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Trends in Foster Care Use in Washington State: 1970 to 1997

Finding: The average monthly rate of foster care use in Washington has changed little over the last decade.

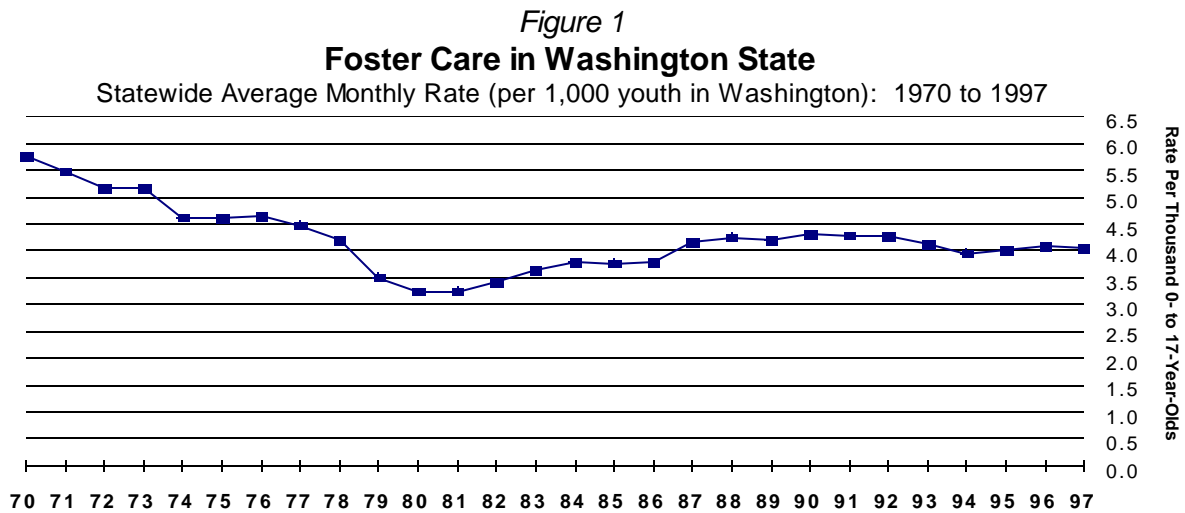
Purpose

In 1994, the Washington State Legislature passed legislation intended to decrease juvenile violence and certain "at-risk" behaviors of youth in Washington.¹ The goal of the 1994 legislation was to achieve measurable, cost-effective reductions in eight specific outcomes.² This topic brief focuses on trends in foster care in Washington State.

Foster Care in Washington State

The Department of Social and Health Services oversees placements for the family foster care program. DSHS describes the foster care program as providing "services to children who need short-term or temporary protection because they are dependent, abused, neglected, and/or cannot live with their parents because of conditions which threaten their normal development."

Figure 1 reports data on the rate of youth in state and private foster care.³ The data are from the "Income Assistance, Social Services, and Medical Assistance" monthly reports published by DSHS. The average number of youth in foster care during a typical month in 1997 was 6,113. When divided by the total number of youth in Washington under the age of 18, the rate of foster care was 4.05 per thousand youth in 1997. **Table 1**, on page 2, displays the rate of state and private foster care placement by county from 1987 through 1997.



¹ RCW 70.190.050.

² Violent crime, teen substance abuse, teen pregnancy, teen suicide, dropping out of school, child abuse or neglect, domestic violence, state funded out-of-home placements.

³ Private agency foster care providers receive monthly service fees from the state.

Table 1

Foster Care in Washington State
 Monthly Averages by County
 Per 1,000 Youth 0 to 17 Years Old

County	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Adams ¹	2.49	2.17	2.02	1.84	1.88	1.97	1.87	1.71	2.14	1.97	2.07
Asotin ⁴	2.95	2.70	1.68	1.72	1.40	2.86	3.83	3.30	3.31	3.20	4.09
Benton ⁴	3.75	2.74	2.61	2.57	2.21	2.73	2.65	2.41	2.23	2.62	3.05
Chelan ⁴	3.80	3.11	3.50	3.41	3.23	3.49	3.00	3.46	3.76	3.67	3.29
Clallam	13.84	9.46	5.61	5.87	5.08	6.31	7.35	7.27	8.09	8.17	7.18
Clark	4.07	3.82	3.82	3.55	3.44	4.13	3.77	3.78	4.30	3.89	3.15
Columbia ²	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cowlitz ⁴	4.90	4.28	4.60	4.65	4.91	5.98	6.23	6.46	7.47	7.50	7.28
Douglas ⁴	3.44	2.84	3.22	3.16	3.06	3.39	2.97	3.50	3.89	3.78	3.40
Ferry ⁴	3.89	2.66	2.28	2.59	2.86	2.75	2.96	2.54	3.50	3.85	4.31
Franklin ⁴	3.31	2.41	2.28	2.23	1.91	2.37	2.30	2.09	1.94	2.28	2.66
Garfield ⁴	3.15	2.88	1.79	1.83	1.48	3.00	4.04	3.46	3.45	3.34	4.26
Grant ⁴	2.69	2.35	2.19	2.00	2.05	2.16	2.06	1.90	2.38	2.19	2.30
Grays Harbor	6.62	5.98	5.94	5.39	5.87	7.93	8.59	7.82	8.34	8.36	7.54
Island	2.47	2.13	1.61	1.57	1.78	2.44	2.25	1.76	2.13	2.24	2.02
Jefferson	3.33	2.73	2.99	3.20	3.67	4.42	3.48	2.39	3.94	3.97	5.00
King	3.56	3.15	3.23	3.41	3.53	4.43	4.32	4.14	4.01	4.04	4.07
Kitsap	2.94	2.65	3.02	3.33	3.36	3.91	3.54	3.78	3.78	4.24	4.71
Kittitas	3.00	2.45	1.52	1.71	1.94	1.55	3.35	2.56	1.69	1.54	1.57
Klickitat	6.90	6.43	5.33	5.41	7.02	9.83	10.63	10.65	10.01	8.59	6.64
Lewis	5.42	4.89	5.02	5.18	5.24	6.73	6.24	6.79	6.28	6.53	6.79
Lincoln ⁵	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mason	3.97	3.77	3.96	4.24	5.08	6.41	6.89	5.97	5.03	4.87	5.16
Okanogan	5.05	4.73	5.79	6.47	8.16	9.37	9.59	8.31	6.93	6.00	4.30
Pacific	5.14	3.75	3.13	3.83	3.20	4.28	3.65	3.77	4.19	4.61	4.72
Pend Oreille ⁴	4.16	2.85	2.45	2.78	3.04	3.23	4.54	4.02	3.95	3.65	3.55
Pierce	5.80	4.89	4.90	5.09	4.84	5.31	4.59	4.21	4.03	4.30	4.32
San Juan	56.43	35.18	0.97	1.17	1.34	1.94	1.99	1.96	2.30	1.45	0.63
Skagit	3.82	3.27	4.04	3.92	3.34	3.38	2.68	2.14	2.15	1.88	2.23
Skamania ⁵	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Snohomish	3.06	2.44	2.45	2.40	2.19	2.85	3.20	3.42	3.79	3.79	3.50
Spokane	4.97	4.39	4.42	4.47	4.29	4.88	4.46	4.14	4.23	4.29	4.53
Stevens ⁴	3.89	2.66	2.28	2.60	2.85	2.72	2.94	2.51	3.44	3.79	4.25
Thurston	2.02	1.99	2.21	2.49	2.65	2.89	2.81	2.37	2.31	2.65	2.74
Wahkiakum ⁴	5.15	4.56	4.98	5.13	5.40	6.54	6.83	7.09	8.15	8.18	7.94
Walla Walla	6.18	3.88	5.09	4.31	3.88	4.26	4.30	4.01	3.05	2.79	2.83
Whatcom	3.55	2.78	2.83	2.95	3.15	3.19	2.87	3.02	2.63	2.23	2.19
Whitman	2.34	2.50	2.41	2.03	2.97	3.67	4.53	3.29	2.96	3.49	2.98
Yakima	3.32	2.70	2.86	3.18	3.29	4.80	4.85	4.96	5.65	6.16	6.47
State	4.15	4.26	4.19	4.31	4.29	4.27	4.12	3.96	4.01	4.08	4.05

¹ For those counties that share a DSHS Community Service Office (CSO), county foster care estimates were made using the ratio of county populations served by the CSO.

² Data were not available for Columbia, Lincoln, and Skamania counties.