



## Prioritize the Long-term Healthy Development of Children in Foster Care

By Creating a Process to Appropriately Prescribe Medications

When Kentucky kids have experienced abuse or neglect, they rely on the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) to keep them safe and healthy. Some of those children and youth who have experienced trauma may heal over time without intense intervention, while many may need additional supports and services—including medication—to treat behavioral health needs. When decisions around children's health are made, their long-term healthy development must be prioritized.

### **All children deserve the opportunity to grow up healthy:**

#### **High rates of medication use for kids in foster care have unclear long-term health outcomes**

Children who have been abused or neglected are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder—likely due to the trauma they have experienced—and have higher rates of severe mental health issues. In Kentucky, there are nearly 10,000 children in foster care, and 42 percent of them are prescribed at least one psychotropic medicine to treat emotional or behavioral symptoms. The rates of use of an antipsychotic medication for children in Kentucky on Medicaid are about twice the national average. Though there is still much we do not know much about the effectiveness and long-term safety of these drugs, younger and younger children are being prescribed these medications.

#### **Children who have experienced trauma need comprehensive care**

While there is a role for medications to help address certain illnesses, these medications can be harmful if used improperly. And when medications are used, they should be accompanied by therapy. The providers and systems serving these children must take a comprehensive approach that addresses the trauma and issues that are at the root of the behavior.

### **Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:**

Strengthen the review processes and therapeutic services to ensure medications are appropriately prescribed to children in foster care for behavioral health issues.