

Championing Health Across Generations: How Project Healthy Grandparents Empowers Grandparent Caregivers

This [Older Americans Month](#), the [Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network](#) is spotlighting Project Healthy Grandparents (PHG), one of the Network's Exemplary Kinship Program designees, for its work helping kin caregivers champion their health and wellbeing. Through a research-based community service model that combines health education, individualized support, and peer connection, PHG empowers grandparents and other kin caregivers to prioritize their own wellness—recognizing that healthier caregivers are better able to support the children they are raising.

When grandparents step in to raise their grandchildren, they often do so without hesitation—and without a roadmap. For too many, it also means putting their own health last.

“At the start, we found that grandparents were setting aside their own health care needs in order to care for their grandchildren,” said [Patricia Lawrence, director of Project Healthy Grandparents at Georgia State University](#). “They’re focused on making sure the children are okay, even if it means delaying or overlooking their own health care.”

That instinct is deeply human, and it can come at a cost.

Research shows that grandparents raising grandchildren are more likely to experience high levels of stress, depression, and psychological distress than their peers. Many are navigating complex family circumstances—such as parental substance use, deployment, or incarceration—while managing financial strain, limited support, and the needs of children who may have experienced trauma.¹

At the same time, the children they are raising are more likely to face behavioral and developmental challenges, which can further increase caregiver stress—creating a cycle that affects the entire family.²

Breaking the Cycle Through Support

[Project Healthy Grandparents \(PHG\)](#) was designed to interrupt that cycle. For more than 30 years, Project Healthy Grandparents has operated as a research-based community program, continuously refining its one-year intervention based on what works for families. Today, it combines health screenings, case management, parenting education, and peer support into one coordinated model.

Each family is paired with a nurse and social worker who provide individualized support—from managing chronic conditions and accessing preventive care to navigating schools,

¹ Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M., & Campos, P.E. (2019). Differential impact of an intervention for grandmothers raising grandchildren, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 17:2, 141-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2018.1535351>

² Ibid.

legal systems, and public benefits. The goal is not just to connect families to services, but to help caregivers take an active role in their own health.

“We do a lot of education with grandparents about why their own health is important,” Lawrence said. “We remind grandparents that because of them, their grandchildren are doing well, which is all the more reason they have to take care of themselves.”

That shift—from putting themselves last to recognizing their own health as essential—is at the heart of what it means to *Champion Your Health*.

What the Research Shows

The impact of PHG’s approach is clear.

In a large-scale study of more than 500 grandmothers raising grandchildren, participation in a year-long, home-based intervention led to significant reductions in psychological distress.³ These improvements were strongest among caregivers facing the greatest challenges—those who were younger, unmarried, or unemployed—demonstrating how targeted support can reach those most at risk.⁴

And the benefits don’t stop with caregivers. Research shows a direct connection between caregiver well-being and child outcomes. In longitudinal studies, as grandmothers’ stress levels decreased, their grandchildren’s behavioral and emotional outcomes improved.⁵

The takeaway is both simple and profound: when caregivers are supported in managing their own health, which PHG’s model centers, children are better able to thrive.

From Isolation to Empowerment

That evidence is reflected in the lived experiences of PHG participants, and it lasts well beyond the program itself. Grandparents often enter the program feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and unsure how to navigate their new role. But over time, something shifts. Through health education, individualized support, and connection with peers, caregivers begin to feel more confident, not just in managing their health, but also in advocating for themselves and their grandchildren.

“PHG helped me understand how to navigate systems and advocate for myself and my grandchildren,” Lawrence said, reflecting what PHG staff hears consistently from participants.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kelley, S.J., Whitley, D.M., & Lamis, D.A. (2023). An intervention to improve the well-being of families in which African American grandmothers are raising grandchildren: A longitudinal mediation analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107021>

Recent qualitative research presented at an international nursing conference on the long-term impact of PHG shows these changes endure years after participation.⁶ Grandparents describe lasting increases in confidence and resilience, along with a stronger ability to navigate schools, health care, and social services.⁷

Support groups play a critical role in that transformation. Many caregivers who participate in PHG report that connecting with others in similar situations reduces isolation and builds a sense of community that continues long after the program ends.⁸

The impact also extends to children. Grandparents report that early screenings and access to services helped identify needs sooner, contributing to improved academic outcomes and long-term stability.⁹

Health That Sustains Families

Championing health in grandparent-led families is not just about individual well-being, it's also about stability across generations. When grandparents are healthier, they are better able to care for their grandchildren. When they feel supported, they are more confident navigating systems and accessing resources. And when those pieces come together, families are better positioned to move forward.

Programs like Project Healthy Grandparents show what's possible when health, social support, and practical guidance come together. They don't just improve outcomes in the moment—they create the conditions for families to sustain those wellbeing gains over time.

As one of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network's Exemplary Kinship Program designees, Project Healthy Grandparents draws on the Network's no-cost resources, webinars, and state-level kinship data to strengthen its work and support funding proposals. Lawrence shared that the recognition has helped elevate the program's visibility and reinforce its credibility with partners and funders. Learn more about Project Healthy Grandparents' evidence-based approach and impact, which earned the program Exemplary recognition from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network in 2024:

<https://www.gksnetwork.org/resources/project-healthy-grandparents-georgia-state-university/>

Learn more about Project Healthy Grandparents at Georgia State University:

<https://phg.gsu.edu/>

⁶ Lawrence, P.R., Marcus, J., Stoudmire, T., & Spratling, R. (2025). "Perceived Long-term Benefits of an Intervention to Improve Health Equity of Minority Grandparents Raising Grandchildren" [Poster presentation]. 48th Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing Biennial Convention, Indianapolis, IN.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.