



# Collecting Race and Ethnicity Data in Child Welfare

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families aims to utilize data to better understand inequities and to support efforts to achieve equity. A critical step in this process is creating engagement opportunities with individuals and families to explain why race and ethnicity data is collected and used and allowing individuals to self-identify their demographic information.



## Strategies to collect families' race and ethnicity in an engaging and meaningful way

- Begin by explaining why you are asking this personal information and how that will be used.
- Ask how the individual identifies their race and ethnicity. Acknowledge that you do not want to assume how the individual identifies.
- Acknowledge reasons why an individual would be reluctant to share this information (e.g., discrimination, confidentiality, fear of repercussion, and unearned trust). Let the individual know that they are not required to provide this information, and if the individual doesn't provide it, their information will be entered as "declined."
- Re-confirm this information at various points during the individual's involvement within the system. This allows individuals to update or correct their information over time.



## Questions to use with families to encourage engagement beyond data collection

- To best support you, what is the most important thing for me to know about how you identify yourself?
- Is there anything I should be aware of when working with you and your family regarding cultural values, communication, and expectations?
- Do you have any existing connections to cultural groups, practices, or connections that are particularly meaningful or important to you and why?

## Tribal membership is a political status!

"American Indian/Alaska Native" is a race and "Native American" is an ethnicity in eWISACWIS. However, tribal membership is a political status that must be confirmed to ensure Indian children and their families are afforded legal protections in accordance with ICWA and WICWA.

A child's American Indian/Alaska Native heritage must be documented, regardless of whether the information is received from a third party to ensure compliance with ICWA and WICWA.

## Why reconfirm demographic information?

Families come to the attention of the child welfare system through referrals typically made by a **third party**. It is important that demographic questions are asked at this first point of contact, but the answers are often **assumed**. This assumed information should not be viewed as fact until it is confirmed by the individuals within the family.

When child welfare professionals contact a family for the first time, re-confirming each family member's race and ethnicity can ensure that the demographic information we have is correct and not assumed.

### Assumed information

- Typically based on visible physical characteristics
- May not represent all the race and ethnic groups the individual belongs to or identifies as belonging to
- Takes power away from the individual

VS.

### Self-identified information

- Offers a more complete picture of an individual's identity
- Seeks to empower the individual
- Builds trust between child welfare professionals and the individuals and families they work with

## Why this is important

### Engaging with youth and their families about their race and ethnicity can...

- Affirm the identities of those we serve.
- Inform service delivery in child welfare interventions.
- Include the individual or families' cultural support network in planning and decision making.
- Identify disproportionate outcomes for demographic groups and alert to areas that need system improvements.
- Direct resources and funding to support historically underserved or excluded populations.
- Monitor equitable use of resources and funding for DCF funded programming and services.
- Help to identify root cause of disparities.
- Comply with federal reporting requirements that are established to provide data that would assist in policy development and program management at the federal, state, and local levels.

# Key Terms Defined

## eWiSACWIS Demographic Questions

**Race:** Select all races the individual identifies. If the individual does not answer this question, select "unknown" or "declined."

**Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity:** Only select "yes" or "no" if the individual answers this question; otherwise, select "unknown" or "declined."

**Additional Ethnicity:** If the individual does not identify with any of the listed ethnicities, use the option "prefer to self-describe"; otherwise, leave it blank.

**Tribal Identification:** To document tribal identification information, "American Indian/Alaska Native" race or "Native American" ethnicity must be selected. Proceed to enter the Indian Tribe(s), Status, and Date confirmation was received from the tribe.

## ICWA Record

All children, regardless of American Indian/Alaska Native heritage, are required to have an ICWA record completed before approving the initial assessment.

If the ICWA record has been previously created, the hyperlink will read as "View ICWA Record" If an ICWA record does not yet exist, the hyperlink will read as "Create ICWA Record." For more information, please see the [WICWA Online Resource for Case Workers](#).

## Unknown vs. Declined

- **Unknown** should be selected if the source of information, including the individual themselves, does not know the individual's race or ethnicity.
- **Declined** should be selected if the individual chooses not to disclose their race and/or ethnicity information.

## Abandoned

Child's demographic information may be unknown because the child was abandoned. Abandoned means that the child was left alone or with others and the identity of the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) is unknown.

## Confidentiality

- All data, including data related to an individual's race, ethnicity and tribal identification is maintained in eWiSACWIS, an encrypted, password protected data management system.
- Access to eWiSACWIS is only granted to appropriate child welfare staff and other authorized users. State and federal confidentiality laws apply to eWiSACWIS records and information. See the [eWiSACWIS Knowledge Web](#) for additional information about access and confidentiality.
- All data presented publicly, by DCF or a third party who is granted access to eWiSACWIS data through a formal data sharing agreement, is delivered in a way that protects participants' identities.

## Additional Resources

- [Our Identities | Ourselves: A Guide to Anti-Racist Data Collection for Case Workers and Other Frontline Staff](#)
- [Child Welfare Practice to Address Racial Disproportionality and Disparity](#)



## Contacts

For additional help and/or resources on race and ethnicity calculations: [DCFCWRA@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DCFCWRA@wisconsin.gov)

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 422-6925. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.