

Human Services

Overview

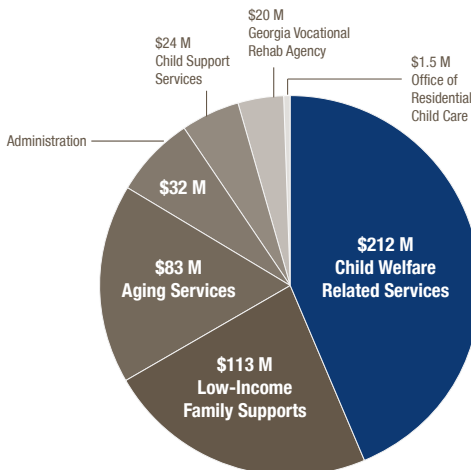
Georgia’s spending to help children, the poor and seniors is overseen by the state Department of Human Services. State funding for the agency is \$486 million in 2014, or about 3 percent of total state spending.

Child welfare-related services represent the largest share of the department’s responsibilities, accounting for \$212 million, or 44 percent of the department’s 2014 budget. These services include protecting children from abuse, abandonment and neglect, as well as safeguarding them in suitable temporary and permanent homes. Human Services employees also license, monitor and inspect temporary foster homes.

About \$113 million of the Human Services budget helps low-income families gain access to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), nutrition assistance, Medicaid and other federal services. These temporary supports help people stay healthy and prepared for job opportunities and financial independence.

Other Human Services functions protect and sustain older Georgians, enforce parents’ responsibility to financially support their children and help employ people with disabilities.

Figure 24 Georgia’s Children a Major Focus of Human Services



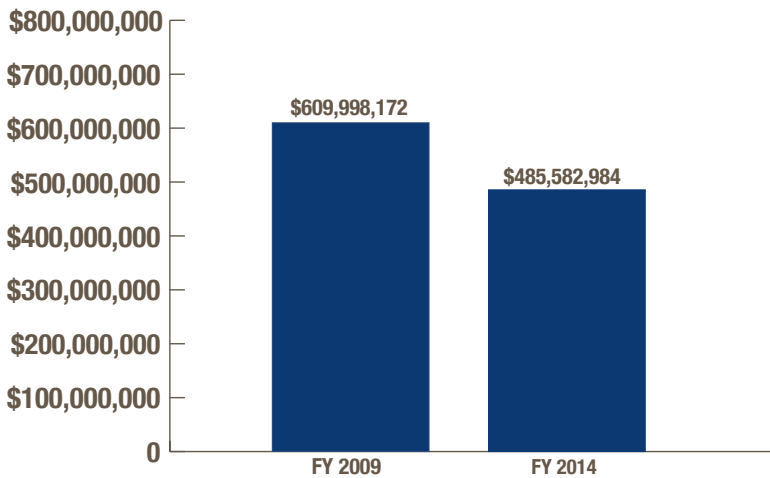
Source: Georgia’s 2014 Fiscal Year Budget (HB 106), signed by governor

Fewer Resources for State's Most Vulnerable

The Georgia Department of Human Services budget has fallen by 20 percent since the 2009 fiscal year. The result is fewer state workers to protect children and fewer staffers to help Georgians who need TANF, nutrition assistance and Medicaid to move toward financial independence.

Since 2009, the decline in state support for the department has meant drastic reduction or changes in a number of services, including community-based support services for seniors and work assistance for families receiving TANF. Recruitment of potential adoptive families and support services for grandparents raising grandchildren also were significantly cut.

Figure 25 Department of Human Services Budget Down 20 Percent



Sources: Georgia's 2009 and 2014 fiscal year budgets, includes programs remaining in the Department of Human Services as of FY 2013

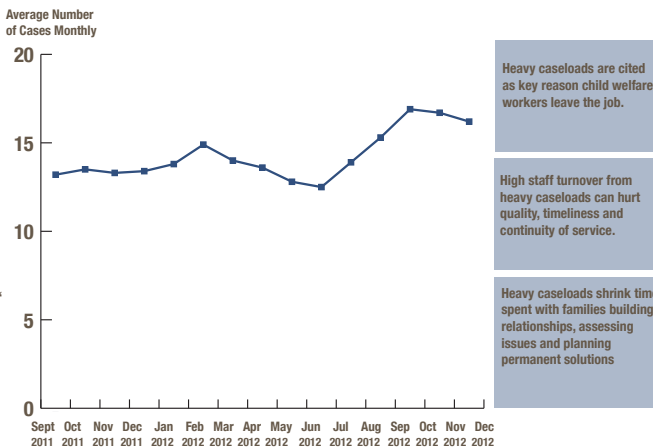
Child Welfare Workers: A Strained Safety Net

The largest portion of the Human Services budget, \$212 million, pays the salaries of staff who investigate allegations of child abuse, abandonment and neglect, and goes to support families and organizations that provide temporary and permanent homes for children in need.

The budget for child welfare-related services is down nearly 23 percent since the 2009 fiscal year, which has led to layoffs and three consecutive years of requiring those who remain to take time off without pay. Budget cuts also led to the cancellation of some contracts with private companies for in-home services, leaving state workers with increased responsibility. These in-home services can include preparing families for reunification, helping parents cope with discipline issues and facilitating family conferences.

Between September 2011 and December 2012, state child welfare workers saw the number of cases they handled increase by over 20 percent. Child welfare workers need adequate time to talk with families face-to-face, assess a child’s safety risk and follow up to see if the necessary services and supports are provided. Requiring human services workers to deal with a growing volume of work is troubling news for Georgia’s children, since the quality of the help they get can suffer.

Figure 26 Protectors of Child Welfare Stretched Thin



Source: Department of Human Services Appropriations presentation, 1/2013; Child Welfare Information Gateway

Low-Income Supports

As Georgians continue to struggle with high unemployment or, in many cases, jobs offering fewer hours than they are willing to work, the human services workers who help them have seen the number of people they serve more than double. These workers help families obtain TANF, nutrition assistance and Medicaid. TANF is a state-federal partnership designed to help low-income families become financially independent through job preparation, temporary cash assistance and other support. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps) helps low-income families afford the nutrition they need to work, attend school and otherwise contribute to their communities. Medicaid provides some low-income Georgians with health insurance. (See more on Medicaid in the Health Care section.)

The highest growth rate among these low-income supports is for SNAP, which saw a 128 percent increase in cases in Georgia between December 2007 and December 2012. Georgia's record high unemployment and poverty during that time meant more families needed help putting food on the table. One in five Georgians do not have sufficient access to food, including more than one in four children. SNAP helps these families. State costs are expected to decline over time as the economy recovers.

Food Stamp Needs Soar



**SNAP cases grow
128% in five years**



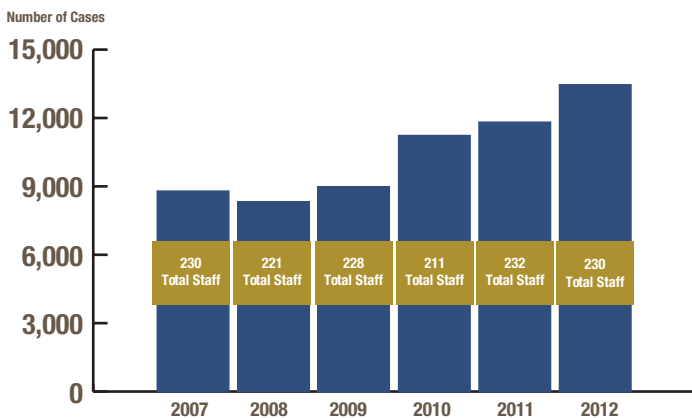
Adult Protective Services: Less Support, Greater Need

Georgia's population is aging, which increases the need to help seniors with medication, nutrition and other necessities. In only three other states is the over-65 population growing faster than in Georgia. And the over-85 population is also growing faster than most states.

Adult Protective Services prevents abuse, neglect and exploitation of Georgians 65 or older who are not in long-term care, and investigates violations. The agency's family services workers take older Georgians to get medicine and groceries and spend time with them in their homes, which makes seniors less susceptible to abuse. In 2014, the budget that pays for these workers is cut in half from the previous year.

Though reports of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation surged 50 percent between the 2007 and 2013 fiscal years and confirmed cases increased by 53 percent, the number of Adult Protective Service workers has not grown. As with their counterparts who help children, these workers have taken on higher caseloads.

Figure 27 Adult Protective Services Cases Rise, Staff Levels Remain the Same



Source: Department of Human Services Appropriations presentation, January 2013