

Introduction to AFCARS for Tribal Child Welfare Programs

September 2024

AFCARS is the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System.

Tribes that operate a direct title IV-E agency, or claim reimbursement for title IV-E-eligible foster care expenses from the federal government, are required to submit AFCARS data to the government twice per year.

Despite its name, AFCARS is not a data system. It is two data files that contain case-level data, much of which your program already may collect. Your case management system should be set up to take information from case files and move it to a report to submit to the government. If you receive IV-E reimbursement through your state as a pass-through, you are already reporting AFCARS data to the state regarding children who receive IV-E funding.

AFCARS helps the government learn about child welfare nationwide.

Children's Bureau uses AFCARS data to learn about the characteristics, needs, and outcomes of children and families who are involved in the foster care system in every state, territory, and tribal nation that receives title IV-E funding. AFCARS data helps the government understand trends and make informed decisions on funding, technical assistance provision, regulatory change, and other planning. For example, Children's Bureau uses AFCARS data **to report child welfare outcomes to Congress annually** and to conduct **other important research**.

Native children and families, although overrepresented in the child welfare system, historically have been underrepresented in AFCARS and other federal data. As more tribal nations begin to operate title IV-E agencies and report AFCARS data, policymakers and funders will understand more about tribal child welfare and how tribes are similar to or different from other jurisdictions.



AFCARS data elements include common child welfare information.

The AFCARS report includes data on

- all children who are placed in out-of-home care, and
- all children who exited care into adoption or guardianship assistance.

There are 186 data elements to report on for children in foster care, and 19 data elements for children in adoption or guardianship. Case management systems can be set up to extract these data elements to a file that is uploaded to the federal data system. Your program likely tracks many of these data elements in your daily casework already.

The data elements include information on:

- Demographics on children, parents/guardians, and foster caregivers
- Child health and schools
- Sex-trafficking history
- Removals and foster care placements
- Permanency plans and hearings
- Financial information
- Dates of caseworkers' monthly visits
- Child's exit from foster care

Free technical assistance is available.

Early preparation for AFCARS is essential as it can take longer to prepare than you may think. However, you don't have to figure it out alone. Children's Bureau offers technical assistance to tribal child welfare programs that are title IV-E funded or interested in learning more about title IV-E. Technical assistance is available at no cost to the tribe.

For more information about AFCARS and to learn more about available technical assistance, please visit:

- [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System](#) (Children's Bureau)
- [Tribal Information Exchange](#)

