

OVERVIEW OF THE CHILD SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Child Support Program is also known as the “IV-D Program” because it is authorized under Title IV-D of the federal Social Security Act. Department of Health and Human Services (DHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is charged with oversight of the IV-D program, however, states and U.S. Territories operate their own distinct IV-D programs in compliance with federal and state laws and regulations. Tribes may also receive federal approval to operate IV-D programs in accordance with their traditions and values. The national child support enforcement system is composed of the federal government, states, counties, tribes, and public and private partners working together to carry out the IV-D program’s mission of “enhancing the well-being of children by assuring that assistance in obtaining support, including financial and medical, is available to children...”

In general, OCSE covers 66% of state IV-D program operating costs. The state match is 34%. States that meet or exceed federal performance goals may earn additional federal funding in the form of financial incentives. Likewise, states may incur financial penalties for failing to meet minimum federal performance standards.

IV-D services encompass:

- Establishing paternity for children born out of wedlock
- Establishing and modifying child support and medical support orders
- Locating parents and their assets
- Enforcing child and medical support orders
- Cooperating with other state and tribal IV-D agencies
- Collecting and distributing child support payments

The IV-D program has a number of other components that contribute to its efficiency and effectiveness. For example, each state must have an automated child support system, a new hire reporting program, a hospital paternity establishment program, a state disbursement unit, and other functional units and programs to satisfy federal requirements. Many states have statewide customer service units as well to enhance the quality of care that customers receive.

Primary program customers are single, separated, and divorced parents who are required to pay or are entitled to receive child support. Custodial parents who receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits are automatically referred to the IV-D program for the full range of services. Custodial and non-custodial parents who aren’t receiving TANF may apply for services. States are required by federal regulation to designate a single and separate organizational unit of state government to administer the child support program; however, program structures vary among states.