

As illustrated in the graph to the left, for AI/AN children, disproportionality increased dramatically from 2010 to 2014.⁵ It has since continued to increase subsequently.



NICWA
National Indian Child Welfare Association

The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) works to support the safety, health, and spiritual strength of Native children along the broad continuum of their lives. We promote building tribal capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect through positive systems change at the state, federal, and tribal levels.

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Sources

- ³ Earle, K. A. & Cross, A. (2001). Child abuse and neglect among American Indian/Alaska Native children: An analysis of existing data. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.
⁴ National Center for Juvenile Justice (2019). Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care Dashboard. http://www.ncjj.org/AFCARS/Disproportionality_Dashboard.aspx
⁵ Woods, S. & Summers, A. (2016). Technical assistance bulletin: Disproportionality rates for children of color in foster care (Fiscal Year 2014). National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges: Reno, NV.