

# OVERVIEW

THE AUDITOR  
STATE OF HAWAII

## Study of Family Preservation Services and the Families Together Initiative

### Summary

In response to the Legislature's request, we (1) evaluated the administration, provision, and funding of family preservation, home-based services in the state prior to the implementation of the Families Together Initiative (FTI) program, and (2) evaluated the development, intended benefits, and implementation plan for the Families Together Initiative.

We found that the former family preservation, home-based services that were merged into the FTI program had been provided by the Department of Health and Department of Human Services (DHS) through contracts with private providers. But the contracts called for services that were only loosely related to each other and the data generated under the contracts are not comparable nor sufficient for determining the effectiveness of these services.

For the new FTI program, we found that FTI administrators will need to plan for services that are culturally sensitive, sufficiently flexible, of sufficient duration, and supported by continuing wrap around services. We also found that DHS, in requesting state funding of FTI and FTI-related budget items from the Legislature, made financial representations based on very optimistic assumptions about federal reimbursements; and that, at the conclusion of our study, there was uncertainty as to the actual amounts of federal reimbursements the State will receive.

### Recommendations and Response

We recommend that the Department of Human Services, Families Together Initiative executive board, and Families Together Initiative interagency coordination team do the following: (a) address the concerns of providers and referring case workers regarding the need for cultural sensitivity and flexibility; (b) evaluate the need, availability, and accessibility of wrap around services by island and community; and (c) plan for wrap around services in conjunction with FTI services. We recommend that a balance be struck between the duration of FTI services and the availability and accessibility of wrap around services.

We recommend that the Legislature mandate that federal reimbursements resulting from the Title IV-E funding mechanism be immediately refunded to

the general fund. Until the \$4.8 million is fully refunded, the Legislature should not expand FTI services, wrap around services, and supporting positions beyond their current levels.

The Department of Human Services found our study to be very comprehensive and agreed generally with our findings and recommendations in its response to our draft report. The Families Together Initiative executive board also agreed generally with our findings and recommendations. Both DHS and the FTI executive board added their own comments and DHS made a few clarifications and updates to the information provided in the report.

The Department of Health responded that it agreed with our recommendations on assessment and culturally sensitive services of sufficient duration and flexibility that are supported by a range of wrap around services.

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