



OLR BACKGROUNDER: DCF POST-MAJORITY SERVICES

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MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR FORMER FOSTER CHILDREN

As of January 1, 2014, the federal Affordable Care Act established a mandatory Medicaid coverage group for former foster children under age 26 who (1) are not otherwise Medicaid-eligible and (2) were in the foster care system when they turned age 18. Individuals in this group also receive Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) program services up to age 21. EPSDT provides comprehensive and preventive health services to children enrolled in Medicaid, including health screenings and diagnostic services.

ISSUE

Describe the (1) process to transition youth out of Department of Children and Family (DCF) care when they turn age 18 and (2) services available to help youth transition out of DCF care.

SUMMARY

The law requires DCF to develop a transition plan for any youth in department custody before his or her 18th birthday ([CGS § 17a-15c](#)). Under DCF policy, the department must hold an adolescent case transfer conference when the youth turns age 14 and develop a transition plan by the time he or she turns age 16. In certain circumstances, youths in DCF custody before they turn age 18 may remain in department custody and continue receiving services on a voluntary basis from age 18 until age 21. Youths who leave the voluntary services program may, in certain circumstances, re-enter before they turn age 21.

Eligible youths with ongoing mental health needs may receive services from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) when they turn age 18. According to DMHAS' website, its Young Adult Services (YAS) program "was developed to help young adults transition successfully from the Dept. of Children & Families to the adult mental health system and to achieve the necessary skills for adulthood." OLR Report [2013-R-0319](#) discusses YAS and other mental health services available to teenagers and young adults in Connecticut.



As part of the process of transitioning from department care, some youths in DCF care participate in a transitional living program, which helps them learn independent living skills while still receiving professional support.

According to DCF policy, for a youth that is adopted through the department's foster care system before he or she turns 18, the department pays higher education expenses for tuition, fees, and room and board, equivalent to the cost at the UConn Storrs campus, through the school semester of the youth's 23rd birthday if he or she meets certain requirements (e.g., remains enrolled full-time, maintains at least a 2.0 GPA, and contributes a minimum \$500 annually towards educational costs)([DCF Policy 48-20-2](#)).

DCF policy also allows the department to provide financial assistance for post-secondary education (PSE) expenses, within available appropriations, to youths who, at the time they turn age 18, are committed to DCF as uncared for, neglected, or abused ([DCF Policy 42-20-20](#)). Such youths may also receive additional financial assistance and case management services by participating in the Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) or through Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resources (CHEER). These youths may also be eligible for health coverage through Medicaid due to recent changes under the federal Affordable Care Act (see sidebar).

For more information about DCF adolescent transition services, see the Department's [Adolescent Services Practice Guide](#).

ADOLESCENT CASE TRANSFER CONFERENCE

According to DCF policy, the department must hold an adolescent case transfer conference for every youth age 14 or older in an out-of-home placement or committed to DCF as uncared for, neglected, or abused. The conference is held to determine if the youth should be assigned to an adolescent specialist. Adolescent specialists are certified social workers trained in childhood and adolescent trauma who are responsible for providing services to youths age 14 or older ([DCF Policy 42-1](#)).

Conference attendees include the youth's current social worker, the social work supervisor, the adolescent program manager, and the regional education consultant. The attendees discuss various topics, including the youth's permanency goal, current placement, trauma history, comprehensive needs, and any compelling reasons the youth should remain with his or her current social worker.

If a youth is transferred to an adolescent specialist, the reasons must be documented in his or her records. The specialist performs various functions. Among other things, he or she:

1. educates the youth about PSE, job training options, and volunteer opportunities;
2. works with the youth and school personnel to collect a comprehensive educational record and monitor the academic programming to create a PSE plan;
3. ensures the youth is educated in financial planning;
4. develops with the youth permanent, adult and social support systems; and
5. when appropriate, helps transition the youth from DCF to DMHAS or the Department of Developmental Services.

The adolescent specialist also reviews the youth's credit report with him or her and helps the youth to resolve any inaccuracies. Under federal and state law, DCF must annually obtain a free consumer credit report for each youth age 16 or older in DCF custody who is placed in foster care ([CGS § 17a-114b](#)).

TRANSITION PLAN

DCF policy requires the department to develop a transition plan for each child in its custody when the child turns age 16. The adolescent specialist must develop the transition plan in collaboration with the youth. It must be as detailed as the youth chooses and include specific options for:

1. the anticipated date the youth will leave DCF care;
2. names and contact information for at least three significant family members or other adults;
3. anticipated living arrangements;
4. an estimated budget;
5. sources and amount of income;
6. health insurance;
7. education;

8. local opportunities for mentoring;
9. continuing support services, including application for benefits;
10. work force supports;
11. employment services;
12. immigration services, to the extent not previously addressed; and
13. any other needs the youth may have ([DCF Policy 42-7](#)).

The transition plan must be reviewed by DCF staff at the first annual case review after it is developed and then be reviewed and revised annually after that until the youth leaves DCF care.

VOLUNTARY DCF COMMITMENT

By law, youths committed to DCF custody before age 18 may remain in department custody and continue receiving services on a voluntary basis until age 21 if they consent and are:

1. enrolled in a full-time approved secondary education program or an approved program leading to an equivalent credential,
2. enrolled full-time in an institution providing postsecondary or vocational education, or
3. participating full-time in a DCF-approved program or activity designed to promote employment or remove employment barriers.

The law allows the commissioner, in her discretion, to waive the full-time enrollment or participation requirement based on compelling circumstances. It also requires DCF, within 120 days after a youth's 18th birthday, to file a motion in juvenile court to determine whether continued custody is in the youth's best interest and, if so, whether there is an appropriate permanency plan for the child (i.e., a plan stating what permanent outcome DCF feels is in the child's best interest and the facts on which the decision is based) ([CGS § 46b-129\(j\)\(5\)](#)).

VOLUNTARY SERVICES RE-ENTRY

Youths may apply to resume voluntary DCF adolescent services if they:

1. were committed to DCF as abused or neglected or were dually committed (i.e., committed for abuse or neglect and delinquency) when they turned age 18,

2. left DCF care after age 18 but before age 21 and did not participate in two PSE or employment training programs,
3. are not married,
4. do not have serious criminal charges pending,
5. are not on probation or incarcerated,
6. are not on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces, and
7. have had their case closed for at least 90 days or services discontinued for at least 90 days. (This criteria may be waived if the youth is pregnant or parenting.)

The youths must receive the commissioner's approval to resume services if they have not received a high school diploma and are pursuing a GED. Once approved, they must accept additional support services in order to complete the GED within six months ([DCF Policy 42-8](#)).

TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAMS

According to DCF's [Adolescent Services Practice Guide](#), the department offers a range of transitional living programs for older youth in department care to practice their independent living skills with support. These programs include Preparing Adolescents for Self-Sufficiency (PASS) homes, Maternity Homes, and Supportive Work, Education and Transition Program (SWETP) homes.

PASS Homes

PASS group homes are six to 10 bed residences in neighborhood settings that are staffed 24 hours per day, seven days per week with non-clinical paraprofessionals.

The homes serve youths ages 14 to 21 with mild to moderate behavioral health needs who are too young or lack the necessary skills to live independently. PASS home residents attend school and receive services in the community. Such services include screenings and referrals; individual, group, and family therapy; and substance abuse screening. They also receive stress and crisis management training, tutoring, and vocational services.

Maternity Homes

Maternity homes provide congregate care for pregnant and parenting young women. Residents receive pre- and post-natal health services from a local health care provider, professional counseling, an educational program (including parenting education by a certified parent educator), and child care.

SWETP Homes

SWETP homes are community-based and staffed apartments in which DCF-committed youths age 16 or older reside. The SWETP program helps residents develop independent living skills through coaching, teaching, and adult leadership. Staff members provide on-site supervision 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (PSE) FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Youths committed to DCF as uncared for, abused, or neglected, upon turning age 18, may receive financial assistance for PSE, including assistance for college, technical school, or a state-accredited job training program. To be eligible for the assistance, the youth must:

1. have obtained a high school diploma or received approval prior to completing a GED;
2. show adequate social skills and appropriate behavior, as assessed by his or her social worker;
3. have signed the appropriate paperwork to continue receiving DCF services beyond age 18;
4. maintain compliance with DCF through an individual post-majority contract;
5. begin full-time post-secondary education for the first semester immediately after receiving his or her high school diploma or GED; and
6. have an approved PSE plan ([DCF Policy 42-20-20](#)).

CHAP

According to DCF's [Adolescent Services Practice Guide](#), the department "may offer the Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) and provide financial assistance to youth who were committed uncared for, abused, or neglected, or dually committed as of their 18th birthday who demonstrate an interest and ability to pursue post-secondary education or vocational training" ([DCF Policy 42-4](#)). CHAP provides youths in DCF care with support services and housing options, such as individual or shared apartments or on-campus dormitories, that enable them to move towards independent living.

In addition to the commitment requirement stated above, to qualify for CHAP, a youth must meet a number of other qualifications. Among these, he or she must:

1. have obtained a secondary school diploma or GED;
2. have exhibited adequate social, behavioral, and life skills as documented in his or her case record;
3. be enrolled and in good standing in an educational or vocational program; and
4. have completed a DCF-approved life skills program.

Life Skills Program

A life skills program is a pre-requisite for participating in CHAP. DCF-approved life skills programs help youth in DCF-care to move towards self-sufficiency by providing instruction in basic life skills, daily living and social relationships, self-care, work and study skills, career planning, and financial and communication skills.

To be admitted to such a program, a youth must be:

1. involved with DCF;
2. between age 14 and age 21;
3. residing in out-of-home placement in the community (except in SWEPT or PASS programs or therapeutic group homes); and
4. be committed to DCF as a neglected, abused, or uncared for child (or dually committed).

Youths receive completion certificates upon completing the program ([DCF Policy 42-3](#)).

Eligibility

A youth enrolled in (1) post-secondary vocational training may remain eligible for CHAP up to age 21 or (2) a post-secondary college degree program may remain eligible for CHAP up to age 23.

Participating youths must account for at least 40 “productive hours” a week (i.e., time spent devoted to classes, studying, extracurricular activities, part-time work, etc.). Of those 40 hours, at least 10 must be spent at a part-time job, internship, training, or volunteer experience. During the summer, participating youths must work, participate in summer youth employment programs, take classes, or participate in an internship.

Eligible youths who enroll in the program must sign a contract twice a year agreeing to the terms and conditions of their enrollment.

Financial Assistance

DCF may provide one-time funds as well as monthly subsidies to youths enrolled in CHAP.

One-Time Funds. According to the guide, DCF may provide CHAP participants with one-time subsidies for specified purposes in the following amounts:

1. up to \$1,500 for furniture;
2. up to \$150 for housewares and household supplies (e.g., towels, cleaning supplies, pots and pans); and
3. up to \$100 for food staple items.

DCF may also provide a one-time apartment deposit, including first and last month's rent. The maximum amount depends on the geographic area where the apartment is located.

Monthly Subsidies. Additionally, a CHAP participant's adolescent specialist and CHAP case manager, if applicable, must develop a monthly budget with the youth that accounts for rent, food, utilities, telephone, transportation, and clothing. The budget must take into account any entitlements (e.g., Social Security benefits) and PSE funds the youth receives. DCF must provide a monthly payment to the youth to cover the budgeted costs minus any entitlements. As of April 2015, the maximum monthly subsidy amount was \$1,883.

Case Management

CHAP participants may receive two years of case management services in the community, up to their 21st birthday. There are various such services available for CHAP participants, including:

1. help developing a monthly budget,
2. crisis intervention services,
3. educational status monitoring and assessment,
4. strength and needs assessment,

5. assistance with behavioral health issue management,
6. employment status monitoring, and
7. quarterly life skills acquisition reports.

Discharge from Program

A youth may be discharged from CHAP if he or she:

1. has achieved self-sufficiency and no longer needs DCF support,
2. makes a voluntary decision to no longer participate,
3. has his or her DCF commitment revoked by the court, or
4. is unable to meet the program requirements or contract terms.

COMMUNITY HOUSING EMPLOYMENT ENRICHMENT RESOURCES (CHEER)

DCF policy allows the department to use CHEER to provide financial assistance to youths who were committed uncared for, abused, neglected, or dually committed as of age 18 and who demonstrate strong motivation and ability to pursue post-secondary employment training or career development ([DCF Policy 42-5](#)).

Eligibility

CHEER services are available to youths age 18 or older, immediately after they graduate high school or complete their GED, for up to 18 months. Youths may also qualify for CHEER if they completed one year of post-secondary education or vocational training.

A CHEER applicant must, among other things:

1. be committed to DCF at the time of his or her birthday;
2. have obtained a secondary school diploma or GED;
3. have successfully completed a DCF-approved life skills program; and
4. complete activities consistent with job training or job acquisition for 40 hours per week, with certain exceptions.

To remain eligible, the youth must stay in good employment standing and DCF compliance and comply with the CHEER contract he or she enters into upon enrollment.

Financial Assistance and Case Management

A CHEER participant's adolescent specialist and CHEER case manager, if applicable, must develop a monthly budget with the youth that accounts for rent, food, utilities, telephone, transportation, and clothing. DCF must provide a monthly payment to the youth to cover the budgeted amount. Participating youths must save and deposit into a savings account 50% of any employment income during the first 10 months they participate in CHEER. CHEER participants are eligible for the same one-time funds as CHAP participants (see above) and they initially qualify for the same monthly subsidies. The DCF monthly subsidies are reduced by 25% of the original amount per quarter, starting at the beginning of the fourth quarter of the youth's enrollment.

CHEER participants, up to age 21, are also eligible for similar community case management services as CHAP participants (see above).

Discharge from Program

A youth may be discharged from CHEER if he or she has voluntarily decided to withdraw or is unable to meet the program requirements or terms of the CHEER contract.

RESOURCES

DCF "Adolescent Services Practice Guide," available at:

http://www.ct.gov/dcf/lib/dcf/policy/pdf/Adolescent_Practice_Guide.pdf

DMHAS Young Adult Services Program, available at:

<http://www.ct.gov/dmhas/cwp/view.asp?q=334784>

OLR Report [2013-R-0319](https://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/rpt/pdf/2013-R-0319.pdf), "Mental Health Services for Teenagers and Young Adults," available at: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/rpt/pdf/2013-R-0319.pdf>

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