



## ***Differential Response Continues to Show Positive Child Welfare Results Updated September 2014***

(Des Moines, Iowa) –The Iowa Department of Human Services has released new performance data for the state’s Differential Response System for assessing child abuse cases.

The data shows that the new system is helping more families access services, and is helping keep kids safe from re-abuse. On January 1, 2014, the department began using the bipartisan-approved Differential Response System, which allows for a family assessment in addition to a traditional child abuse investigation for allegations of abuse and neglect.

About one-third of families are being assigned to the family assessment pathway, which focuses on connecting families with services and supports which can enhance safety and stability.

“This new approach, which strengthens families while protecting children, continues to perform as expected, and Iowa is seeing positive results which align with national trends,” said Wendy Rickman, administrator of Adult, Child and Family Services. “This was truly a bipartisan effort, with lawmakers providing support and guidance in developing Iowa’s Differential Response System. New data is indicating the model continues to be successful.”

Traditional child abuse assessments include an investigation to determine if child abuse has occurred, followed by a decision regarding whether the name of the perpetrator must be placed on an abuse registry. The implementation of a Differential Response System continues the investigatory approach with the more serious cases, and uses a proactive approach for less serious cases.

“The emphasis on determining whether abuse occurred can overshadow helping a family meet their unique needs. And, it may set the stage for an adversarial relationship with child protection workers,” said Rickman. “Now there’s an opportunity to improve family functioning, dynamics and healthy child development before negative action, and this can help families become stronger and remain safer for kids.”

The family assessment pathway is not used in physical or sexual abuse cases, or other types of serious abuse cases seen here <http://dhs.iowa.gov/child-abuse>. It is used only in denial of critical care cases where the child is not in imminent danger. If at any time during a family assessment it appears the child isn’t safe, the case is reassigned to the child abuse assessment pathway. Iowa law clearly defines assignment and reassignment criteria for child abuse cases.

While the family assessment pathway results in pairing families with services and supports (<http://dhs.iowa.gov/child-welfare/services>) traditional child abuse assessments result in a finding. Those include:

- “founded”- abuse occurred and placement on the child abuse registry.
- “confirmed”- abuse occurred, but it was minor, isolated and not likely to reoccur (only in denial of critical care cases and physical abuse), does not go on the central abuse registry.
- “not confirmed”- abuse did not occur.

Data from January through June 2014 indicates the following:

- About 38 percent of cases, or 4,571 of 11,913 cases, were assigned to the family assessment pathway
- 532 cases, or 4 percent of family assessment cases, were reassigned from the family assessment pathway to the child abuse assessment pathway, which aligns with the national standard of 2 percent to 5 percent.
- 4,117 families, 1,386 more than the same period in 2013, were referred for state-funded services
- Of the 180 cases reassigned from family assessment to child abuse assessment due to a safety concern, 114 (63%) resulted in a finding.
- The percentage of founded cases increased by 3 percent for more serious cases from the same period the previous year, and confirmed cases increased 1 percent. The smaller total number of cases on the child abuse assessment pathway, combined with the fact they are more serious cases, results in a higher founded percentage. Overall, fewer names were placed on the central abuse registry.

Differential Response Systems are used in about two dozen states, and supported by the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). Studies from other states have found that under such systems, subsequent reporting of families decreases and families’ engagement increases, while safety remains the same.

Laverne Armstrong, DHS’s administrator of field operations, said the department will continue monitoring outcomes under the new system, and be vigilant in following the law and reassigning cases whenever necessary.

“The goal of Iowa’s child welfare system is to keep families together whenever that can be done safely, and this data shows the new approach is working to provide needed services and supports toward that goal,” Armstrong said. “We’ll continue to closely monitor pathway assignments and how that is working to protect kids and make families safer.”

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and

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