

# Critical Workforce Needs



The [National Child Welfare Workforce Institute](https://www.ncwwi.org) (NCWWI) has worked in partnership with public and tribal child welfare programs and schools of social work across the country for more than 12 years to build the health of the child welfare workforce. Based on research and evaluation data from the field and longitudinal studies conducted with thousands of child welfare professionals, NCWWI has developed and refined the Workforce Development Framework (WDF) that identifies the essential components of

an effective child welfare workforce. Informed by data from Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessments (COHA) and Tribal Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessments (TCOHA), NCWWI has identified common themes and critical needs across both public and tribal child welfare programs.

WDF Component	Critical Need
<b>Recruitment and Selection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost all Child Welfare (CW) programs struggle with recruiting and retaining qualified and effective child welfare staff</li> <li>• Turnover rates remain high, at 20-50% nationally</li> <li>• Staff replacement costs are high; it is an estimated \$58,000 to hire, onboard, and train a new employee</li> <li>• Issues recruiting and retaining qualified and effective staff are related to challenges in all the WDF component areas</li> </ul>
<b>Education/Professional Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CW agencies need more staff with social work training and BSW and MSW degrees and can benefit from Title IV-E training and education programs and other partnerships with schools of social work</li> <li>• More professional development opportunities are needed for experienced staff, supervisors, and managers</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Need for innovative learning strategies such as coaching, mentoring, and experiential learning through simulation and virtual reality technology</li></ul>
<b>Supervision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workers rate supervision as a strength across agencies</li><li>• Strong supervision is critical for staff well-being and retention</li><li>• Supervisors need more training and supports for addressing secondary traumatic stress and burnout</li><li>• Supervisors need training and support to provide coaching and mentoring</li></ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CW agencies need more diversity in leadership positions</li><li>• Need adaptive change leaders who can implement change; create a positive culture; and ensure best practice, collaboration, and improved outcomes for families</li><li>• CW agencies need to grow leadership at every seat to create pipelines for succession</li></ul>
<b>Workload</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most CW staff report workload is too heavy and experience job stress due to time pressure<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Workload is a contributor to burnout and staff exits</li></ul></li><li>• Chronically high caseloads, compliance-driven policies, lack of job resources, and high administrative job demands contribute to heavy workload</li><li>• More time is spent documenting than working directly with families, which is a disincentive for workers and adds to the already heavy workload</li></ul>
<b>Work Conditions and Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CW staff have pervasively high secondary traumatic stress and burnout levels compared to other human services fields</li><li>• Need to ensure physical and psychological worker safety in the field and in the office</li><li>• Need for organizational culture and climate that supports the holistic well-being of the workforce (resources, professional development, job satisfaction, support, and self-care)</li><li>• Need for more promotional pathways and opportunities for salary differentials through attainment of advanced social work degrees and career ladder development</li></ul>
<b>Practice Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CW programs need practice models, policies, and procedures that are values-based and family-centered</li><li>• CW leaders need skills for implementing systems change and supporting uptake of new practices and using distributive leadership skills to include staff in decision-making</li></ul>



---

**Organizational Culture and Climate**

- CW programs with positive organizational culture and climate are more likely to retain an effective and healthy workforce. Elements include:
  - Culture of learning where innovative practice is encouraged and teams learn from mistakes
  - Culture that prioritizes physical and psychological well-being of staff and families served by the program
  - Inclusive climate that values diversity of people, thoughts, perspectives
  - Climate of support and teamwork

---

**Community Engagement**

- Resources and services available to children and families vary widely across the country, although rural and poorer communities consistently lack trauma-informed services
  - More cross-systems training and practice models are needed to support cross-systems collaboration and wraparound support for families
  - CW agencies with strong service delivery options and collaborative agency partnerships are more likely to retain CW staff
- Public perceptions of child welfare work impact staff recruitment and retention

---

**Inclusivity/Racial Equity**

- CW staff who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color report significantly more bias and workplace prejudice and discrimination than White CW staff
  - CW agencies need more training related to equitable and bias-reduction practices that apply to the workplace as well as the work with children and families
  - CW agencies need more training and consistent practice around the Indian Child Welfare Act and best practices around active efforts for all families
-