

Florida Adoption Assistance- Who Do You Contact?

State Contact information

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Adoption Assistance- Who is Eligible?

A good place to start. Public adoption in Florida is administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Family Safety and Preservation Office (FSPO). DCF and adoption links: www.state.fl.us/cf_web/ and www.myflorida.com/cf_web/myflorida2/healthhuman/adoption/index.shtml or phone 1.800.96.ADOPT.

- 1. What specific factors or conditions does your state consider to determine that a child cannot be placed with adoptive parents without providing financial assistance? (“What is your state definition of special needs?”)**

A child with special needs is defined as a child that has at least one of the following needs or circumstances that may be a barrier to placement or adoption without financial assistance:

- Eight years of age or older
- African American or racially mixed parentage
- Member of a sibling group being placed for adoption as a unit
- Mentally handicapped.
- Physically handicapped.
- Emotionally handicapped.
- Significant emotional ties with his foster parents or relative caregiver

- 2. What are the eligibility criteria for your state-funded adoption assistance program?**

In order to be eligible for state-funded adoption assistance a child must be a special needs child as defined above.

- 3. What is the maximum amount a family may receive in non-recurring adoption expenses from your state? Adoptive parents can receive reimbursement of certain approved, “one-time” adoption expenses incurred in the process of finalizing a special needs adoption.**

\$1,000.00 per child

- 4. Does your state enter into deferred adoption assistance agreements? In some states, adoptive parents can enter into an agreement in which they choose to defer the receipt of a Medicaid card, the monthly monetary payment, or both and can elect to receive the Medicaid card and/or monetary payment at another time.**

Florida offers deferred adoption assistance. If at the time the child is placed for adoption, the adoptive parents choose not to receive adoption assistance for the child, they are encouraged to sign the initial assistance agreement with a payment amount of zero (\$0) listed in the agreement. Establishing a deferred adoption assistance agreement preserves future active adoption assistance eligibility for the child in the event that the family needs assistance in meeting the needs of the child.

- 5. When may adoption assistance payments and benefits begin in your state?**

Adoption assistance payments and benefits may begin in Florida at adoption placement.

- 6. How are changes made to the adoption assistance agreement in your state?**

- a. When can a parent request a change in the adoption assistance agreement?
- b. How does a parent request a change in the adoption assistance agreement?

- c. What if a parent does not receive the change they request in the adoption assistance agreement?

Adoptive parents may request modifications to adoption assistance agreements at any time, either verbally or in writing. The amount of the subsidy may be readjusted periodically up to the maximum allowable payment for the child, or reduced, with the concurrence of the adoptive parents, to fit the changing needs of the child and the circumstances of the adoptive parents. To start this process, families are directed to contact the adoption unit or private adoption agency through which they adopted the child. Families are directed to contact (1) the social worker or department through which they receive their adoption assistance check, (2) the unit through which they finalization the adoption or (3) the district administrator at their local Children and Family Services office.

Adoptive parents may appeal any decision of the department with which they disagree. They may seek redress through levels of the departmental administration up to and including the district administrator. If an issue is not resolved to a family's satisfaction, they may request a fair hearing pursuant to Florida statute. See Question #10 for information regarding fair hearings.

Adoption Assistance- Post Adoption Services

7. What types of post adoption services are available in your state and how do I find out more about them?

Post adoption services in Florida are administered by the Department of Children's Services, Family Safety and Preservation Program Office. The DCF and contracted agencies provide various services, depending on location. Post-adoption services include the following examples:

1. Information and referral
2. Support groups
3. Adoption related libraries
4. Case management
5. Training
6. Florida Adoption Reunion Registry (FARR)

A collaboration of community-based agencies, Adoption Support Network, is a parent support group serving adoptive families in the Sarasota area. Network link: www.sarasota-ymca.org or phone: 941.721.7670 x205. Statewide, adoptive families are directed to contact their adoption assistance worker, the county Department of Children and Families or the unit through which they finalized the adoption. DCFS office contact locator link: www.dcf.state.fl.us/admin/dcfcontacts.shtml.

Note: Not all services may be available in all cases. Contact your adoption assistance worker or post adoption services contact for information regarding process, eligibility, availability, and duration of services.

Adoption Assistance- Medical assistance

8. What mental health services are provided by your state?

Public mental health services for children in Florida are administered by the Department of Children and Families, Substance Abuse and Mental Health. The Children's Mental Health system of care is public-funded and serves eligible children with serious emotional disturbance, children with emotional disturbance, and children at risk of emotional disturbance, within the amount of funds appropriated for these services. Mental health services in Florida are received through various programs including:

Community Mental Health: Includes rehabilitative services which are either psychiatric in nature, rendered or recommended by a psychiatrist; or medical in nature, rendered or recommended by a psychiatrist or other physician.

Early Intervention: Includes medical and remedial services designed to enhance the capacity of children with conditions causing a delay in normal development. The services include screenings, evaluations and medically related early intervention services, such as nutritional, psychological, audiological, nursing, developmental, social work, speech language pathology and parent training.

Intermediate Care Facility Services for the Mentally Retarded or Developmentally Disabled: Provided to individuals who, because of their mental or physical condition, require care and services which can be made available to them only through institutional facilities.

The Florida Children's Mental Health link:

www.myflorida.com/cf_web/myflorida2/healthhuman/substanceabusementalhealth/cmhsystemcare.html and Medicaid help line: 888.367.6554.

Note: Not all services may be available in all cases. Contact your adoption assistance worker or medical assistance specialist for information regarding process, eligibility, availability, and duration of services.

9. Does your state provide additional finances or services for medical or therapeutic needs not covered under your state medical plan to children receiving adoption assistance?

Florida offers a program known as *Medical Subsidy* that can be requested at any time. The subsidy can be received for the length of time that the condition for which subsidy was sought exists, or until the child turns eighteen years of age, whichever occurs first. The need for medical subsidy must be supported by documentation of that need from appropriate professionals and established and authorized prior to the adoptive placement. The need or potential need for the *Medical Subsidy* program must also be documented in the adoption assistance agreement. Medical and medically related service costs may be subsidized under this program for conditions which pre-existed the adoption and can not include costs that can be covered by the family's private insurance or other available medical coverage.

Note: Not all services may be available in all cases. Contact your adoption assistance worker for information regarding process, eligibility, availability, and duration of services.

Adoption Assistance- Fair Hearings

10. What is your state's process for applying for a fair hearing? A fair hearing is a legal, administrative procedure that provides a forum to address disagreements with agency decisions.

Adoptive parents may appeal any decision of the department with which they disagree and seek redress through levels of departmental administration up to and including the district administrator. Fair hearings must be requested in writing to the adoption specialist or the appropriate entity in the community based care agency. If a dispute cannot be settled at the counselor/supervisor level, the Adoption Review Committee will be convened. The adoption counselor, adoption specialist, family safety program administrator or the appropriate entities with the community-based provider may make requests for committee review. To start this process, families are directed to contact the adoption unit or private adoption agency through which they adopted the child. Families are directed to contact (1) the social worker or department through which they receive their adoption assistance payment (2) the unit through which they finalization the adoption or (3) the district administrator at their local DCFS office. DCFS office contact locator link: www.dcf.state.fl.us/admin/dcfcontacts.shtml.

Adoption Assistance- Web/Internet Information

11. What is your state Web address for general adoption information?

Florida's general adoption link: www.adoptflorida.com (DCF's Florida Adoption Information Center)

12. What is your state Web address for adoption assistance information?

Florida's DCF Website includes a Frequently Asked Questions page that covers some adoption assistance information issues. Link: www.myflorida.com/cf_web/myflorida2/healthhuman/adoption/faq.shtml.

For a description of specific special needs, link:

www.myflorida.com/cf_web/myflorida2/healthhuman/adoption/specialneeds.shtml

13. What is your state Web address for state-specific medical assistance information for children?

Florida's state-specific medical assistance link: www.fdhc.state.fl.us/Medicaid/index2.shtml