

Tennessee Department of *Human Services*



2023 *Annual Report*



Tennessee Department of Human Services Annual Report 2023



"When we join forces with community organizations and agencies to discover new ways and approaches to help customers achieve stability and wellness, it not only strengthens these individuals; the work of TDHS filters into the lives of their friends, families, neighbors, and consequently, our shared communities, economies, and state."

-Commissioner Clarence H. Carter







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

Greetings and welcome to the 2022/2023 State Fiscal Year Annual Report from the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS). This report is an opportunity to provide transparency to taxpayers and the nearly two million Tennesseans our department is honored to serve through 17 programs. I'm excited to share how we strategically managed \$3 billion in resources to help Tennesseans in 95 counties overcome today's challenges and build a better future for themselves and our state. For me, this report is also an opportunity to show appreciation for the nearly 4,000 employees who make the commitment each day to meet customers where they are and walk beside them on their path to economic stability and wellbeing.

Our relationship with many of our customers occurs at a point of personal crisis in their life or juncture where we can work together to proactively ensure wellbeing. When I joined TDHS in 2021, I found the department in the midst of major service delivery improvements that were accelerated by the pandemic. These improvements assisted Tennesseans in need with both temporary pandemic related crises and long-term social and economic challenges created by other factors. Over the past year, we've improved the One DHS Customer portal, a virtual tool that encourages autonomy and empowers customers to manage multiple TDHS administered resources from one online login. We've also centralized our customer service call options so that customers can connect with multiple programs from a single call line and do not have the burden of researching phone numbers for specific programs. These are just two examples of how TDHS continues to



improve the way we assist the Tennesseans we are privileged to serve. But, it is my belief that success for our department is not simply the efficient delivery of benefits and services: Success is the day that many of our customers can say "thanks, but no thanks" and live a life of their own choosing.

This year, TDHS introduced and sustained initiatives that take a wholistic person-centered approach to programing and demonstrated that our department is ready and able to be a catalyst for hope and change that affects our customers and the state we call home. A wholistic approach involves managing resources to efficiently deliver services while considering the life factors that created a need for our supports and inviting other community organizations and agencies--the whole of Tennessee --to join us in our mission. These initiatives include our partnership with employers and child care providers, implementation of TANF Opportunity Act grants and our support of



Success is the day that many of our customers can say "thanks, but no thanks" and live a life of their own choosing.

the role of Tennessee fathers. These and other collaborations and pilot programs demonstrate that TDHS has the courage to ask questions and examine what works best to help Tennesseans thrive.

When we join forces with community organizations and agencies to discover new ways and approaches to help customers achieve stability and wellness, it not only strengthens these individuals; the work of TDHS filters into the lives of their friends, families, neighbors, and consequently, our shared communities, economies, and state. This report highlights our

accomplishments and our belief that when we help Tennesseans to grow beyond their current challenges or find economic freedom and wellness, we reduce the overall dependency on public benefits and make our state stronger. For us, each customer is capable and deserves hope and the opportunity to determine their own destiny. As a public servant with more than 30 years of experience, I am grateful to lead a skilled workforce dedicated to the greater good and we thank you for the opportunity to share how we're strengthening Tennessee by strengthening Tennesseans.



Mission Vision Values

Mission

To Strengthen Tennessee by Strengthening Tennesseans.

Vision

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

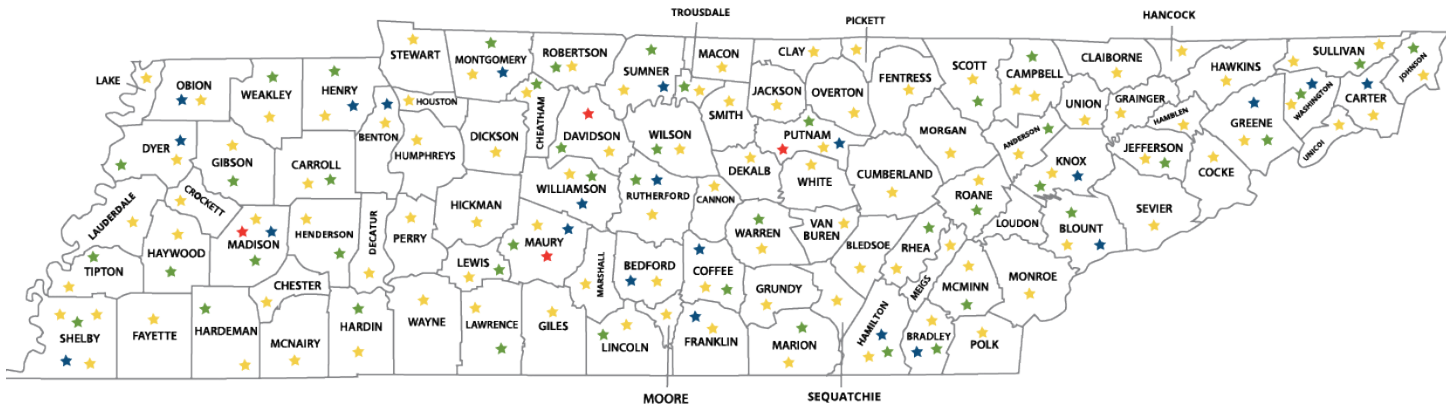
Values

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



How and Why We Serve

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) understands that our state's strength comes from its people. Our work seeks to ensure each and every Tennessean has the opportunity to achieve economic and social wellness. We achieve this goal by offering an extensive range of social services to a diverse group of almost two million Tennesseans in all 95 rural and urban counties.



- ★ DHS Central and District offices
- ★ Child Support Office
- ★ Family Assistance and Child Care Offices
- ★ Rehabilitation Centers and Offices

Our broad range of customers includes custodial and non-custodial parents who participate in the Child Support Program, as well as the child care providers who may apply for licensure and parents that need child care payment assistance. We also serve community members with disabilities who are classified as blind, visually impaired, deaf, and hard of hearing. Other customers include families living below the poverty line who may need assistance in obtaining nutrition or other resources to move beyond their current circumstances. We serve these groups and more, however our goal is always same: help more Tennesseans to reach a higher capacity for self-sufficiency and reduce their dependency on outside supports. Simply put, we want every Tennessean to have an opportunity to live a full life of wellness.



TN STATE Welcome Sign | TN PHOTO SERVICE

Executive Team Leaders

Commissioner

Clarence H. Carter

Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer

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

Melisa Hucks

- Procurement/Facilities
- Budget
- Division of Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions
- 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
- People Operations

Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Krisann Hodges

- Division of Appeals and Hearings
- Legal Services
- Records Management

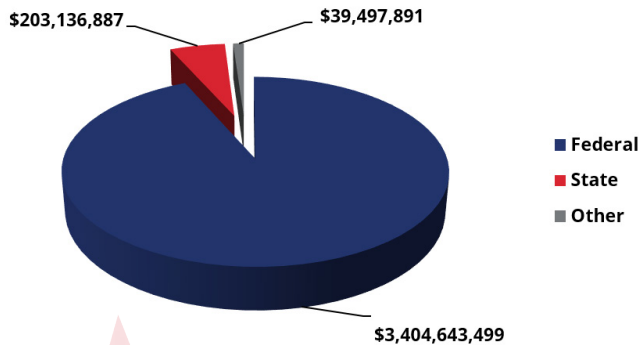
Inspector General

Todd McKinney

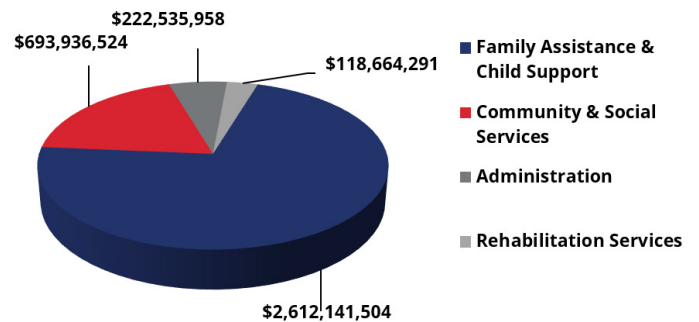
- Audit Services
- Program Integrity

Tennesseans Served in 2022/2023

TDHS FY 2023 Revenue



TDHS FY 2023 Expenditures



Families First

- 13,638 Open cases as of May 2023
- An average of 109 households achieved employment and moved beyond the need for services each month between July 2022 and May 2023



Child Support

- \$596,285,604 in Child Support payments distributed to 290,953 children
- 94% of Child Support collected went to families --5% of Child Support reimbursed public assistance dollars (does not total 100% due to rounding)



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) & Pandemic Benefit Transfer Programs

- 794,734 Individuals representing 404,180 households served on average each month
- \$1,802,036,736 in SNAP benefits issued
- \$372 Average monthly SNAP benefit per household
- \$ 116,817,465.32 in Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) funds delivered to 644,303 school age children and 118,373 households with pre-school age children.



Office of General Counsel

- 11 Childcare board hearings litigated
 - 104 Child Care legal enforcement actions served
 - 6 Adult Protective Services (APS) due process hearings litigated
 - 264 APS legal enforcement actions taken
 - 32 Administrative Hearings litigated
 - 34 Human Resource matters litigated
-



People Operations

- 93 Staff members graduated from internal training academies
 - 3,836 TDHS employees completed a total of 31,522 learning sessions
 - 756 TDHS employees participated in LinkedIn Learning, completing 5,874 hours representing 4,905 courses
 - 472 Staff members hired and onboarded
 - 433 Employees promoted
-



Child Care Services

- 23,493 Children served through the Smart Steps Child Care Payment Assistance Program
 - 47,414 Children registered to receive books each month through the TDHS partnership with Governor's Early Literacy Foundation
 - 8,619 Child care spaces created through the Pre-Licensure process representing 134 provisional licenses and 64 continuous licenses
 - 83 Establishment grants approved representing \$3,604,599.27 in funding for child care providers
 - \$4,469,807.17 Invested into 995 licensed child care agencies through Enhancement Mini Grants
-



Rehabilitation Services

- 5,109 Vocational Rehabilitation applications received
- 1,209 Vocational Rehabilitation customers achieved their employment goals
- An average of 9,294 pre-employment transition services were provided to an average of 5,760 students each month
- 605 Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP) technology demonstrations reached 930 individuals
- 225 devices loaned out and 1853 devices were reutilized by TTAP, creating a cost savings of \$739,328
- TTAP Information was provided to 1476 people and training was provided to 877 individuals
- 85,675 Social Security Administration Disability claims processed



Appeals & Hearings

- 11,772 Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) appeals received
 - 38,385 Program issues appealed by 21,550 appellants
-



Nutrition Programs

- 34,000,000 meals provided in 2022 and 26,000,000 meals provided 2023 by the Child and Adult Care Food Program
 - 2,000,000 Meals provided by the Summer Food Service Program
-



Community Services Block Grant

- \$23,968,598.70 Invested in Tennessee communities through CSBG funds
- 293,768 Individuals representing 150,798 Tennessee households served by CSBG funds
- 8,654 Public and private organizations supported through 20 community action agencies/eligible entities.

Note: funding operates on a Federal Fiscal Year and information provided below is for the period 10/01/2021 to 09/30/2022, as provided in the FY2022 CSBG Annual Report.

For a more in-depth look at how these TDHS programs are working to build stronger families across Tennessee, continue reading.

A Partner for Good

Key to the work of the Tennessee Department of Human Services, is the spirit of collaboration and partnership. TDHS administers more than 17 programs and services to aid Tennesseans, however that work cannot be done in isolation. TDHS leadership and team members greatly value building relationships across all levels of government and within local communities – all with the overall goal to best serve Tennesseans. Partnership is a vital function to the effectiveness of programs which help spur innovation, wraparound services to triage through challenges, and community specific service networks. Read on for a few highlights of TDHS partnerships that are directly meeting the needs of Tennessee communities.



Child Care Services Team Develops Innovative Partnership with Tyson Foods to Expand Access to Affordable Childcare in Humboldt, TN, Setting a Standard for Employer Based Child Care

Child Care Services team members partnered with Tyson Foods, one of the world's largest food companies, to provide employees at their Humboldt, TN location with employer-sponsored on-site child care. Understanding the challenges of parents and providers, the Child Care Services team provided consult to the Tyson Foods team, advising on the licensure process, specifications on physical locations, staff training, and financial assistance available to families.

In collaboration with TDHS and KinderCare, a provider in early childhood and school-age education and care, Tyson Foods now provides access to child care to eligible employees through its new Tyson Learning Center. Eligible employees, can also receive financial assistance through the TDHS Smart Steps Child Care Payment Assistance program, contribute a small co-payment based on their income and family size and Tyson will pay the difference of up to \$125 per week.

On an ongoing basis, the Tyson Learning Center will have access to quality supports such as WAGE\$, a salary supplement program tied to continuing education, enhancement grants, professional development opportunities for child care agency staff, technical assistance and training resources. These types of supports are available to all TDHS licensed child care providers as important investments in promoting early childhood environments that are safe, healthy, and educationally rich.

Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Programs Begin Work

As part of the TANF Opportunity Act (TOA) pilot grants were awarded to seven (7) collaborative groups in November 2022. Known as the Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative (TOPI) each collaborative group will receive up to \$25 million across three years. The intent of

the pilot initiative is to explore various service interventions that set Tennesseans with low incomes on a path of reduced dependency on government funded social service programs, while increasing their capacity toward upward mobility and self-sufficiency.

Each pilot grantee provides services to individuals to assist in improving stable and safe housing conditions, increasing earned income, boosting financial empowerment, obtaining of certifications, obtaining high school diploma/GED, or post-secondary degrees/training, improving parenting skills, reducing adverse childhood experiences, and increasing knowledge/access to community resources. The pilot grantees work alongside their partners to provide classes and resources to assist customers with improved outcomes and provide wraparound services to help families achieve their long term goals.

The seven Tennessee Opportunity Pilot Initiative grantees include:

- **Families Matter** | Through the AFIRM program, this pilot will address challenges faced by fathers with low incomes to increase economic mobility and earning capacity, increase sustained child support payments, and build capacity for healthy parenting and co-parenting. Serves Shelby County.
- **University of Memphis** | Through the GROWWTH program, the University of Memphis will braid and leverage resources through a broad, regional approach that increases nontraditional child care capacity, accelerates work readiness programming that leads to high-quality jobs, and college credit and provides training and access to capital for microbusinesses. The organization serves the following counties in West Tennessee: Benton, Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Dyer, Fayette, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Henry, Lake, Lauderdale, Madison, McNairy, Obion, Shelby, Tipton, and Weakley.
- **Family & Children Services** | Through the Connecting Forward program, Families & Children Services will reduce and mitigate systemic barriers that prevent families from leaving generational poverty by coordinating the work of existing organizations to create a comprehensive, connected social services, and family-centered workforce development network. The organization serves the following counties in Middle Tennessee: Bedford, Cheatham, Coffee, Davison, Dickson, Franklin, Giles, Grundy, Hickman, Houston, Humphreys, Lawrence, Lewis, Lincoln, Marshall, Maury, Montgomery, Moore, Perry, Robertson, Rutherford, Sequatchie, Steward, Sumner, Trousdale, Wayne, Williamson, and Wilson.
- **Martha O'Bryan Center** | Through the Tennessee Alliance for Economic Mobility collaborative, the Martha O'Bryan Center pairs community-driven wraparound supports, family-centered coaching, and employment and training pathways with transitional benefits that mitigates the benefits cliff and increases families' incentives to earn more. Martha O'Bryan serves the following counties in Middle Tennessee: Davidson, Dickson, Maury, Montgomery, Rutherford, Sumner, and Wilson.
- **Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency** | Through the Empower Upper Cumberland collaborative, this pilot targets families who are unemployed and those who have never entered the workforce through a new continuum of care process that reduces duplication across human services programs and increases workforce participation, job readiness, placement, and advancement. Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency serves the following counties: Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren, and White.

- **First Tennessee Development District Foundation** | Through STRONG Families Northeast Tennessee, the First Tennessee Development District Foundation will build a results-based network that supports responsive relationships, reduces sources of stress, and strengthens core skills to increase low-income families economic mobility, self-sufficiency, and well-being. First Tennessee Development District Foundation serves the following counties in East Tennessee: Carter, Cocke, Greene, Hamblen, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Washington, and Unicoi.
- **United Way of Greater Knoxville** | Through the East Tennessee Collaborative, United Way of Greater Knoxville uses an evidence-based coaching model to match each family's assets and needs with essential and timely programs and services, disrupting silos of service delivery through an innovative redesign of care coordination that increases social opportunities. United Way of Greater Knoxville serves the following counties in East Tennessee: Anderson, Blount, Claiborne, Grainger, Jefferson, Knox, Sevier, and Union.

Ensuring all
Tennesseans have
a pathway to
self-sufficiency
and economic
stability



Families First
Community Grants

Made Possible by the Tennessee Opportunity Act



Fostering Community Impact through the Families First Community Grant Program

In January 2023, TDHS implemented its first group of Families First Community Grants. The Families First Community Grant program was created as an additional method to invest Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to provide assistance and help them move towards sustainable economic stability. The grants support a wide range of services in the areas of education, health and well-being, economic stability and foster safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. The grant recipients were selected through a competitive application process and evaluated based upon their ability to provide effective services and programs that address the specific needs of the community.

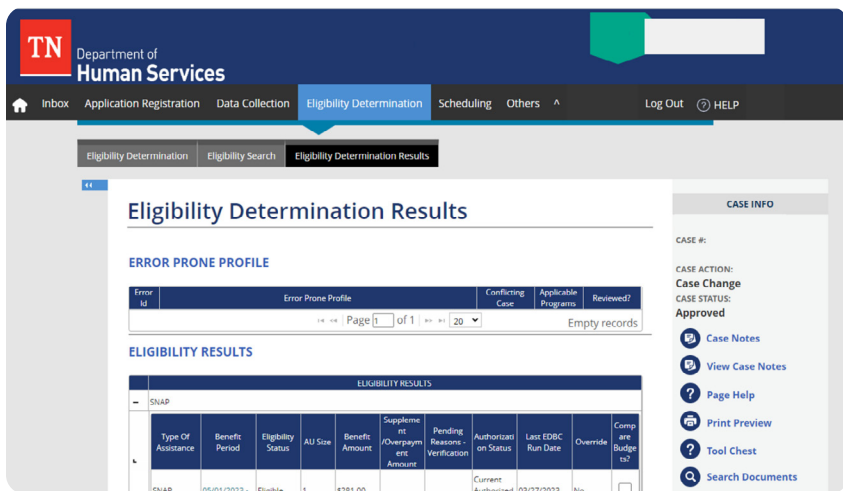
TDHS currently works with more than 50 community and state partners to deliver wholistic support services across the state.

2Gen and Families First Community Grant Partners:

- A1 Learning Connections
- Agape
- A Step Ahead Foundation Chattanooga, Inc.
- A Step Ahead Foundation of East Tennessee
- A Step Ahead Foundation of Middle Tennessee
- Advanced Therapy Solutions dba Allied Behavioral Health Solutions
- Ballard Health
- Belmont University
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Chattanooga
- Big Brother Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley
- Catholic Charities of Tennessee
- Center for Family Development
- Chattanooga Hamilton County Hospital Authority ((Erlanger))
- Childhelp, Inc. dba Childhelp Tennessee
- Cocke County High School
- Council for Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services
- Daughters of Zion All Women's Bible College
- Dismas, Inc
- Eagle's Nest of Gastonia
- Families Free, Inc.
- Family and Children's Services
- Family Center, Inc.
- Girls Inc. of Chattanooga
- Goodwill Industries--Knoxville, Inc.
- Greater Kingsport Family YMCA
- Hamilton County Coalition
- Healing Word Counseling Center
- Helen Ross McNabb Center
- Hope House Day Care Center Inc.
- Impact Management Solutions
- Knowledge Quest
- Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee
- Knoxville Leadership Foundation
- Legal Aid Society of Middle TN & the Cumberlandds
- Martha O'Bryan Center
- Meharry Medical College
- Methodist LeBonheur Community Outreach
- Green and Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI)
- Neighborhood Christian Centers
- New Life Center
- Partnership for Families, Children, and Adults
- Persevere
- Porter Leath
- Rooftop Foundation
- Rural Resources, Inc.
- Salvation Army
- 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 Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services – Therapeutic Intervention, Education, and Skills Program
- TN Dept of Health - Home Visiting Program
- TN Dept of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services - Project Lifeline
- TN Dept of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services - System of Care Across Tennessee Initiative
- United Neighborhood Health Services
- United Way of Greater Chattanooga
- United Way of Greater Nashville - Family Collective
- United Way of Rutherford and Cannon Counties
- United Way of the Mid-South
- Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency
- Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency, Inc.
- UpRise Nashville
- Urban Strategies
- Wesley House Community Center
- Workforce Midsouth Inc
- Youth Villages, Inc.
- YWCA Knoxville and the Tennessee Valley
- YWCA Nashville & Middle Tennessee
- YWCA Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia

Modernization

State Fiscal Year 2022-2023 marked a significant turn in our modernization journey. In 2019, TDHS set out with a vision to revolutionize the customer experience through innovation and a seamless network of services. The TDHS team had been working hard to determine technology updates that could transition the department's work processes from outdated legacy systems to a 21st century service delivery model, similar to customer-centered technology in the private sector. This involved examination of both program business processes and a fresh look at technology solutions to bring TDHS up to date. Just a year later, one of our largest county offices was destroyed by a tornado, impacting programs and services that were heavily paper dependent. Days later, the state, nation and world experienced the Covid-19 pandemic. Our teams had to quickly deploy solutions to maintain services to customers. In a matter of hours, TDHS had to adjust service delivery from in-person, to virtual. TDHS team members worked remotely and customers had to adapt to virtual solutions to obtain the services they needed. Additionally, TDHS received an influx of applications for existing and new services from people who previously never needed the assistance from TDHS. The pandemic greatly impacted our modernization journey, fast tracking us to where we are now.



Electronic Benefit Management System

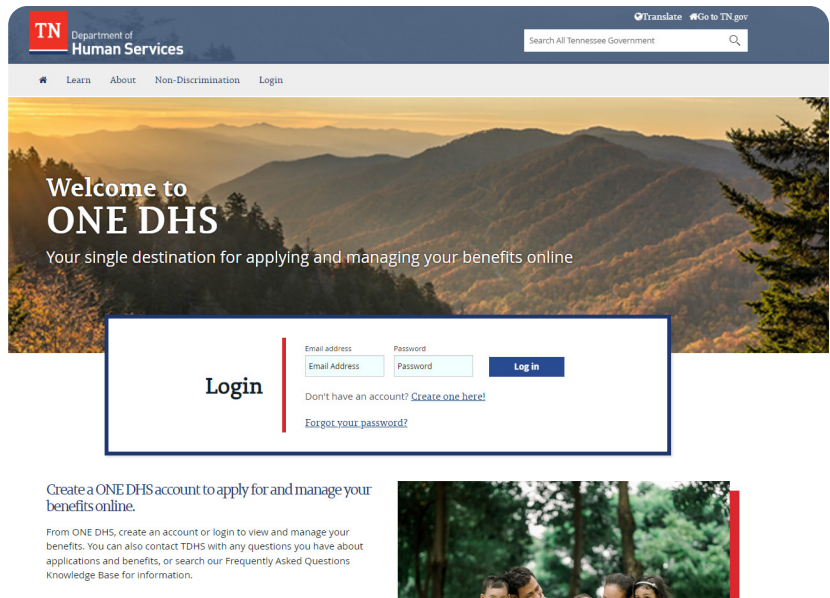
This year, TDHS experienced its largest technology transition since 1992. Family Assistance, Appeals & Hearings, Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions (QISS), and the Office of Inspector General have worked with Department of Human Services IT and Deloitte to develop a new Eligibility Benefit Management System. The Eligibility Benefit

Management System (EBMS) merges and replaces multiple, separate ACCENT, FARAS, ARTS and COTS legacy systems, all used for SNAP and TANF case management functions. EBMS has a modern user interface, determines eligibility in compliance with policy and manages casework transactions within a single system. A primary component of EBMS is the ability for staff to track and monitor their work. With the launch of the EBMS system, TDHS team members now have one case management system to manage multiple case functions.

One DHS Customer Portal

In 2022, TDHS launched the One DHS Customer Portal, a one-stop shop to access TDHS online tools. Since its initial launch, the One DHS Customer Portal received several updates. In June 2023, the One DHS Customer Portal was equipped with additional seamless functionality for customers. Major updates include:

- The ability to apply for Child Care Payment Assistance, SNAP and Families First all at once
- The ability to manage case aspects from a benefits dashboard that allows customers to:
 - Apply for Benefits
 - Upload Documents
 - Sign and Return a Personal Responsibility Plan
 - Report Changes
 - Submit a Mid-Certification Form
 - Submit a Renewal
 - File an Appeal



This is an exciting time for the Department as we make a huge leap into technology upgrades that will guide our future work. Going forward, we will work to familiarize the public and existing customers of this resource, designed with them in mind.

One DHS Omnichannel Customer Support Model and One DHS Contact Center

In February 2023, TDHS launched the One DHS Omnichannel Customer Support Model – including the launch of the One DHS Contact Center. The cross-program contact center fields customer inquiries across multiple supported channels. The One DHS Contact Center will focus on general, 'level 1' customer inquiries, while customers will still be connected to program-specific service specialists for more complex questions.

Other key features of the new customer support model include simplified entry points for the customer, a new ability for customers to speak to a live chat agent through our AVA chat bot, and the launch of a universal Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool that enables the department with a single view of a customer's service history.

These technology and modernization highlights are just a snapshot of the innovative approach taken by the TDHS team. Additional improvements have been made in child care, food programs, vocational rehabilitation, and support divisions. TDHS continues to embrace the spirit of transformation and process improvement for greater efficiency and better customer service, with more to come.

Customer Facing Divisions

The department's customer facing divisions include Child Care and Community Services, Family Assistance and Child Support, and Rehabilitation Services. Many of the staff employed by these divisions have direct interactions and relationships with customers, their applications, case maintenance and other functions related to the administration of benefits.

Child Care and Community Services

The Division of Child Care and Community Services includes Child and Adult Care Services, Adult Protective Services, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, the Community Services Block Grant, and the Social Services Block Grant Programs. The division works to ensure the safety and wellness of Tennessee children and vulnerable adults by standardizing care, protections and related assistance while guiding and providing aid to partnering community agencies in accordance with federal guidelines.



Adult Protective Services

The Adult Protective Services (APSA) Unit investigates reports of abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of adults who are unable to protect themselves due to a physical or mental limitation. APS collaborates with other state agencies, such as TennCare and the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD), to that ensure vulnerable adults in Tennessee have the resources needed to be well.

Within the Tennessee Department of Human Services, APS regularly collaborates with the Office of General Counsel and Social Services Block program, and makes referrals to other programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to obtain services for APS clients.

To maintain a seamless and timely flow of services, APS leads the Statewide Coordinated Community Response (CCR), a group of 19 state agencies that meet monthly to address issues and develop efficient interagency processes to improve the protection of Tennessee's vulnerable adults.

Child Care and Community Services Leadership

Jude White

Assistant Commissioner

Barbara Davis

Director of Operations

Renee Bouchillon

Director, Adult Protective Services

Gwen Laaser

Director, Child Care Services

Lindsay Whitten

Community Services Block Grant Program Director

Allette Vayda

Director of Operations, Food Programs

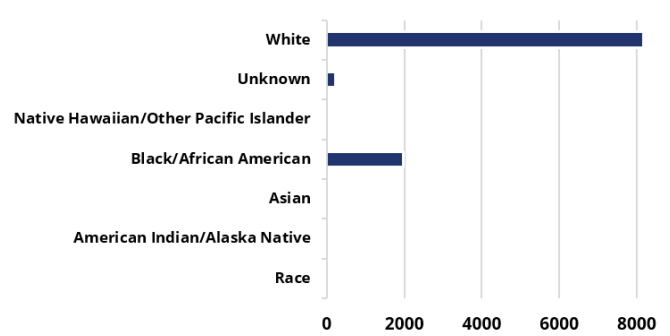
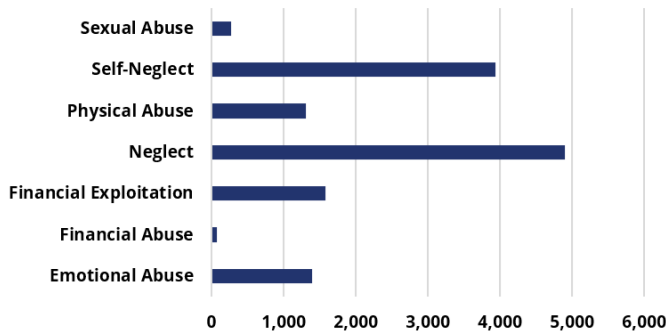
Avé Trotter

Director of Strategic Initiatives

2022/23 | Adult Protective Services Adult Protective Services by the Numbers

- 23, 437 Reports of abuse received
- 135 of 10,445 Investigations classified as “Emergency” status
- 6,040 Referral calls
- 96% Call answer rate
- 96.92% Timeliness rate for cases
- 9,899 Clients served
- 406 Tennesseans helped through Collaborative Response to Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse (CREVAA) program
- 22 Investigative Specialists graduated from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation Academy

Types of Allegations Reported in 2022/23



Note: There may be more than one allegation per report. Additional allegations may be added during an Investigation (Assigned Reports). On May 1, 2023, state guidelines changed to remove investigations of self-neglect from the authoritative scope of APS. Consequently, APS is no longer permitted to investigate these cases.

Serving APS Customers Better

Modernization with Structured Decision Making (SDM) | Two years ago, APS began a partnership with Evident Change to develop four Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessments to improve outcomes for older and vulnerable adults in Tennessee. The evidence-based system identifies key points in SDM model and provides APS workers with clear and consistent decision-making criteria for screening an investigation, determining the response priority, identifying immediate harm, estimating the risk of future abuse and assisting with case planning. The system maximizes APS resources and assessments to improve the consistency and validity of each decision and is expected to be fully implemented by spring 2024.

Expanding the State Coordinated Community Response | Addressing abuse and neglect of older and vulnerable adults is a complex process and one lone agency is not sufficient to handle the scope of abuse and neglect issues faced by older and vulnerable adults. The State Coordinated Community Response (CCR) is an APS led initiative comprised of 19 state agencies that hold monthly meetings to improve the investigation, response, and delivery of services to older and vulnerable adults. CCR meetings provide an opportunity for all agencies to communicate, collaborate and respond to the needs of older and vulnerable adults.

across the state. Meeting consistently, broadening the partner base, developing innovative approaches, and creating streamlined systems improves efforts to protect Tennesseans. This year, the State CCR expanded into nine additional regions, hosting three virtual meetings per region, to share information and hear concerns regarding abuse, neglect, and exploitation of this population. To better understand state needs, the CCR conducted an external partner survey during March and April, 2023. Results from the survey's 241 partner participants were shared during the nine State CCR Regional Meetings in May and additional data trends continue to be examined by APS and CCR teams.

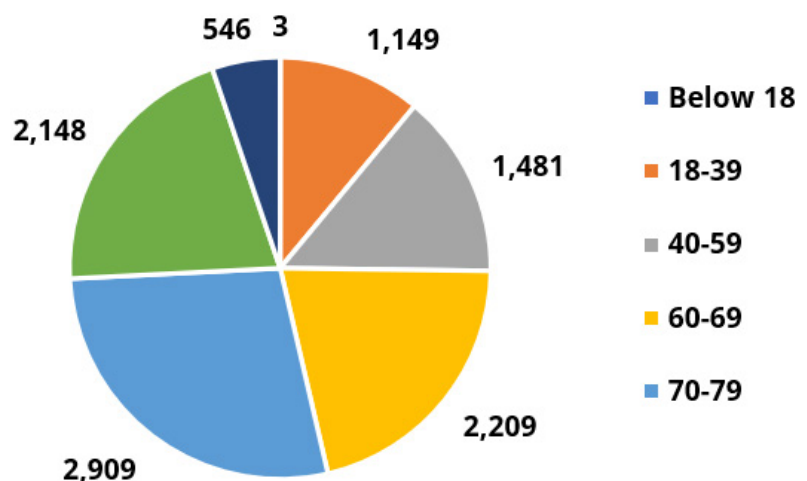
Adding Additional Health Expertise to the Team | In July 2022, APS hired the program's first registered nurse to provide guidance to the investigative team when allegations require interpretation of medical records, diagnoses, or medications, as sufficient evidence of abuse or neglect. Between July 2022 and June 2023, the RN assisted staff with more than 465 cases and used formal assessment tools to determine cognitive status in protective supervision cases that considered safety and risk of harm. The RN also completed critical monthly assessments of custody clients and staff training for APS throughout the year, as well as training, for collaborative and community providers to who improve services for Tennessee's vulnerable adults. The RN made presentations at several state-wide events including the Center on Aging and Research and Education Services (CARES) and the Tennessee Elder Justice conferences. In short, the RN is an extremely valuable member of the team.

Improving Communication and Responses for Vulnerable Victims | APS and the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TCAD) regularly works with District Attorneys (DA) to serve vulnerable Tennesseans. Following a directive from the Comptroller's report, the District Attorney's Conference, APS and TCAD collaborated to build a portal for DAs to have real-time notifications and access to APS reports as a solution for improving communication and responses to vulnerable victims. The portal launched in August 2023.

Preparing to Serve More Customers

Around 75 percent of APS customers are over 60 years of age, and the baby boomer generation is expected to create a "silver tsunami" of need in several care sectors. APS continues to work with the department's Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions division and the Data Strategies team to update five-year projections of the APS program workload and anticipated staffing and resource needs.

APS Client Diversity | Age



Empowering Our Greatest Asset: Our Team

Supporting our APS Leaders and Staff | In April 2023, APS and the People Operations Division held a Growing Our Culture training session with team managers. Content focused on celebrating successes, strengthening connections with program and agency mission, vision, and values, and connecting with Commissioner's vision to grow capacity to reduce dependency, in the context of APS. The session also included an Optum presentation on compassion fatigue and information from all presentations was shared with other team members.

New APS Supervisor Summit | In December 2022, APS introduced a four-week APS Supervisor Summit. This pilot provided information on team building, coaching direct reports, and staff safety. The next Supervisor Summit, held in August of 2023, utilized previous feedback to ensure participants have the best experience possible.

Supporting our Staff and Promoting Self-Care | To help staff stay well and manage compassion fatigue, APS hosted a monthly series of virtual workshops. "Growing Our Awareness," focused on staff well-being and growth. Some of the 2022/23 session topics included: How to Overcome Negativity in the Workplace, Coping with Traumatic Events, How to Build Successful Teams, Employee Communication: Beyond the Basics, Making the Holidays Happier, How to Create a Healthy Workplace, Embracing Happiness, Get the Best of Stress, How to Use Conflict as Opportunity, Employee, Mindfulness: Beyond the Basics, and How to Build Customer Satisfaction.

Building the Team | During fiscal year 2023, 30 new staff members were hired to fill intake and investigations vacancies. While there are still vacancies across the state, coverage and morale continue to increase.

22 Investigative Specialists Graduate from TBI Academy | On November 10, 2022, APS team members participated in the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) Academy at the TBI Headquarters in Nashville for the first time since 2019. Participants received training on interview techniques, drug awareness, and situational awareness. When COVID-19 prevented this annual training from taking place in recent years, leaders utilized the hiatus as an opportunity to update the curriculum based on staff feedback and modern policies. This year's graduating class included 22 APS Investigative Specialists and three People Operations Division trainers.

Connecting with the Community and Partners

Community Outreach | APS is focused on increasing public awareness about the signs and dangers of neglect and abuse. During the fiscal year, the team provided 27 presentations to senior citizen centers, law enforcement teams, hospital social workers, provider agencies, other key stakeholders and organizations across the state. Presentations included a panel discussion at Middle Tennessee State University and the South-Central Tennessee Adult Abuse Coalition Conference.

Helping 406 Victims of Crime | Beginning on January 1, 2023, APS started managing the Collaborative Response to Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse (CREVAA) program. Made

possible through a through the Victims of Crime Act grant and a contract with the Offices of Criminal Justice, the program assists elderly and vulnerable adults who are victims of crime. Through the program, advocates help provide emergency assistance, home repairs, personal care assistance, durable medical equipment, medication replacement and emergency housing. Advocates also assist in obtaining needed long-term services and supports, and referrals to other agencies who can also assist with needs of the client.

Providing Immediate Solutions for 524 Tennesseans in Crisis | The Collaborative Response to End Self-neglect in Tennessee (CREST) program offers immediate solutions for clients in crisis. Leveraging funds from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), APS contracts with Human Resource Agencies and area agencies on aging and disability to provide person-centered advocacy, case management, and specific assistance to self-neglecting APS clients across the state. APS staff refer participants to CREST advocates who will assist clients and address emergency needs. During the 2022/23 fiscal year, CREST served 524 vulnerable adults across Tennessee.

Aligning Programs to Better Serve Tennesseans | The Social Service Block Grant (SSBG) program works closely with the APS Unit to ensure clients' needs are addressed following an investigation. This year, APS created a Grants Team that works to ensure CREST and CREVA programs align to form a wholistic approach that meets the needs of APS clients and program participants. The team reviewed, revised, and drafted policies, procedures, and forms to ensure all three programs are in line with each other and provide wrap around supports to create long term positive outcomes for more Tennesseans.

Key Milestones

2023 CARES Conference May 31-June 1, 2023 | The CARES Conference on Aging is a partnership between the TDHS Adult Protective Services Unit the and Center on Aging Research and Education Services (CARES) at Tennessee State University's College of Public Service and Urban Affairs. This free annual conference brings together nationally recognized experts from around the country to train on best practices in the field, enhance job skills and elevate public awareness of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older and vulnerable adults. This year's conference was attended by nearly 158 attendees who participated in sessions on Undue Influence, Multiple Lenses of Investigations, Bed Bug Infestations, Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue as well as an update on federal funding related to APS.

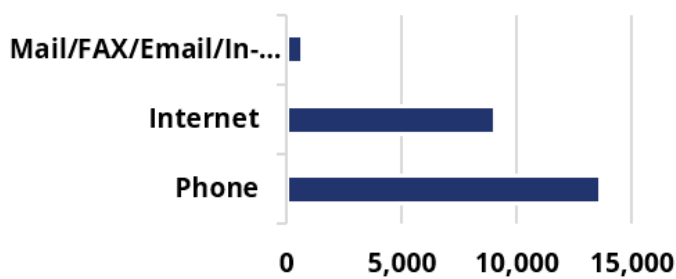


Using Data for Good | In February 2023, Tennessee's APS Unit submitted de-identified data to the National Adult Maltreatment Reporting System (NAMRS). Initially implemented by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) during the 2016 federal fiscal year, NAMRS is first comprehensive national reporting system for state APS programs. The system aims to collect

consistent and accurate national data on investigations and services from APS programs. This data is used to better understand patterns of adult maltreatment across the country. Every state now participates in NAMRS, and Tennessee APS participated since the system's inception.

Delivering the Inaugural APS Annual Report to Legislature | In January 2023, pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 71-6-125(d), TDHS submitted the first APS annual report to the chairs of the judiciary committee of the senate and the criminal justice committee of the house of representatives. This report included detailed data on APS reports, allegations, investigations, perpetrators, services, relationships, and demographic information for calendar year 2022.

How Tennesseans Contacted APS in 2022/23



Upgrading the Intake Call Center | Most reports received by APS are submitted via phone and this year, APS completed several Call Center upgrades to better serve customers. After hours calls are routed through the Call Center system and all calls are recorded and can be pulled and redirected to the on-call Intake Counselor. Callers can also volunteer to participate in a three-question customer satisfaction survey. Survey data is reviewed on monthly basis and used to improve services.

Child Care Services

Child Care Services plans, implements, and coordinates activities and programs that promote quality care, ensure the health and safety of children in licensed spaces and facilitate child care financial support for families utilizing child care. The Division includes Child and Adult Care Licensing and Child Care Certificate Program Units. The Division also collaborates with Child Care Resource and Referral Centers and other community partners to strengthen child care environments in Tennessee.

Child and Adult Care Licensing

Child and Adult Care Licensing is the regulatory body that licenses and monitors child and adult care facilities across Tennessee with the goal of ensuring the safety and health of young children and vulnerable adults in care. To build thriving, high quality licensed programs, the Department launched the Pre-Licensure Unit in August 2021 that streamlines processes and provides intentional supports for the creation of new licensed spaces. This unit works to build partnerships with community and business leaders to assess child care needs, explore solutions and recruit prospective providers to increase the number of child care slots in rural and underserved areas.

This State Fiscal Year, the Department began transitioning to the new Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Under this new structure, the Licensing Consultant monitors compliance and evaluates quality. This aligns with our goals of improving quality and

strengthening our business efficiencies and will support a better customer experience. We believe that a relationship focused approach fosters overall improvement and helps our partners, families, and children in Tennessee will thrive.

Child Care Certificate Program

The Child Care Certificate Program (Child Care Payment Assistance, including Smart Steps) provides child care payment support to families who are working, in post-secondary education programs, those participating in the Families First program and others. Child care payment assistance not only allows parents and guardians a sense of security while they work or pursue educational goals, it also promotes children's learning and development in quality child care environments.

2022/23 Child Care by the Numbers

- 23,493 Children served through the Smart Steps Child Care Payment Assistance Program
- 47,414 Children registered to receive books each month through the TDHS partnership with Governor's Early Literacy Foundation
- 1,897 Educators from 727 different licensed agencies served through the WAGE\$® salary supplement program impacting 47,241 children
- 52 Percent of educators participating in the WAGE\$® program have an Associates of Applied Science Degree or higher or are continuing their education
- 8,619 Child care spaces created through the Pre-Licensure process representing 134 provisional licenses and 64 continuous licenses
- 83 Establishment Grants approved representing \$3,604,599.27 in direct funding to child care providers
- 758 Current and future business owners supported through 53 Small Business Academy sessions
- 1475 Participants representing 441 child care agencies served through Tech Goes Home
- 121 Educators completed the Infant and Toddler Care Specialization Path
- \$4,469,807.17 Invested into 995 licensed child care agencies through Enhancement Mini Grants
- 1,316 Educators participated in First Aid and CPR Certification training
- 774 Inclusion coaching sessions held with educators across the state
- 433,073 Tennessee Child Care On-line Training System education hours completed.

Promoting High Quality, Safe, Educationally Rich Early Child Care Environments

To support high quality and increased access to early care and education programs, the Department supports several initiatives through contracted partners that are available to all TDHS Licensed Child Care Agencies.

Investing \$4,469,807.17 in Licensed Child Care Agencies | In 2022/23, TDHS continued utilizing Enhancement Mini Grants as a tool to assist licensed child care providers in achieving higher standards. These grants are available to TDHS Licensed agencies and specifically support quality improvement, compliance with licensure rules and capacity enhancement.

433,073 Training Hours Completed in Tennessee Child Care On-line Training System Course Completions | The Tennessee Child Care On-line Training System (TCCOTS) is a free online learning management System made possible through a TDHS partnership with Tennessee State University, Center of Excellence for Learning Sciences, and ProSolutions Training. TCCOTS offers web-based trainings, which may be completed at any time; to accommodate the busy schedules of early childhood professionals. TCCOTS trainings meet basic licensing and Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) requirements. At the time this report was published, there were 67 courses available in English and Spanish.

TCCOTS Completions October 2022- June 2023

Total Courses Completed	233,238
Total Hours Completed	433,073
TCCOTS Courses Available on ProSolutions	67
TCCOTS Courses Ready to be Launched by August 2023	4

This table represents the total number of courses accessed and the total hours completed by licensed agency staff and those child care programs who participate in the Child Care Certificate Program.

WAGE\$® Program Places a High Value on Education for Child Care Professionals |

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program encourages professional development among child care workers and helps licensed child care agencies attract and retain quality staff by providing education-based salary supplements for child care educators. In 2022/23, 1,897 educators from 727 different licensed agencies participated in this TDHS and partner promoted program impacting 47,241 children. Educators who have an Associates of Applied Science Degree or higher or are continuing their education account for 52 percent of program participants.

121 Educators Complete the Infant and Toddler Care Specialization Path |

The Infant and Toddler Care Specialization (ITCS) certification provides an additional alternate professional development path for child care educators who are not ready for college course work and care professionals who may not yet qualify for the Infant and Toddler Credential. Educators who complete the specialization are connected to the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) to begin the Child Development Associate credential and/or enroll in academic course work that leads to the Infant-Toddler Credential and participation in the WAGE\$ program. This year’s cohort had 121 infant and toddler educators.

Shared Services Help Child Care Agencies with Their Bottom Line | TDHS continues to make Shared Services and Resources available to TDHS licensed child care providers. This includes access to business management, human resource and program administration tools and classroom resources at no cost to the agency. Access also includes discounted bulk pricing options for participating agencies.

February System Launch Helps Parents and Child Care Providers with Tracking |

The Child Care Payment Assistance Program helps qualifying parents by paying child care providers directly based on a child's attendance at the agency. To increase efficiency, this year, TDHS launched a new attendance and bill tracking systems that makes it easier for parents and providers to track attendance and manage resources.

Connecting with the Community and Partners

To support continuous improvement of early childhood environments, Child Care Services engages a range of "quality partners." Child Care Resource and Referral Centers are free child care location and counseling services located in communities across the state. Parents can receive information regarding the components of quality care and what to look for when choosing quality care. Other partners include the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation, the Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee, the University of Tennessee, and Tennessee State University.

Helping Tennesseans in Recovery | Through a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, TDHS launched a new category of child care payment assistance to support families participating in an approved treatment or recovery services program. This program supports the overall well-being of the family.

Increasing Employer Based Child Care Options | Our partnership between TDHS, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, and local development districts works to expand the state's network of child care facilities through exploration of community and employer-based child care opportunities by braiding funding when possible, and connecting employees with quality child care options.

Small Business Academies Help 758 Current and Future Business Owners | Small Business Academies promote best practices and strengthen business operations for child care agencies in partnership with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network. This year, the academies held 53 sessions attended by 758 individuals. These academies offer child care providers business tools on budgets, projections, planning, financial reports, internal controls, marketing, staff recruitment and staff retention.

Helping 441 Child Care Agencies Work Smarter | "Tech Goes Home," a collaboration with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network, provides technology devices and free coaching and education on the use of the equipment and how it strengthens business operations. Upon completion of the training, licensed child care programs may be eligible to receive technology incentives for use by their program staff. The program reduces the digital divide and supports child care agencies in modernizing their systems and equipment in order to lessen the administrative burden and allow providers to focus on family/child interactions and delivering quality care. Tech Goes Home served 1,475 total participants, representing 441 child care agencies statewide during the 2022/23 fiscal year.

Keeping Children Safe with First Aid Training | Through partnership with Child Care Resource and Referral TDHS provides free age-appropriate First Aid training and CPR Certification to educators and administrators. During the 2022/23 fiscal year 58 sessions held for 1,316 educators helped further strengthen safety for children in licensed spaces.

Promoting Inclusive Child Care Settings With 774 Coaching Sessions | Each child with a disability is unique. To better serve young Tennesseans with disabilities and their families, TDHS partnered with the Child Care Resource and Referral Network (CCR&R) to provide 774 targeted technical assistance coaching sessions with educators across the state. Sessions focused on appropriate accommodations, caring for children with developmental delays, medically identified disabilities, adaptive equipment or technology and other tools and strategies to build inclusive spaces that ensure all children have sufficient learning opportunities, activities, materials and care that fosters growth and social development. Inclusion coaches also shared care and family resources and facilitated connections and referrals to the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD)/ Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS), and the Tennessee Department of Education. Each of the partners plays a role in helping children transition from early care and school.



Connecting with Leaders Who Understand the Importance of Child Care Providers in Our Economy

Having access to affordable quality care means parents are assured their children are safe in a nurturing environment and employers have a larger pool of talent when working parents have more child care options. On May 12, 2023, Johnson County Mayor Mark Potts, joined other leaders around the nation in proclaiming the day as "Child Care Provider Appreciation Day."



The pandemic illuminated how indefensible child care providers are for the well-being and economic security of Tennessee's young children, families and communities ...Our future depends on the quality of the early childhood experiences provided to young children today.



Pictured: TDHS Child and Adult Care Licensing Field Supervisor Amber Blakley, Carson Newman, Child Development Lab Director Tammy Hickle, and Johnson County Mayor Mark Potts

Establishment Grant Partnerships Create More Options for Tennessee Families, Employers and Child Care Professionals



In 2021, Tennessee's 112th Assembly convened the state's Child Care Task Force (CCTF) to "develop a strategic action plan for increasing the availability of high quality, affordable, and accessible child care" through a combination of strategic cross sector partnerships and streamlined coordinated resource allocation. In 2022, CCTF contractor Public Consulting Group LLC (PCG) released the Child Care Task Force Final Report which provided research-based recommendations to address challenges related to child care quality and availability. As a team of experts that leads our state's CCTF, our Child Care Services unit knows child care is a major concern for both Tennessee families and their employers and is taking action to enact recommendations from the 2022 report. The Establishment Grant program is one example of a recommendation in action.

The Establishment Grant program expands the state's network of child care facilities by providing funds to child care agencies who are seeking licensure. During the 2023 state fiscal year, TDHS approved 83 establishment grants representing \$3,604,599.27. Qualifying agencies may apply for up to \$1000 in Establishment Grants per slot of licensed capacity. Funds may be used to purchase furniture, supplies, materials, and curriculum needs upon completion of the Pre-Licensure Process. TDHS partners with Childcare Tennessee, an initiative of the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee to administer the application process.

"The Establishment Grant offered by TDHS has been instrumental in the beginning stages of Room to Bloom, a play-based daycare in Piney Flats. We have been given the opportunity to outfit our Group Home with high quality equipment that will enrich the lives of our young learners for years to come,"

said Jessisa Roberts, Director of Room to Bloom, Group Child Care Home in Sullivan County.

Roberts' agency received \$14,999.85 in Establishment Grant funds that supported purchasing of equipment, materials, supplies and curriculum based on the provider's needs and capacity to accommodate 15 children.

"We are now set up with a great foundation of furnishings, educational materials, art supplies, toys and so much more. In addition to materials and equipment, we have been able to streamline our setup by enhancing our kitchen to run more efficiently, enabling us to spend more time where it counts, with our kids!

We were also able to invest in a security system that gives us peace of mind that we are doing all we can to keep our kids safe. There is not an area of our facility that has not been positively impacted by the Establishment Grant. In addition to the items we have been able to purchase, we take pride in knowing that we are helping local families thrive by accepting the Childcare Certificate.

For me, deciding to open a childcare center started with a dream and a realization that I could do what I wanted in life, while also positively impacting my community. From this time of realization, to now owning and operating a licensed Group Home in Tennessee, my original vision has taken many forms and continues to evolve."

In addition to appreciation for the ability to help parents who are pursuing career advancement through work, training or education and participating in the Child Care Certificate Program, Roberts also expressed thanks for Rachael Pogue, her Program Specialist who "guided, encouraged and supported" her throughout the preclosure and grant process.



Any questions I had during my preclosure, and preliminary stages were answered promptly, and I felt like we were on a team working toward the same goal, quality childcare in Tennessee! My Program Specialist had real life experiences and knowledge that she shared with me, giving insight on what to expect in different areas of running my business, along with great ideas that I have been able to implement with my kids. I always felt encouraged and ready for the next step after our visits.



Roberts' story is not only a victory for the families of the 15 children who learn and grow at Room to Bloom, it is a positive for the businesses employing parents in these families and Roberts who is able to realize a dream of business ownership that contributes to her community.



Community Services Block Grant

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is a federally funded grant program created by the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981. The program aims to combat poverty within communities by removing the barriers to self-sufficiency clients may encounter.

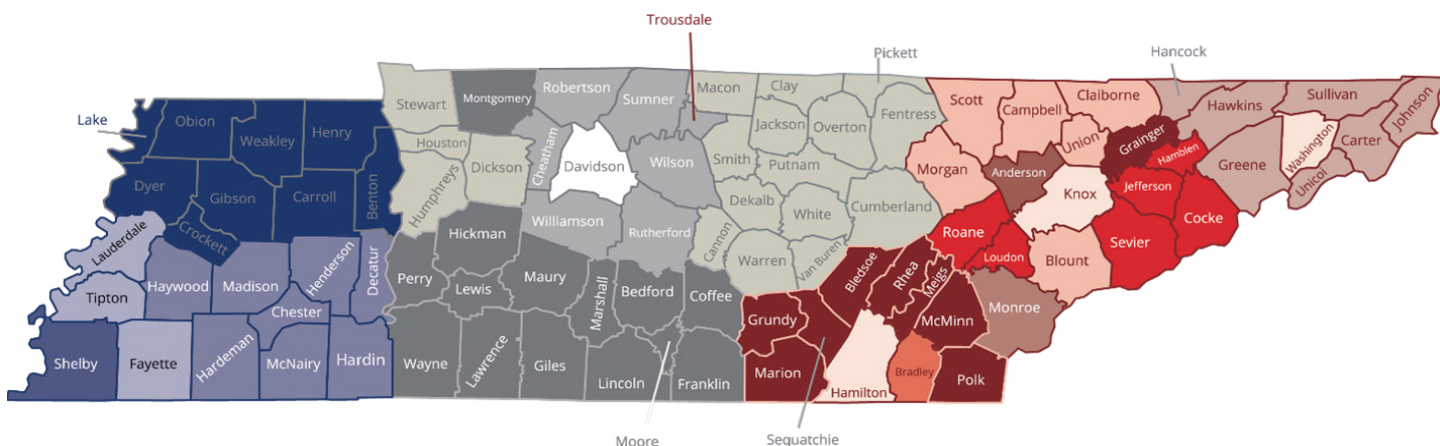
TDHS CSBG Purpose Statement

“Everybody should have equal opportunity to achieve their highest potential in partnership with their families and communities.”

The goal of the program is to provide services to eligible individuals and families with low-incomes to improve the communities in which they live.

A Highly Collaborative Operation

CSBG goals are realized through a network of 20 local agencies that reach Tennessee’s 95 counties. CSBG funded agencies, referred to as community action agencies (CAA), provide a wide array of services to individuals and families with low-income to improve communities. Services include emergency utility assistance, Head Start, services for senior citizens, transportation assistance, employment assistance and more.



West Tennessee

- **Delta Human Resource Agency**
Serving Fayette, Lauderdale and Tipton Counties
- **Northwest Tennessee Economic Development Council**
Serving Benton, Carroll, Crockett, Dyer, Gibson, Henry, Lake, Obion and Weakley Counties; HeadStart/EHS serves four additional counties: Fayette, Lauderdale, Madison and Tipton
- **Shelby County Community Service Agency**
Serving Shelby County
- **Southwest Human Resource Agency**
Serving Chester, Decatur, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, McNairy and Madison Counties

Middle Tennessee

- **Clarksville/ Montgomery County Community Action Agency**
Serving Montgomery County
- **Highland Rim Economic Corporation**
Serving Dickson, Houston, Humphreys, and Stewart Counties
- **Metropolitan Action Commission**
Serving Davidson County
- **Mid-Cumberland Community Action Agency**
Serving Cheatham, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Trousdale, Williamson and Wilson Counties
- **South Central Human Resource Agency**
Serving Bedford, Coffee, Franklin, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Lincoln, Marshall, Maury, Moore, Perry and Wayne Counties
- **Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency**
Serving Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren and White Counties

East Tennessee

- **Anderson County Community Action Committee**
Serving Anderson County
- **Bradley-Cleveland Community Services Agency**
Serving Blount County Community Action Agency
- **Chattanooga Human Services Department**
Serving Bradley County
- **Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority**
Serving Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Monroe and Sevier Counties
- **Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee**
Serving Knox County
- **Mid-East Community Action Agency**
Serving Roane and Loudon Counties
- **Mountain Valley Economic Opportunity Authority**
Serving Campbell, Claiborne, Morgan, Scott and Union Counties
- **Southeast Tennessee Human Resource Agency**
Serving Bledsoe, Grundy, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Polk, Rhea and Sequatchie Counties
- **Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency**
Serving Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington Counties

As part of the Job Seekers Work Group, the CSBG program collaborates with the state's Departments of Labor & Workforce Development, Corrections and other organizations to provide recommendations for a comprehensive integrated workforce support system that responds to the needs of Tennessee job seekers. The program also collaborates with the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) on monthly Tennessee Homeless Support Services calls. Various departments with the State of Tennessee and Continuum of Care entities provided regional updates and held discussions regarding homeless initiatives, events, and resources. The CSBG program also collaborates with the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) on monthly Tennessee Homeless Support Services calls. Other state departments and Continuum of Care entities provide regional updates and discussions regarding homeless initiatives, events, and resources.

CSBG by the Numbers

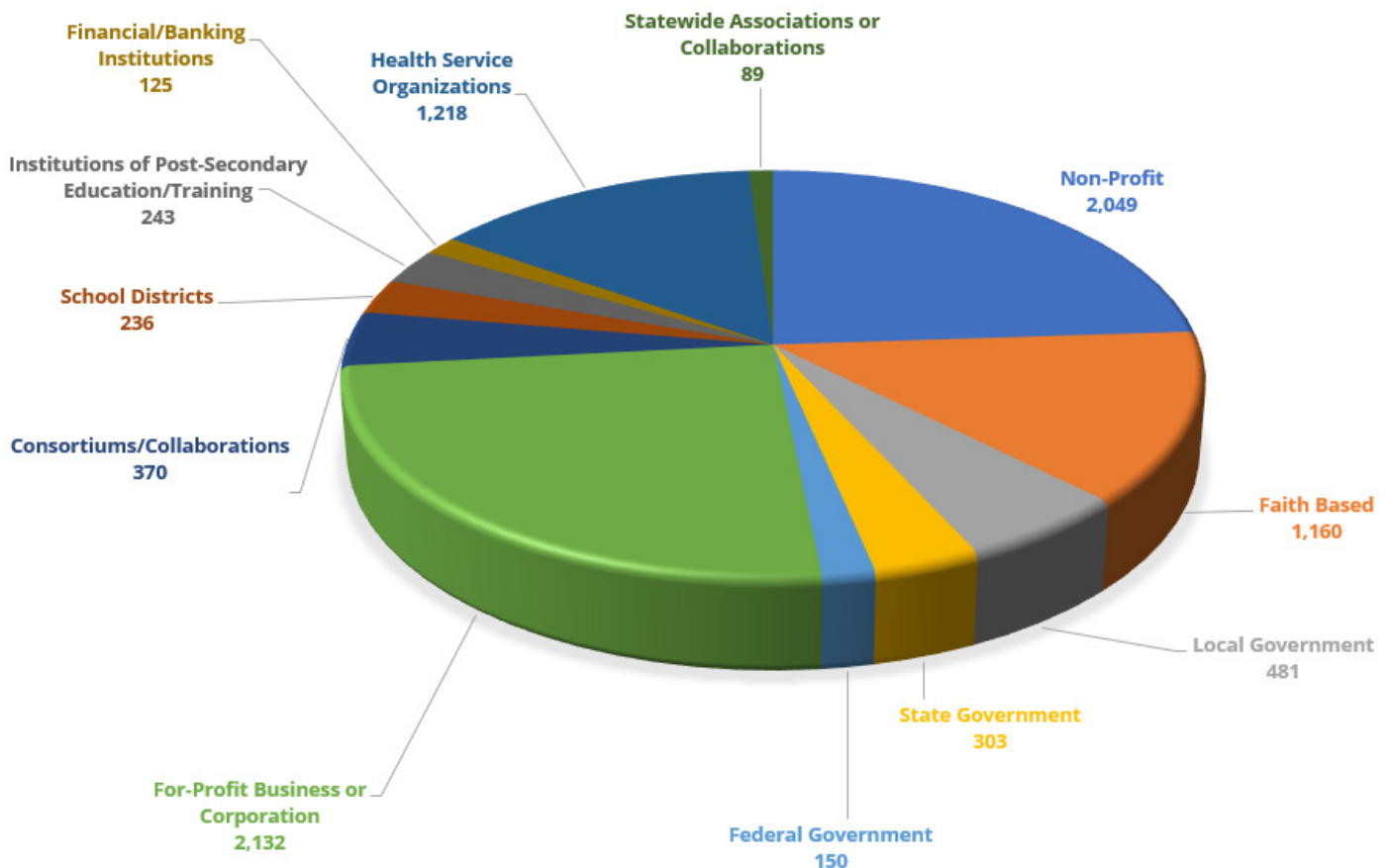
- \$23,968,598.70 Invested in Tennessee communities through CSBG funds
- 293,768 Individuals representing 150,798 Tennessee households served by CSBG funds
- 8,654 Public and private organizations supported through 20 community action agencies/ eligible entities

Note: funding operates on a Federal Fiscal Year and information provided below is for the period 10/01/2021 to 09/30/2022, as provided in the FY2022 CSBG Annual Report.

- 835,465 Volunteer hours donated to CSBG partner agencies with 550,755 hours donated by individuals who had low incomes or qualified for CSBG funded services

A Diverse Spectrum of 8,556 Strategic Partners Funded Through CSBG Program Funds

Through our 20 Community Action Agencies (CAAs --also referred to as eligible entities), the TDHS CSBG team worked with a broad spectrum of 8,556 public and private organizations to help improve Tennessee communities.

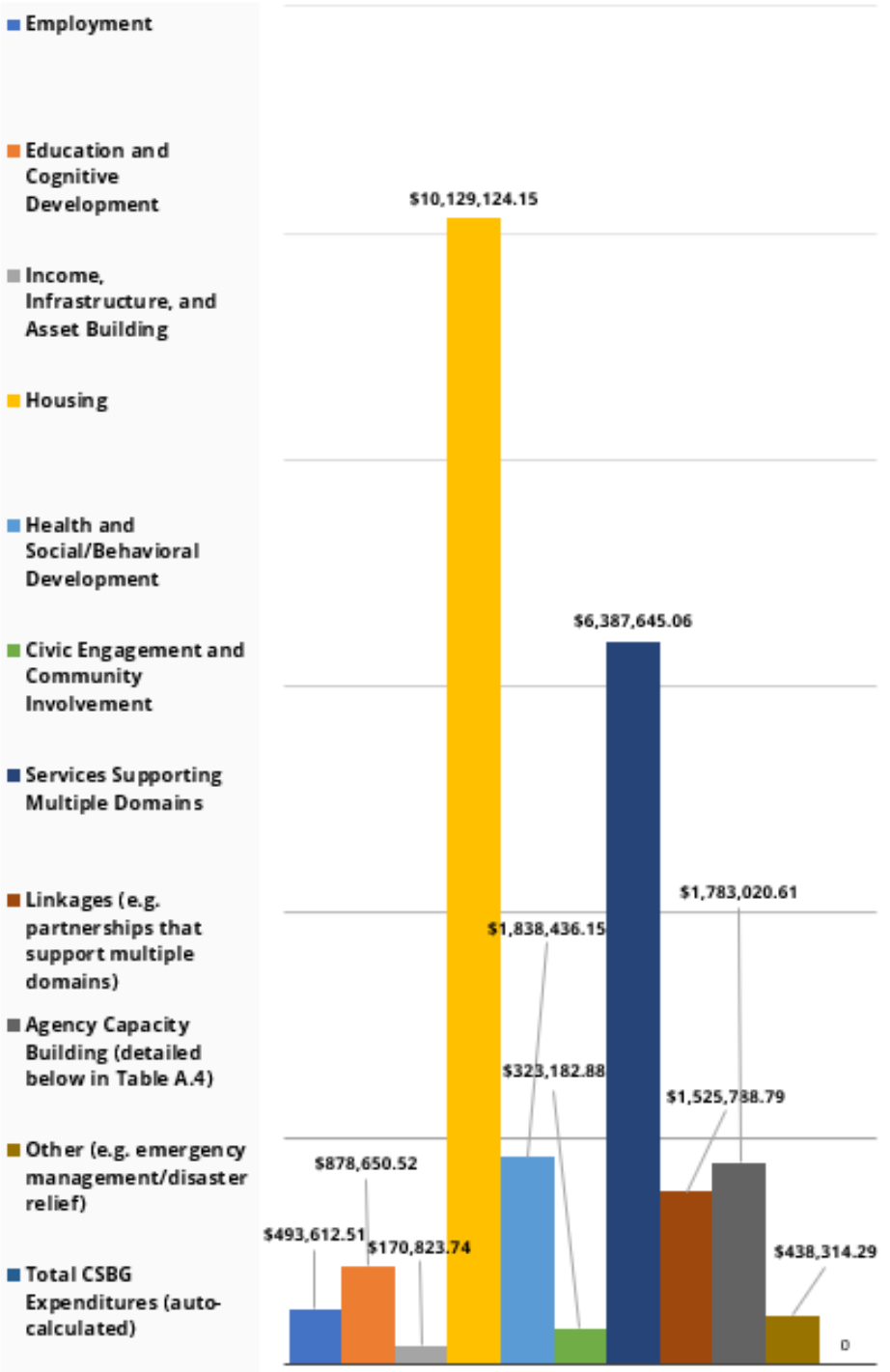


Investing \$23,968,598.70 in Tennessee Communities

Poverty is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted strategy and focused collaborators to address current and generational socio-economic challenges affecting Tennesseans and our state's economy. TDHS partners with other federal, state, and local resources to fill the gaps and develop innovative and promising practices to meet the needs of low-income individuals. Services and strategies are provided to individuals and families with low-incomes to address the causes and conditions of poverty and improve the communities in which they live. Services and strategies support education, employment, housing, health, nutrition, income management, and incorporate case management, self-sufficiency, and re-entry programs.

This year, CSBG funded agencies focused investments into 10 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.

CSBG Investment Focus Areas



Note: The CSBG operates on a Federal Fiscal Year. Numbers provided in all categories are for the period 10/01/2021 to 09/30/2022, as provided in the CSBG Annual Report.

**Total CSBG Expenditures include all funding streams for the budget period. This funding streams include CSBG Regular, Carryover, and CARES expenditures.*

Keeping the Communication Lines Open

Moving Forward on Common Ground | In August 2022, the CSBG Unit served as the title sponsor for the Tennessee Association of Human Resource Agencies (TAHRA) conference. During the conference the unit participated in a roundtable discussion with frontline workers, agency leadership, and other CSBG partners to discuss current issues.

CSBG Calendar Keeps Agencies on Track | In December 2022, CSBG Staff provided a collective CSBG Agency Calendar that included due dates for future planning and program activities. This information offered agencies more transparency to address program expectations and needs.

Amplifying Agency Voices | This year, the CSBG Unit continued production on its quarterly CSBG e-Newsletter titled "Community Impact in Action." The newsletter is designed to amplify Community Services Block Grant agency voices, increase communication, and connect partners through peer sharing opportunities. The CSBG Unit also conducted agency visits in May and June 2023 to observe the daily routine of an agency and discuss concerns or answer questions one-on-one.

Keeping the Communication Lines Open | In March and April 2023, CSBG Program Coordinators conducted fund utilization calls with all agencies to discuss spending down of all CSBG funds and to provide technical assistance.

Celebrating Community Action Professionals | In honor of Community Action Month in May 2023, TDHS and the Tennessee Association for Community Action (TACA) hosted an in-person event celebrating Community Action Month. Over 100 attendees convened to celebrate the hard work and dedication of our frontline Community Action workers. The event included a presentation of the April 25, 2023, proclamation issued by Governor Bill Lee.

Task Force Connection | Participating in agency-led CSBG Task Force meetings is another strategic tactic to grow relationships with the partners who help communities. Meetings provide an opportunity for CSBG leadership and agencies to explore current policies, procedures, and possibilities for upcoming training and technical assistance.

Serving Tennesseans Better

Training for the Future | In August 2022, with the support of Division of People Operations, the CSBG Unit developed its annual Training and Technical Assistance plan for 2023 that focused on the implementation of the Multi-Year Community Action Plan. This included a Town Hall, micro-training sessions and the development of seven training modules.

Presenting Before the Tennessee General Assembly | On August 24, 2022, CSBG leadership made a presentation before the Fiscal Review Committee of the General Assembly. Per the CSBG Act, to be eligible to receive a grant or allotment under section 675A or 675B, the State must hold at least one legislative hearing every three years in conjunction with the development of the state's plan.

Transition to Success Educates on the Connection Between Poverty and Health | In

2022, CSBG and the Division of People Operations facilitated a virtual training pilot for Transition to Success (TTS). TTS integrates standards of care, uniform protocols, and analytics to treat the condition of poverty—a condition brought on by negative exposures to the social determinants of health.

Leveraging Technology | This year, the CSBG Unit worked with the Strategic Technology Solutions team to further improve invoicing tracking and spending reporting practices for agency partners. The unit also developed a technical assistance support system that empowers partner agencies to expand capabilities and assist more Tennesseans.

Nutrition Programs

In addition to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TDHS fights food insecurity through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Food Service Program. Each works with Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) organizations to share information about the programs and many CSBG institutions participate in CACFP and/or SFSP.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides reimbursements to organizations (sponsors) that serve nutritious meals to participants who meet age and income requirements. Eligible participants include children enrolled in child care institutions who are 12 and younger; children of migrant workers who are 15 and younger; persons of any age with one or more disabilities who are enrolled in an institution or child care facility serving a majority of persons who are 18 and younger; and adults who are enrolled in adult care institutions that serve functionally impaired adults or persons who are 60 or older. Eligible institutions include child and adult care centers, child care homes, emergency shelters and afterschool care programs for at-risk children. CACFP works with childcare licensing teams to ensure mandatory licensure requirements are met where applicable. CACFP also provides information about the program to new child and adult care license applicants.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides reimbursements for nutritious meals served to participants in needy areas during periods when their schools are closed for vacation. The program primarily serves children 18 or younger in areas where poor economic conditions exist and in residential camps where children are determined individually to be eligible. Persons older than 18 with mental or physical disabilities who participate in school programs for the disabled are also eligible to participate. Sponsorship of the SFSP is limited to public or private, nonprofit school food authorities; state, local, municipal, or county governments; residential public or private, nonprofit summer camps; public or private, nonprofit colleges or universities administering Upward Bound Programs; and private, nonprofit organizations. Eligible feeding sites include public parks, recreation centers, schools, churches, playgrounds, residential camps, and public housing complexes. SFSP works closely with the Tennessee Department of Education and their Seamless Summer Option (SSO), a program similar to SFSP.

COVID-19 Changes for CACFP and SFSP

Both programs were modified in March 2020 by federal waivers issued by USDA in response to COVID-19. The CACFP and SFSP programs were part of the emergency network providing meals to families impacted by COVID-19. Most waivers remained in place for SFSP through August 2022 and for CACFP through June 2022. Remaining waivers expired with the end of the Public Health Emergency with additional CACFP flexibilities available on a case-by-case basis through June 2023.

Tennesseans Fed in 2022/23

- The Child and Adult Care Food Program provided approximately 34,000,000 meals in the 2022 state fiscal year and approximately 26,000,000 meals during the 2023 state fiscal year. **Note: The number of meals represents those submitted for reimbursement as of July 1, 2023 and does not include the months of April, May or June 2023. The actual number served is subject to change. We anticipate CACFP 2023 numbers being similar to CACFP 2022. As a federal program, CACFP operates on a federal fiscal year schedule.*
- The Summer Food Service Program provided approximately 2,000,000 meals during the state fiscal year.

Using technology to Feed More Tennesseans

App Optimization Improves Meal Counting Accuracy | In 2021, the SFSP applied for and received a Technology and Innovation Grant (TIG) to introduce an app to help participating sponsors better manage program operations and track meal counts. Following the app's launch, this year, the SFSP Unit focused on onboarding new users and increasing app usage among partners.

New Case Management Model and Portal Improve Customer Experience | This year, nutrition program teams improved the customer experience by transitioning to a case management model supported by an online portal. The new portal allows sponsors to utilize an application and claim portal that is easily accessed by staff who provide ongoing customer service.

AVA Provides More Answers | During the 2022/23 fiscal year, AVA, the TDHS chat feature, updated to include answers to common CACFP and SFSP questions for customers visiting nutrition program webpages.

Improving Training Accessibility | All CACFP and SFSP trainings are now available in an online platform that includes both live web-based trainings and on-demand training modules. Training opportunities are posted to the TDHS websites and are now accessible to customers as needed.

Family Assistance and Child Support

The Family Assistance and Child Support Division offers programs and services that support families working to strengthen their households. The division includes Families First, Tennessee's Temporary for Needy Families (TANF) program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, and Child Support Programs. Beyond these programs, TDHS has a number of two-Generation (2Gen) contract partners that work to break cycles of poverty by focusing support services on both the parent (or guardian) and child.



Family Assistance & Child Support Division Leadership

Charles Bryson

Assistant Commissioner

Lisa Francis

Director of Operations, Field Services

Keisha Thaxton

Director of Operations, Policy & Contracts

Sherron Brown

Director of Operations, ACCENT/TCSES Solutions

Patricia Wood

Director of Operations, Field Services and Contracts

Robert Duck

Director of Operations

Child Support

With offices in each of the state's 32 judicial districts and services provided through local district attorneys, TDHS employees and private vendors, Tennessee's Child Support Program has a board spectrum of family-centered supports. Services include assisting families locating parents; establishing paternity; establishing and enforcing financial and medical support orders; and collecting and disbursing child support payments. The program also connects customers with parenting resources, prisoner reentry, employment assistance, father involvement, and access and visitation services. Tennesseans participating in the Families First (TANF) program are automatically referred and served by the program and staff refer customers to SNAP, the Child Care Payment Assistance program and other resources that help families achieve economic independence. The Child Support Program's license revocation program collaborates with the Tennessee Department of Safety and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to enforce support orders to provide enforcement services for customers, and the program exchanges information with the Tennessee Department of Correction to assist justice involved customers with case reviews and modifications. An automated interface with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development helps families deduct child support collections from non-custodial parents who are receiving unemployment benefits. However, the program is always focused on providing children with the resources needed to grow and be well.

Tennesseans Served by the Child Support Program

- \$596,285,604 in Child Support payments distributed to families in Tennessee through the Child Support Program during the 2022 federal fiscal year, reaching 290,953 children.
- 60.2% of Child Support collected through income withholding from employee's paychecks
- 94% of Child Support collected went to families --5% of Child Support reimbursed public assistance dollars (does not total 100% due to rounding).

Serving Tennessee Families Better

Virtual Connections are Good Connections | Using lessons learned during the pandemic, Child Support staff piloted their first virtual customer service forum during the fall of 2022 using WebEx. Staff prepared presentations on services provided by the Child Support Program and were available in private virtual rooms to discuss individual cases with customers as needed. Following a successful pilot, additional forums were held in the spring of 2023. The forums have proven to be a cost-effective event for connecting directly with Child Support customers.

Helping in Customers in Cases of Domestic Violence | As part of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, in October 2022, Child Support staff helped develop a training for frontline caseworkers called "Pursuing Child Support Safely." This session concentrated on the intersection of domestic violence and child support with the goal of safely collecting child support for all customers. Caseworkers learned how to serve customers impacted by domestic violence trauma while connecting them to needed resources.

Maintaining a 90 Percent Paternity Establishment Rate | The Covid-19 pandemic impacted some federal reporting measures, and multiple states fell below the 90 percent Paternity Establishment Percentage required by the Federal Office of Child Support Services. Tennessee was able to maintain its percentage by emphasizing paternity establishment by taking a strategic approach. Tactics included working with birthing hospitals, local health departments and local child support offices to promote awareness of the process and benefits of paternity establishment, conducting statewide virtual events and in person community outreach, and partnering with a vendor to study current state laws and policy and recommend best practices and possible improvements to our Voluntary Acknowledgment of Paternity (VAoP) program.

Helping Justice Involved Individuals Support Their Children | Introduced in 2021, the Re-Entry Team consists of program managers and coordinators who partner with the Tennessee Department of Correction and Child Support offices to assist parents while they are incarcerated, during the pre-release period, and after release. During the 2022/23 fiscal

One of the Most Cost- Effective Government Programs

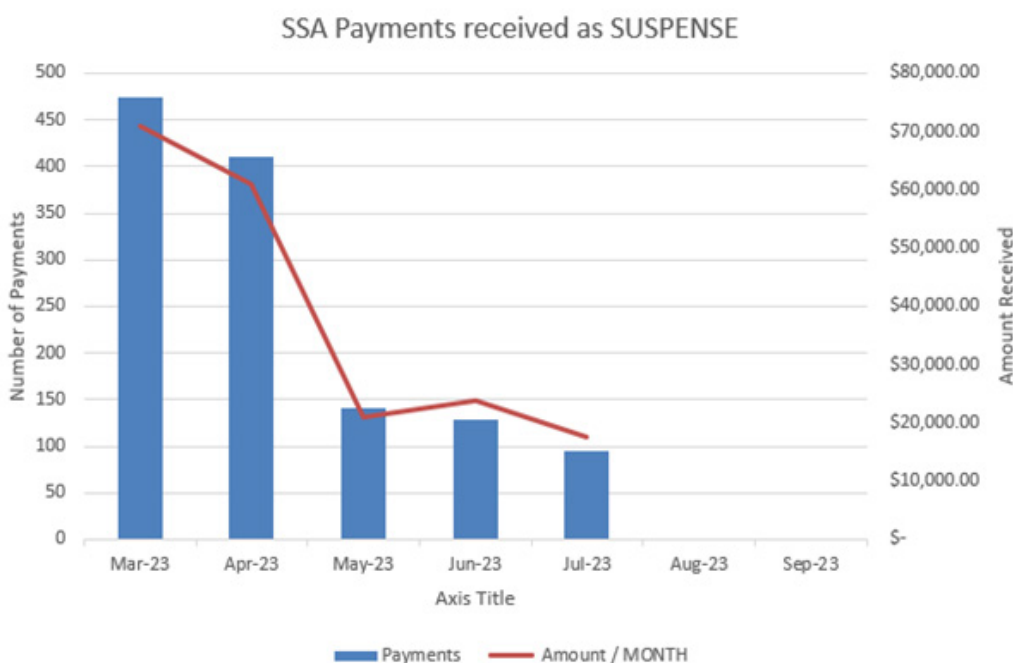
For every \$1.00 spent on Child Support administrative costs, the program collects and distributes \$7.92 that benefits children. This metric combines 34% state and 66% federal funds for each dollar spent.

year, the Re-Entry Team became fully staffed and expanded its services to include assistance with vital records, housing, employment, transportation, visitation, clothing/uniforms and more. Since its beginning in 2021, the team modified 1,026 child support orders and served 853 incarcerated parents.

Working Toward a Better Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System | This year, TDHS staff collaborated with a vendor and STS staff to implement end user enhancements to the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES). The system previously underwent a major update 2021, after being in service since 1995. The long-term goal is to convert all the current TCSES screens into modern, intuitive, user friendly interfaces and workflows. As of the end of SFY 2023, the modernization team implemented three distinct enhancements of TCSES. The Bluebird, Beale Street and Caverns updates to TCSES captured information from multiple legacy screens and streamlined workflows to assist caseworkers with customer service questions, order entry, demographic updates and member match resolution. The project continues to move forward with design work for the Dollywood update, which should be released in the first quarter of 2024.

Electronic Income Withholding Order Improves Service and Efficiency |

While working a project to process refunds to customers on closed cases (suspense payments), Child Support staff noticed a majority of these payments were being received each month from the Social Security Administration (SSA). Further analysis suggested a need to enhance our electronic income withholding process (e-IWO) by adding a manual termination process to this automated feature. In April 2023, staff updated the Tennessee Child Support Enforcement System (TCSES), the system used to track and manage Child Support payments. Updates permitted central office staff to manually add cases to the e-IWO termination file. The deceased suspense payments received from the SSA reduced calls and manual refunds to our local offices and the Child Support Fiscal Unit. After implementation, the number of suspense payments from the SSA fell from 411 in March to 141 in May, a 66 percent reduction. This new feature saves time for our fiscal staff and avoids an inconvenience for our customers who receive benefits from the SSA.



A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out



The Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (TCSEPP) is a TDHS funded initiative managed by the University of Tennessee Social Work Office of Research and Public Service. With employment and related support services, the program concentrates on helping non-custodial parents in East Tennessee counties “find ways to meet their financial obligations” and “establish healthy and strong relationships with their children.” Often economic instability is a multifaceted problem with interlocking causes and effects. For example, when Drenda Tuttle, a non-custodial parent, found the TCSEPP she was struggling to pay child support due to a cycle of economic instability: unemployment meant limited resources and limited resources meant Tuttle struggled to buy food and fund reliable transportation to get to work to earn more resources. Tuttle learned about TCSEPP in a recovery class and shared her story:

“I was attending Drug Court class and we had a presenter, Sonia Law, from the Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program (TCSEPP). The details that Ms. Law explained sounded phenomenal and that a program existed to assist non-custodial parents who had current child support cases and needed assistance was just the help I needed! Since I was already attending drug court, I already had a job working at Cornerstone of Recovery in housekeeping and living in a halfway house. I needed assistance with my rent due to being a couple of months behind and gas to get back and forth to work. Dana Paramore enrolled me in the program in October 2022 and was wonderful working with! She listened to my needs and concerns, helping me along the way with my barriers of rental assistance, help with a car payment and of course gas cards for work. I had a set back after a couple of months into the program and lost my job. I immediately had a lead on another job that I am still currently at and worked my way up to assistant manager. I also became house manager of the halfway house I am living at which has been great to assist others in their recovery journey. Dana was always motivating me and a great sounding board for any issues that I ran into. I successfully graduated from the TCSEPP program in March 2023 as I was consistently paying on my child support. I am grateful that I was part of this program and will be a great source of referrals for the TCSEPP program for future enrollees. I am eager to get my child support paid off and continue in my recovery program.”

Tuttle is just one of many Tennesseans who “just needed a hand up,” to move beyond their current circumstances. In her case, gas cards and rent assistance were the tools she needed to find stability. As a result, she could, provide more stability for her children. TCSEPP not only provided financial stability for Tuttle, more importantly, it provided hope. Tuttle was asked to share her story to encourage others.

“I am honored to have graduated the program and be a part of the story” Tuttle said before sharing her hope to “become Assistant Manager at my job” as an immediate goal.



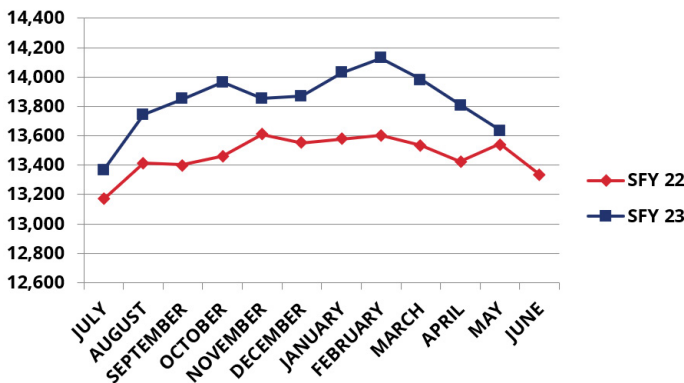
Families First

Families First, the state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, is a workforce development and employment program that provides temporary cash assistance, transportation, child care assistance, education, job training, employment activities, and other support and transitional services to help participants reach long-term self-sufficiency through employment. To be eligible for the program, participants must meet eligibility requirements and agree to follow a Personal Responsibility Plan (PRP). The Personal Responsibility Plan is a binding document that outlines actions participants must take to support their family and move toward self-sufficiency including but not limited to maintaining child health checks; school attendance and progress; working with Child Support Services to collect child support; and participating in work and/or training for thirty (30) hours per week while receiving program benefits.

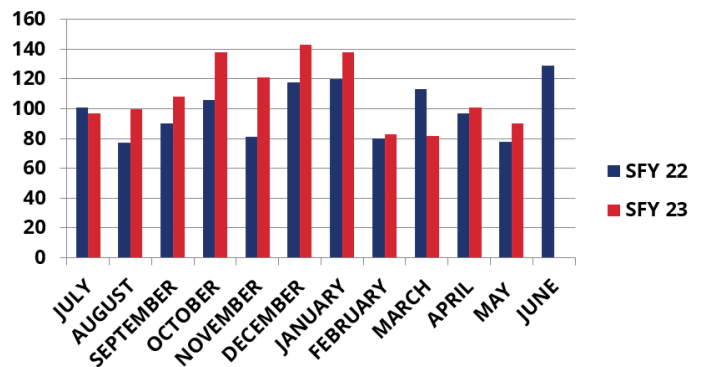
Tennesseans Served Through Families First 2022/23

- The Families First caseload for May 2023 was approximately 13,638 representing a less than one percent increase since May 2022
- Between July 2022 and May 2023, an average of 109 cases were closed monthly due to customers achieving employment

Families First 2022/23 Caseload



Cases Closed Due to Employment Achievement



Families First is a temporary bridge that helps participants reach self-sufficiency through employment. Once a participant achieves this goal, their case is closed.

Restarting the Journey

Note: Names changed to protect customer privacy.

Sometimes our journey can become derailed when events from our past impact our present. In the case of Sally Baker, a single mother living in East Tennessee, despite completing her bachelor's degree and perusing graduate studies, childhood trauma and domestic violence impacted her mental health and path forward. In January of 2018, Baker began receiving counseling services through Family Focused Solutions (FFS), a voluntary support service available to Families First participants. Families First requires participants to set career and/or training goals that will lead to economic freedom. Baker committed to perusing a master's degree through the University of Tennessee's social work program and found a job. After achieving employment and financial stability, the purpose of the Families First program, Baker exceeded the income requirements for Families First and transitioned from the program and closed her case. However, with her daughter experiencing developmental delays and sensory processing challenges, Baker found herself struggling to cope with the demands of school, work, trauma from earlier years and single parent life. Eventually, Baker took family medical leave and a pause from school to give birth to her second child.

In 2022, Baker returned to the Families First program and her academic pursuits, but again found herself struggling with acute mental health symptoms that were further exacerbated by a severed relationship, issues of domestic violence and a custody battle. Tracking Baker's progress and challenges, FFS helped Baker develop coping strategies, connected her to additional community resources to assist with financial stressors and encouraged her to apply for Student Disability Services to ensure her academic record would not be compromised by her challenges. In June, Baker completed her Masters in social work and found employment with a mental health hospital that moved her beyond the need for Families First. However, she lacked the resources to purchase new tires needed to transport her to work. Before closing her case Families First program, Baker's TDHS case worker ensured that Baker had the new tires needed to reach a stable job to provide for Baker and her daughters. Although her Families First case closed once she achieved the prescribed level of earnings, Baker continues to utilize the FFS community provider supports for her daughter's needs and reports she is doing well with her new job and is feeling hopeful for her children.

Helping Tennesseans Find Long Term Stability

Ensuring Better Outcomes with Strategic Transitions | Abruptly removing supports for Families First participants due to an income increase is inconsistent with the program's aim to help families reach long-term stability. In 2018, the program began a work incentive program that provides short-term support for families who are transitioning out of the Families First program after successfully achieving employment that makes them ineligible for Families First. To date, 773 families have been approved for work incentive payments for a total of \$774,891 transitional benefits issued.

\$12,994,779 in COVID-19 Relief Funds Distributed | Tennessee was awarded \$12,994,779 from the Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund (PEAF) to provide non-recurrent, short-term benefits to needy families impacted by COVID-19. Through this funding, all active Families First child only assistance units received an additional one-time payment of \$950 in December 2021, and in July 2022, all active Families First assistance units received an additional one-time payment of \$450.

Helping Families in Need Adjust to Inflation | On December 1, 2022, 13,140 Families First households received an additional one-time payment of \$500 to provide additional financial support for families impacted by rising costs due to inflation. A second one-time payment was disbursed on July 15, 2023, to assist families preparing for the 2023-2024 school year.

1,049 Tennesseans Served through TOA Pilot Grant Recipients | The TANF Opportunity Act of 2021 established six three-year Tennessee Opportunity Pilots and one TDHS-administered pilot to demonstrate the efficacy of well-implemented, two-generation approaches to improving education, health, and economic outcomes. Seven agencies across the three Grand Regions of Tennessee were chosen to serve as the Pilot Grants. The Pilot Grants started November 1, 2022, and have served 1,049 individuals.

First Hand Customer Service | In the past, contracted Families First partners provided oversight of customers required to do a 30 hour a week work activity. In December 2022, TDHS began the process of bringing this service in-house and created a new position, TANF Case Manager, to work more directly with customers required to participate in a work activity. Steps have been taken to ensure a successful implantation of the change effective July 1, 2023.



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) supplements monthly household food budgets for eligible families and individuals with low incomes. TDHS staff determine the eligibility of SNAP applicants based on guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). TDHS has a dual focus on alleviating hunger and establishing or re-establishing self-sufficiency. The primary goals of the program are to alleviate hunger and malnutrition and to improve nutrition and health in eligible households.

The SNAP unit includes the following focus areas: SNAP Policy, SNAP Nutrition Education, SNAP Outreach, Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP), Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF/Families First) and SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T), and SNAP Education and Training (SNAP E&T). The SNAP E&T program helps eligible SNAP recipients over the age of 16 move toward financial independence by providing tuition, training, textbooks, uniforms, tools, transportation assistance, child care, job search, and other employment support services.

With these programs, the SNAP/EBT Unit works in collaboration internally with other TDHS divisions and externally with other State agencies and community organizations statewide to provide services for families in need. The program's work empowers participants to direct more of their available income toward essential living expenses and ensures they maintain health levels needed to work toward higher levels of economic stability.

Notable Statistics on Food Assistance 2022/23

- 794,734 Individuals representing 404,180 households served on average each month
- \$1,802,036,736 In SNAP benefits issued in state fiscal year 22-23
- \$372 Average monthly SNAP benefit per household
- \$116,817,465.32 in Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer funds delivered to 644,303 school age children and 118,373 households with pre-school age children.

Pandemic EBT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government authorized the administration of the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program in 2020 to provide nutritional benefits to children that missed meals due to pandemic-related school closures and student absences. P-EBT has been administered collaboratively by TDHS and the Tennessee Department of Education since its inception with the SNAP/EBT Unit administering the program.

The program continued during the 2022/2023 fiscal year, providing valuable food resources to Tennessee families. For the 2022-2023 school year, the federal government expanded P-EBT eligibility to include home school and virtual school students. However, P-EBT benefit eligibility ended for all children on May 11, 2023 with the end of the federal COVID-19 public health emergency.

\$116,817,465.32 in P-EBT Distributed in 2022/23

Benefit	Amount	Households/Students
Child Care P-EBT for Children five years of age or younger	\$34,791,667.28	118,373 Households
School-Age P-EBT for In-Person Students	\$79,982,474.94	642,790 Students
School-Age P-EBT Home School/Virtual School Students	\$2,043,323.10	1,513 Students

**Data of 6/30/2023*



Rehabilitation Services

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) supports Tennesseans with disabilities as they strive to achieve their employment and independent living goals. With a commitment to strengthening communities, the division utilizes a cross section of vocational partnerships, transitional accessibility, self-advocacy promotion, and individualized services. Each action is meant to ensure that no Tennessean is defined by their disability, but able to leverage their strengths, resources, abilities, and capabilities in contributing to our state's community and economy. The Division's program areas includes Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Services, Disability Determination Services, Tennessee Technology Access Program, Tennessee Business Enterprises and services specific to blind, visually impaired, deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing customers. Tennesseans access services in many spaces including the division's Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers and community based locations.

Rehabilitation Services Leadership

Kevin Wright
Assistant Commissioner

Julie Johnson
Director of Operations

James Stanfield
Disability Determination Services Director

Amy Radar
Strategic Business Solutions Director

Tiffany Ramsey
Vocational Rehabilitation Director

Selina Kirkland
Community Services Unit Director

How Rehabilitation Services Helped Tennesseans Reach for Independence in 2022/23

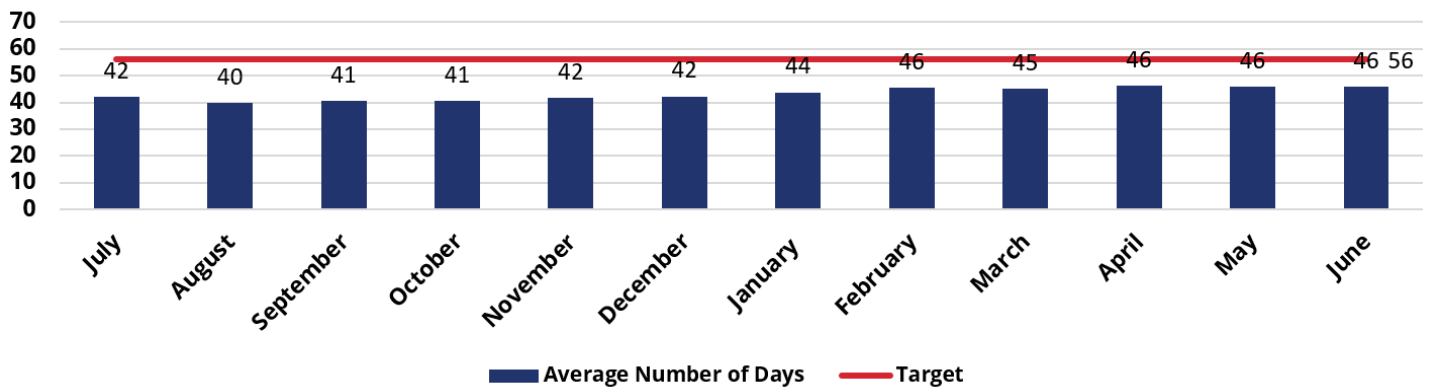
- 5,209 Vocational Rehabilitation program applications received
- 1,209 Vocational Rehabilitation customers achieved their employment goals and worked an average of 29 hours per week earning an average of \$14.41 per hour
- An average of 9,294 pre-employment transition services provided to an average of 5,760 students each month
- 110 Tennessee Business Enterprise locations operated by Rehabilitation Services customers
- 605 Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP) Technology demonstrations to 930 individuals
- 225 TTAP devices were loaned out and 1853 devices were reutilized, saving creating a \$739,328 in costs
- Information and assistance was provided to 1476 people and training was provided to 877 individuals
- 85,675 Social Security Administration Disability claims processed, approximately a 17 percent increase over SFY 2022
- 100 percent of the federal Continuing Disability Review workload processed

Vocational Rehabilitation

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, focuses on connecting Tennesseans with disabilities, their advocates and potential employers with resources that pave pathways to employment and elevated levels of independence.

Supporting Customers with Timely Decisions Making | A key metric in enhancing the customer experience is the speed with which customers are engaged in their individual plan for employment (IPE). Over the last year, VR set a goal to complete the individual plan for employment in 56 days – that is 34 days faster than the federal regulations require. This ensures that VR customers are engaged more rapidly in the pursuit of their employment goals. In its focus on serving the customer, over the last year VR not only met, but exceeded this goal ending the year with a cumulative average of 46 days from eligibility to signed individual plan for employment.

Average # Days from Eligibility Determination to Signed Individual Plan for Employment



Preparing a Portal to Improve Accuracy and Timeliness | This year, DRS laid the groundwork to launch the Aware Vendor Portal for Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs). With a 2023 release date, the Portal will improve accuracy and timeliness of entered information while also improving communications between the Department and vendor partners by providing secure remote access to specific Aware features for via a browser-based interface. Vendors will be able to sign into the Aware portal through access granted by Vocational Rehabilitation and utilize the portal to review authorization, manage payments, upload records, track case notes, communicate with stake holders and conduct referrals.

Tracking Successful Employment Outcomes | Throughout the year, DRS received 5,109 new VR applications. In 2022/23, the division focused on reducing the number of customers with individualized plans for employment who were exiting the program without achieving their career goal. VR successfully reduced the number of customers exiting without competitive integrated employment outcomes by three percent. In addition to tracking the number of individuals who achieve and maintain employment for 90 days, VR also tracks the average number of hours worked per week and the average hourly wage. Over the last year, 1,209 VR customers achieved their employment goals, and worked an average of 29 hours per week earning an average of \$14.41 per hour.

Expansion of Individual Placement and Support Assisting Tennesseans with Behavioral Health Disorders and Addictions Find Work and Independence |

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Supporting Employment Expansion took place in 2022 with the with aid from the Tennessee General Assembly and in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS). By leveraging state funds and VR's federal match dollars, Tennessee expanded IPS by 46 positions, allowing for 770 additional people to be supported with an employment goal. Tennessee authorized \$900,000 in recurring state dollars for the expansion of IPS and the VR program will use these state funds to draw down an additional \$3.2 million in federal match dollars for the expansion. This program is provided in 49 counties across Tennessee, 32 of which are in rural areas of the state. Through this program, people have obtained a variety of jobs from nursing, lifeguarding, to warehouse workers. IPS is offered in all TDMHSAS and VR regions.

Exploring New Ways to Improve Individual Placement and Support Services for Justice Involved Individuals | Case Management, Inc. (CMI) Healthcare Services is a Memphis-based Individual Placement and Support (IPS) provider and Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (TDMHSAS) and VR supported employment partner. In 2022, CMI became one of five programs across the nation chosen to participate in a national study exploring how to help adults with justice involvement find employment. The study is part of a federally sponsored project called the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project. This study is examining if the Individual Placement and Support model helps adults with justice involvement to find jobs and reduce their reliance on government benefits. The study aims to help participating adults achieve higher levels of success in their community and contribute to improvements in services for adults with justice involvement nationwide.

Meeting the Needs of ALL Eligible Customers | Due to funding limitations, in recent years, the Vocational Rehabilitation program operated under an order of selection that prioritized service delivery based on a customer's disability and the services and timelines needed to achieve their career goals. In 2022/23, with a new process that analyzes customer data, staffing capacity, and funding availability as guides, the Vocational Rehabilitation program strategically identified customers in closed priority categories for the purpose of providing services. The new process allows for timely and continuous review of any customers placed in a closed priority category to be released to receive services. As of the end of June 2023, all closed priority categories were resolved. VR is extremely excited about this process as it will allow many more Tennesseans to begin receiving services that will assist them in achieving their career goals.

Seeing Himself There



When Caleb Jones's Vocational Rehabilitation team asked where he saw himself in a year, he responded "Nowhere, I don't have a bright future and I usually don't leave my room." As the VR team began to work with Jones, they focused on increasing his confidence, improving his self-esteem, and understanding his motivations as he worked on technical skills appropriate to his employment goals. With these newly acquired skills, Jones gained poise and transformed his outlook on his future.

Jones found employment working with customers as a front-end associate at a local retail store and gained attention for his work ethic and determination. Consequently, he was invited to be a guest speaker at the 2023 Disability MegaConference in May. When first approached, he was not sure if his story would interest anyone. Once he arrived at the conference, he successfully networked with vendors and attendees. Through these interactions he quickly realized the impact of his story and the importance of sharing his story. His portion of the program had a full house and Jones relayed his journey enthusiastically.

Vocational Rehabilitation played a part in Jones achieving his employment goals, and more importantly, helped him see who he'd been all along: an inspiration for others. The VR team is thrilled to be part of his journey.

From Vocational Rehabilitation and Back Again



Greyson Jennings knew he wanted to attend a university but was unsure if it would be possible due to his personal and financial assistance needs. With Vocational Rehabilitation's support, Jennings enrolled at East Tennessee State University and began a path that would change his life and eventually place him into a position to help other Tennesseans who identified with his story.

During his college career, Jennings studied political science and psychology and took advantage of the opportunity to join several organizations on campus including Student Government (serving as the Chief Justice his senior year), the Sigma Chi Fraternity, and re-colonized an honor society solely dedicated to recognizing students with disabilities, Delta Alpha Pi. Jennings also found All Wheels Up, a group dedicated to appropriate seating for those in wheelchairs on commercial airlines. While in the organization, helped to collect more than 63,000 petition signatures to change Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standards surrounding designated wheelchair accessible spaces for commercial aircraft. This change would allow airline passengers to remain safely seated in their personal wheelchairs during flight. He also successfully lobbied Congress to pass an amendment requiring a study on the feasibility of in-cabin wheelchair restraints. The measure passed into law and signed in 2018. During this time, Jennings served on the State Rehabilitation Council as well as the State Independent Living Council, two groups that partner with VR, and gained a better perspective and appreciation for the work of VR in his life and in the lives of others. He graduated with two undergraduate degrees: Political Science and Psychology, and went on to earn a master's degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis.

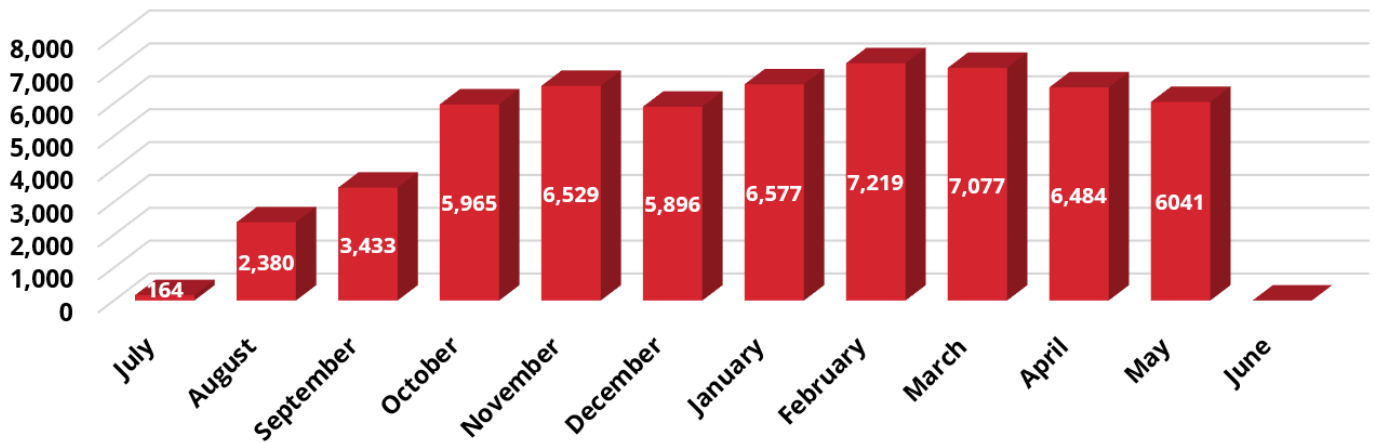
Soon after graduating, Jennings grappled with the global pandemic and the uncertainty and fear abundant during that time. He made the decision to pursue a technical degree, which he hoped would be beneficial in obtaining a position working remotely. He earned a certificate in User Research and Design through General Academy and when Jennings felt confident in his new skill set. Jennings' job search led him to join the Vocational Rehabilitation team as a Counselor in Region 1. In this role, he has an up-close view of the impact he makes in the lives of others and regularly sees and values the gratitude customers experience from working with a counselor who has firsthand knowledge of life with a disability.

Outside of VR, Jennings continues to excel as an advocate and professional. During the 2023 Disability Megaconference, he received the ARC Award for Self-Determination. After being accepted into the Auburn University Vocational Evaluation Forensic Certificate program, he plans to resume further studies. As an organization dedicated to strengthening Tennesseans, TDHS is excited to see what the future holds for Jennings as he brings awareness and advocacy for the needs of individuals with disabilities!

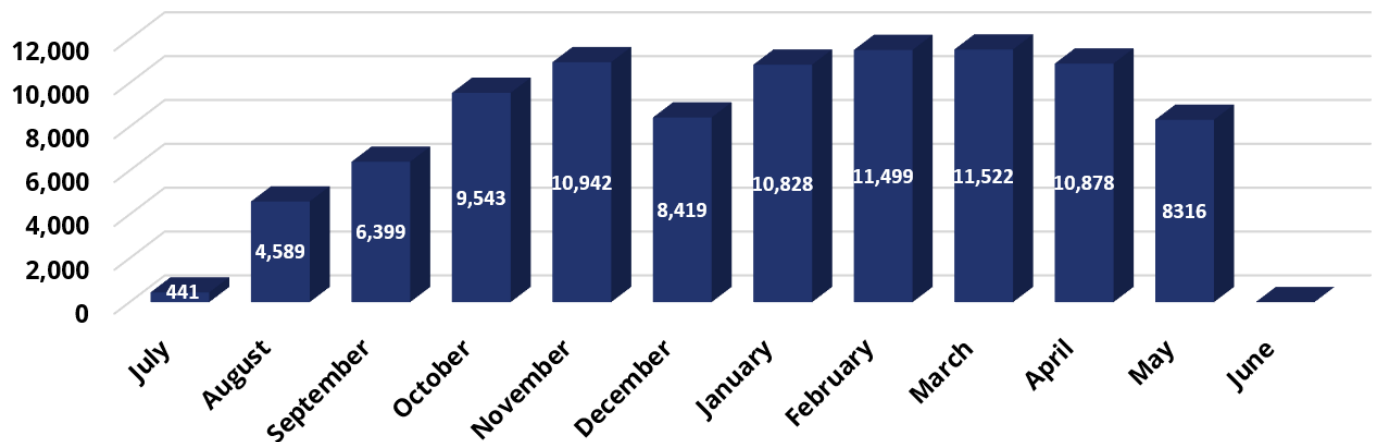
Transition Services Helps a Record Number of Students

Transition Services is a VR program area that focuses on helping qualifying Tennessee students who are under 21 to prepare for post high-school life. The program offers Pre-Employment Training Services (Pre-ETS) including job exploration, work-based learning, postsecondary, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy experiences and counseling. In 2022/23 Transition Services broke a participation record with 7,000 students receiving services for consecutive months.

Pre-ETS Total Students Served



Pre-ETS Total Units of Service Provided



Helping Teens and Young Adults Find Work and Training | As Tennessee began implementing plans related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Vocational Rehabilitation joined forces and established an Interagency Agreement with the Tennessee Department of Education to outline the provision of Pre-ETS for students between the ages of 14-22. The Interagency Agreement clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of each entity and the shared responsibilities between the two agencies and was updated in March of 2023. The five Pre-Employment Transition Services facilitate education, training, and work experiences within the supportive high school environment.

Preparing for Life and Employment After High School



VR has many strategies, events, and pathways for students with disabilities to prepare for life and work after high school. The Bradley County Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Summer Camp is one of many VR happenings that invite Tennessee students to engage, explore, and learn about opportunities and resources that are available in the community. This year's camp included hands-on activities related to post-secondary education preparedness, job exploration, job-readiness, employment, self-advocacy,

independent living, career development, business and community tours, and a forklift training certification opportunity. Jacob Wilson, a McMinn Central High School student, learned about the Summer Camp while visiting his local American Job Center.

"I'm always willing to learn what people do on their jobs," said Wilson when describing what motivated him to attend the camp. During the camp he and other students fellowshiped, shared experiences and learned about employment during sessions on looking for work, communication, workplace harassment, budgeting, and spending. As an up-and-coming Cleveland State Community College freshman, Wilson especially enjoyed visiting Cleveland State Community College to see all the study halls, the advanced technology workshop, the library, and the medical science building.

One of his favorite parts of the camp was the driving simulator which allowed him to practice his driving skills and consider starting a video game club, as there was not a club listed at the College.

"I had a good time learning how to be a professional individual," Wilson said, when describing the camps sessions on college preparation and the transition from high school to college. His is one of many experiences made possible through the work of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Tennessee Business Enterprise Helps 110 Entrepreneurs with Low Vision or Blindness

The mission of Tennessee Business Enterprise (TBE) Program is to provide high quality products and customer service while maximizing employment and economic opportunities for individuals with blindness. Federal and state laws grant TBE priority in operating vending and food service in federal, state, and local government buildings with high foot traffic. The VR program trains and licenses individuals with low or no vision to operate automated vending locations, snack bars, cafeterias, inmate commissaries, counter sales, and micro markets in these areas and there are currently 110 facilities in operation across the state. VR also provides ongoing technical and operational support for participating licensed vendors.

The Impact of Assistive Technology

The Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP) is designed to increase access and acquisition of assistive technology and services. Through TTAP funding assistance, device demonstration and education, device loan and device reutilization, DRS helps people with disabilities and their families find and get the tools they need to live independent, productive lives where and how they chose. The program partners with assistive technology centers across the state to effectively meet the needs of individuals in their communities. An example of the work conducted by TTAP and the difference technology made in the lives of Tennesseans occurred at Aspell Recovery Center, an addiction treatment center in Jackson.

The STAR Center, one of TTAP's partners, learned that Aspell counselors were reading the program workbooks aloud to some residents because the paper materials created barriers due to various disabilities. STAR Center and Aspell staff discussed the older model iPods available in the STAR Center's reutilization inventory and how they could be used to either read workbook content aloud or prepare voice recordings of the materials. The STAR Center refurbished and prepared the iPods with a fresh installation so they could be used for these purposes. Aspell's residents with disabilities now have access to the iPods to independently complete the workbooks as part of their path to recovery.

Organizations like the STAR Center, make a great difference in the lives of individuals like Timothy, a 62-year-old Decaturville resident who almost lost his life and faced complications due to congestive heart failure that left him unable to walk long distances. Timothy learned about TTAP's reutilization program at the STAR Center from a local insurance company. He contacted the STAR Center to express his need for a powerchair and resource limitations. An appropriate power wheelchair was located at the STAR Center and his need was met at no cost. Because of TTAP's reutilization program, Timothy can now play with his grandchildren, keep up with them in the power wheelchair and go out in the community and not feel left behind.

Learning New Skills at Age 100

Sylvia McMahan is a social, independent 100-year-old woman and serious phone conversationist with a good sense of humor and love for jelly beans. As an older widow, she relies on fellow church members and friends to ensure she has a transportation to attend church each Sunday, but she's always enjoyed the freedom of living in her own home and being self-reliant. A recent macular degeneration diagnosis classified McMahan as legally blind and left her concerned she might be unable to manage her finances or medications, and consequently, become more dependent on others. But, a meeting with a Rehabilitation Instructor changed McMahan's prospects.

McMahan's instructor met with her to discuss her goals, talk about the services offered, and perform an assessment. Together they formed a plan and considered services, training, and technology to allow McMahan to continue enjoying her independence. She learned to utilize a large print check register and was relieved to have the means to manage her own finances, as she felt vulnerable trusting someone else to complete them honestly and accurately. McMahan delighted in the chance to knit again with the help of a hands-free neck magnifier. Transitioning to use the cordless phone with amplified sound was more of a challenge, but McMahan and the independent living team persevered and she became comfortable using the memory buttons to quickly place phone calls to her most frequently dialed friends. Now, she is "back on the dialing end" of calls to her friends and church members. Her new tools also empowered her to read the birthday card from her church family on the occasion of her 100th birthday.

McMahan is an unforgettable DRS program participant who demonstrates that age is not a deterrent for a mind that has the right tools and determination to remain independent.

Independent Living Services

DRS provides independent living services to eligible individuals of all ages who are blind or who have a severe visual impairment. Services aim to enable individuals to care for themselves in their homes and communities. Rehabilitation Instructors provide a wide range of independent living services through one-on-one training in adaptive skills and in providing and using simple assistive devices to make life with vision loss easier.

Disability Determination Services

Following an agreement between the State of Tennessee and the Social Security Administration, Disability Determination Services (DDS) works to process Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability claims.

Over the past year, Disability Determination Services (DDS) processed 85,675 Social Security Administration Disability claims which is an approximately 17 percent increase over last year. The agency processed 100 percent of the federal Continuing Disability Review workload.

Hiring Quality Employees from Across the Nation | DDS is 100 percent federally funded and the Social Security Administration (SSA) adjusted several onboarding, hiring and advertising changes, including a telework expansion. Consequently, Tennessee DDS continues to attract applicants and this year, the team agreed to accept additional hires from the nation/region to assist the SSA.

Getting Help to Customers Faster | Tennessee's DDS is a national leader in presumptive disability decisions which provide faster assistance to those in need. Tennessee's presumptive disability rates are 29.5 percent. This is comparatively higher than the national average of 15.9 percent. Due to Tennessee's increased productivity, DSS agreed to increase both our overall workload and Continuing Disability Review goals to assist the region and nation achieve the expected goals. Tennessee is also recognized as a national leader in SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) claim production and had the second highest allowance rate in the nation.

Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) operates 17 Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers across the state and a single residential training center in Smyrna. Each location offers employment and training services to individuals with disabilities and support services to employers related to hiring an inclusive workforce.

Tennessee Rehabilitation Center Smyrna Develops Apprenticeship Program | This year, the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna (TRC-Smyrna) collaborated with CVS Health to develop the center's Pre-Apprenticeship program. With approval from the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Pharmacy Technician program was officially registered as a Pre-Apprenticeship for students of TRC-Smyrna on February 28, 2023 and student enrollment opened later in the year.

Supporting Veteran Employment | To provide additional support to veterans and their families, TRC-Smyrna worked with the Department of Veterans Affairs to become an approved training center. This collaboration provides additional funding to veterans and/or family members in areas that are not covered by the Department of Rehabilitation Veterans Services.

Updating Facilities to Better Serve Students | TRC-Smyrna completed the first phase of a three-phase capital project. Each update provides students and instructors with more training options and opportunities. In addition to mechanical and structural updates, the first phase included significant updates to student training areas and equipment. During this phase, TRC-Smyrna purchased 16 Interactive SMART Boards for each of the classrooms and redesigned the Health and Customer Service Unit that holds the Certified Nursing Assistant, Customer Service and Pharmacy Technician training programs and labs.

Strategic Partnerships Serve Tennesseans with Disabilities Better

DRS is full of examples of partnerships and collaborations between departments and programs that are working to align service delivery systems to achieve increased employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities. Three primary examples of this cooperative spirit across state government for the Vocational Rehabilitation program are the agreements with the Division of TennCare for the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, the Department of Education for the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model of supported employment. Additionally, Vocational Rehabilitation is a core partner with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and partners collaborates with them to provide wrap around services to customers. Vocational Rehabilitation has offices at many of the one-stop comprehensive American Job Centers where customers can connect with all service providers in one location. These arrangements are active and on-going and continue to ensure that employment services and supports for the programs' common customers are coordinated.

Creating Community Work-Based Training Opportunites | The Community Services Unit (CSU), a specialty unit of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, built a partnership with Old Time Pottery in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a retailer with a mission to become more inclusive in the workforce. As part of this initiative, Old Time Pottery collaborated with VR to provide a paid internship training program for individuals with disabilities. The paid internship is a three-month training program that gives the individuals hands-on experience with interviewing, orientation, and key retail functions throughout the store. VR staff work with the participants during the onboarding process and the first month of training to provide supports. After the first month of training, VR is available to continue person-center supports where needed.

During the training program, Old Time Pottery store managers are given weekly and monthly tracking tools to allow supportive feedback for the participants. After three months, the store evaluates the individual's progress, along with the store's hiring needs, to assess if regular part-time employment is good option. The overall goal of the training program is to allow individuals with disabilities to gain experience and exploration that will help their employment goals. The training program is currently set to rotate new individuals every quarter and this pilot is looking to be duplicated throughout other Old Time Pottery stores across Tennessee and eventually across the country.



Bridging the Gap, Connecting Employers with Skilled Workers | This year, VR formed a workforce partnership with City Fields, a community development non-profit in Cleveland, and SunBelt Rentals to offer a one-week, non-paid forklift training program. The onsite program targets underemployed individuals while promoting inclusion and integration between VR participants and non-VR participants in the program. The initiative

leads to an industry-recognized certification in Forklift Operation and Safety and consists of classroom instruction, hands-on training, and a final exam all provided by an instructor from SunBelt Rentals. Students also receive career readiness classes including resume writing, interview skills, and financial literacy through a joint effort by VR and City Fields. Job search assistance and follow-up support is provided by VR or City Fields, as appropriate. The mobile American Job Center attends on the last day of the program to provide job search assistance. The first cohort of four students received their ANSI Classes 1, 4, 5 Warehouse Forklift Operator certifications on January 13, 2023.

“A trained workforce is something that we are constantly told we have a need for. You four have completed that part. Any certificates that you can get is going to make you more valuable, and if you’re a dependable employee that’s going to make you really valuable,” said local Mayor Gary Davis, who attended the January graduation and told the students. A second cohort met in March and a third training session took place June 19, 2023. To date, twenty-one individuals have completed the training. This number includes three VR customers. One of the VR customers gained competitive integrated employment.



Disability Employment Training for Chambers of Commerce | Providing employers with the resources to support the recruitment and retention of talent with disabilities is one of Vocational Rehabilitation's valuable assets in the disability employment landscape. During this past year, Vocational Rehabilitation, through the work of the Employers workgroup of the Employment First Task Force, partnered with TennCare and the Tennessee Department of Human Resources to develop a training to educate local Chambers of Commerce about the various programs and resources to support talent with disabilities and employers across Tennessee. Training introduced participants to the Employment First Task Force, Employment and Community First Choices program, Individualized Placement and Support services, and Vocational Rehabilitation's Business Service Unit. Chambers representatives were invited to ask questions and have an open dialogue with trainers to share the value proposition of intentional diversification and inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. The training team hosted monthly training sessions from October 2022 through February 2023, enabling Chambers to join the training that best fit their schedule. Based on the interest and success of this year, the team is planning to offer updated sessions in the upcoming year.

Partnership to Serve Employers and Customers More Effectively | Community Rehabilitation Providers are an essential ingredient in the recipe for Vocational Rehabilitation's efforts for delivering quality services to customers. These providers offer one-on-one support to customers on their way to comparative and integrated employment. This year, VR made a historic shift in its allocation of internal resources to better support the work of providers and employers. Changes included: barriers related to financial risk were removed to allow additional support from the Business Service Unit; allowing the Community Rehabilitation Providers who work directly with businesses to recruit and employ talent with disabilities; coordinating single points of contact for employers; continuity of messaging to employers to build stronger relationships with the business community; hosting introductory meetings with VR counselors; orchestrating communication between staff and providers to understand customer needs; and developing training materials to support the shift. Removing barriers and aligning resources around the needs of customers is one of many strategic decisions made by VR to strengthen person-centered practices. These updates not only positively impact individuals with disabilities receiving services but create a tremendous value-add for the business community. Changes of this scale don't happen overnight, and it is expected that in the upcoming year these efforts will result in increased customer outcomes and value delivered to talent and businesses.



WILSON COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME



Support Divisions

TDHS is here to help Tennesseans reach their full potential and a significant ratio of staff work is to interact with the public and perform tasks to administer benefits on a daily basis. However, the success of our programs and services is directly reliant on the work of our support divisions and offices. Divisions that enhance the function of direct services and foster innovative efficiency in service delivery include: Operations, Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions (QISS), Appeals and Hearings, the Office of Inspector General, the Office of General Counsel, People Operations, and the Public Information and Legislative Office.



Appeals and Hearings Leadership

Mary-Glenn Hartup
Assistant Commissioner

Shawn DeHaven
Director of Operations

Josh Eldridge
Chief Administrative Judge

Daniel Koomen
Senior Associate Counsel

Nancy McLean
Senior Associate Counsel

Appeals and Hearings

The Appeals and Hearings Division processes administrative and eligibility appeals for Child Support, Families First (TANF), Food Programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Vocational Rehabilitation, disaster/pandemic benefits programs and other initiatives managed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS).

2022/23 Appeals and Hearings Numbers

- 11,772 Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) received
- 38,385 Program issues appealed by 21,550 appellants

Program	Unique Appellants	Program Issues Appealed*
SNAP	17,980	32,170
Families First	1,470	3,261
Child Support	901	1,631
Non-TANF Child Care - NTCC	1,109	1,145
Child Care	29	108
Adult Protective Services	23	26
Child Care Certificate	15	16
Tennessee Business Enterprise	8	9
Rehabilitation Services	6	7
Summer Food Services	3	5
Adult Daycare Services	2	3
Child and Adult Care Food	2	2
Social Services Block Grant	1	1
Community Services Block Grant	1	1

This chart depicts total number of issues appealed per program and the number of appellants from whom appeals were received between June 1, 2022-May 31, 2023. Each unique appellants may have multiple issues appealed.

Embracing Change

During the 2022/23 fiscal year, the Appeals and Hearings division continued to experience an increased volume of appeals due to pandemic-related programs. However, this challenge did not prevent the division from transitioning from a legacy system to a new Employment Benefit Management System (EBMS) that improves departmental efficiencies and customer experiences. In addition to this May 2023 launch, the division took a lead role in adapting to the new One DHS omnichannel Customer Service system. This modern system reduces wait times and voicemails by utilizing automation to answer common customer inquiries.

Office of General Counsel

Office of General Counsel Leadership

Krisann Hodges

Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel

Rebekah Parkhurst

Deputy General Counsel

Dezanne Russell

Deputy General Counsel

Jacqueline Griffin

Office Manager

The Office of General Counsel (OGC) provides legal consultation, advice, and representation to the department in judicial and administrative forums across all department programs and support divisions. Department attorneys draft and promulgate departmental rules related to the implementation of laws and programs; draft and analyze departmental legislation; draft and review departmental contracts and all other agreements; review employee disciplinary action; process public records requests; coordinate with the Attorney General's Office on legal matters in federal or state court; and provide oversight and advice of child support law to the Child Support IV-D offices statewide.

Over the past year OGC executed activity related to modernization efforts and facilitated enterprise-wide program changes that elevated the volume and complexity of work executed by the Office of General Counsel.

Office of General Counsel Metrics

- 11 Child Care board hearings litigated
- 104 child care legal enforcement actions served:
 - 96 Civil penalties
 - 4 Denials
 - 1 Revocation
 - 3 Summary Suspensions
- 6 Adult Protective Services (APS) due process hearings litigated
- 264 APS legal enforcement actions taken
 - 180 Subpoenas
 - 53 Legal actions
 - 31 Due process
- 32 Administrative Hearings litigated
 - 13 APS hearings
 - 19 Child Care hearings
- 34 Human Resource matters litigated
 - 6 Unemployment appeals
 - 12 Step I appeals
 - 5 Step II appeals
 - 2 Step III appeals
 - 8 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charges
 - 1 Human resource case

Transformative Achievements

Responding to an Increased Demand for Contract Development, Analysis, and Review |

As the Department moves through an aggressive modernization schedule, OGC is providing comprehensive analysis and review of large-scale technology contracts and ongoing contract compliance maintenance. OGC is also providing increased support for grants and contracts related to the conclusion of pandemic spending. These tasks often have tight deadlines related to obligation or expenditure of funding. OGC also provided in-depth analysis and review of contracts and other issues related to the TANF Opportunity Act legislation, an initiative requiring unique solutions to promote success, as well as the Families First Community Grants. Due to the continuing increase in legal contracts work, OGC added two additional attorney positions dedicated to contracting.

Comprehensive Review of Rules | OGC is leading the retrospective review of all TDHS rules and intends to develop a plan to review, amend, and delete any rules as appropriate. OGC, in conjunction with input from program partners, reviewed 82 percent of the Department's rules in the past year to advise on amendment or deletion. This review is scheduled to reach completion in 2023. OGC is working to review TDHS policies to ensure policies also reflect the modernization and programmatic changes for TDHS programs.

New Case Management System for OGC | The Office of General Counsel is always looking for new innovative ways to provide internal customers with comprehensive legal advice that is easy to access and track. Launched in October 2022, the OGC portal, available through the Service Now platform, provides a channel for TDHS employees to request, conduct related communication and track progress of legal services. The dashboard offers a collaborative space for OGC staff to track assignments and workflow, metrics, reports, research and notes. The system is currently being updated to integrate with the new childcare e-licensing system and OGC anticipates increased access to analytics and added TDHS HR Portal interface over the next year that will better serve internal and external customers.

Records Management | The Records Management Unit (RMU) is leading departmental efforts to quantify electronic records to reduce server space and destroy appropriate electronic records that meet retention periods. RMU continues to lead annual reporting requirements, develop retention schedules through the Public Records Commission for all TDHS records, and provide records management training for all staff. The RMU also initiated connections with other records management professionals in fellow state agencies to build a records management network across state government.

Office of Inspector General

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) oversees the department's independent accountability functions. Those functions include internal audit, external program review, claims management, and special investigations. The office also investigates allegations of fraud, waste, and abuse while handling adjudication. The Division's work is conducted through the Audit Services, Background Check, Claims Management and Special Investigations Units.

Office of Inspector General Leadership

Todd McKinney
Inspector General

Frank Houle
Director of Program Integrity

Sam Alzoubi
Director of Audit Services

Office of Inspector General by the Numbers

- 211 External auditing / monitoring reports investigating \$359,829.45 of questioned costs
- 116 Internal audits conducted
- 26,198 Background checks conducted
- Provided support for 180 identity theft cases.

Audit Services

The Audit Services Unit is a 54-person organization of audit and administrative support professionals headed by the Director of Audit Services (DAS). The DAS has four reporting audit directors for each of the following divisions: Food Programs, Grants and Contracts, Internal Audit, and Data Analytics/Special Projects.

The purpose of Audit Services is to conduct audits and monitoring reviews of the departments' 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. Audit Services also serves the department by identifying and following up on potential fraud, waste, or abuse of the department's administered programs; as well as follow up on internal or external referred complaints.

Data Analytics | The Data Analytics/Special Projects Division supports Audit Services' operations by providing analysis of data to enhance the value of the audit work performed through potentially problematic transactions. Special projects are initiated at the direction of the DAS to further help bring program integrity to the department's programs and processes.

Fraud Examiners | TDHS employs Certified Fraud Examiners who are responsible for auditing and monitoring staff. Currently, there are 17 Certified Fraud Examiners and two Certified Public Accountants within Audit Services who ensure grant recipients receive high-quality auditing, monitoring, and feedback. Audit Services provides contractors/grantees with training and technical assistance while onsite during each monitoring or auditing engagement. Receiving specific, timely feedback, and technical assistance allows grant recipients to be fully equipped with the knowledge and information needed to improve operations or services quickly and more effectively serve the citizens of Tennessee.

TDHS Programs	Number of Monitoring/Auditing Reports Released	Questions/Disallowed Cost
Food Programs (SFSP/CACFP)	144	\$132,448.21
Block Grants (CSBG/SSBG)	11	\$525.50
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	19	\$16,563.05
Childcare Program	25	\$131,519.74
Family Assistance Programs (SNAP/TANF)	12	\$78,772.95
Total External Auditing/ Monitoring Reports	211	\$359,829.45

Internal Audits of GHS

Internal Audits	4
Federal Tax Information Audits	65
Motor Voter Act Audits	47
Total Internal Audit Reports	116

Background Investigations

The Background Investigations Group consists of two units: the Background Investigations (BIU) Unit, and Child Care Licensing (CCL) Unit. These units focus on ensuring potential employees have the proper credentials to qualify for employment, work for TDHS programs and other contracted initiatives. The unit conducts fingerprint and criminal background investigations on all current and/or prospective employees and/or contract workers who have access to Federal Tax Information. This includes TDHS employees who work for the Tennessee Department of Human Services divisions. Other agencies include the Tennessee Department of General Services (TDGS) and Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). The background check tracking system also records, and tracks fingerprints submitted to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from employees of child daycare providers, and adult care providers.

The Child Care Licensing (CCL) Unit places qualified individuals for employment and determines whether an individual has credentials to work in Child Care or Adult Care facilities. The (CCL) researches, distributes notifications, and closes investigations. The (CCL) unit oversees the appeal and waiver process up to case closures.

TDHS Programs	Number of Background Checks Performed in 2022/23
Adult Day Care Applicants	268
Child Care Applicants	24,046
TDHS State Employees	1,414
Food Program	334
Vocational Rehabilitation	120
Vocational Rehabilitation	16
Grand Total	26,198

Helping the Public Protect Children | This year, Child Care Licensing created and published a new web form that invites the public to report new arrests that may concern individuals who should have restricted access to children. Several reports prevented individuals with problematic histories from accessing children.

Improving the BackTrack Platform | TDHS utilizes an online platform, BackTrak, to perform many of the task related to back ground screening and reporting. This year, Background services unit added division suffixes, invoice reconciliation process improvements, and a new tableau that facilitates faster processing times and records reporting.

Resolving Incorrect Records | This year the unit revised the process to resolve incorrectly matched contract employee record registrations and adjusted the coding process to allow staff to identify and correct fingerprint records that are duplicated or incorrectly processed.

Claims Adjustment Unit

The Claims Adjustment Unit is responsible for processing claims related to overpayment and fraud for TDHS programs.

Special Investigations Unit

The Special Investigation Unit (SIU) partners with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies as necessary on fraud/trafficking investigations. SIU conducts internal and preliminary employee misconduct investigations. This year, SIU worked with internal and external partners to facilitate timely, precise, and accurate reports of employee misconduct investigations throughout SFY 2022/2023.

Connecting with More Partners | The Special Investigation Unit increased the number of State Law Enforcement Bureau (SLEB) partners to 60 during 2022/23 and continues to seek out new agencies to join in combating SNAP trafficking and fraud.

Addressing Fraud in 180 Identity Theft Cases | Fraud increased in 2022/23 with a rise in card skimming and cloning schemes having negative effects in the lives of SNAP, TANF, and Disaster SNAP customers. SIU identified and investigated these fraud schemes and supported Family Assistance and Appeals and Hearings teams in tracking and advising appropriate actions for an ongoing fraud investigation encompassing more than one hundred-eighty identity theft SNAP cases.

Operations

The Operations team is responsible for managing the infrastructure that supports TDHS in helping Tennesseans. The Operations subdivisions include Budget, Fiscal, Information Technology and Procurement/Facilities, and the division of Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions.

Operations Leadership

Melisa Hucks

Deputy Commissioner & Chief Operating Officer

Gary Wilson

Quality Improvement & Strategic Solutions Assistant Commissioner

Kevin Lauer

Operations Assistant Commissioner

Stephen Reksten

Director, Procurement

Winfield Shier

Director, Budget

Amanda Woody

Director of Strategic Analysis

Anthony Burwell

Chief Information Officer

Krysta Krall

Chief Financial Officer of Fiscal Services

John Preisel

Director of Operations, Technology and Innovation

Mike Leitzke

Director of Operations, Procurement Strategy

Procurement and Facilities

The Office of Procurement and Facilities Management is dedicated to procuring or providing goods and services necessary for serving TDHS clients in an efficient, timely, professional, courteous, and fiscally responsible manner that is compliant with applicable law, rules and policy. Services provided include professional contracting, goods and non-professional services procurements, coordinating printing services for all printing materials, facility administration, management of capital assets, management of fleet vehicles, mail delivery to State Office staff and Emergency Response coordination.

Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions

The Quality Improvement and Strategic Solutions (QISS) division provides oversight and direction to the department's data analysis efforts, continuous quality improvement, and quality assurance.

Budget

The Budget Unit is responsible for overall management of the Department's \$5.4 billion budget, including analysis and approval of contracts, personnel actions, and program initiatives having a financial impact. Alongside the development of the Department's annual State budget, the Budget Unit regularly monitors the Department's budgetary health and provides counsel to program and executive leadership on issues affecting the budget. In addition, the Budget Unit serves as the primary contact for administration and legislative requests for financial information and provides support to the Public Information and Legislative Office and legal staff on legislation impacting the Department, including fiscal note development.

2022/23 Operations Metrics

- 337 Contracts Awarded
- 60 Continuous Quality Improvement Champions trained
- 59,000 Cases reviewed

Operational Achievements

Reimagining Procurement Process | This year TDHS completed a comprehensive analysis of the existing competitive grant process and developed a "future state" process comprised of 40 percent fewer steps and decision points. The resulting process will allow TDHS programs to award grants to external partners in an expedited manner and more Tennesseans benefiting from TDHS' diverse offerings with less administrative burden.

Training Champions and Eliminating 25,031 Hours of Work Time | In SFY 2023, the QISS Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Unit partnered with employees across all divisions in the agency to make 19 processes more effective and efficient. During this time period, the CQI unit facilitated LEAN methodology training to empower more than 60 TDHS employees, known as "CQI Champions" to utilize process improvement within their areas and create a culture of problem solvers. Capitalizing on the strengths and expertise of the CQI Champions and CQI unit, the agency was able to save 25,031 hours of work time by eliminating waste, reducing redundancies of handoffs, and increasing the use of automation. Finally, as in 2022, one of the biggest accomplishments of the year resulted in administrative task reductions for 100 percent of TDHS employees enabling them to devote more focused time to serving the citizens of Tennessee.

Keeping Contract Awards on Schedule | This year, the Office of Procurement set and met a goal to have 98 percent of contracts awarded by July 1, 2023.

Awarding 337 Contracts | In 2022/23, the Office of Procurement ensured uninterrupted services for TDHS customers by awarding 120 contracts for the state fiscal year in addition to 217 contracts for the federal fiscal year that started on October 1, 2022.

Combining Offices for Improved Efficiency and Cost Savings | TDHS merged several service locations to eliminate overhead cost and waste:

- Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) Cookeville and the Putnam County Field Office merges spaces in March 2023.
- TRC Gallatin combined with American Jobs Center in Sumner County March 2023
- TRC Maryville combined with Blount County Family Assistance Office June 2023

Moving All of TDHS to a Single Channel | This year, Information Technology successfully delivered two OneDHS releases to enhance the client omnichannel (voice, chat, email) experience. First, two DHS divisions streamlined their client services within OneDHS-Child Care and Appeals & Hearings. Secondly, the OneDHS Customer Portal was launched to provide a new experience for clients in the ability to create accounts; apply for benefits; view enrollment information; report changes; view notices; and upload documents for several DHS programs.

Beyond these improvements, TDHS introduced more than 20 significant enhancements to Customer Portal including changes that enable dynamic prompts for verification document uploads, application processes, electronic communications/notices viewing options, demographic information updates and re-verify identity automations. The One DHS vision continues to evolve and will benefit Tennesseans and their families for years to come.

Improving Operational Systems | Information Technology successfully delivered nine Child Care improvement releases to enhance licensing, billing and payments and time and attendance services. IT also improved the case management system for Child Support and successfully delivered the vendor portal for the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

People Operations

With Human Resources, Learning and Organizational Development units, the People Operations Division manages all processes impacting the work-life cycle of Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) employees. This includes focused support driven by agency strategy to ensure that TDHS has the ability to attract, recruit, select, develop, engage and retain staff. People Operations operates from the guiding principle that TDHS employees are the most important resource and make the mission possible.



People Operations Leadership

Dana Braxton

Assistant Commissioner, People Operations

Morgan Williams

Director, Human Resources

Karen Perry

Director, Talent Management

Catherine Clark

Director, Leadership & Organizational Development

Kevin Wesley

Assistant Director, Talent Management

Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) team focuses on managing and optimizing our most valuable asset – our people. Specific services provided by HR include new employee orientation, employee relations, employee performance management, and other employee-related services. The HR Team is dedicated to driving the success of the TDHS workforce, aligning their efforts with the organization's goals, and fostering a positive and inclusive work environment.

Learning and Organizational Development

The Learning and Organizational Development team within People Operations plays a vital role in maximizing the potential of employees, fostering a

culture of continuous learning, and focusing on enhancing employees' knowledge, skills, and capabilities. The primary goal is to ensure that employees have the necessary competencies to perform their job effectively, adapt to changing demands, and contribute to the overall success of the organization.

People Operations Metrics

Leadership Development

- 434 TDHS leaders attended the DHS Leadership Conference in June 2023
- 28 TDHS leaders graduated from One DHS Leadership Academy
- 65 new TDHS supervisors graduated from the New Supervisor Academy

Training & Development

- 4,546 TDHS employees and contract staff successfully completed learning opportunities for professional growth and development
- 3,836 TDHS employees completed a total of 31,522 learning sessions
- 710 TDHS contractors completed a total of 1,544 learning sessions
- 151 web-based courses were offered with 26,226 completions
- 114 instructor-led courses were offered with 6,840 completions
- 756 TDHS employees participated in LinkedIn Learning, completing 4,905 courses, and engaging in 5,874 hours of learning
- 535 Child Support employees and contractors completed the Pursuing Child Support Safely domestic violence training
- 312 Child Care & Community Services division staff participated in Growing our Culture sessions

Talent Acquisition and Management

- 472 Staff members hired and onboarded
- 433 Employees promoted
- 139 Employees assisted in the retirement process

Transformative Accomplishments

Managing Resources in While Training Staff | The Leadership and Organizational Development team facilitated leadership retreats for various divisions within TDHS and achieved \$60,000 in cost savings related to staff expenses by leveraging direct billing practices.

Helping New Talent Start Strong | This year, People Operations collaborated with the Public Information and Legislative Office to develop a comprehensive online Onboarding Guide to aid new hires during their first year of employment. The guide provides benchmarks for the first year of life at TDHS and directs employees to informational resources to further manage expectations.

Streamlining Communication with an HR Service Portal | This year People Operations launched the HR Service Portal. The portal makes it easy for staff and HR representatives to track and manage inquires. The tool also includes a Knowledge Base with 48 informational article to assist employees and supervisors with HR functions and inquiries. These articles are accessible to employees and supervisors at any time providing an additional mode of service. Most reviewed articles include content and resources related to retirement, timesheet instructions and HR forms.

Better Time and Labor Processing | People Operation automated the time and labor and Family Medical Leave processes to allow HR staff to spend more time focusing on intense work that require subjective care.

Health and Wellness Council

The TDHS Health and Wellness Council is an interdivisional workgroup that focuses on helping the employees make wellness a priority. During the 2022/2023 fiscal year, the council facilitated and encouraged employees to participate in weekly fitness breaks with the Tennessee Departments of Health and Education, wellness challenges, Lunch and Learn series on health and nutrition topics, and virtual activities from Working for a Healthier Tennessee. The council also produced and released a podcast series on topics of mental health, acupuncture, yoga, faith-based recovery, and men's health month. The TDHS Health and Wellness Council also received rewards from Working for a Healthier Tennessee including: Most Innovative Wellness Council (second year in a row), All Star Award, and recognitions to several council members who have contributed in areas of well-being and financial wellness.



Public Information and Legislative Office

The Public Information and Legislative Office (PILO) facilitates public, media, legislative, and customer requests. Within the division, the Communications Team works to implement communications strategies that are supportive of the department's mission and program needs and the Customer Service team collaborates across program lines and directly with customers to ensure timely, thorough, and compassionate customer service. The office also focuses on legislative priorities for the Department, including the analysis of legislation affecting the Department, and representing the Department before the Tennessee General Assembly.

Public Information & Legislative Office Leadership

Callon Schmid
Assistant Commissioner

Pamela Fusting
Director of Operations & Customer Experience

Devin Stone
Director of Communications

Communications

TDHS is tasked with helping Tennesseans reach their full potential as independent contributing members of our community and economy. The Communications team helps TDHS team members foster public trust not only through communication related to service delivery, but also through everyday messaging practices and standards. The PILO team is responsible for managing communication tools and production such as the TDHS web pages, print media, social media and other tools and also interacts with the media and other entities that share a vested interest in TDHS services.

Customer Service

The Customer Service (CuSe) unit within PILO serves as a centralized customer service operation, equipped to handle inquiries and escalations related to all TDHS programs and services and to provide appropriate referrals for misdirected inquiries. Customers access CuSe via multiple channels: telephone (mainline), mail correspondence, email, webform submissions, LiveChat, fax, and referrals from other agencies and political officials. The team is trained to care for customers seeking services as well as those lodging legitimate concerns regarding delivery of services. All inquiries are documented and tracked within the ServiceNow inquiry management platform, per required protocol and timelines.

Legislative

The Legislative team works to represent the Department before the General Assembly and with any related external stakeholders. The team monitors legislative session, meets with members, and ensures passage of Department initiatives. The team also works to educate members on topics related to TDHS programs and services, as well as assisting with constituent concerns. The team also handles rule review before the legislature's Government Operations Committee and contracts before the legislature's Fiscal Review Committee. Post legislative session, the legislative team works with program and legal to develop legislative proposals for the upcoming year and plan outreach events for the Commissioner and executive leadership team.

PILO by the Numbers

- More than 40 brochures, flyers, signs and pieces of printed collateral produced
- More than 505 social media posts published across platforms to reach more than 48,000 followers
- 18 press releases distributed.
- More than 7 videos produced
- 85 Internal Newsletters distributed
- More than 30 external newsletters distributed
- Approximately 22,000 calls per month to the One DHS Contact Center
- Approximately 1,000 contacts per month through non-live customer channels (webform and email) with approximately 60% handled through automated routing.
- More than 40 brochures, flyers, signs and pieces of printed collateral produced
- An average of 22,000 calls routed per month with 4, 570 calls fielded related to non-program specific calls
- 85 Percent of calls correctly routed utilizing speech automation technology
- Abandoned Child Care calls reduced by 23 percent
- Child Care call wait times reduced from 28 minutes to 6:24 minutes.

Transformative Achievements

Reaching Customers Where They Are | To ensure customers have the information they need to manage benefits and move forward, the Communications Team collaborated with program experts and outside vendors to proactively communicate with Pandemic EBT customers via text, e-mail and through several online communication channels. Lessons learned from this campaign were used to lay the foundations to utilize similar tactics to communicate with SNAP customers and reduce related error rates.

Creating Successful Onboarding Experiences | The Communications Team partnered with People Operations to launch an online onboarding guide for staff who are new to TDHS or have questions about general TDHS operations, HR or other topics that effect their everyday life as TDHS employees. This guide clearly articulates timelines related to benefits, required training and communication for the first year of employment.

Serving Customers More Efficiently | In 2022, TDHS introduced several tools to elevate communication project management processes. Using these new processes, the Communications Team received and executed more 107 requests to create brochures, flyers, signs, social media posts, press releases, videos, newsletters, and other communication materials for a variety of internal and external communications channels. In addition to producing these materials, including a DHS Style Guide, the Communications Team also produced a significant number of communications materials in response to emergency programing or time sensitive customer needs.

Launching of the One DHS Contact Center and Customer Support Model: A Wholistic Approach to Customer Experience Management

Although the economic, social and employment insecurities that bring customers to TDHS often intersect and prompt a need for multiple services offered through the department, previously customers were expected to access these services and seek assistance from multiple, portals and channels. Furthermore, staff tasked with assisting customers could only access information for a segment of each customer's record within a program area and consequently were unable to have a clear view of the customer's journey. This year, the Customer Service team led forward movement on the One DHS Customer Support Model to better serve Tennesseans.

The new Customer Support Model aims to further the idea of an efficient wholistic approach that improves services and long-term outcomes. Taking a customer relationship management (CRM) approach that records all customer transactions, the model better serves Tennesseans by:

- **Drastically Simplifying Customer Entry Points for Customers Contacting TDHS** | Now customers can find help for multiple TDHS programs through a single phone line, chat function, email option or webform (referred to as the omnichannel). Previously, to find help for multiple program areas, the customer needed to use separate points of contact for various programs or needed to be transferred between programs to address both simple and complex inquiries.
- **Creating a 360° View of the Customer's Journey** | The new model initiates unique customer records that create a single, comprehensive view of each customer's journey. Each customer journey record is visible to all staff responsible for providing customer support. Prior to the new model, TDHS staff had limited access records representing a customer's previous interactions with TDHS programs or interactions done across multiple program areas. Consequently, a customer participating in multiple TDHS programs may need to contact each program separately and staff may not have vital information that could make a positive difference the customer's long-term outcome.
- **Managing Resources Through Automation** | The new model harnesses automation to route customers to the correct service center or program expert. This reduces manual processes and permits better resource management. Automation also includes the use of webforms that reduce opportunities for human error.
- **Multiple Channels with One Record** | The new model recognizes that customer communication preferences and capacities may create additional burdens or influence the customer's journey to stability and independence. The new model allows customers to access assistance through phone, live chat, email and webform channels with all transactions being added to the customer record.
- **Allowing Program Experts to Focus on Complex Issues** | A major asset of the new model is the One DHS Contact Center that fields inquiries across multiple programs. This center fields "tier 1" inquiries from customers that do not require deep program knowledge for resolution. Customers inquiries that are more complex are escalated to program specialists and experts based on customer need. This allows program experts to concentrate on intricate cases where their knowledge has the highest return on investment.

How the One DHS Support Model and Contact Center Improved Efficiency in 2022/23

- **Need for Manual Call Transfers and Additional Wait Times Reduced** | In 2022/23 TDHS received an average of 22,000 calls per month: 40.5 percent of these calls were answered by the One DHS Contact Center based on the program. This allowed program experts to focus on other priorities and cases that required expert knowledge.
- **Total Call Volume to Appeals and Hearings Reduced by 60 Percent** | Previously, many of the 600 calls received by the Appeals and Hearings Division each month were manually redirected to Family Assistance based the customer need. With automation, these calls are now routed to Family Assistance.
- **Connecting 22,000 Calls Per Month Efficiently** | Using Natural Language Understanding (NLU) and interactive voice response (IVR) technology, the new model correctly transfers 85 percent of calls to the correct center or program area based on speech. The remaining calls are routed utilizing press-selection. The new system improving the customer experience by consolidating the vast array of telephone numbers through which customers must search and/or connect. Now customers can dial one line and use options to connect with 18 program areas vs dialing numbers for 18 program areas to receive assistance.
- **Leveraging New Customer Support Centers** | This year, the Customer Service Team strategically onboarded multiple programs to the new Customer Support Centers using an incremental approach. Appeals and Hearings, PILO and Child Care Payment Assistance joined the center during the 2022/23 fiscal year and accounted for 40.5 percent of call inquiries. Vocational Rehabilitation, the Tennessee Technology Access Program and Child Support program areas will be added in 2023/24. These and other programs were responsible for 59.5 percent of calls.
- **Improving Child Care Services Calls** | By building a Child Care self-service 'application status check' into the One DHS IVR, the department enabled 56 percent of calls to end without further escalation, reduced abandonment calls by 23 percent and reduced call wait times from 28 minutes to 6:24 minutes.
- **Automating 60 percent of Webform and Email Inquiries** | During 2022/23, the department received an average of 1000 contacts per month and successfully routed more than half of these contacts through automation.
- **Combining Platforms to Better Serve Customers** | As part of the One DHS Customer Support Model, now live phone and chat channels are managed through a single agent platform. This allows live representatives view and answer inbound phone/chat messages from one screen.

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. A century later in 1925, the Welfare Division was created under the state Department of Institutions to license child care institutions, maternity homes, jails, workhouses, and almshouses.

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

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



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