

DHS Overview

2024



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Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is an integrated system responsible for administering publicly funded human services. The Department's mission is to:

- Help people during their most vulnerable times and prevent crises in their lives.
- Help children and youth grow up safer and healthier and assist adults in living more securely and independently.
- Advocate for support and services so people can thrive.

DHS manages more than \$1 billion in funding to support human services in our region, contracting with over 490 community providers – making DHS our region's largest funder of human services.

History & Accomplishments

In 1997, Allegheny County embarked on an ambitious plan to revolutionize human services delivery, embracing a community-led vision to create an integrated system. Working together, government, philanthropic, business, and human service leaders set out to deconstruct silos and create a new integrated approach to implementing programs and addressing community needs.

Creating an integrated Department of Human Services was a herculean task. It involved combining multiple county departments that were geographically dispersed and independently directed into one overarching department that now includes the Offices of Children Youth and Families, Behavioral Health, Community Services, Developmental Supports and the Area Agency on Aging. The result provided powerful opportunities to meet community needs through holistic services – and to braid previously siloed funding streams.

Since the very beginning, DHS has continually challenged itself – and the sector more broadly – to deliver human services better. Through this ethos, DHS has gained national recognition for achievements like:

- Commitment to, and success in growing, kinship/relative homes as a preferred placement type for children in out-of-home care.
- Engagement of people with lived experience in its service delivery and planning, including the Youth and Family Support Partner staff who work with youth and family members currently involved in human services systems to support, advocate for, and mentor them.
- Creation of the Data Warehouse to consolidate human services, health, criminal justice, education, and labor data, and use of this data to coordinate care, evaluate service impacts, prioritize resources to those most in need, and support real-time decision-making.

Services

DHS serves more than 200,000 County residents each year, many of whom engage with more than one of the following services:

- **Mental health & substance abuse services:** including Medicaid behavioral health services, reentry and diversion programs, crisis prevention and response.
- **Family strengthening and youth programs:** including child care subsidy, 26 family centers, home visiting, out-of-school time programs, services for transition aged youth, juvenile justice diversion programs and self-sufficiency programs.
- **Child protective services:** including abuse and neglect investigations, out-of-home placements, and family reunification efforts.
- **Housing and support for people experiencing homelessness:** including eviction prevention, supportive housing, emergency shelter, homeless system coordination.
- **Support for older adults:** including enrichment activities, coordinated long-term care, adult protective services.
- **Supports for people with intellectual disabilities/autism:** including independent living, support coordination, 24-hour staff support.

Priorities

DHS is guided by the following priorities—

- 1. Improve Access to Human Services:** DHS is creating wide-open access to human services to make sure people get the right help when they need it. Examples of DHS efforts include maintaining the 2-1-1 resource line, conducting outreach and community engagement, and prioritizing scarce resources to those most in need.
- 2. Support Economic Security:** In recognition of the relationship between poverty and people's human service needs, DHS invests in basic needs by providing emergency financial support, child care subsidies, rental assistance, and more.
- 3. Prevent harm and overuse of coercion :** DHS's aim is to reduce the number of people impacted by serious issues that cause harm and coercive system involvement, wherever possible. This includes prevention work such as family strengthening supports, juvenile justice diversion, and community violence reduction.
- 4. Support People, Their Families and First Responders During Crises:** DHS is working with its partners to build a system that provides quick help from human services and the community instead of expecting law enforcement or other first responders to do the work alone. Examples of DHS efforts include implementing the 9-8-8 crisis hotline and providing informal mental health supports and mobile response teams.



Importantly, all DHS services, policies and processes are informed by a commitment to transparency, diversity, equity, and inclusion, requiring the active and intentional inclusion of people of varying social identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic class, ability, religion, citizenship status and country of origin). This commitment recognizes the social and structural differences that are deeply embedded in the fabric of society. By frankly addressing the privilege and power disparities that have led to unequal access to opportunities and resources, all people, regardless of social group or individual characteristics, will have an opportunity to succeed.

Structure, Staff & Advisory Bodies

DHS is composed of five program offices and three support offices that employ approximately 1,150 full-time staff. DHS is actively hiring over 100 positions, primarily for roles in child welfare; however, DHS has 415 vacant approved county positions that have not been filled for various reasons.

In addition to internal staff, DHS contracts with roughly 490 community providers to deliver services.

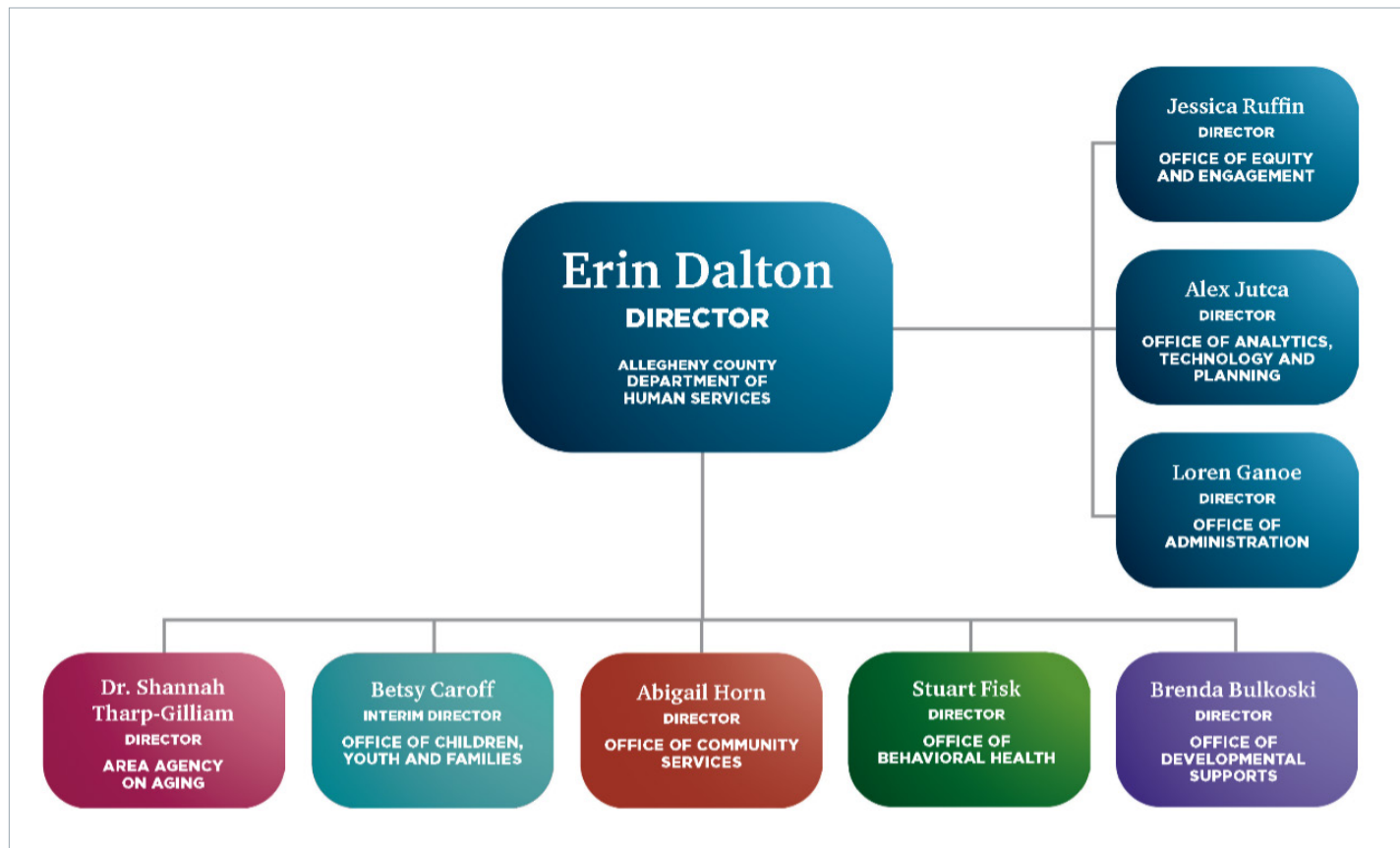


Figure 1

DHS oversees five mandated advisory bodies. These boards serve as the conduit for community stakeholders and partners to advise on the department's direction and key decisions:

- Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging (Aging Services)
- Mental Health/Intellectual Disability Advisory Board
- Drug and Alcohol Planning Council
- Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee
- County Community Services Advisory Council

Additionally, DHS convenes several non-mandated advisory bodies including:

- Homeless Advisory Board
- Children's Cabinet
- Immigrant and International Advisory Council

Please find more information about advisory bodies [here](#).

Budget

Allegheny County DHS is the region's largest funder of human services.

DHS manages more than \$1 billion in annual awards. In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022-23, DHS's largest sources of revenue were:

- **Behavioral HealthChoices** (\$476M): DHS manages Medicaid Managed Care funding for behavioral health (e.g., mental health and substance abuse) services in Allegheny County.
- **PA OCYF Award (\$293M)**: DHS receives an annual allocation from the PA Office of Children and Families (OCYF) to support child protection and prevention services.
- **Human Services Block Grant** (\$124M): DHS's most flexible funding source is its Block Grant, which offers opportunities to shift funds among mental health, drug and alcohol, housing and homelessness, and intellectual disability services.
- **Early Learning Resource Center** (\$92M): DHS receives funding from the PA Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) to support subsidies that help low-income families pay their child care fees, and help child care programs improve the quality of their services.

The below figure highlights how DHS uses its revenue. More than half of expenditures are used for behavioral health services (52%), followed by child protection and prevention services (27%).

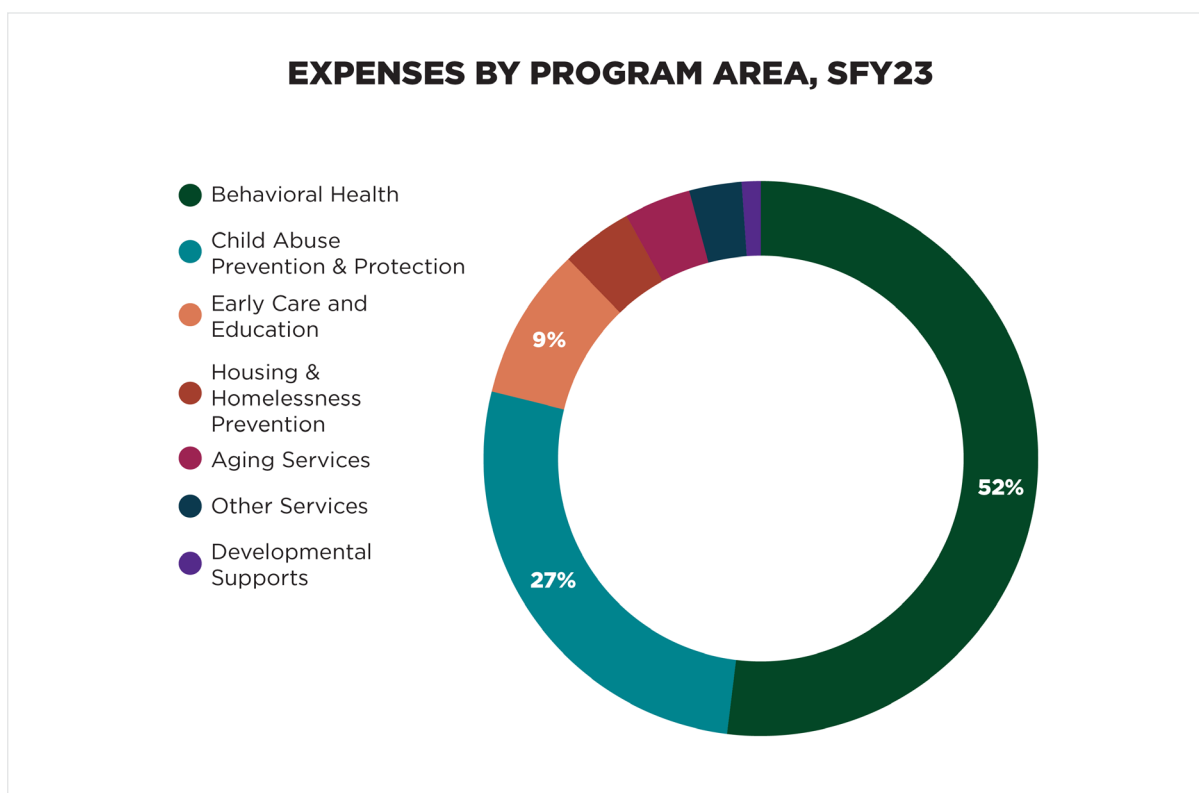


Figure 2

¹This summary excludes County-administered American Rescue Plan Act and Opioid Settlement funds, some of which are allocated by the County to DHS. The summary includes the part of PA OCYF's award that supports Court-operated services like detention and juvenile probation (about \$20M).

²As an integrated Department, DHS braids funding from different sources across its program offices to meet the holistic needs of clients. Therefore, while Figure 2 categorizes expenses based on the program area that leads their implementation, some services can't be fairly bucketed as "behavioral health" or "housing" – because they are both.

