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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-25](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

To improve outcomes for youth leaving foster care, Congress passed the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA), which increased the allocation of federal funds for independent living programs from \$70 million to \$140 million. This report reviews (1) how states' funding allocations changed to serve youth after FCIA, (2) the extent to which states have expanded services and age groups of foster youth served since the passage of FCIA and what challenges remain, (3) the extent to which states have used other federal and state programs to coordinate the delivery of services to foster youth, and (4) how the states and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have fulfilled the program accountability provisions of the law and assessed the effectiveness of independent living services.

## What GAO Recommends

We are making recommendations to the Secretary of HHS to improve the availability of information on the array of federal programs that could be used to assist youth transitioning out of foster care at the state and local levels and to improve existing processes for monitoring states' progress in meeting the needs of current and former foster care youth. HHS disagreed with our latter recommendation, which included standardizing the reporting format for plans and reports, stating that it would impose an unnecessary burden on states.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-25](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-25).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David D. Bellis, (415) 904-2272, [BellisD@gao.gov](mailto:BellisD@gao.gov).

## FOSTER YOUTH

# HHS Actions Could Improve Coordination of Services and Monitoring of States' Independent Living Programs

## What GAO Found

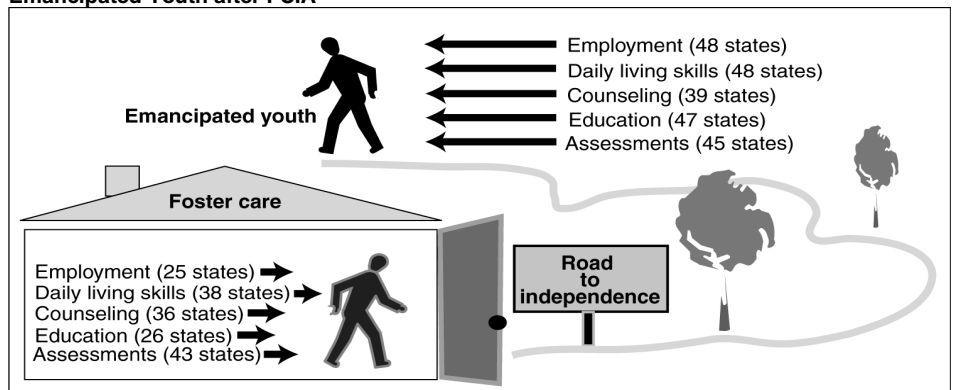
The doubling of federal funding for independent living programs has resulted in most states receiving an increase in funds. Although some states had difficulty expanding their program infrastructure in the first 2 years of increased funding, the amount of funds states returned to HHS declined the second year. Differences in funding also appeared in the amounts available per eligible foster care youth.

Following the passage of FCIA, 40 states reported in our survey expanding independent living services to younger youth, and 36 states expanded services to older youth, but gaps remain in providing some key services to youth. State differences in serving youth may have been caused by gaps in the availability of critical services, such as mental health services, mentoring, and housing, as well as challenges engaging youth and foster parents to participate in the program.

Almost all states that we surveyed reported increased levels of coordination under FCIA, but linkages with other federal and state youth-serving programs were not always in place to increase services available across local areas. Despite some coordination efforts, states may not make full use of available resources. One of the barriers in linking program services reported by the 4 states we visited included the inconsistent availability of information on the array of programs that were operating in each state and local area.

States and HHS have taken action to fulfill the accountability provisions of FCIA, but little information is available to assess the effectiveness of independent living services. All states submitted required plans and reports, but the absence of a uniform reporting format and lack of standard monitoring practices among HHS regional offices hindered assessments of state performance. HHS is developing an information system that may improve program accountability and reported that it expects to issue a proposed regulation in 2005.

### Number of States Providing Key Independent Living Services to Youth Younger than 16 and Emancipated Youth after FCIA



Source: GAO analysis.