



**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY
CENTERS**
OF NORTH DAKOTA

Senate Appropriations – Human Resources Division
Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill #2012
1-24-23

Mister Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Greg Kasowski and I am the executive director of the Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota.

As you may be aware, Children's Advocacy Centers serve victims of child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and other forms of maltreatment. Before Children's Advocacy Centers existed in North Dakota, children would have to tell of their experience of abuse an average of 10 to 12 times—as they shared with law enforcement, human services, prosecutors, and therapists—further traumatizing the child.

Now with Children's Advocacy Centers, children only need to tell of their experience once, and to a trained forensic interviewer who asks age-appropriate questions in a child-friendly environment.

In addition to forensic interviews, we serve victims of child abuse by providing mental health counseling, medical exams, victim advocacy, telehealth, and an array of other services. These services are in alignment with the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services' goal of becoming the healthiest state in the nation.

Since our last appropriation increase in 2017, we have experienced a 73% increase in the number of services provided. In that same timeframe, we have also increased the number of our locations from six to nine. By 2025, we project a 181% increase in services compared to 2017.

Our exceptional staff at Children's Advocacy Centers are stretched to the limits as we meet the demands of the increase in cases while striving with the same amount of resources. This trajectory is unsustainable.

We are appreciative of the executive recommendation to increase funding for Children Advocacy Centers from \$1.6 to \$3.2 million. However, last summer we had worked on

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a proposal with the Children and Family Services Division for \$4.1 million, as they are well aware of the on-going needs of Children's Advocacy Centers.

We respectfully request an additional \$900,000 to:

1. Correlate with the increase in services we are providing and expect to provide for victims.
2. Match the rising costs of retaining our staff and serving children.
3. Have the state of North Dakota cover a larger share of the cost of serving our state's children, from 20% of our budgets to 33%.

This further funding will allow us to:

1. Increase our capacity to respond to the number of children requiring services
2. Boost workforce retention efforts for our professionals who work in a high-stress, high burnout profession
3. Increase access to services, especially tele mental health and new locations
4. Recruit and train more social work professionals into the field
5. Streamline administrative operations
6. Implement a statewide awareness campaign to bring healing to unreached victims
7. Boost prevention efforts to decrease the amount of children being victimized
8. Conduct a community assessment to determine gaps in service delivery

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and I will try to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Greg Kasowski
Executive Director

Children's Advocacy Centers of North Dakota

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Child Abuse and Neglect in North Dakota and Children's Advocacy Centers' On-Going Response

At least **1 in 7 kids** experienced child abuse or neglect last year. In North Dakota that's **26,000** children.



At least **1 in 10 kids** will experience child sexual abuse before they turn 18. That's **18,500** children.

Last year, 1,702 out of those 26,000 kids (6.5%) made it to a CAC. We aim to serve **every one** of those 26,000 children.



What is a Children's Advocacy Center?

BEFORE CACs

Children had to tell the worst experience of their life 10-12 times on average as they talked to law enforcement, social services, prosecutors, and therapists.

NOW WITH CACs

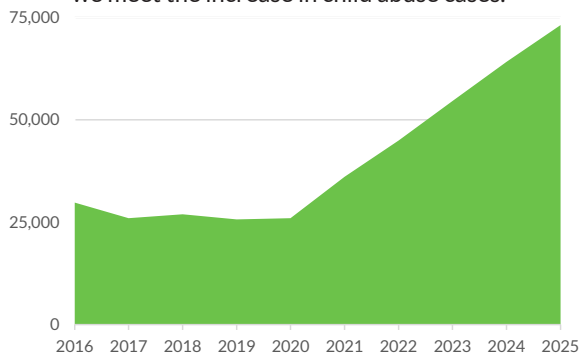
Children only need to tell their experience once to a trained interviewer who asks age-appropriate questions in a child-friendly environment.

What Does a Children's Advocacy Center Do?

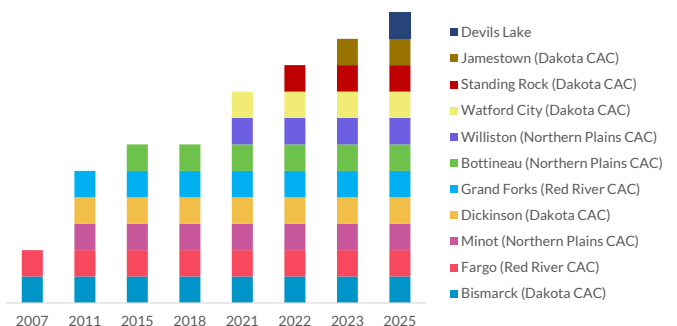
In line with DHHS's goal of becoming the healthiest state in the nation, we provide services to victims of child abuse and maltreatment.

- Forensic Interviews
- Mental Health
- Medical Exams
- Victim Advocacy
- Human Trafficking
- Tribal Outreach
- Telehealth
- Prevention & Education

We project a 181% increase in services from 2017 to 2025 as we meet the increase in child abuse cases.



We hope to add more locations in the next biennium with additional funding.



Strategic Focus Areas for 23-25



Increase capacity to respond to the number of children requiring services



Boost workforce retention efforts for high-stress, high-burnout professions



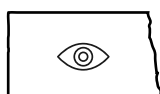
Increase access to services through telehealth and new locations



Recruit and train more social work professionals into the field



Streamline administrative operations by sharing key staff and contractors



Implement a statewide awareness campaign to bring healing to unreached victims



Boost prevention efforts to decrease the amount of children being victimized



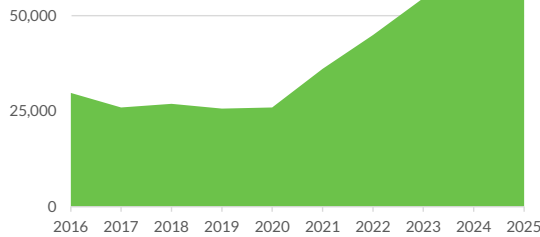
Conduct a community assessment to determine gaps in service delivery

Request for DHHS Appropriation Increase for the Children's Advocacy Centers in North Dakota

Last appropriation for CACs

\$1,600,000 /biennium

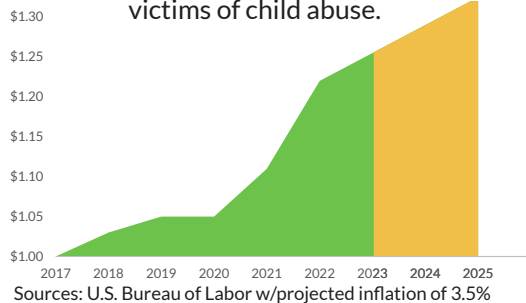
For 23-25, we project a 181% increase in services compared to 2017 (the last time CACs received an appropriation increase).



CACs request funding to correlate with the increasing numbers of child abuse and neglect services we offer.

+\$1,000,000 /biennium

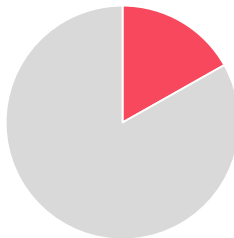
Inflation is pinching CACs' shoestring budgets for them to retain quality employees to continue to effectively serve victims of child abuse.



CACs request an increase to match the rising cost of serving children in our state.

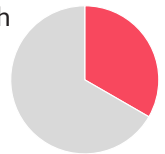
+\$500,000 /biennium

North Dakota's appropriation for CACs accounts for 20% of CACs operating budgets.



We request the state cover a larger share (33%) of CACs' budgets as we serve North Dakota victims of child abuse.

+\$1,000,000 /biennium



Requested state appropriation for CACs

\$4,100,000 /biennium



2022 Annual Report



**CHILDREN'S
ADVOCACY
CENTERS**
OF NORTH DAKOTA

What Is a CAC?

A Children's Advocacy Center is a victim-focused, community-orientated, safe facility in which members of a multidisciplinary team work together to provide a comprehensive coordinated and compassionate investigation and intervention of abuse allegations.



Without CACs



Before CACs, children had to tell the worst story of their life over and over again to social workers, nurses, law enforcement, lawyers, therapists, investigators, etc.

With CACs



With CACs, children only need to tell their story once to a trained interviewer who knows the right questions to ask in a way that does not retraumatize the child.

What CACs Do

Forensic Interviews

Specially trained Forensic Interviewers work with the multidisciplinary team (MDT) to ensure victims are not interviewed unnecessarily and allow them to do so in a safe, legally sound and neutral setting.

Advocacy Services

Advocacy focuses on the needs of the youth and non-offending caregiver(s), providing needed support and information along with a compassionate, listening ear.

Medical Evaluations

Specialized medical evaluations are offered to ensure the health and safety of each victim, identify any evidence of abuse, and refer for additional care as needed.

Mental Health Care

Specialized evidenced based, trauma-focused mental health services are offered to the victim and family to help them cope with the trauma and to assist them through the healing process.

Multidisciplinary Team

In the past, responses to child abuse were fragmented and poorly coordinated. Now children and families receive a collaborative approach from a multidisciplinary team made up of law enforcement, social services, prosecutors, victim advocates, forensic interviews, mental health clinicians, and medical personnel.

997

Forensic Interviews



38,766

Advocacy Services



206

Medical Evaluations



5,032

Mental Health Care



486

MDT Members @
Case Review

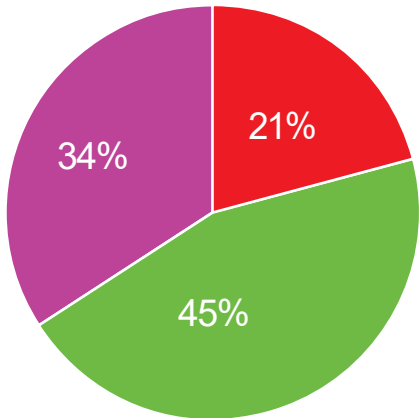


Who CACs Serve

1,897 Female



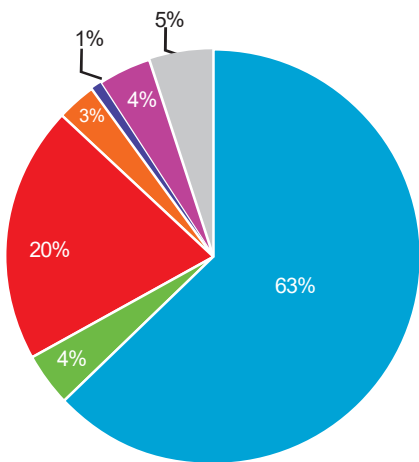
803 Male



- 0-6 years
- 7-12 years
- 13-18 years

Age

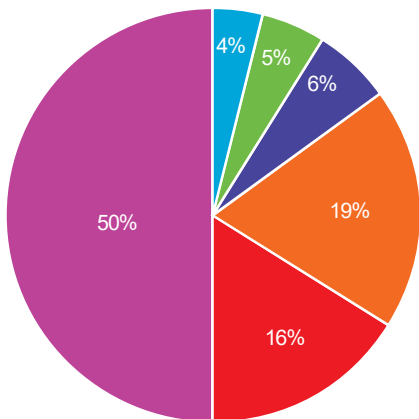
Though child abuse affects individuals of all ages, the majority of children seen at Children's Advocacy Centers in North Dakota are under 12.



- Caucasian
- Native American
- Asian
- Multi-racial
- African American
- Hispanic
- Other

Race

As North Dakota has grown over the past 10 years so has the ethnic diversity of our victims. Although 64% of our victims are Caucasian, representation of other races have increased nearly 10% since 2007.



- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Other
- Neglect
- Psychological
- Drug Endangered

Survivors of Abuse and Neglect

The majority of cases seen at the CACs in North Dakota involve an allegation of sexual abuse. In fact, more than one in ten of all substantiated victim abuse and neglect referrals to social service agencies nationwide are victims of sexual abuse.

One in every 10 children in North Dakota will be a victim of sexual abuse by their 18th birthday; approximately 65% will be female.

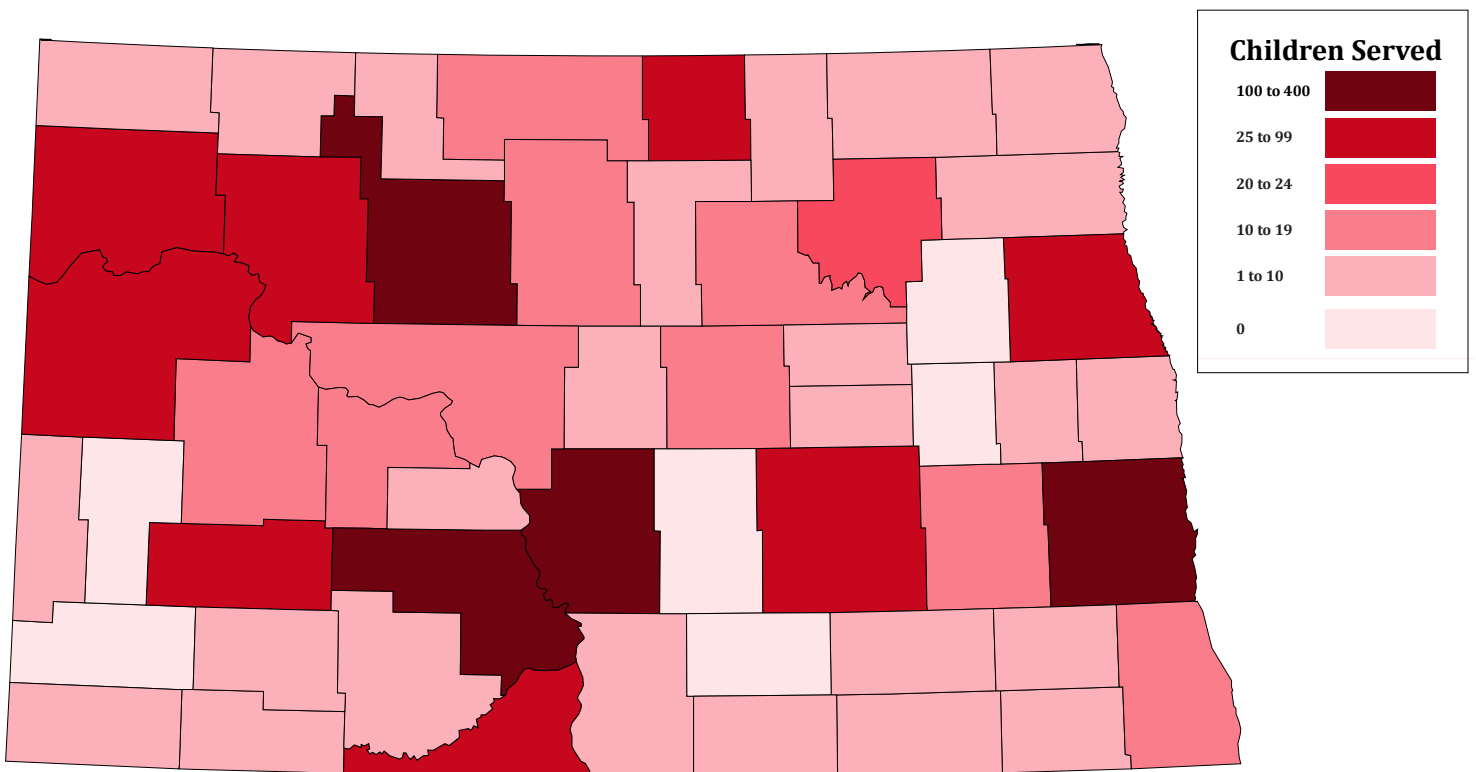
Where CACs Serve

CAC Locations



Our 3 Children's Advocacy Centers operate in 10 location, while serving all 53 counties and 5 reservations in our state. Our services ensure all suspected child victims of abuse get the help they need to live healthy lives. Each of our Children's Advocacy Centers coordinate with law enforcement, human service workers, medical professionals, counselors, and prosecutors to provide healing to child abuse victims and their families.

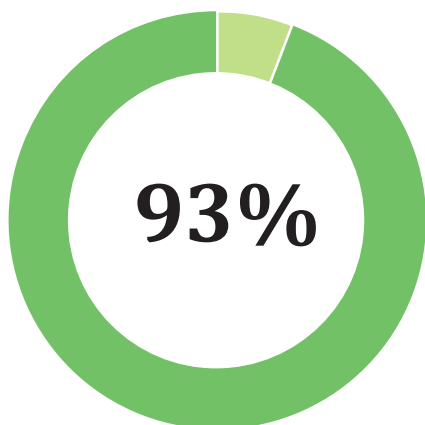
Children Served by County



How CACs Made an Impact

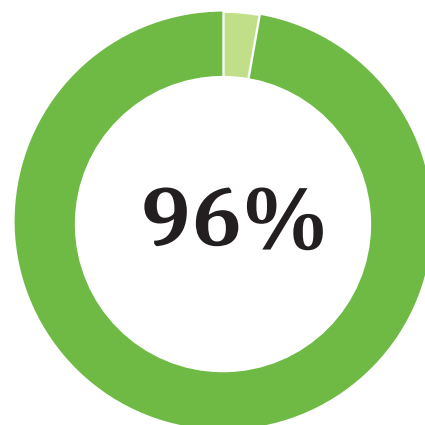
"They made sure to reassure me and my child that they were here to do anything they could to help the situation at hand, they also made sure to reassure her that my daughter was not in any trouble and that she could be very comfortable in the environment she was in."

My child felt safe at the CAC.



■ Agree
■ Unsure/Disagree

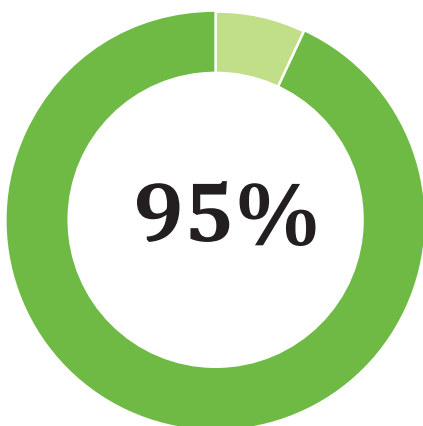
The CAC provided me with resources to support my child.



■ Agree
■ Unsure/Disagree

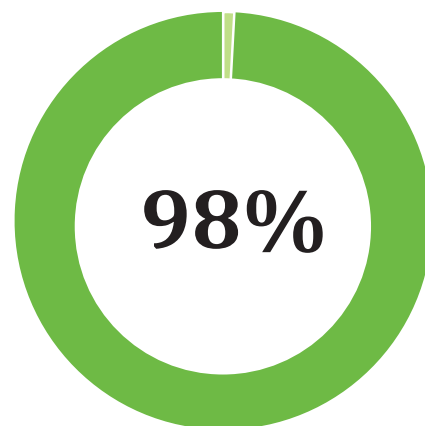
"Thank you for all your kindness and willingness to help my child."

MDT members feel the CAC provides resources to build better cases.



■ Agree
■ Disagree/Not Applicable

MDT members feel clients benefit from the collaborative approach.



■ Agree
■ Disagree/Not Applicable

"I feel that the center is a huge asset to our agency. Being able to use a well trained and experienced person for forensic interviews is incredibly important."