

## Process checklist: Adoption and Northstar Adoption Assistance

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Case number: \_\_\_\_\_

Caseworker name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date assigned: \_\_\_\_\_

### Instructions

Use this checklist as a guide for:

- Completing the adoption process for children under guardianship of the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
- Establishing Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility.

The checklist is organized by stage within the process. Each stage includes concrete items to complete. **This checklist is not a practice guide.** It does not address all required or best-practice components when working with children in foster care.

It also does not include specific steps to complete in the Social Services Information System (SSIS). The following detailed SSIS instructions are available on PartnerLink, under DHS Systems and IT Updates, [SSIS Worker Documentation](#), in the Adoption – County and Tribal section:

- [Adoption Workflow in SSIS](#)
- [Northstar Adoption in SSIS–Child Ward Folder](#)
- [Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement](#)
- [Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination.](#)

Helpful resources are listed throughout the checklist. These include references to statutes and policies, as well as documents, forms and practice guides. Additional resources include:

- [Paths to Permanency: Adoption of children in foster care \(DHS-7024A\)](#)
- [Legally and Financially Responsible Agency Roles under Northstar Care for Children \(DHS-3822\).](#)

**Note:** When applicable, “adoption” as used in this checklist includes “customary adoption” according to Tribal code or law.

## Child Ward folder

The Child Ward folder is located in SSIS-Worker. Its purpose is to send information to DCYF about children under guardianship of the commissioner. It is also used to submit Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determinations for children under guardianship of the commissioner and children who are wards of Minnesota Tribes.

This section includes the requirements for sending Child Ward information to DCYF regarding children under guardianship of the commissioner. To assist county and Tribal agency staff in completing their work, all requirements that are also used for determining eligibility for Northstar Adoption Assistance are noted.

Tribal social services agency staff who use the Child Ward folder in SSIS-Worker may also reference this section, as many of these items may be similar or the same as requirements under their Tribal code or law. However, Tribal social services agency staff should verify with their Tribal attorney to determine specific requirements that need to be completed according to their Tribal code or law.

### 1. Prepare documentation

Open an A/G workgroup in SSIS-Worker<sup>1</sup>.

Make sure the following documents are in the child's case record. These documents verify the child's guardianship status and that parent relationships that have been inactivated. *Note: These documents are also required for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility.*

Signed court order/s addressing parental rights for each parent (i.e., termination or suspension of parental rights, parent's consent to adoption, parental death). Additional documentation required for:

**Consent to adoption:** Each parent's signed consent ([DHS-3502](#))

**Parental death:** If date of death not stated in the court order, a copy of the death certificate or obituary for each deceased parent.

Signed court order transferring guardianship of the child to the commissioner or to the Tribe/Tribal court

Child's birth certificate (or similar documentation verifying the child's legal name, parentage and citizenship/immigration status, if not U.S. citizen)

If the child's legal name changed and is **not** reflected on birth certificate: Court order reflecting the child's legal name change.<sup>2</sup>

Ensure there is certification on file that [Minnesota Father's Adoption Registry](#) has been searched.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DCYF recommends this for all children under state or Tribal guardianship. This supports maintenance of guardianship and adoption records.

<sup>2</sup> If this court order required that child's birth certificate be amended, but it was not amended, there may be additional steps required. Consult with your records and eligibility consultant.

<sup>3</sup> This is a required document for finalizing an adoption under Minnesota Statutes 260C. Addressing this early in the adoption process will ensure there are no adoption delays. (Minnesota Statutes 260C.625 (a)(4) and 259.52; Minnesota Rules, part 32.01.)

Review the child's social and medical history (DHS-6754A)<sup>4</sup> to verify it has been created and is current.<sup>5</sup>

Obtain copies of the child's:<sup>6</sup>

- Birth records
- Medical records
- Dental records
- Evaluations and assessments (if applicable)
- Relevant health and mental health documentation (if applicable)
- Education records (if applicable).

## 2. Review data and verify information

See: [Adoption in SSIS—System Requirements and Security Functions](#)

Reviewing data and verifying information is critical at this point in the process. Once information is sent to DCYF via SSIS (see [Step 3](#)), it can be challenging to make any changes. Often, a **data fix** is required, which can result in significant delays in the adoption process.

Verify legal names and dates of birth for the child and parent/s whose rights to the child were inactivated.

Double check that names, spellings and dates of birth for the child and inactive parent/s are correctly entered in SSIS and court orders (including any consents).

Correct any errors immediately to avoid possible issues requiring SSIS data fixes.

Verify Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)/Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA) applicability.<sup>7,8</sup>

Ensure proper inquiry has been made about the child's Native American heritage during the current continuous placement episode. **This is a requirement for all children in foster care.** At a minimum, the following individuals must have been asked about whether there is any Native American heritage:

Child (if age or developmentally appropriate)

Biological mother

Biological father, including alleged fathers who have held themselves out as the child's father

Extended family (such as maternal and paternal grandparents, stepparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, etc.)

If applicable: Others that may know about the child's Native American heritage (such as teachers, day care providers, neighbors, coaches, etc.).

If there is reason to believe the child may be an American Indian child under ICWA:

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<sup>4</sup> Available in SSIS and on [eDocs](#).

<sup>5</sup> Child's social and medical history must have been created by six months into placement and kept updated. (Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, subd. 15.) It must be given to the child's adopting parents at the time of making an adoptive placement (see [Step 5](#)), to the child (if age 14 or older) upon their adoption (see [Step 21](#)), to the child (if age 14 or older) if they remain in care longer than six months or upon turning age 18 while under guardianship of the commissioner. (Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, subd. 1(f).)

<sup>6</sup> These become part of the child's social and medical history. (Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, subd. 15.)

<sup>7</sup> This requirement does not apply to children who are under Tribal guardianship.

<sup>8</sup> ICWA non-compliance **will** result in a permanency delay for child, including Adoption Placement Agreement denial. Download the ICWA/MIFPA [manual](#) and [desk aid](#). For additional resources, visit the DCYF [Indian Child Welfare: Policies and procedures webpage](#). Contact the DCYF American Indian Wellbeing unit with questions: [DHS.ICWA.MIFPA@state.mn.us](mailto:DHS.ICWA.MIFPA@state.mn.us).

But the child's Tribe is unknown and/or parent is unable to be located: Ensure Notice to BIA for Assistance to Locate was sent.

And the child's Tribal Nation and/or location of Tribal affiliation is known:<sup>9</sup> Ensure required ICWA notices were sent to each Tribe.

And the child's Tribe is known:<sup>10</sup> Ensure required ICWA notices were sent to:

- Child's Tribe
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- Each parent
- Indian Custodian (if applicable).

Verify that the [ICWA/MIFPA tabs in SSIS-Worker](#) are completed and accurate.

Confirm the child's [citizenship/immigration status is entered](#) and correct.

Ensure the child has a Social Security number. Apply for one, if needed.<sup>11</sup>

Verify that the court has actually terminated or suspended parental rights, accepted a parent's consent to adoption of the child, and/or verified parental death for each legal parent,<sup>12</sup> prior to ordering the child under guardianship of the commissioner or Tribe/Tribal court.<sup>13</sup>

For **birth** parents: Both mother's and father's status must be addressed by the court, including if mother is the only legal, living parent when father is unknown or alleged.

For **adoptive** parents: The court must address each legal adoptive parent.

For termination of parental rights in **ICWA/MIFPA cases**:<sup>14</sup>

Qualified Expert Witness (QEW)<sup>15</sup> testimony supporting termination of parental rights is required.

The court's standard of proof must be evidence beyond a reasonable doubt (as supported by QEW testimony).

Ensure parent and sibling relationships for the child are accurately entered in SSIS.<sup>16</sup>

How to [inactivate parental relationships](#).

Verify the child's guardianship status.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, if someone identifies as Lakota, but they do not know the specific Tribe, notice should be sent to all federally recognized Lakota Tribes.

<sup>10</sup> For example, if someone says they are enrolled in a specific Tribe, then notice must be sent to that specific Tribe, along with the BIA, each parent and the child's Indian custodian (if applicable).

<sup>11</sup> For Medical Assistance, a Social Security number for child is required.

<sup>12</sup> To support post-adoption search requests (see [Step 23](#)): Court order/s addressing parental rights should also contain a notice to parent/s about their rights around consenting to disclosure or nondisclosure of information on child's birth record. Agency staff should have notified parent/s that they should keep a current address on file with the agency if they want to: 1) Receive information about child's death or terminal illness, and 2) Designate someone who will notify the agency should the parent die, to allow the agency to inform child or child's adoptive parents of the parent's death. Agency staff can document this information via affidavit in child's case record. (Minnesota Statutes 260C.317, subd. 4; Minnesota Statutes 260C.613, subds. 6 and 7; Minnesota Statutes 259.83, subd. 3.)

<sup>13</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.515, subds. 2 and 3; Minnesota Statutes 260C.325.

<sup>14</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260.771, subd. 6.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on who is able to serve as a QEW, download the ICWA/MIFPA [manual](#). (Minnesota Statutes 260.771, subd. 6.)

<sup>16</sup> This is required data entry prior to opening a new Child Ward folder (see [Step 3](#)).

For children in **county** foster care: Verify that the child is under guardianship of the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families by reviewing the guardianship court order.<sup>17</sup>

For children in the care of a **Tribal** social services agency: Verify the child's guardianship status with the Tribe/Tribal court.

Ensure that the guardianship date is **on or after** the date the court terminated or suspended parental rights, accepted a parent's consent and/or verified parental death for each parent. Guardianship cannot be ordered until all parents' rights have been addressed.

### 3. Create and enter Child Ward folder data in SSIS-Worker

See: [Northstar Adoption in SSIS—Child Ward Folder](#) and [Adoption Workflow in SSIS](#).

Create and save the following verifications to send information to DCYF:

- Sibling verification, for all siblings under guardianship of the commissioner<sup>18</sup>

- Previous parent verification, including verified by date

Complete State Adoption Exchange (SAE) registration for the child in SSIS within 45 days of the child being legally free for adoption.<sup>19</sup> Statuses are: Registered, deferred or exempt.

- Report any changes in the child's status.

- If deferred: Update status within 90 days.

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<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.317 and 260C.325.

<sup>18</sup> Note: This is not required for children under Tribal guardianship.

<sup>19</sup> All children under guardianship of the commissioner must be registered on the SAE. [Policy on State Adoption Exchange and other child-specific recruitment activities for children under guardianship of the commissioner \(PDF\)](#); Minnesota Statutes 260C.605 and 259.75.

## Adoption Placement Agreement (APA)

See: [Policy on adoptive placement decisions for children under guardianship of the commissioner \(PDF\)](#).

**Note:** This section does not apply to children under Tribal guardianship; however, many of these items may be similar or the same as requirements under Tribal code or law. Tribal social services agency staff who reference this section for their adoption work should consult with their Tribal attorney to determine which requirements are applicable for making an adoptive placement according to their Tribal code or law, and whether there are additional requirements not indicated in this section.

To make an adoptive placement of a child under guardianship of the commissioner, an APA (DHS-0312) must be signed by each prospective adoptive parent, legally responsible county agency staff, and the commissioner.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of whether a prospective adoptive parent is pursuing Northstar Adoption Assistance, an APA must be signed.

Follow the steps in this section to make an adoptive placement of a child under guardianship of the commissioner and send information about the adoptive placement to DCYF. Items that are also required to establish eligibility for Northstar Adoption Assistance are noted.

County agency staff may choose to submit an APA and an eligibility determination for Northstar Adoption Assistance at the same time. In this case, agency staff should follow steps in this section and the section titled [Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination](#).

### 4. Identify an adoptive family

Follow special requirements for the following circumstances:

**For American Indian children under ICWA:**<sup>21</sup> Follow ICWA adoptive placement preference order (if the child is an American Indian child under ICWA).<sup>22</sup> *Note: If ICWA applies and ICWA adoptive placement preference order is not followed, the child's permanency will be delayed, and may result in their APA being denied by the commissioner. This also has implications for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility.*

**For siblings under guardianship of the commissioner:** Recruit an adoptive family for the siblings to be adopted together, at the same time and by the same adoptive parent/s.<sup>23</sup>

If requesting sibling **separation** for the child: Submit sibling separation proposal to the court and notify parties entitled to receive notice according to Minnesota Statutes 260C.617.

Participate in court hearing regarding sibling separation proposal.

If proposal is **approved** by the court: Obtain copy of court order containing approval.

Identify an adoptive family for the child through one or more of the following:<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.613, subd. 1.

<sup>21</sup> This does not apply to children under Tribal guardianship.

<sup>22</sup> 25 U.S.C. 1915(a)

<sup>23</sup> [Policy on sibling placement, separation, visitation, and contact in permanency \(PDF\)](#); Minnesota Statutes 260C.613, subd. 3, and Minnesota Statutes 260C.617.

<sup>24</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.605, subd. 1(d).

Parent's consent to adoption accepted by the court  
Placement with a relative, foster parent, or sibling's adoptive parent<sup>25</sup>  
Recruitment of an adoptive family for the child through:

- Updating the child's SAE registration information<sup>26</sup>
- Revisiting previous relative searches and engaging known relatives
- Searching for new/previously unknown relatives
- Reviewing home studies of prospective adoptive families
- Updating the child's social and medical history
- Updating the child's needs
- Making other recruitment efforts as needed.

Ensure identified prospective adoptive parents have an approved adoption home study with completed background studies, according to Minnesota Statutes 260C.611.<sup>27</sup> *Note: Background studies are also required for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility.*

For prospective adoptive parents residing **outside** of Minnesota: Ensure compliance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), including that the placement is approved for adoption through ICPC.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Provide full disclosure to the identified prospective adoptive family

See: [Policy on providing full disclosure to prospective adoptive parents of children under guardianship of the commissioner \(PDF\)](#).

Update the child's social and medical history (DHS-6754A)<sup>29</sup> as needed.

Confirm there are up-to-date copies of the child's:

- Birth records
- Medical records
- Dental records
- Evaluations and assessments (if applicable)
- Relevant health and mental health documentation (if applicable)
- Education records (if applicable).

Review the child's social and medical history with prospective adoptive parent/s.

Give prospective adoptive parent/s a redacted copy of the child's social and medical history plus redacted attachments.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Relatives must be considered for adoptive placement of child in the order specified in statute. Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, subd. 2(a); Minnesota Statutes 260C.605, subd. 1(b); and Minnesota Statutes 260C.613, subd. 1(b)

<sup>26</sup> [Policy on State Adoption Exchange and other child-specific recruitment activities for children under guardianship of the commissioner \(PDF\)](#).

<sup>27</sup> If prospective adoptive parents have a current child foster care license under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 245A, the home study used for child foster care licensure may meet this requirement, under certain conditions. (Minnesota Statutes 260C.611.) <sup>28</sup> ICPC-related questions can be submitted to [mn.icpc@state.mn.us](mailto:mn.icpc@state.mn.us). Visit the ICPC CountyLink web page for more information.

<sup>29</sup> Available in SSIS and on [eDocs](#).

<sup>30</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.609(a).

If prospective adoptive parent/s choose **not** to adopt or adoptive placement **disrupts**: Ensure the child's social and medical history, plus attachments, are returned to the agency.

Explain Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits to prospective adoptive parent/s.

Include estimated benefit amount, if possible.<sup>31</sup>

## 6. Prepare documentation

Verify prospective adoptive parent/s' legal name/s and date/s of birth.

Ensure legal name/s and date/s of birth are entered in SSIS.

Prepare the following documents, which will be submitted to your agency's records and eligibility consultant at DCYF for reviewing and processing the adoptive placement decision for the child.<sup>32</sup>

APA<sup>33</sup> signed by prospective adoptive parent/s and legally responsible county case manager

Ensure legal name/s and date/s of birth are used.

Adoption Placement Decision Summary,<sup>34</sup> signed by legally responsible county case manager

**If using out-of-home placement plan** for completing sections A and/or B of the Adoption Placement Decision Summary: Ensure the child's out-of-home placement plan includes placement decision information before including it.

Completed and current Social and Medical History for a Child in Foster Care (DHS-6754A)

Child's birth certificate (or similar document, if not U.S. citizen), also required for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility

If the child's legal name changed and is **not** reflected on birth certificate: Court order reflecting child's legal name change<sup>35</sup>

Fully compliant (fingerprint-based) background study clearance letters for prospective adoptive parents and other adult household members (also required for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility)

For children under guardianship of the commissioner placed in homes **licensed for foster care by a Tribal social services agency**: A copy of the child foster care license verifying licensure effective dates (also required for Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility)

If the child is to be **separated** from their sibling/s for adoption: Court order approving agency's proposal to separate siblings **for adoption**.<sup>36</sup>

## 7. Enter adoptive placement information in SSIS-Worker to submit to DCYF

See: [Adoption Workflow in SSIS](#).

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<sup>31</sup> Questions about rates and Minnesota Assessment of Parenting for Children and Youth (MAPCY) can be directed to [Mapcy.DHS@state.mn.us](mailto:Mapcy.DHS@state.mn.us).

<sup>32</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.615, subd. 1(b)(3).

<sup>33</sup> Available in [SSIS](#) and on [eDocs](#).

<sup>34</sup> Available in SSIS and on [eDocs](#).

<sup>35</sup> If this court order required that child's birth certificate be amended, but it was not amended, there may be additional steps required. Consult with your agency's records and eligibility consultant.

<sup>36</sup> Court orders approving separating siblings in foster care do not meet this requirement.

Ensure the placement setting in SSIS is pre-adoptive.

Update the child's SAE registration status to Exempt.

Create and save Adoptive Placement verification, including verified by date, in Child Ward folder, to send adoptive placement information to DCYF.

Submit documentation listed in [Step 6](#) to your agency's records and eligibility consultant at DCYF.

Complete any data or document correction requests sent by DCYF staff.

## Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination

Every child for whom an agency is in the process of completing their adoption must have a Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination completed on their behalf.<sup>37</sup>

- County and Tribal social services agency staff are responsible for submitting Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determinations to DCYF. They **do not** determine eligibility or ineligibility.
- DCYF staff are responsible for determining whether a child and their adopting parent/s are eligible or ineligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance.

County and Tribal social services agency staff **must not** assume a child or their adopting parent/s are ineligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance. Only the Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination process can establish whether a child is or is not eligible for the program.

This section outlines requirements for submitting a Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination to DCYF on behalf of children under guardianship of the commissioner **and** children under Tribal guardianship.

### 8. Prepare documentation

Prepare the following documents to be submitted to DCYF for reviewing and processing a Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination:<sup>38</sup>

MAPCY rating report

Court order authorizing the child's removal from the home, or voluntary placement agreement (VPA)

Court order/s authorizing trial home visits within same continuous placement episode (if applicable)

Documentation verifying primary "barrier" to adoption

Additional documents for children under **Tribal** guardianship:

Report of Adoptive Placement (DHS-0178) or other placement agreement

Court order/s addressing parental rights

Tribal guardianship court order

Child's birth certificate (or similar document, if not U.S. citizen)

If the child's legal name changed and is **not** reflected on birth certificate: Court order reflecting the child's legal name change.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Minnesota Statutes 142A.606, subd. 5 and subd. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.615, subd. 1(b)(2).

<sup>39</sup> If this court order required that the child's birth certificate be amended, but it was not amended, there may be additional steps required. Consult with your agency's records and eligibility consultant.

Fully compliant background study clearance letters for prospective adoptive parents and other adult household members.

For children placed in homes **licensed for foster care by a Tribal social services agency**: A copy of the child foster care license verifying licensure effective dates.

## 9. Review data and verify information

Review Title IV-E foster care status.

Review placement authority (court order or VPA) and removal home.

If **court order**, ensure the following requirements were met:

Court order authorized removal of the child from their home

Court order contained a judicial determination to the effect that remaining in the home would be contrary to the child's welfare

Child's removal from their home coincided with court order, **or** DCYF approved extenuating circumstances resulting in a delay in removal.

If **VPA**, ensure the following requirements were met:

VPA authorized the child's placement, based on parent and agency signature.

The correct type of VPA was used (i.e., if ICWA applies, ensure the ICWA VPA was used).

Verify legal names and correct dates of birth for the child and adopting parent/s are used in documentation, court orders and SSIS.

Correct any errors immediately.

Review MAPCY rating report to ensure purpose and level are accurate.

For primary barrier documentation:

If selecting **disability** as primary barrier: Ensure documentation meets definition of "disability" under Minnesota Statutes 142A.602, subd. 9. Prepare additional statement to support documentation if it is not clearly consistent with the definition.

If selecting **at risk of developing disability** as primary barrier: Ensure documentation meets definition of "at-risk child" under Minnesota Statutes 142A.602, subd. 4. Include brief explanation as to how the child is considered at risk.

## 10. Submit eligibility determination in SSIS

See: [Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination](#)

Complete a Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility determination in SSIS-Worker for the child. Select "Send to DCYF for approval" when finished.

If family is **declining benefits**:<sup>40</sup> If a adopting family is willing to adopt the child without receiving Northstar Adoption Assistance, print the Statement to Decline Benefits<sup>41</sup> and have the adopting parent/s sign it.

Send the Statement to Decline Benefits to DCYF along with the eligibility determination. The remaining steps in this section and steps associated with Northstar Adoption Assistance are not applicable.

Submit all documentation listed as required in the eligibility determination, preferably by secure email or [Attached Documents](#) in SSIS, to your agency's assigned records and eligibility consultant at DCYF. See [Step 8](#). Complete any data or document correction requests sent by DCYF staff.

## 11. Review the child's eligibility status

If the child receives **conditional approval**<sup>42</sup> for Northstar Adoption Assistance: Follow steps outlined in letter sent by DCYF staff.

If the child is determined **ineligible** for Northstar Adoption Assistance:

Support adopting parent/s through the appeal process, if adopting parent/s choose to appeal the child's ineligibility.

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<sup>40</sup> **Do not** have family sign Statement to Decline Benefits based solely on the possibility that the family and/or child will not be eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance. Only DCYF staff can determine eligibility. Assuming ineligibility and requiring families to sign a Statement to Decline Benefits takes away a family's right to appeal denial of eligibility.

<sup>41</sup> Available in SSIS only.

<sup>42</sup> Conditional approval means child is eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance, pending full execution of a benefit agreement followed by adoption finalization.

## Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreement

Children who are eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance must have a benefit agreement negotiated on their behalf prior to their adoption finalization. Financially responsible agencies are responsible for negotiating terms of Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreements with adopting parents.<sup>43</sup> This section provides guidance on creating and negotiating benefit agreements. It is applicable to children under guardianship of the commissioner and children under Tribal guardianship.

**Important:** If an adoption finalizes before there is a fully executed benefit agreement in place, the child's conditional eligibility for Northstar Adoption Assistance ends, and the child is no longer eligible to receive Northstar Adoption Assistance, unless and until the child's adoptive parent/s appeal the eligibility denial and prevail.

### 12. Create benefit agreement in SSIS-Worker

See: [Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement](#).

Double check that names, spellings and dates of birth are correctly entered in SSIS-Worker for the child and adopting parent/s.

Verify the child's adoptive name is entered accurately.

Correct any errors immediately.

Create and print a Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreement in SSIS-Worker for the child.

### 13. Review benefit agreement with adopting parent/s

Review terms of the benefit agreement with adopting parent/s. Agency staff should ensure adopting parent/s understand:<sup>44</sup>

When the child's benefits begin and end

Whether they are receiving a monthly payment or not<sup>45</sup>

Whether their monthly payment includes additional MAPCY levels for childcare and/or extraordinary levels

Whether their monthly payment will be issued at the school-age entry rate or preschool entry rate

When and how to request reassessment via the MAPCY

Child's eligibility for Medical Assistance in Minnesota or, if residing outside of Minnesota, whether the child is categorically eligible for Medicaid in their state of residence

Their eligibility for reimbursement of nonrecurring expenses associated with adopting the child

That child's benefit agreement will be in effect regardless of where they live

Their responsibility to report specified changes to their Northstar Adoption Assistance payment specialist at DCYF, including if they are no longer legally and/or financially responsible for the child.

<sup>43</sup> Minnesota Statutes 142A.608, subd. 2(a).

<sup>44</sup> Minnesota Statutes 142A.608, subd. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Children determined at risk of developing a disability are not eligible for a monthly payment.

Who to contact if they have questions about their benefits

For at-risk Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreements only:

How to request a monthly payment if the child develops a disability related to the child's at-risk eligibility status

That any monthly payment will be issued at the payment entry rate as determined by the date adopting parent/s initially signed the child's at-risk Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreement.

After agreement to the terms, have adopting parent/s and authorized financially responsible agency representative sign the benefit agreement.<sup>46</sup>

Complete the caregiver information page with adopting parent/s.

#### **14. Submit benefit agreement to DCYF**

Submit the signed benefit agreement and completed caregiver information page to your agency's records and eligibility consultant at DCYF for review and signature.

Complete any correction requests sent by DCYF staff during their review.

Ensure there is a fully executed benefit agreement, with all required signatures, prior to proceeding to adoption finalization.

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<sup>46</sup> Signatures must be either: 1) Handwritten, original signatures, or 2) Electronic signatures verified by software that includes digital certification. A person with delegated authority to sign on behalf of another must sign their own name. A person's typed name must match their signature field.

## Adoption finalization

This section provides guidance on finalizing an adoption in Minnesota district court and, for children eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance, completing important items to ensure final eligibility for Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits.

Note: Steps 15 through 17 may not apply to adoptions finalizing in Tribal court. Tribal social services agency staff should consult with their Tribal attorney to determine requirements for finalizing a child's adoption in Tribal court, according to their Tribal code or law.

**Important:** Before finalizing the adoption, be sure there is a fully executed Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreement in place, where all parties to the agreement (including the commissioner) have signed.

### 15. Verify data and file adoption petition

Ensure legal names are used and that they match names used on the child's benefit agreement.

**If filing on behalf of adopting parent/s:** File an adoption petition along with the following documents that are required to be filed with petition<sup>47</sup> at the court with jurisdiction over the adoption proceedings.

- Proposed decree

- Copy of fully executed APA

- Adopting parent/s' adoption home study (or child foster care licensing home study, if applicable), including required adoption (or child foster care licensing, if applicable) background studies

- Child's social and medical history

- Document establishing who must be given notice of the adoption proceedings, including names and addresses of those to be served by the court administrator

- If **not** in the adoption petition: Statement certified by each adopting parent that they desire a legal parent-child relationship be established between them and the child and that adoption is in the child's best interests.

**If not filing on behalf of adopting parent/s:** Send Information for Attorney to File Petition (DHS-0329)<sup>48</sup> to family and provide information to adopting parent/s as needed.

### 16. Complete post-placement assessment

Complete post-placement assessment (DHS-0188).<sup>49</sup>

Send copy of post-placement assessment to assigned records and eligibility consultant at DCYF.

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<sup>47</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.623, subd. 4; Minnesota Rules of Adoption Procedure 35.05, subd. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Available in SSIS and on [eDocs](#).

<sup>49</sup> Available in SSIS and on [eDocs](#).

## 17. File additional documentation as needed

File additional documentation required to be in the child's adoption court file:<sup>50</sup>

- Certified<sup>51</sup> copy of the child's original birth certificate

- Certified copy of the court order transferring guardianship to the commissioner

- Certified copy of the court order terminating parental rights of the child's parent/s and/or accepting a consent of parent to adoption under Minnesota Statutes 260C.515, subd. 3

  - If a parent consented to the child's adoption, include a copy of the parent's signed consent.

- Copy of any communication and/or contact agreement<sup>52</sup>

- Certification that the [Minnesota Father's Adoption Registry](#) was searched

- If the child is 14 years of age or older, their written and signed consent to their adoption<sup>53</sup>

- Post-placement assessment and report to court (DHS-0188)

- If the child was born in Minnesota:<sup>54</sup>

  - Certificate of Adoption ([Minnesota Department of Health form](#))

  - Birth Certificate Application ([Minnesota Department of Health form](#))

- Any known aliases of the child.

Confirm report from the child's guardian ad litem is filed with the court prior to adoption finalization.<sup>55</sup>

## 18. Inform adopting parent/s of important post-adoption tasks and documentation

Inform adopting parent/s of important documents they will need following the adoption finalization hearing and how to obtain them:

- Certified copies of the adoption decree

- Certified copies of the child's new birth certificate

- New Social Security card for the child (if applicable).

If the child is eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance:

- Ensure adopting parent/s know to contact their Northstar Adoption Assistance payment specialist at DCYF via their email (if known) and/or [adoption.assistance@state.mn.us](mailto:adoption.assistance@state.mn.us) for questions about their Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits (including post-permanency reassessments), important forms (including those from MMB), and accessing the Benefit Information Portal (BiP; <https://bip.dhs.mn.gov/>). There are special considerations for the following two circumstances:

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<sup>50</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.625 and 260C.635, subd. 1 (e).

<sup>51</sup> Statute requires certified copies of these documents; however, because Minnesota district court rules require electronic filing, which removes the "certified" status of these documents, it may be possible to obtain a noncertified copy of these documents. Check with the court to determine their preference.

<sup>52</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.619.

<sup>53</sup> If a youth age 14 or older has a disability that makes them unable to consent to their adoption (whether verbally or in writing), consult with the court to determine how to document consent.

<sup>54</sup> The Minnesota Department of Health cannot amend or replace an original birth record when another state is the recordholder. See: [Birth Records and Adoption](#).

<sup>55</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.629, subd. 2.

**For youth nearing their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday at the time of adoption finalization:** Remind adopting parent/s about applying for an extension to the youth's Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreement.<sup>56</sup>

**For children with at-risk Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreements:** Ensure adopting parent/s know how to request reassessment to receive a monthly payment, should the child develop a disability during childhood.

Refer adopting parent/s to the letter they will receive from their Northstar Adoption Assistance payment specialist at DCYF after DCYF receives and reviews the child's adoption decree, as this letter contains important resources.

Refer adopting parent/s to their county of residence if they have questions about Medical Assistance (MA)/Medicaid for the child.

## 19. Verify certain items are completed prior to finalizing adoption

For Northstar Adoption Assistance eligibility: Double-check that there is a Northstar Adoption Assistance benefit agreement in place that has been signed by each adopting parent, the financially responsible agency and the commissioner's designated agent. **If the adoption finalizes without this in place, the child will not be eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance.**

Ensure that any communication and/or contact agreement in place is included in a signed court order on or before the date of the adoption decree, or it will not be legally enforceable.<sup>57</sup>

## 20. Confirm adoption finalization

See: [Adoption Workflow in SSIS](#) (Adoption Finalization section).

Attend adoption finalization hearing.

For adoptions that finalize in:

Minnesota district court: Court administration sends adoption decrees directly to DCYF staff. Agency staff **do not** need to send adoption decrees to DCYF staff.

Tribal court: Agency staff **must** send adoption decrees to DCYF staff via secure email at [adoption.assistance@state.mn.us](mailto:adoption.assistance@state.mn.us).

Verify adoption has finalized before ending the child's continuous placement episode in SSIS.

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<sup>56</sup> This message is also given to adopting parent/s by DCYF staff; a reminder helps ensure the extension application is submitted in a timely manner.

<sup>57</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.619.

## Post-adoption finalization

Following an adoption, county and Tribal agency staff must complete certain tasks to ensure Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits can begin. There are also documentation and adoption record retention requirements for county agency staff. This section provides guidance on post-adoption finalization tasks and requirements.

Documentation and adoption record retention requirements may not apply to Tribal social services agency staff. Tribal social services agency staff should consult with their Tribal attorney to determine requirements for providing certain documentation to children and families as well as adoption and guardianship record retention requirements, according to their Tribal code or law.

### 21. Give the child copies of documentation

Provide the child with a redacted copy of their social and medical history, including redacted attachments, and their health and education record, if age 14 or older. Children younger than age 14 may also receive copies of these documents, if appropriate.<sup>58</sup>

### 22. Complete items necessary to begin Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits

Complete any correction requests related to a final adoption decree to ensure Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits begin.

Inform the child's MA-Foster Care (MA-FC) health care eligibility worker of the foster care placement end date. If the child will receive Northstar Adoption Assistance and the child's adoptive parents reside:

**In Minnesota:** Remind the child's MA-FC health care eligibility worker to follow processes around transitioning to MA-NAA.

**Outside Minnesota:** Work with ICPC office to ensure ICAMA<sup>59</sup> provisions are followed.

### 22. Retain the child's adoption record<sup>60</sup>

- Ensure the child's adoption record contains the following documentation:<sup>61</sup>
  - Reasons for the adoptive placement decision regarding the child, including:
    - Individualized determination of the child's needs
    - Agency's consideration of relatives in the order specified in statute
    - Assessment of how the selected adoptive placement meets the child's identified needs.
  - Child's placement record

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<sup>58</sup> Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, subd. 1 (f).

<sup>59</sup> Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance, or ICAMA, is an agreement among member states to coordinate medical benefits and services to children who are receiving adoption assistance from one state and reside in another state. Visit <https://aaicama.org/> or email [MN.ICPC@state.mn.us](mailto:MN.ICPC@state.mn.us) with questions.

<sup>60</sup> Adoption records for children under Tribal guardianship may have different documentation and retention requirements. Tribal social services agencies should consult with their Tribal attorney to determine adoption record requirements according to their Tribe's code or law.

<sup>61</sup> Minnesota Statutes 259.79 and 260C.613, subd. 5.

- Copies of all out-of-home placement plans made since the child was ordered under guardianship of the commissioner
- Copies of all relevant legal documents, including:
  - All court orders from post-permanency reviews
  - Copies of all reports and recommendations made to the court.
- Responsibly collected genetic, medical and social history of the child and the child's birth parents
- Copies of all pertinent agreements, contracts and correspondence relevant to the adoption.
- Follow record content and retention laws.<sup>62</sup>

## **22. Complete post-permanency reassessments as requested by DCYF staff**

See: [At-Risk Adoption Assistance Conversion Process and Post Permanency Reassessment Process \(DHS-8395\) \(PDF\)](#).

- Monitor the post-permanency reassessment log in SSIS-Worker.
- Complete any post-permanency reassessments as requested (including regular MAPCY reassessments as well as new MAPCYs for at-risk conversions).

## **23. Respond to requests for post-adoption search and record information**

- Respond to post-adoption information requests as required under Minnesota Statutes 259.83.

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<sup>62</sup> Minnesota Statutes 259.79.