

Ohio 2025-2029 Disaster Plan

Introduction

Ohio counties have faced several natural disasters and operational emergencies, including flooding, tornadoes, massive power outages, and the COVID-19 national pandemic of 2020. During natural disasters procedure letters, memos on guidance for practice considerations, and teleconferences have been used historically to communicate emergency information specific to Ohio.

Being prepared for unplanned and sometimes catastrophic interruptions in business operations is critical for agencies providing basic health and safety services to children and families, as these agencies are often the first point of contact for displaced community members seeking assistance.

Unplanned disasters can disproportionately impact and widen disparities for marginalized groups, including people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Child welfare agencies can be overwhelmed during these times, which can make it difficult to implement equitable practices when these disasters hit.

An assessment of available state and local government aide for food, clothing, medical, and shelter needs prior to a disaster/crisis occurring is paramount. Ohio's public children services agencies (PCSAs) will need to work with the Department of Children and Youth (DCY), jurisdictional emergency partners, and their local communities to ensure services and resources are accessible and culturally responsive to meet and mitigate inequities. Community collaboration and engagement should occur across all levels of disaster planning and response. It is critical during crises to share information and identify early where each community stands in their preparedness and communication to ensure pre and post disaster response and an equitable distribution of disaster relief services.

In Ohio, direct services for child protection (e.g., assessment/investigation, foster care and in-home supportive services to children and families), are provided by county PCSAs. In addition, DCY licenses private child placing agencies (PCPAs), group homes; children's residential centers (CRCs), and private non-custodial agencies (PNAs) to provide substitute care and adoption services. DCY has statutory responsibility to promulgate rules via the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) and provide oversight of PCSAs, PCPAs, group homes, CRCs and PNAs to ensure rule compliance.

The activities conducted by DCY with direct impact on the child protective services (CPS) system's clients include: processing Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) paperwork; conducting searches of Ohio's CCWIS Alleged Perpetrator Search (OSAPS) in compliance with the Adam Walsh Act and to assist other states' CPS agencies with assessment/investigation activities; ongoing case services, operating the Putative Father Registry, and providing technical assistance to agencies and customer service for the general public via the Family and Customer Support Center. Section 422(b)(16)(A)-(E) of the Social Security Act requires that states' disaster preparedness and recovery plans (henceforth, disaster plans) do all the following:

- Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster.
- Respond to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster and provide services in those cases.

- Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster.
- Coordinate services and share information with other states.

As a state supervised, county administered child protective services (CPS) system, planning for disaster response and recovery in Ohio occurs at both the state and county levels. While emergencies and disasters may vary in size and significance, the population and diversity of each community can magnify its impact.

Plans to ensure continuity of critical, direct child protection services interrupted by an emergency or disaster, are developed by PCSAs in collaboration with their local stakeholders and service providers. Private agencies holding custody of children placed in substitute care or supervising certified resource caregivers, Children’s Residential Centers, and group homes with children in placement are also required to develop disaster plans to ensure continuity of services for children and families.

Through OAC [Rule 5101:2-5-13.1 Disaster preparedness plan requirements](#), DCY, requires each agency under its purview to have specific policies in place related to agency operations, personnel practices, provision of services, etc. This rule also requires public and private agencies to develop a county and/or agency specific disaster plan in cooperation with key stakeholders and service providers (e.g., caregivers, families, other agencies, courts, shelters). Policies and plans should be developed by each agency to address the specific cultural needs of those with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic status within their jurisdiction. Agencies should include community stakeholders and partner agencies that are able to recognize and support those specific needs in their disaster planning process. Examples of these services from the Capacity Building Center for States, 2021, suggests the following:

- Immediate trauma services.
- Assistance for medically fragile children and their caregivers.
- Benefit programs to respond to new needs.
- Childcare for families.

Additionally, each agency should engage with community services and resources that are available to support the needs of both the diverse and underserved areas of their community, these local services can include:

- Hospitals and community health centers
- Food banks
- Emergency management agencies
- Faith centers
- Public transportation
- Community-based organizations
- Those with lived experience
- Community businesses

During a disaster there is a potential for children to be displaced or adversely affected. Locating missing children and reuniting minors with their parent/guardian(s) is a priority. The most effective method to reunite children is to provide efficient and coordinated family reunification programs with a goal to deliver reunification services and support to survivors and their families. The agency that has the lead for reunification of children (depending on where the disaster occurs) will coordinate its efforts and

requests for resources (such as the National Emergency Child Locator Center) with the lead agency coordinating reunification operations. Reunification support teams may be assembled to assess reunification needs and to support multi-agency coordination, information sharing and other reunification operations.

The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response is a key agency in ensuring the health and well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities to support vulnerable families living at, near, or below the margins. They play a key role in preparedness, response, and recovery to support vulnerable families when disasters strike. Children services agencies should utilize this resource as they assist in coordinating efforts to:

- Prevent additional destabilization of socially vulnerable individuals and families who relied on human services programs, systems, and networks pre-disaster.
- Support socially vulnerable individuals and families that need assistance navigating human services programs because of the disaster.
- Support the continuity and restoration of human services providers and delivery systems in disaster-impacted communities.
- Enhance the capability of human services providers in host communities to support displaced disaster survivors during their transition to recovery.

Areas that must be addressed in an agency's disaster preparedness plan include roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies they partner with for this plan. One of the most critical objectives of the disaster plan, whether public or private agency, is to coordinate efforts to ensure the location and safety of the children in their care. The plan is intended to be equitable, address the varying level of needs in their respective communities and how an agency will respond to those needs, and include, but not be limited to:

- Identification of essential personnel needed for the operation of the agency.
- Identification of any health concerns which will need to be addressed to ensure employee safety (i.e., Stay at Home Order because of a virus).
- Identification of necessary travel and restrictions related to travel.
- Alternative physical work location (provisions for temporary work sites).
- Communication plan for agency staff, substitute caregivers, and other critical team members – with or without e-mail, internet, Ohio's Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) or telephone access.
- Identification of essential work activities that must continue to ensure child safety and support caregivers, youth, and service providers.
- Procedures for handling new reports of child maltreatment.
- Procedures for how assessments/investigations will be completed.
- Procedures for tracking clients and substitute caregivers (with or without Ohio's CCWIS or other technical systems in place).
- Continuity of services to families receiving in-home supportive services.
- Continuity of services to children in substitute care and kinship care placements.
- Maintenance and security of agency records not included in Ohio's CCWIS including soft copies stored in other software applications and hard copies.
- Maintenance and security of court records for child protective services cases and PCPA adoption court records.

- Coordination of services with law enforcement, hospitals/medical providers, schools, appropriate agencies, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to understand and define respective reunification roles, responsibilities, capabilities, capacity of their jurisdictions or other disaster response agencies:
 - Children in agency custody
 - Children with no known or available parent, guardian, or custodian
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for agencies and organizations that are responsible for the temporary care of children (educational, childcare, medical, foster care, juvenile justice, and recreational facilities) will be established prior to the need to activate this plan.
- Working with emergency shelters:
 - Staff training in disaster preparedness
 - Coordination of services for children and families in emergency shelters (physical location; shared responsibilities)
 - Working with volunteers
- Protocols to share information among agencies/organizations and neighboring counties providing reunification services will have been developed through Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs).
- Coordinate and facilitate multi-agency family reunification response operations.

Plans developed by PCPAs, PNAs, CRCs and group homes must address, at a minimum:

- Identification of essential personnel needed for the operation of the agency.
- Identification of an alternative physical work location including provisions for temporary work sites.
- Communication plan for agency staff, substitute caregivers, facility staff (if applicable) and other critical team members.
- Identification of essential work activities that must continue to ensure child safety and support caregivers, facility staff (if applicable), youth and service providers.
- Procedures for tracking clients and substitute caregivers.
- Continuity of services to children in substitute care.
- Maintenance and security of agency records.

Much of the work of public and private agencies providing direct services is dependent upon or supported by state procedures and systems. Because of this, DCY must have disaster recovery strategies in place that are specific to DCY, and concurrently have protocols and procedures in place to assist and support agencies' disaster plans. The disaster recovery strategies to support public and private agencies providing children services are outlined in this document under the following headings:

- Continuity of required activities.
- Maintenance of children services records that are included in Ohio's CCWIS.
- Physical work location for state program staff.
- Essential DCY operations.
- Continuity of services and/or provision of services for children placed out of or into Ohio because of a natural disaster (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children - ICPC).
- Intrastate/interstate communication system.
- Media communication plans.

- Culturally specific responses.

Continuity of Required DCY Activities

Human Resources will utilize the State Alert system to communicate emergency information to employees related to weather and non-weather-related emergencies and/or declared disasters. The system will communicate to all staff employed by ODJFS/DCY and employees will follow the DCY Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) which includes provisions for communicating essential information to ODJFS/DCY staff and contractors to maintain Business Continuity within DCY facilities or in support of DCY service delivery.

DCY Office is located in Columbus, Ohio. Staff assigned to the office can work from their approved alternative work location should the need arise. Staff not assigned to the Columbus office can work from their approved alternative work location and/or the Columbus office should the need arise.

Maintenance of Children Services Records that are Included in Ohio's CCWIS

Ohio completed full implementation of the statewide automated child welfare information system (Ohio SACWIS) in 2008. Since that time, information previously maintained in accordance with internal local agency procedures and available solely through agency hard copy files and computer systems has been housed in a computer system operated and maintained by DCY. As a result, DCY has responsibility for ensuring continued availability of case record and provider information housed in Ohio CCWIS; as well as ensuring the PCSAs can enter new referrals and document the assessment/investigation activities on new child maltreatment reports.

Ohio's CCWIS application is web-based, and therefore, accessible from any location via the internet. Currently, the Ohio's CCWIS production system resides in a secure facility called the State of Ohio Computer Center (i.e., The SOCC). This facility offers the system 24x7x365 on-site security and a 24-hour battery-based back up and a 72-hour diesel-based backup. There are redundant network connections to the building as well as 24x7x365 support staff on-site.

From a systems perspective, the production environment is architected for high availability with server clusters housing the presentation, business, and database tiers of the application. Each of these tiers is horizontally scalable and offers failover within the respective clusters. The database tiers are segregated into a processing and a data tier with the processing tiers running in the cluster and the data residing on a storage area network.

There is a secondary live backup of data to a read-only instance within the storage area network that could be used in case of emergency. The data from the storage area network is backed up to disk with a daily incremental backup and a monthly backup. These disk backups are stored offsite in a secured location and a reasonable distance from the SOCC.

Physical Work Location for State Program Staff

The DCY Senior Management Team has identified its role in maintaining essential functions during an emergency business interruption. Staff have been designated as essential and non-essential based on the anticipated need for continuity or immediate resumption of the job tasks performed. It is understood that staff in some units may need to be temporarily re-assigned to different work

responsibilities to resume or maintain operation of essential functions following an emergency business interruption.

The DCY internal e-mail application is accessible via the internet. If staff cannot report to their assigned physical work locations, information will be sent to all DCY employees through the State of Ohio State Alert system. Employees would then be permitted to work at their approved alternative work location.

Essential DCY Operations

A plan for continuity of internal and external communications following a disaster or other emergency has also been developed by administration. In the event of an emergency business interruption, Ohio's governor has identified the following work activities as essential functions:

- Provision of technical assistance to counties and private agencies.
- Intake screening and investigations.
- Monitoring and support of resource homes.
- Monitoring and support of residential facilities and group homes.
- Payment of reimbursement claims from counties and private agencies and processing of payments to kinship and adoptive parents.
- Processing ICPC cases, Ohio's CCWIS Alleged Perpetrator Search (OSAPS) requests, and Putative Father Registry requests.
- Processing public information and legislative requests.

Certified foster homes, group homes, CRCs, and pre-finalized adoptive homes that relocate or experience a change in household composition because of a disaster, are subject to an assessment of their compliance with the site and safety requirements outlined in Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) rule. The recommending agency (public or private) is responsible for conducting the site and safety assessments; however, there may be certain requirements that DCY would adjust or waive (e.g., time frames) to assist with continuity of services and prevent placement disruptions.

Foster homes, adoptive homes and residential facilities with current placements that experience a change in capacity or that must relocate because of a disaster or other emergency are subject to a re-assessment of their compliance with OAC rule requirements (particularly, occupancy, sleeping arrangements, site and safety requirements, and staffing, if applicable). If the foster or adoptive home becomes uninhabitable for any reason, OAC rules require that the caregiver notify the recommending agency (PCSA, PCPA or PNA) and any agency which has placed a child in the home, of the situation within twenty-four hours. The recommending agency (public or private) is then responsible for assessing the caregiver's continued compliance with applicable rules. Again, DCY may have to work with an agency to adjust certain requirements for a limited time to support the agency's efforts to ensure continuity of services to children in care and prevent placement disruptions.

Pursuant to OAC rule 5101:2-9-07 Emergency planning and preparedness, residential facilities, e.g., group homes and CRCs, are required to develop and implement a set of written procedures for staff and residents to follow in emergencies and disasters. These procedures must be developed in consultation with, and approved by, a local or state fire inspector, and include specific instructions and procedures for the evacuation of buildings, the assignment of staff during emergencies, and a contingency plan for the care of residents who have been evacuated. If the residential facility cares for children who are physically or emotionally handicapped, the facility emergency procedures must also include specific instructions as to the evacuation of these children. Each residential facility shall ensure that all staff and children are familiar with its emergency procedures.

Processing of the Ohio's CCWIS Alleged Perpetrator Search (OSAPS) and Putative Father Registry (PFR) searches are essential DCY functions, each with an identified downtime tolerance of two to five days. A database tracks all OSAPS requests and are stored on a shared network drive. The PFR database is a

web-based application. OSAPS requests are submitted primarily via the OSAPS on-line system, but may be submitted in rare circumstances via e-mail, fax, U.S. mail or delivery service. PFR registrations and search requests may be entered by individuals using the on-line system or sent to DCY via U.S. mail. Information submitted by U.S. mail, delivery service or fax is entered into the appropriate database on the date of receipt. As a result, damage to hard copy files and documentation does not automatically equate to loss of the information needed to process the search requests. Ohio CCWIS access is required to conduct alleged perpetrator searches. With internet access, work for both programs can be resumed or maintained using paper forms, fax, mail, e-mail, and telephone; and can be completed at an alternative work location.

Continuity of Services and/or Provision of Services for Children Placed Out of or into Ohio as a Result of a Natural Disaster (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC))

As Children Services Policy and Supports directly impacts the safety and timeliness of children's placements, ICPC operations will be a primary focus for business resumption activities following a disaster or other emergency. Staff has identified a recovery time objective (downtime tolerance) for ICPC of two to five days.

Work tasks associated with processing ICPC cases are completed within Ohio's CCWIS application. While the work can continue via paper for some states, if the Ohio's CCWIS application is unavailable, efficiency and timeliness will be negatively impacted. Some states do not have the ability to accept paper documentation via mail due to the fact all staff work fully remotely and do not have a physical site where they can receive mail.

The ICPC program can utilize paper forms to resume or maintain operations when working with some states, but some states can only accept documents electronically – either via email or through the National Electronic ICPC Enterprise (NEICE) system. Therefore, the program can function at an alternative work site with phone, fax, mail service, computers or laptops, and internet access.

All work for ICPC is completed electronically. There are no paper documents and all paper documentation that existed previously is now stored in FileNet. All current cases have their documentation in Ohio's CCWIS. All communication and sending/receiving of documents are completed electronically – either through the NEICE system (from Ohio CCWIS) or through email.

If the Ohio's CCWIS system was to go down, but the email system was working, ICPC work could be completed via email until Ohio's CCWIS is back up. Electronic documents could be stored in the secure ICPC folders on the private R drive (assuming it was accessible) until Ohio's CCWIS is available again.

ICPC Staff currently work several days remotely with 2 days per week in the office and have all the equipment needed to work effectively in either location, including laptops and Teams software for calls/meetings/messages. No printers or scanners are needed or used. If Wi-Fi is available, ICPC work can continue.

Intrastate/Interstate Communication System

The DCY Family and Customer Support Center will continue to serve as the centralized point of contact for the public, as well as public and private agencies seeking technical assistance or guidance following a disaster or other emergency business interruption. The Family and Customer Support

Center staff can respond to inquiries and provide assistance for all programs within DCY and collaborates with staff from all of the various DCY Divisions and Bureaus as needed.

Daily Family and Customer Support Center functions will be essential in the event of a disaster or other emergency business interruption, and the recovery time objective has been identified as less than four hours. Operational needs for continuity of Family and Customer Support Center functions are phone, e-mail, computers or laptops, and internet access. Work can be conducted at alternative sites. It is likely that staff from other programs would be temporarily re-assigned to the Family and Customer Support Center to assist with anticipated workload increases following a disaster or other emergency.

The DCY Family and Customer Support Center is accessible by phone: (844)-234-5437 (select option 1) or email: HELP-DESK-OCF@childrenandyouth.ohio.gov.

Media Communication Plans

In response to a disaster situation, DCY Office of Communications would be responsible for identifying the most appropriate method of releasing information to the media. Communications works directly with the management team of the affected Divisions to determine the information and details that will be released.

Media releases should accommodate the community's language needs. During a disaster situation, communication should be translated in a timely and clear manner that is consistent with communications distributed to other groups in the community.

Pursuant to Internal Policy and Procedure (IPP) #11001 *Office of Communications and Responsibilities*:

- All media requests must be referred to the Office of Communications. Even though various program areas may occasionally receive media requests, they must refer all media requests to the Office of Communications so that the Office of Communications can respond to the request appropriately.
- The Office of Communications is responsible for the accurate dissemination of information to the media and will respond to all media requests in a timely manner. The Office of Communications also will determine how best to provide the information requested (for example, in person, via telephone or by email).
- Unless approved by the Deputy Director of Communications or the Director, only staff whose specific job duties include responding to the media will respond to media requests. This includes responding in writing, verbally, electronically, by mail or in any other form. No information will be provided to any local, state and/or national media outlets or to representatives of such outlets without permission from the Deputy Director of Communications or the Director, unless it falls within the responding person's stated job duties.

Culturally Specific Responses

DCY created a high-level disaster training for agencies, particularly aimed at county leadership to include equitable practices when disasters hit their community. This training has been developed and distributed to agencies by DCY through self-directed content in the Child and Adult Protective Services

Learning Management System (CAPS LMS). The training includes actions that recognize and integrate distinct, individual, and especially community-focused race, ethnic, cultural, and language priorities and perspectives into mainstream emergency preparedness, response and recovery plans and programs. DCY launched this training entitled, The Logistics of Disaster Planning, at the end of March 2024.