

THREE-YEAR ASSESSMENT: CHILD MALTREATMENT IN WISCONSIN

CJA TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

The Wisconsin Department of Justice (Wisconsin DOJ) has maintained the multidisciplinary state Task Force on Children in Need, as required under sections 107(b)(2) and 107(c)(1), since 1991 when then Deputy Attorney General convened professionals to review Wisconsin's child abuse statutes and legislation. This original group met on November 6, 1991 to discuss ways to improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases in the state.

The Wisconsin Task Force on Children in Need remains a driving force in the state's efforts to address justice, physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, exploitation, and maltreatment-related fatalities in the lives of Wisconsin's children. The current task force members are well-versed in all aspects of child development and abuse, including child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Task Force recommendations were developed with consideration for the Children's Justice Act priorities with consideration for CAPTA 107(e), as designated in the legislation:

- A. Activities to improve the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as cases involving suspected child maltreatment related fatalities and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as intrastate, interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal, in a manner which reduces the additional trauma to the child victim and the victim's family and which also ensures procedural fairness to the accused;

- B. Support of experimental, model, and demonstration programs for testing innovative approaches and techniques which may improve the prompt and successful resolution of civil and criminal court proceedings or enhance the effectiveness of judicial and administration action in child abuse and neglect cases, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation cases, including the enhancement of performance of court appointed attorneys and guardians ad litem for children, and which also ensure procedural fairness to the accused; and

- C. Reform of State laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols, and procedures to provide comprehensive protection for children, which may include those children involved in reports of child abuse or neglect with a potential combination of jurisdictions, such as intrastate, interstate, Federal-State, and State-Tribal, from child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, while ensuring fairness to all affected persons.

SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENTS FROM 2019 THREE-YEAR ASSESSMENT

The four Task Force recommendations, listed below, were developed for the 2019 three-year assessment.

Recommendation 1: Promote the multidisciplinary approach to the investigation and prosecution of child sexual/physical abuse and neglect.

Recommendation 2: Improve trauma-informed systems, including child welfare systems and court processes, to minimize additional trauma to the child victim.

Recommendation 3: Improve information-sharing across systems, to support interagency cooperation on cases of child maltreatment

Recommendation 4: Improve the initial investigations of child maltreatment

There has been significant progress and improvement in Wisconsin's response to child maltreatment over the past three years. All CJA activities address one or more of the CJA priorities, A, B, and C, and relate to at least one of the recommendations created by the Task Force. Below is a brief summary of activities completed since 2019.

Wisconsin Forensic Interview Guidelines Training (WIFIG): CJA funded the development of a legally sound, research-based protocol. This protocol and accompanying curriculum were written by an internationally renowned expert in forensic interviewing with feedback and guidance from experienced Wisconsin interviewers. WIFIG guidelines and curriculum were finalized in March 2018 after years of extensive work. The curriculum outlines the lecture's critical talking points, cites important research, describes potential activities, and summarizes the practice component of the five-day training.

Investigations of Suspected Child Abuse Training: In partnership with external collaborations, CJA relaunched a new training during this reporting period titled: Investigations of Suspected Child Abuse. This course is designed to enhance child interviewing skills and accurate information gathering during the initial assessment from children who are alleged to be child abuse victims or children who have witnessed abuse or violence. Participants learn about the impact of language and development on gathering accurate information from children, question

strategies that contribute to dynamics of memory and suggestibility, and how and when to adopt an MDT approach to assessments. This training was designed for MDT members who conduct the initial assessment as CJA recommends those conducting forensic interviews attend the five-day WIFIG training.

Support of Child Death Review in Wisconsin: Since 2008 the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin (Alliance) has collaborated with Wisconsin DOJ and the Department of Health Services (DHS) to build and maintain a comprehensive Child Death Review (CDR) and Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) program for Wisconsin. Their overarching mission is to understand the context in which a child lived and died in order to prevent future deaths. The funds awarded through CJA are critical to sustaining a robust death review system and supporting our local CDR teams throughout Wisconsin. At this time there are more than fifty local CDR teams voluntarily engaged in death review and prevention efforts. While more than ninety percent of Wisconsin residents are within counties with a CDR team, the success of the CDR model relies on continuous technical assistance and support to local review teams. Since there is no direct funding to the local teams, ongoing education, refresher training and removal of barriers are critical to a team's success.

Support of Child Advocacy Centers of Wisconsin: Child Advocacy Centers of Wisconsin (the Chapter) provides support and technical assistance to Wisconsin's fifteen CACs, two satellite offices, and various MDTs across the state. Over the past few years, CACs of WI offered guidance, resources, and funding to new MDTs in various stages of development. In addition, the challenges of COVID-19 meant that a lot of CACs needed funding to ensure safe social distancing within their facilities. Through CJA, the Chapter helped support costs for additional MDT observation rooms, hardware for remote viewing, protective plastic coverings for front desks, and supplies for remote workers. The Chapter hosts weekly check-ins with CAC leadership, monthly statewide peer review, and quarterly membership meetings. The Chapter also sponsored scholarships for virtual victim advocacy program training by Frist Witness, which fulfills the National Children's Alliance Standards of Accreditation for victim advocacy training.

Law Enforcement Outreach: The Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services (WAHRS) represents a coalition of fifteen, Wisconsin Based programs providing services to runaway and homeless youth under the age of 18 throughout the state of Wisconsin. The services provided by these programs include shelter, crisis support, hotline/text services, and community outreach and response. Youth who are eligible for services include those who are homeless or runaway or at imminent risk of becoming so. Funding through CJA supported the provision of four regional training events for law enforcement throughout the state of Wisconsin to promote collaboration and mutual referral between law enforcement and agencies serving runaway and homeless youth.

Forensic Interview Room Equipment: CJA released funds to support the expansion of child friendly forensic interview access in Wisconsin. Research has shown that the MDT/CAC model is best practice for a collaborative, coordinated community response to child abuse and neglect investigations. The funding opportunity was released to all county CPA agencies, police departments, and child advocacy centers. Allowable costs included child-friendly furniture, high quality microphones and video cameras, digital recording equipment, soundproofing panels, professional closed-circuit television equipment, headphones, observation monitors, speakers, computers, and recording and transcription software.

CJA Special Project Funding: Special project grant opportunities generally occur semi-annually, but consideration may be given for emergency project proposals. This funding strategy allows for a bi-annual competitive funding announcement for any agency serving child victims of maltreatment within Wisconsin. Not only does this help CJA widen our reach but provides insight into the needs in both urban and rural communities. Allowable costs included but are not limited to training, consultants, equipment, tools and protocol development, support of child fatality review, and coordination with court improvement programs.

MDT Training Co-sponsorships & Scholarships: Wisconsin CJA sponsored multiple trainings for multidisciplinary team members, including several statewide and national conferences. For each of these trainings, outcomes are measured via an evaluation tool developed by the conference planning committee. Outcomes are collected and feedback is considered during the next year's planning committee meetings.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

CJA partnered with a Wisconsin DOJ data analyst to create and disseminate an assessment survey to gather necessary information to develop the Task Force recommendations. The survey was sent to CJA contacts as well as the Office of Crime Victim Services listserv, comprised of law enforcement, county social workers, prosecutors, medical providers, mental health providers, homeless and runaway youth organizations, and more. In addition, the survey was sent to the Children Courts Improvement Program and all child advocacy centers. There were 281 complete responses from all regions in Wisconsin and eighteen different child maltreatment fields (see Figures 1A and 1B).

Figure 1A: Occupation of Survey Respondents

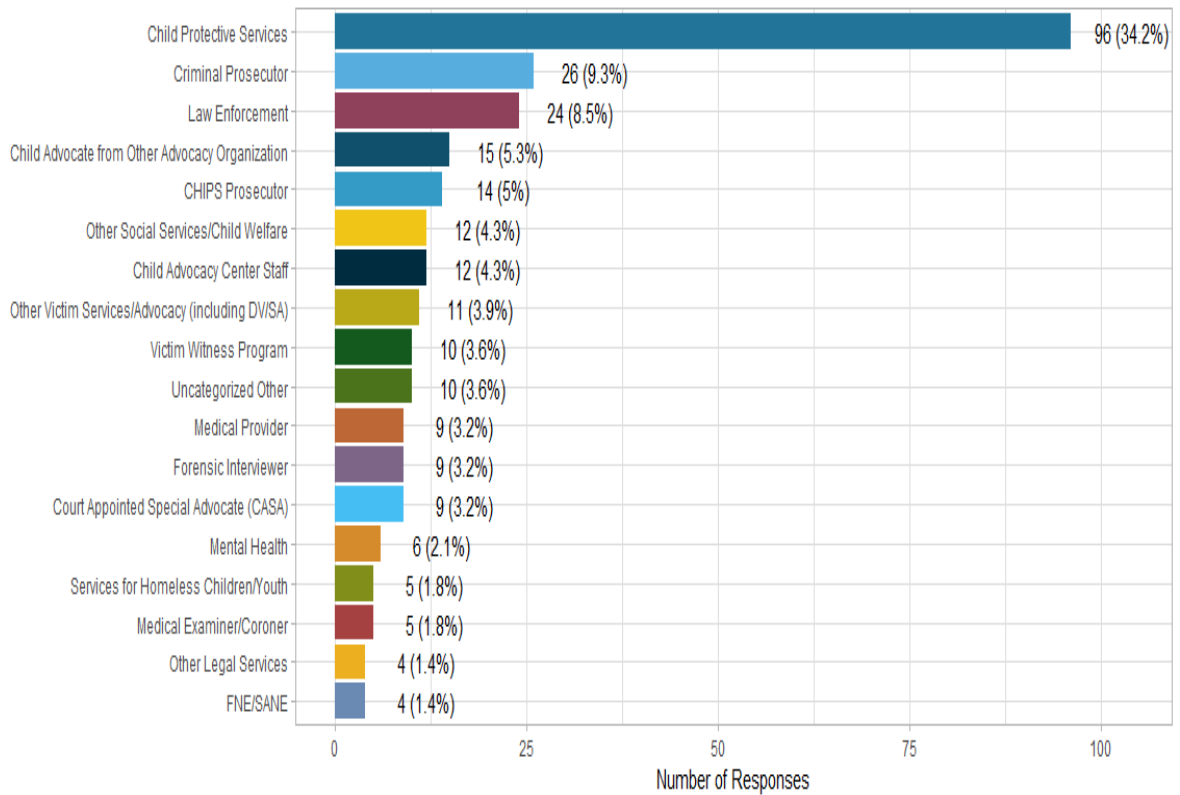
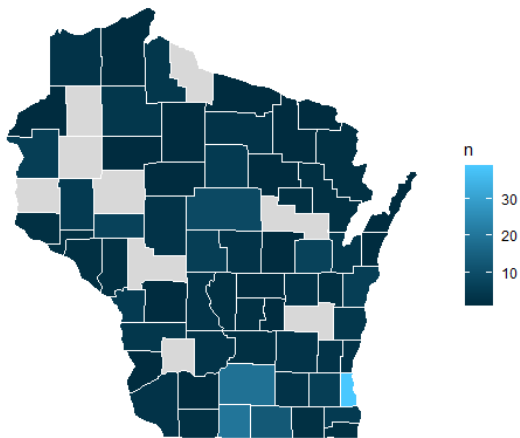


Figure 1B: Location of Survey Respondents

Number of Responses by County



Urban/Rural

	n	percent
Rural	98	34.875445
Urban	164	58.362989
NA	19	6.761566

Region

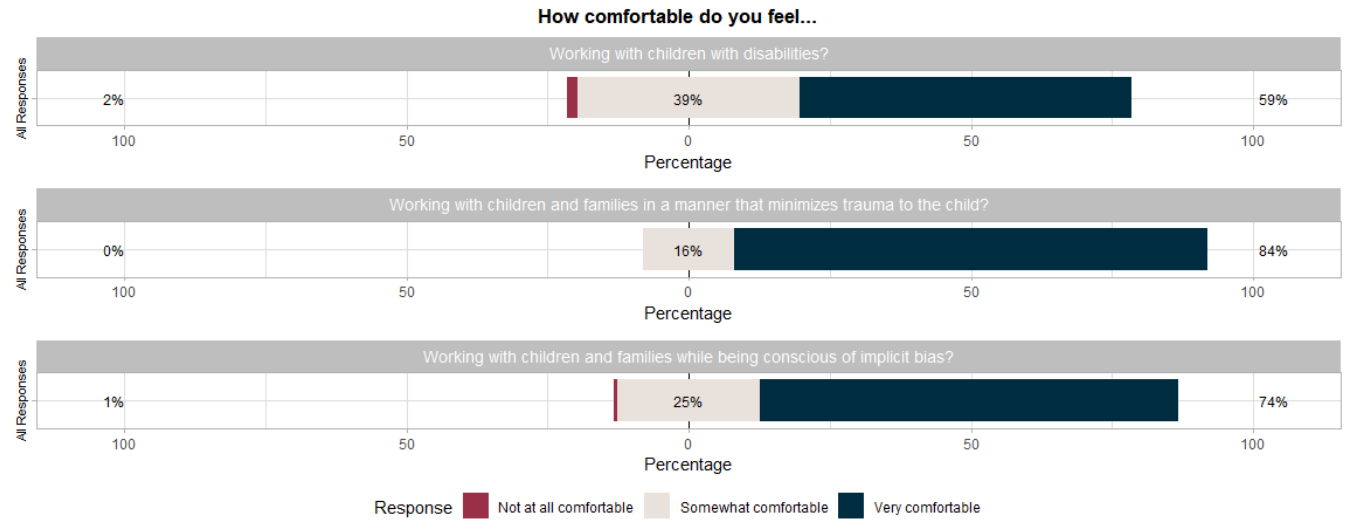
	n	percent
North	41	14.590747
Northeast	39	13.879004
South	76	27.046263
Southeast	63	22.419929
West	43	15.302491
NA	19	6.761566

Survey participants evaluated the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of suspected child maltreatment in their community. See the full survey tool (Appendix A) for reference.

ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS: STRENGTHS IN WISCONSIN

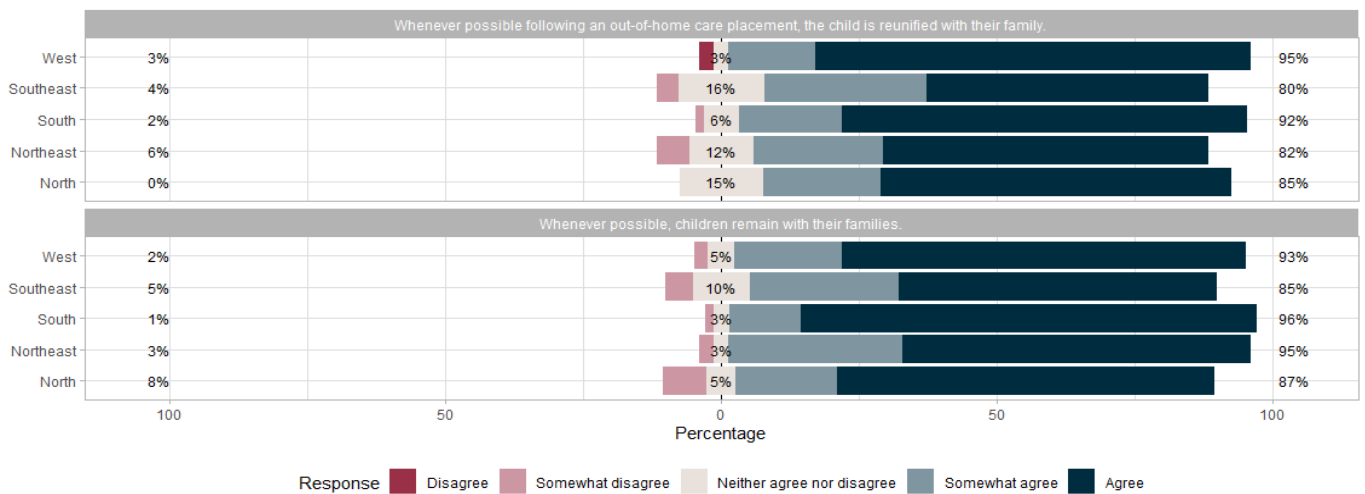
1. Survey respondents report proficiency in reducing additional trauma for the child victim, being conscious of implicit bias, and working with children with disabilities (see Figure 2A).

Figure 2A: Wisconsin Strengths Part I



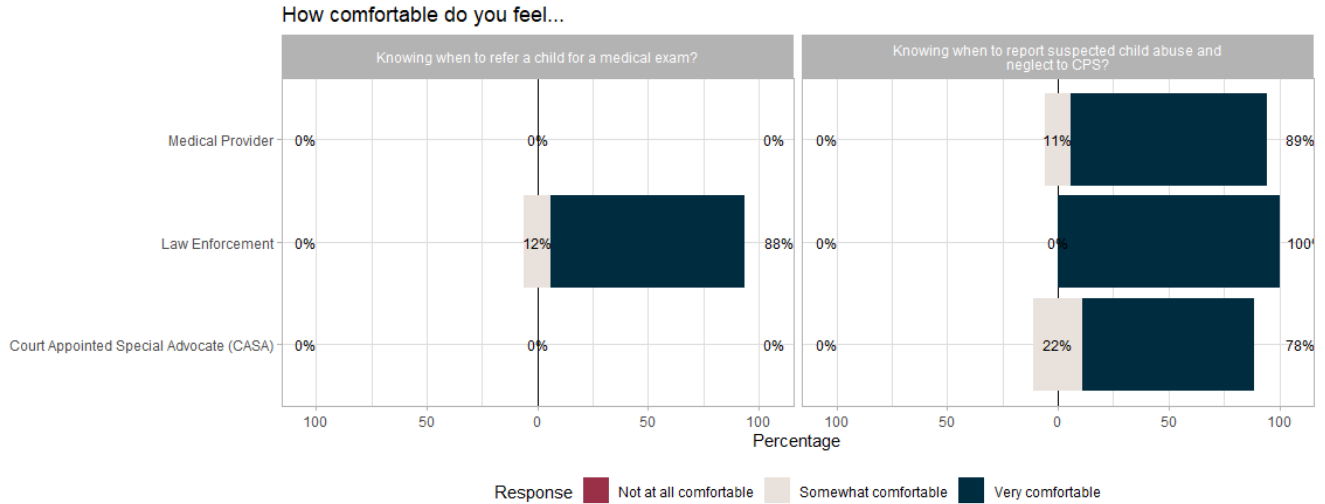
2. Reported via the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Out-of-Home Care Dashboard: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/dashboard/ohc>, 3720 children were removed from homes in 2021. Approximately 40% of those removals were placed with a relative in either foster home or kinship care. And 60% of discharges from out of home care in 2021 were reunified with caretakers. This data was confirmed with assessment responses (see Figure 2B).

Figure 2B: Wisconsin Strengths Part II



- Survey respondents are confident in their ability to make appropriate referrals; specifically related to medical evaluation and reporting child abuse and neglect to Child Protective Services (see Figure 3B).

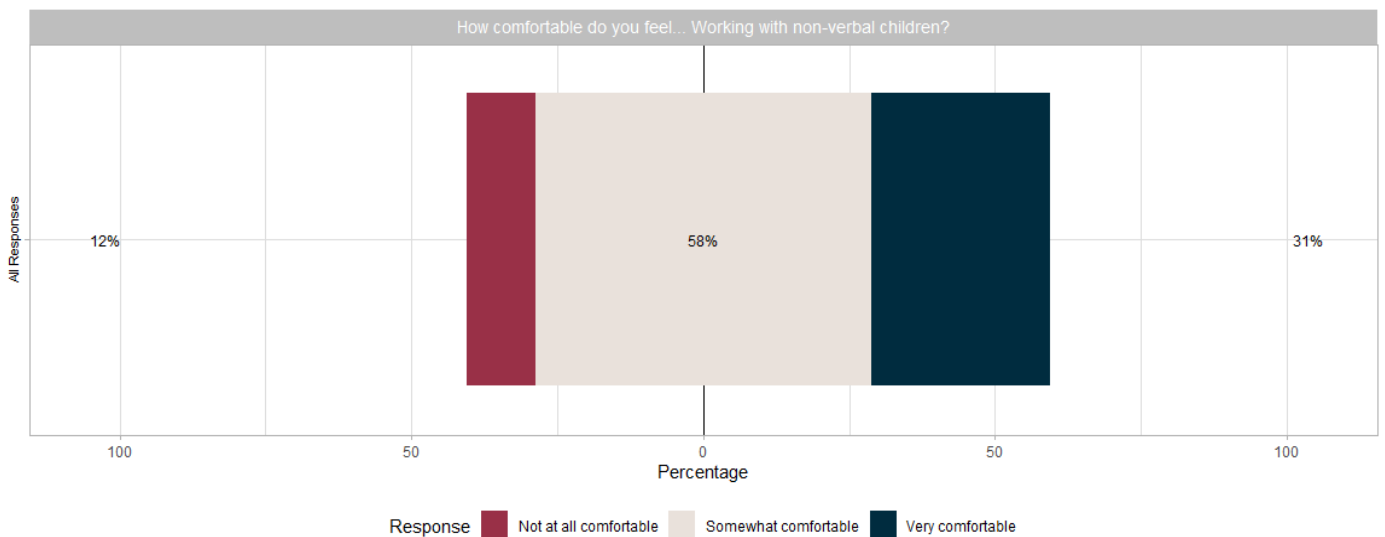
Figure 3B: Wisconsin Strengths Part III



ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS: AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN WISCONSIN

- In general, survey respondents identified the need for strengthened services for nonverbal children with only 30% of respondents indicating they felt very comfortable working with this population (see Figure 4A).

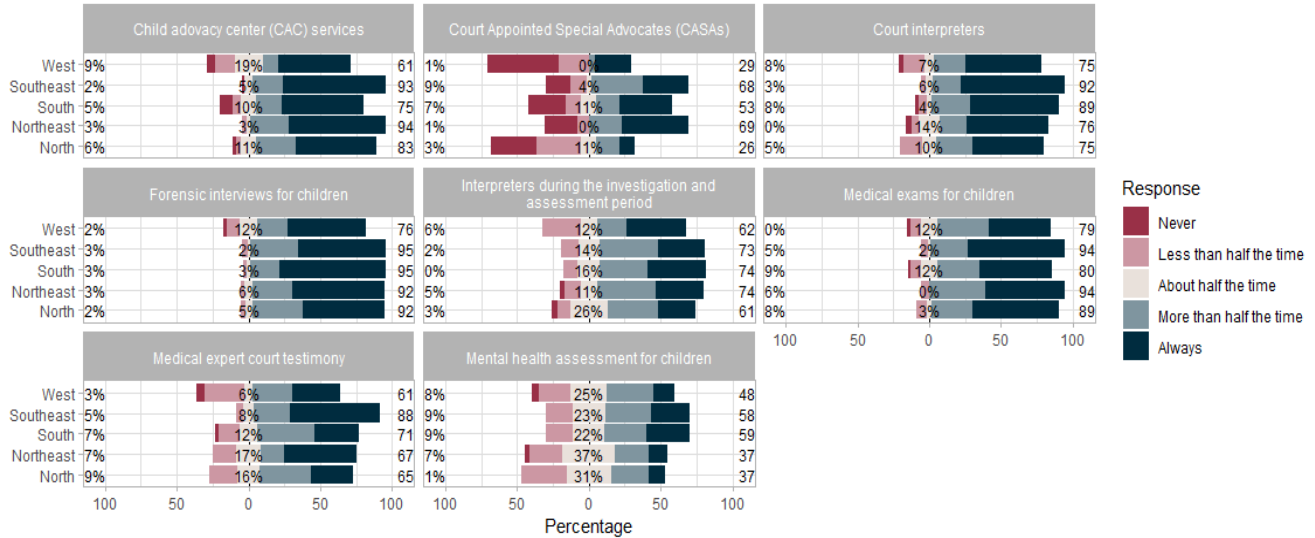
Figure 4A: Wisconsin Areas for Improvement Part I



2. Survey respondents identified the need for additional services in rural Wisconsin (see Figure 4B).

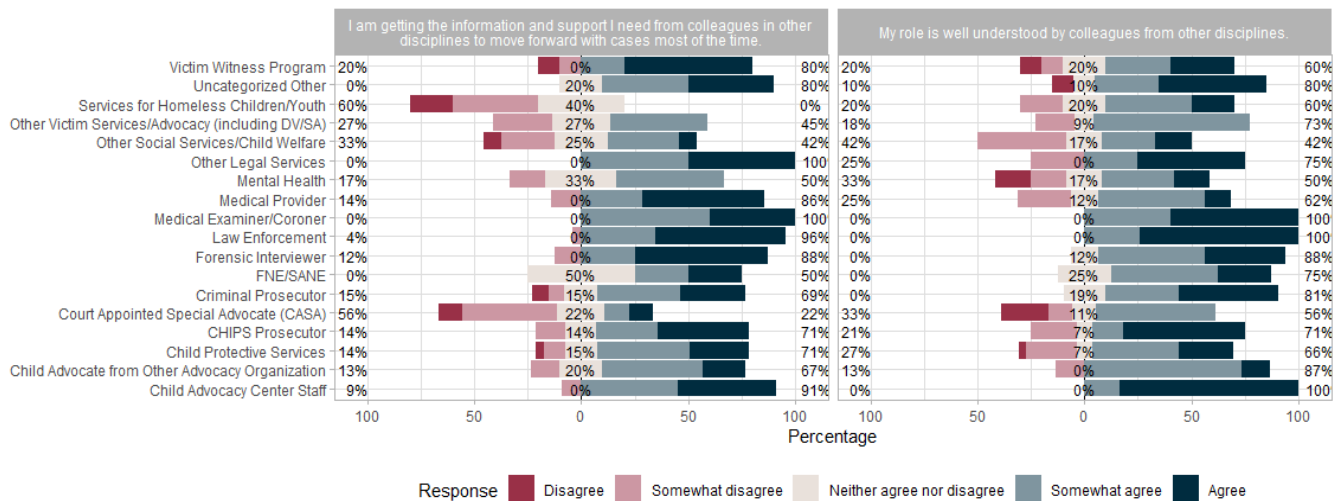
Figure 4B: Wisconsin Areas for Improvement Part II

In your personal experience in your community, how often are these services available when they are needed?



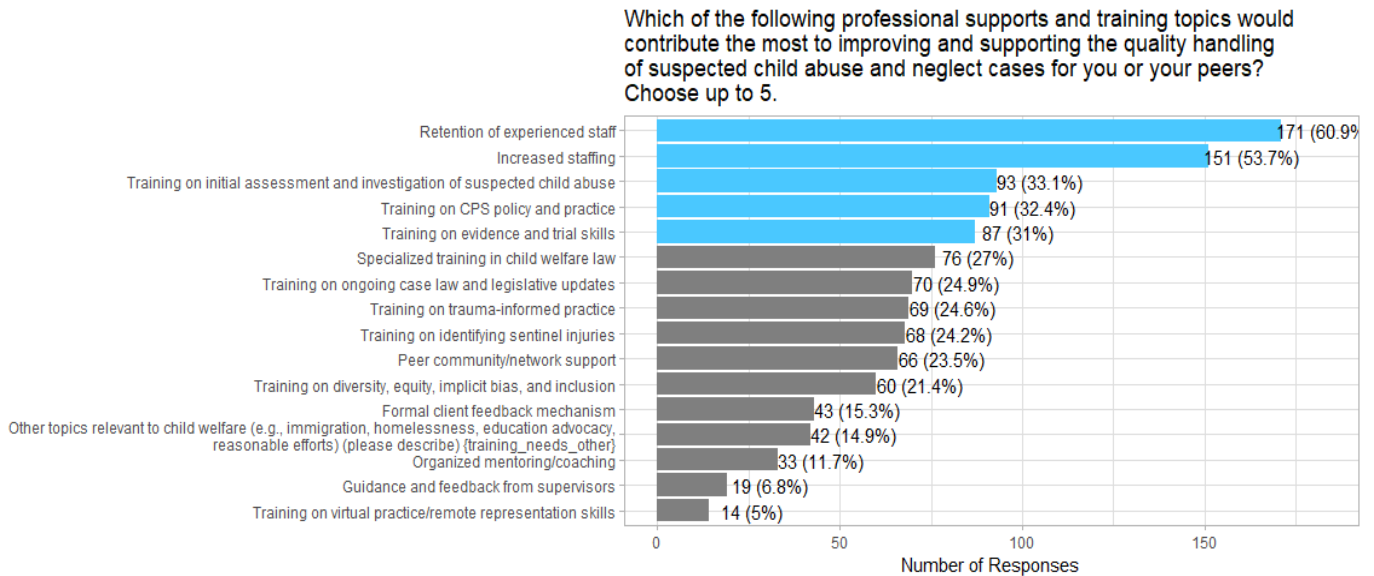
3. When asked about their own role, most felt comfortable in their expertise and communicating with partners as needed. However, others rated them less favorably, indicating a lack of communication and coordination in child maltreatment response. Mental health, legal services, social services indicated that their work is not understood and that they do not receive the necessary information (see Figure 4C).

Figure 4C: Wisconsin Areas for Improvement Part III



- Several training needs were identified in the assessment survey (see Figure 4D). CPS policy and practice, investigation and assessment, and trial and evidence rated highly as a training need across many disciplines, indicating a need for basic training efforts. Results may also be related to staff turnover and staffing needs across the state.

Figure 4D: Wisconsin Areas for Improvement Part IV



POLICY AND TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning for the 2022 three-year assessment began in March 2021 with a round-table discussion about trending CJA related issues. The following four Task Force meetings focused on assessment tool development, data analysis, and creation of the final recommendations. The four subsequent three-year assessment focused meetings were held virtually in July 2021, October 2021, February 2022, and April 2022 with additional email communications in between. All Task Force members participated in these activities and had multiple opportunities to share feedback and suggestions. Recommendations were finalized at the April 2022 Task Force meeting and are detailed below.

Table 1.0 – Wisconsin Task Force Recommendations (*established in 2022*)

#	Task Force Recommendation	Implementation Strategies	CJA Priorities
1	Promote multidisciplinary teams and their approach to the investigation and prosecution of child maltreatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support, sponsor, and promote regional forensic interview training for law enforcement, child protective services (CPS) workers, and Child Advocacy Center (CAC) staff • Support, sponsor, and promote initial responder training for multidisciplinary teams (MDT) to gather information in a child-friendly, developmentally sensitive way while avoiding duplicative interviews • Support, sponsor, and promote advanced topic trainings through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens • Provide technical assistance to support multidisciplinary team development and strengthening • Assist in protocol development and support of regional child advocacy centers • Promote MDT sustainability through protocol and guideline development and structure to support transitions in leadership 	A, B, C
2	Improve trauma-informed system response to minimize additional trauma to the child victim and their family.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with the Children Court Improvement Program and Wisconsin CASA Association to improve support for child victims and their families • Develop training and resources for judges, prosecutors, and corps counsel to better understand the needs of child victims and ensure accommodations are being made as required by law (Ch 950) • Promote the use and expansion of CASA programs • Support CASA program training efforts as needed • Support resource development for children and their families 	

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3	Improve the initial investigations of child maltreatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support, sponsor, and promote regional law enforcement training on initial investigations for a variety of cases, including abusive head trauma, sexual abuse, drug endangered children, diversity, equity, and inclusion, etc. • Partner with DCF to offer training for initial assessment workers on gathering information from children and when a multidisciplinary response is warranted • Support, sponsor, and promote regional forensic interview training for law enforcement, child protective services (CPS) workers, and Child Advocacy Center (CAC) staff • Support resource development for children and their families • Assist in protocol development and support of local or regional child advocacy centers • Support development of local MOUs and disseminate successful examples across the state 	
4	Improve statewide response to drug endangered children (DEC) cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support DEC team and protocol development through technical assistance and trainings that outline team function • Support regional law enforcement and CPS collaboration during initial and ongoing contact with the family • Evaluate impact of inequity on trending child victim needs and interaction with system response • Collaborate with judicial system partners in the development of specialized training efforts (ex. expert testimony training) • Support the development of child neglect resources for MDTs 	
5	Improve statewide response to emerging needs such as child neglect cases and homeless youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate impact of inequity on trending child victim needs and interaction with system response 	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support and coordinate conversations to address emerging needs for child victims and their families• Support resource development for homeless youth• Support, sponsor, and promote regional homeless youth training topics including legislative updates, homelessness definition, and available resources	
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PRELIMINARY ACTIVITIES TO ADDRESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposed activities for the next three years include continuation of successful CJA projects and expansion into new focus areas.

Continuation projects detailed above include:

- Wisconsin Forensic Interview Guidelines Training
- Investigations of Suspected Child Abuse Training
- Support of Child Death Review in Wisconsin
- Support of Child Advocacy Centers of Wisconsin
- MDT Training Co-sponsorships & Scholarships

Additional projects based on the newly completed three-year assessment and Task Force recommendations include:

Support for Medical Providers: The three-year assessment survey highlighted the need for improved engagement and education of medical providers in the investigation and prosecution of suspected child maltreatment. Wisconsin's CJA program is unique in that we have a strong medical presence on the Task Force and new projects are often proposed to the group during our regular meetings. Support will be provided in various ways; however, a specific project has not been identified at this time. Some examples of support include expansion of topics for medical providers at the annual Together for Children conference, scholarship funds designated for medical providers to attend CJA supported training events, and CJA support for the Wisconsin/National Drug Endangered Children's Conference and the La Crosse Child Maltreatment Conference. Additionally, CJA is exploring the possibility of supporting a medical needs assessment for Wisconsin. The assessment would include a multi-regional and discipline focus to understand how a tool like teleconsulting can address the need for specialized medical services in cases of child maltreatment.

CJA Special Projects: In early 2020 Wisconsin CJA redeveloped our award procedures for special projects. This was completed out of the desire to solicit new and innovative project opportunities that will support the investigation, prosecution, and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child victim. Over the next three years, we will continue to evaluate this process and ensure CJA funds have the greatest impact across the state. Some examples of projected special projects based on the newly development Task Force recommendations are forensic interview room improvements, training for MDT members, MDT protocol development, DEC activities and MDT support, resource development for homeless youth, and bolstered support for Wisconsin CASA programs.

In determining if an agency, project, or services should be funded the following will be considered:

- Will this funding support the three-Year Assessment Recommendations determined by the Wisconsin Task Force on Children in Need?
- Will this funding support the investigation, prosecution, and/or judicial handling of cases of child abuse and/or neglect?
- Does the agency have a history of serving or supporting child victims of abuse and/or neglect?
- Does the agency have community partnerships, particularly, are they a member of an MDT to address child maltreatment in their community?
- Is the request, timeline, and budget reasonable?
- Does the agency have a plan to secure future funding if needed?

Over the next three years, CJA will develop new projects to address the three-year assessment recommendations via collaboration with Task Force members, local and national experts, and statewide coalitions.