

Safe Reduction Dashboard: Placement and re-referral trend for cases assessed at higher and lower risk levels



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The purpose of DCYF'S Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability (OIAA) is to build agency capacity to make evidence-informed decisions, continuously learn and improve, and successfully enact system reform.

Child Welfare Safe Reduction Dashboard: December 2025 trend report

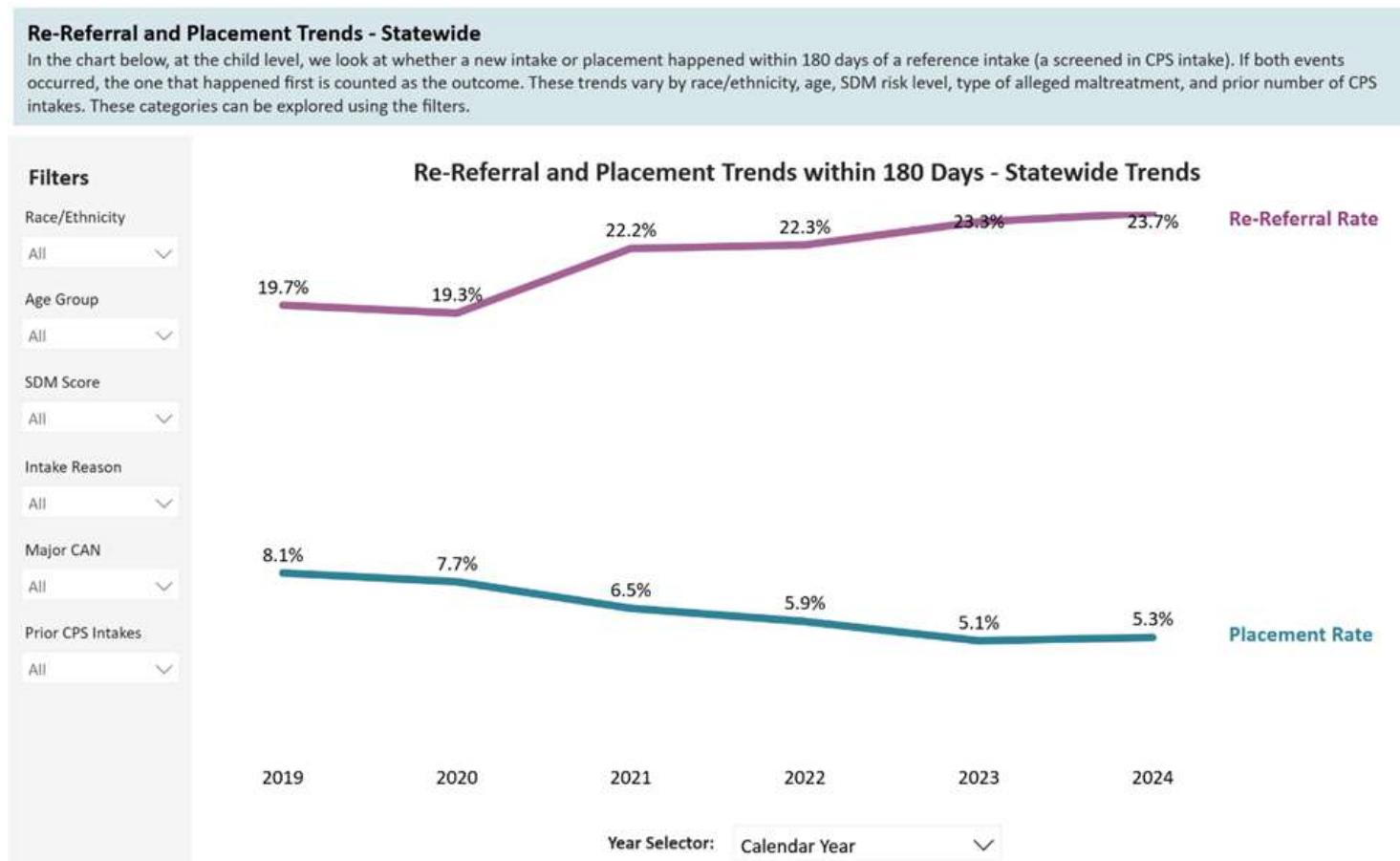
This month's trend report looks at placement and re-referral patterns for families assessed as having higher or lower risk of future child maltreatment. Over the past six years, placements have gone down, while re-referrals have gone up. The increase in re-referrals is linked to a growing number of children who are identified as victims multiple times in CPS intakes, especially in families assessed as higher risk.

Families with ongoing child welfare involvement are not simply "returning cases." Many face long-term challenges such as poverty, ongoing stress across generations, and gaps in services. Research by Loman (2006) and other studies on chronic neglect show that a small group of families accounts for a large share of child welfare work and costs. These families also place heavy emotional demands on staff. In these situations, maltreatment is often not a single incident, but an ongoing condition connected to unmet basic needs, depression, substance use, and unstable housing.

Over time, this pattern can harm children's development, reduce parents' sense of hope, and weaken trust in helping systems. For agencies, repeated involvement leads to more reports, higher costs, and increased worker burnout. Lasting improvement requires long-term, relationship-based support, and coordination across systems.

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Overall placement and re-referral trends

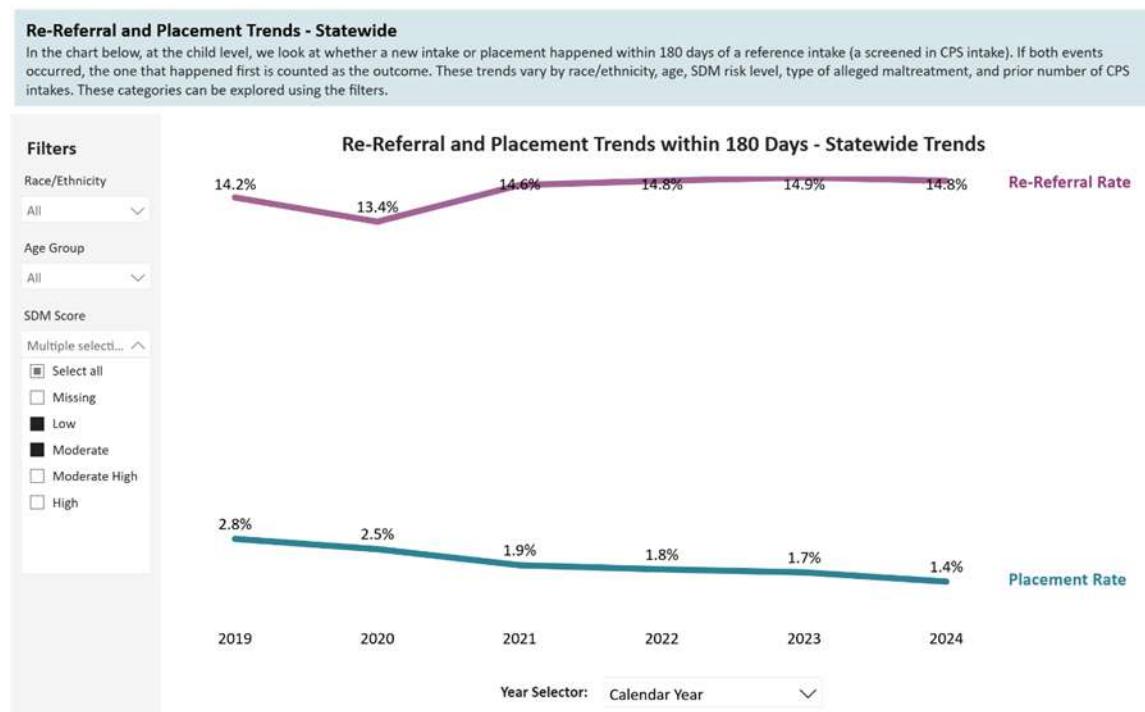


As has been shared in previous trend reports, the placement rate has declined from 8.1% in 2019 to a low of 5.1% in 2023. In 2024 the placement rate ticked up to 5.3%. Correspondingly the re-referral rate has increased from 19.7% in 2019 to 23.7% in 2024.

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Placement and re-referral trend for those cases indicated as **Low** or **Moderate** risk on the SDM*

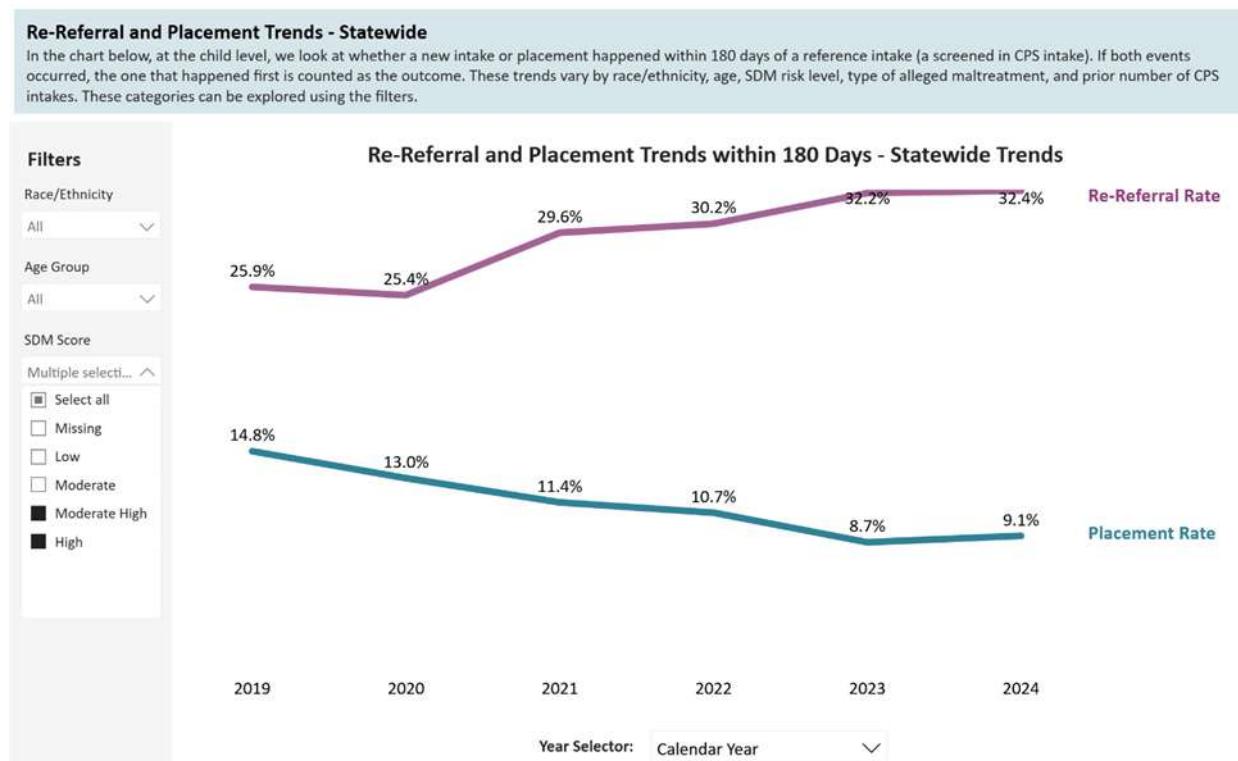
*The SDM (Structured Decision-Making Tool) is a risk assessment tool which is completed for all cases that have a screened-in CPS intake. Per policy the SDM is to be completed within 45-60 days of a screened-in intake. Those cases with an overall score of Moderate-High or High risk are prioritized for ongoing services.



Overall, those cases indicated as **low** or **moderate** on the SDM have a lower placement rate and a lower re-referral rate than the general CPS involved population. There has been a reduction in placement of children associated with cases indicated as low or moderate on the SDM, from 2.8% to 1.4%. The increase in re-referrals is not as noticeable as it is for the general population, going from 14.2% in 2019 and 14.8% in 2024.

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Placement and re-referral trend for those cases indicated as **Moderate-High** or **High** risk on the SDM

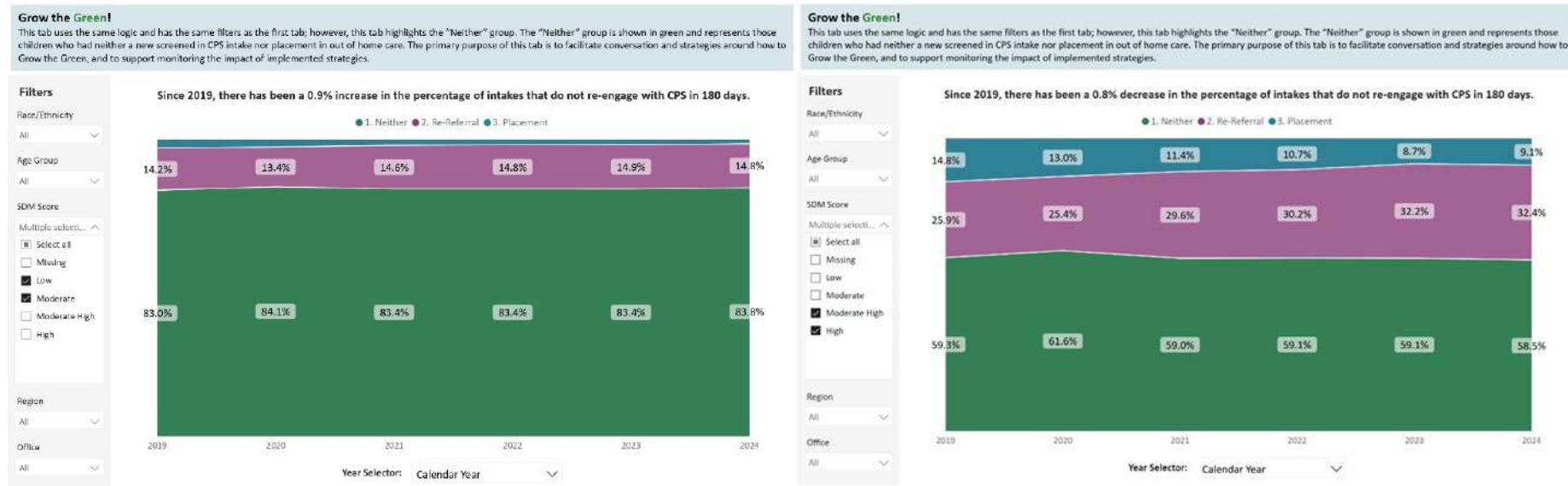


Overall, those cases indicated as Moderate-High or High risk on the SDM have a higher placement rate and a higher re-referral rate than the general CPS involved population. For higher risk cases there has been a reduction in placement, from 14.8% in 2019 to a low of 8.7% in 2023. The placement rate ticked up to 9.1% for this population in 2024. During the same period, there has been an increase in the re-referral rate, from 25.9% in 2019 to 32.4% in 2024.

In summary, cases indicated as higher risk are the primary driver of both the reduction of children being placed in out-of-home care as well as the increase in re-referrals.

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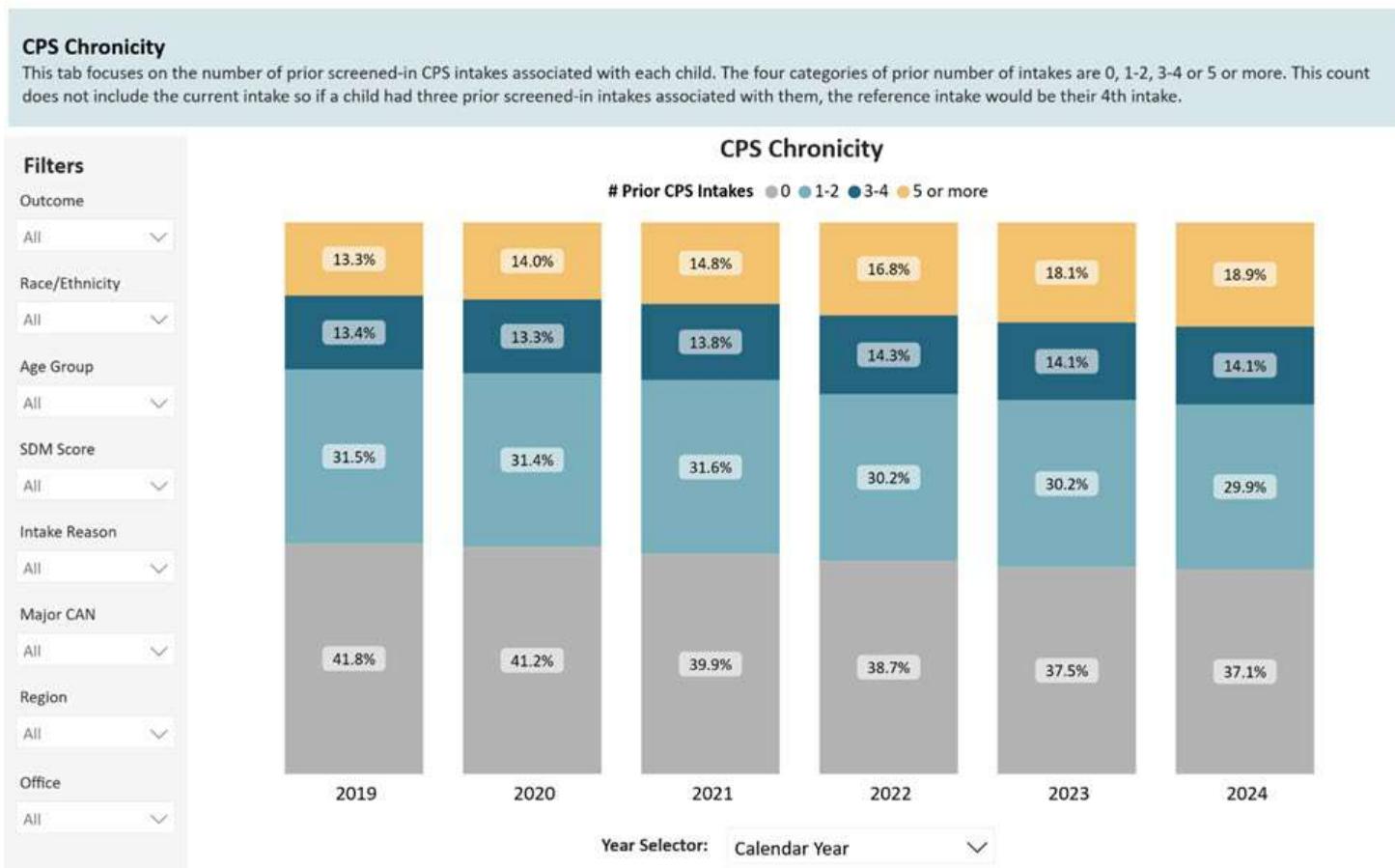
Grow the Green: Cases with Low and Moderate SDM scores compared to those with Moderate-High and High SDM scores



The Grow the Green tab on the Safe Reduction dashboard emphasizes those children who had neither a placement event nor a re-referral within 180 days of the reference intake. For those children associated with cases indicated as Low or Moderate on the SDM, the **Neither group (the Green) has grown by 0.8%**. For those children associated with cases indicated as **Moderate-High or High risk on the SDM, the Neither group has contracted 0.8%**.

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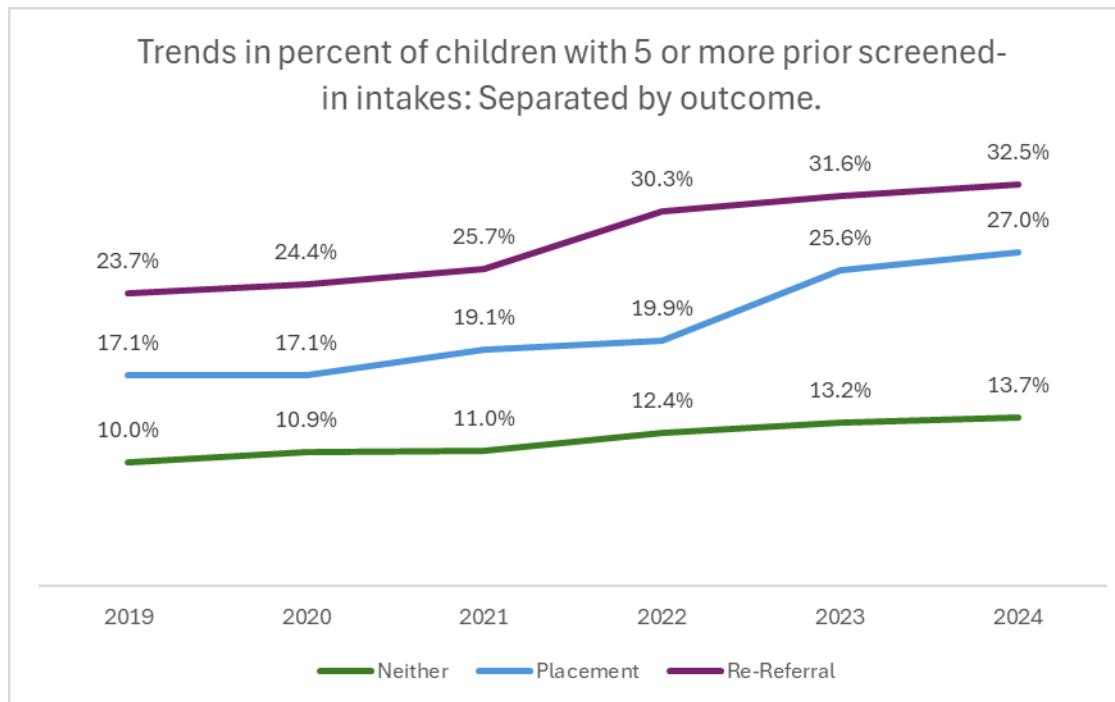
CPS chronicity for the entire CPS involved population



Associated with the overall decrease in the placement rate and increase in the re-referral rate we are seeing more children with 5 or more previously screened-in CPS intakes. The percentage of **children with at least 5 or more prior screened-in CPS intakes has increased from 13.3% in 2019 to 18.9% in 2024.**

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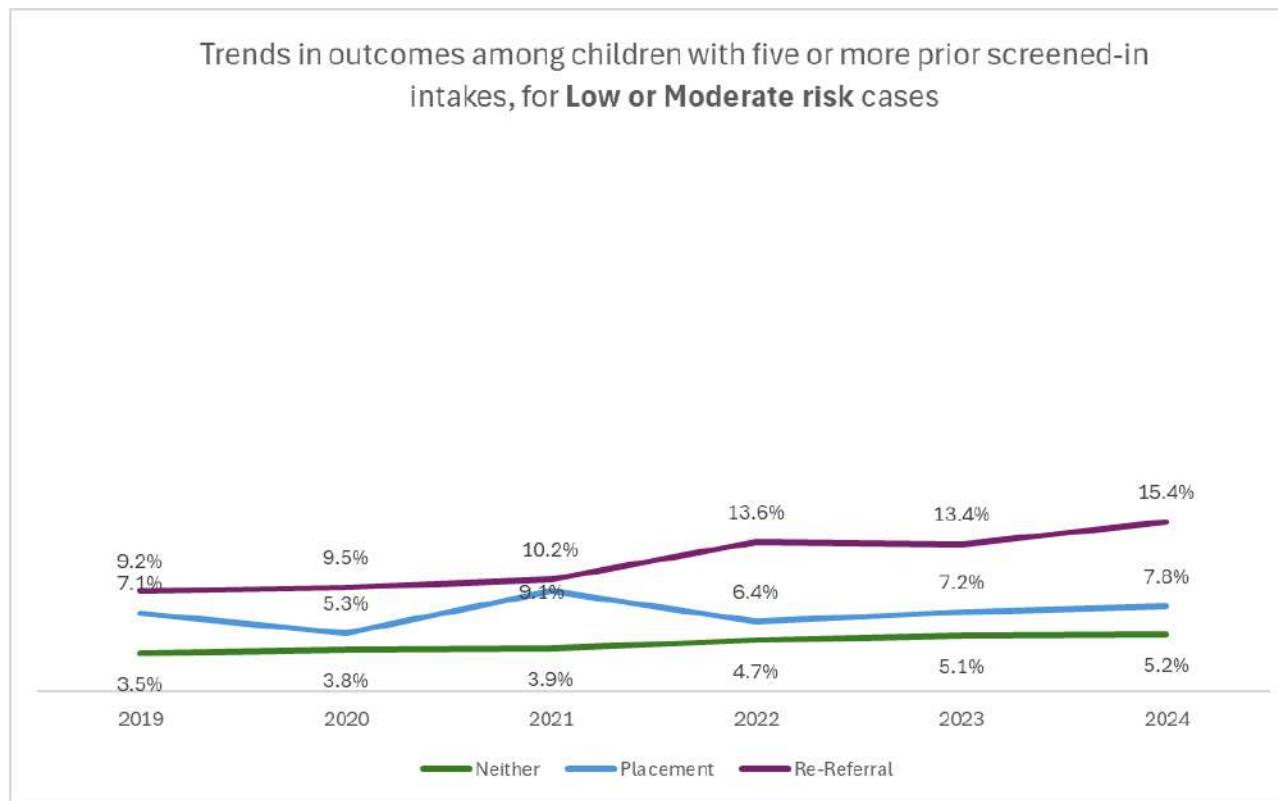
This figure shows the percentage of children with five or more prior CPS intakes who experienced either a placement, a re-referral (new screened-in CPS intake), or neither of these outcomes.



For the total CPS involved population there has been a steady increase in the percent of children with 5 or more intakes, however there are differences based on outcome. For those children who end up being placed within 180 days of the reference referral, there has been about a 10 percentage point increase since 2019 in having 5 or more prior screened-in CPS intakes, while for those children with a re-referral within 180 days the increase has been about 9 percentage points. For those children experiencing neither a new intake nor a placement event the increase is 3.7 percentage points.

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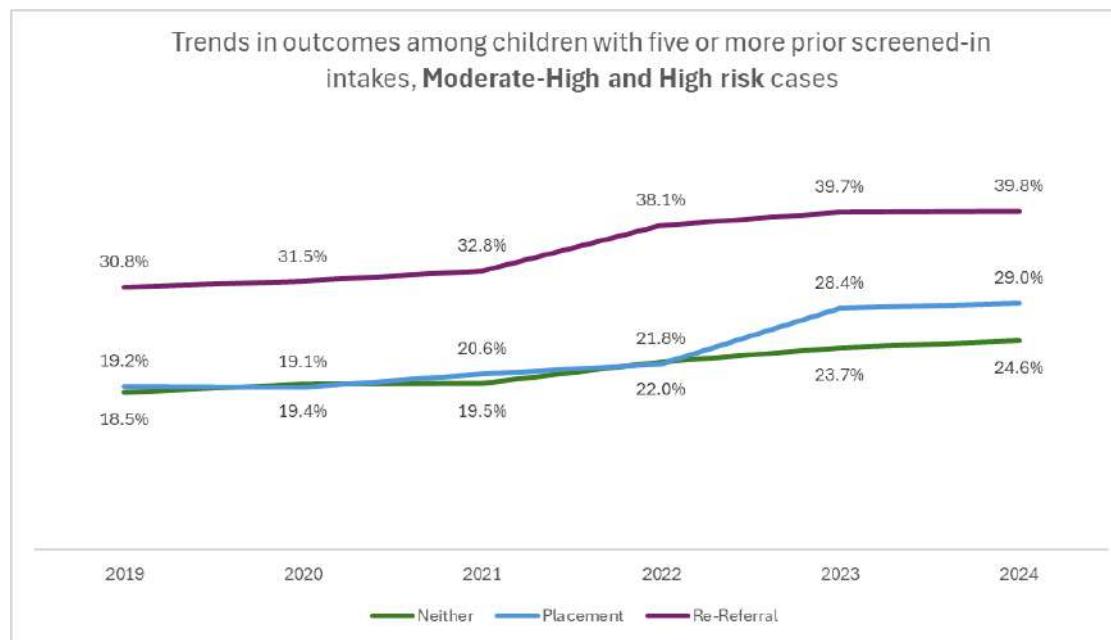
This figure shows the percentage of children indicated as **Low or Moderate Risk on the SDM** with five or more prior CPS intakes who experienced either a placement, a re-referral (new screened-in CPS intake), or neither of these outcomes.



Overall, children in families indicated as Low or Moderate risk on the SDM have a lower likelihood of having 5 or more prior screened-in CPS intakes than the general CPS involved population. For this group of children, since 2019, those children with 5 or more prior intakes have increased for each of the outcome groups, going from 3.5% to 5.2% for those with Neither a placement nor a re-referral. For those with the outcome of a placement the percent of children with 5 or more prior intakes has increased slightly, from 7.1% to 7.8%. While for those with a re-referral the percent has increased more meaningfully, from 9.2% to 15.4%.

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This figure shows the percentage of children rated **Moderate-High or High Risk** on the SDM, with five or more prior CPS intakes, who experienced a placement, a re-referral (new screened-in CPS intake), or neither outcome.



Overall, children in families indicated as Moderate-High or High risk on the SDM have an increased likelihood of having 5 or more prior screened-in CPS intakes. Additionally, for this group of children, since 2019, those children with 5 or more prior intakes have increased significantly for each of the outcome groups. The percent of children who experienced Neither a placement nor a re-referral increased by about 6 percentage points, going from 18.5% to 24.6%. The increase for children is more striking for children who experience a placement, increasing from 19.2% to 29% (an increase of 9.8 percentage points). For those children experiencing a re-referral, the increase has been from 30.8% to 39.8% or an increase of 9 percentage points.

The rising number of intakes involving higher-risk families in the child-welfare system suggests that these children are experiencing more frequent and prolonged adverse events, raising concerns about their development and safety.