

Kinship Care: What the Research Tells Us

September 8, 2026

- Welcome, we will begin at the top of the hour
- Please type in the **chat** box - your name, state, tribe (if applicable), and role
- Type questions in the **chat** box at any point during our time together
- **We will provide a separate meeting link for a 30-minute Q&A with our presenters, starting in an hour, at 2 PM ET**
- By the end of the week, all participants will receive a link to the slides and the recording

Who We Are & How We Help



Learning Collaboratives and Information Dissemination

The Network hosts webinars and facilitates learning collaboratives.



A Centralized Hub

The Network is elevating exemplary kinship/grandfamily practices and programs from around the country.



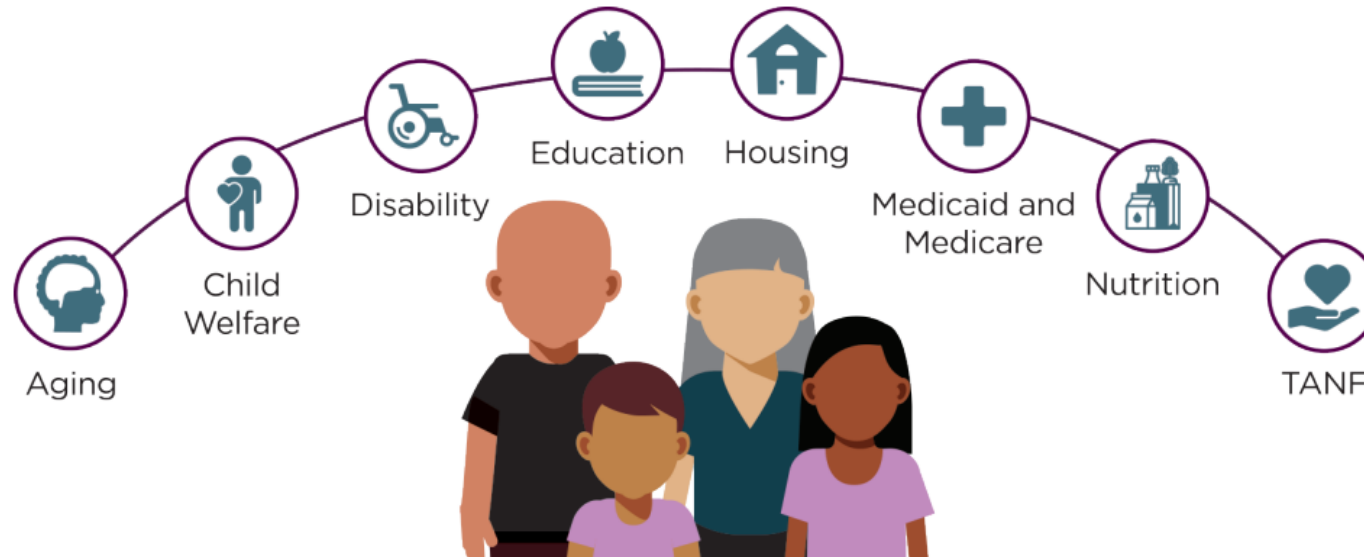
Bridging Systems for Kinship Families

The Network is helping Idaho, San Diego County, and Oneida Nation of Wisconsin optimize their collaborative approaches and improve their services. Solutions will be replicable for others.



Individual Assistance

We respond to individual requests for help from government agencies and nonprofit organizations.



GKSNetwork.org

Welcome Our Panelists



Dr. Tyreasa Washington
Network Subject Matter Expert



Dr. Claire Kimberly
Chapin Hall



Jaia Lent
Generations United

The Children



Children in Kinship Care: National

See: Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network

<https://www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-grandfamilies-data/>

Source: Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center, Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 3-year average estimates (2023-2025)



2.5+ MILLION

children are being raised by a relative or close family friend and do not have a parent living in the household

Children in Kinship Care: National

Source: Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center
Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement
3-year average estimates

Location	Data Type	2017 - 2019	2018 - 2020	2019 - 2021	2020 - 2022	2021 - 2023	2022 - 2024	2023 - 2025
United States	Number	2,654,000	2,682,000	2,614,000	2,529,000	2,426,000	2,463,000	2,566,000
	Percent	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%



Children in Kinship Care: National

See: Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network

<https://www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-grandfamilies-data/>

Source: 2025 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System and 3-year average estimate (2023-2025)
Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement



Kinship Care: National

See: Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network <https://www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-grandfamilies-data/>

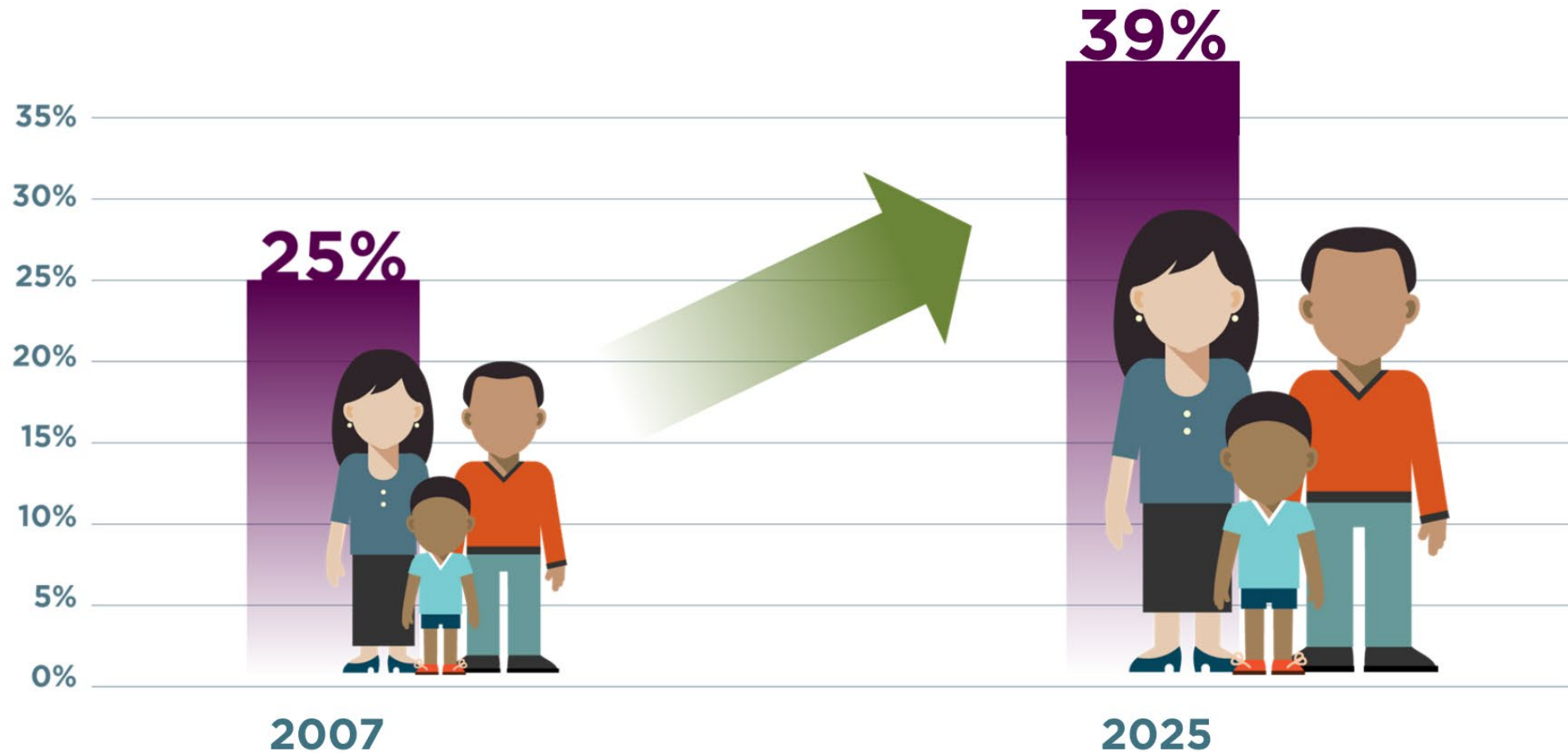
Source: Estimate uses the 2023 national average monthly foster care maintenance payment (\$1622) and the 2023 national average monthly TANF child-only grant (\$328). Rates vary widely across the country. Cost tabulation totals vary significantly by state. A detailed description of the calculation is available at www.gureport.org/2025-report



\$10.5 BILLION

Without grandparent and other kin caregivers, the foster care system would be totally overwhelmed. Foster care maintenance payments alone would cost taxpayers at least \$10.5 billion each year.

Percentage of Children in Foster Care Being Raised by Relatives

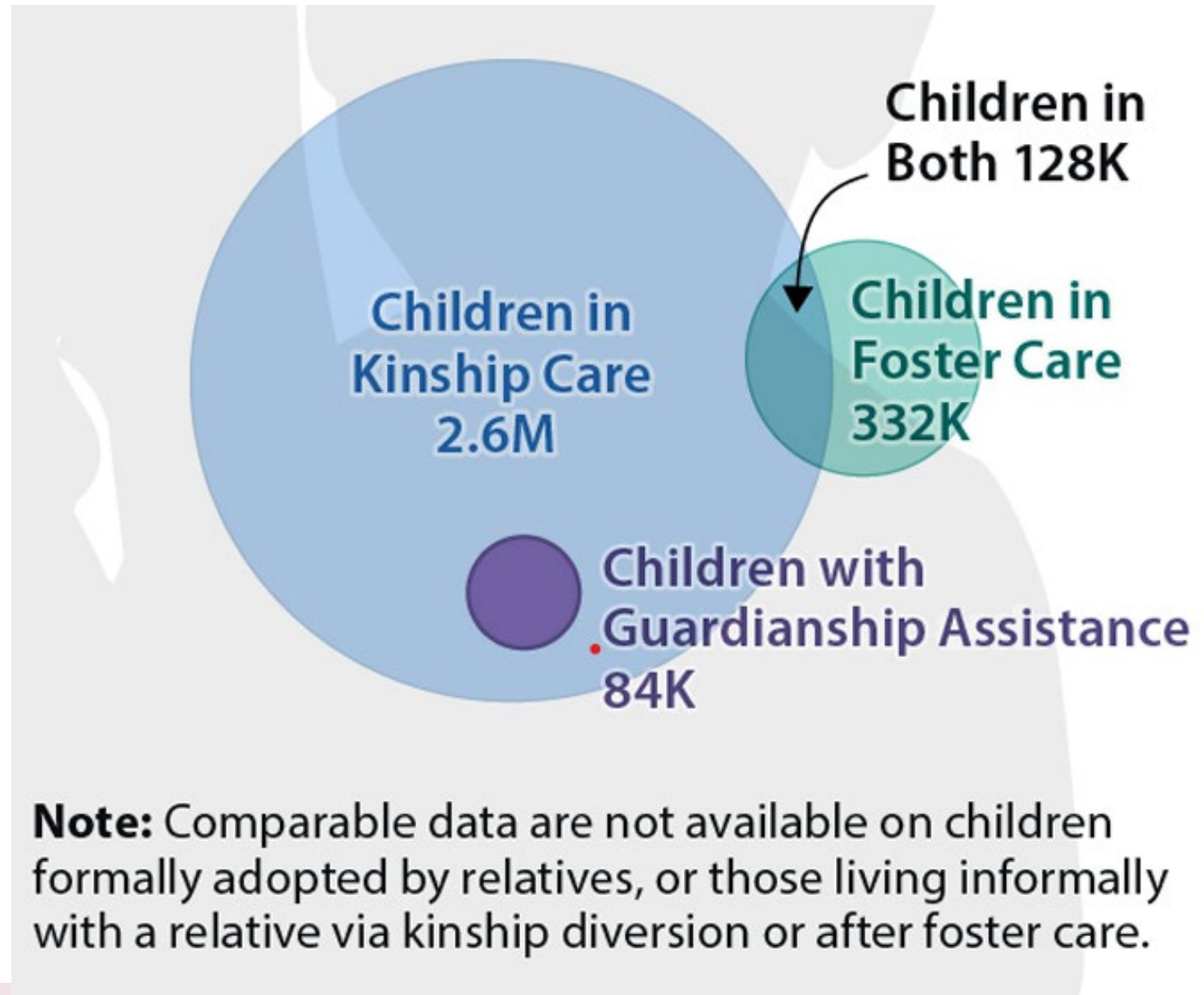


Almost half of all children placed with kin – about 56,000 children – were living in unlicensed/unapproved homes in 2025. These kinship families are subject to the rules and restrictions of foster care, but typically do not receive foster care maintenance payments and don't have a pathway to Guardianship Assistance.

Children in Kinship Care: National

Source: 2026 CRS Kinship Care report
<https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/IG10016.html>

2025 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis & Reporting System, 3-year average estimate (2023-2025) Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2024 Title IV-E Expenditure Claims includes children with or without IV-E supports in states providing IV-E guardianship.



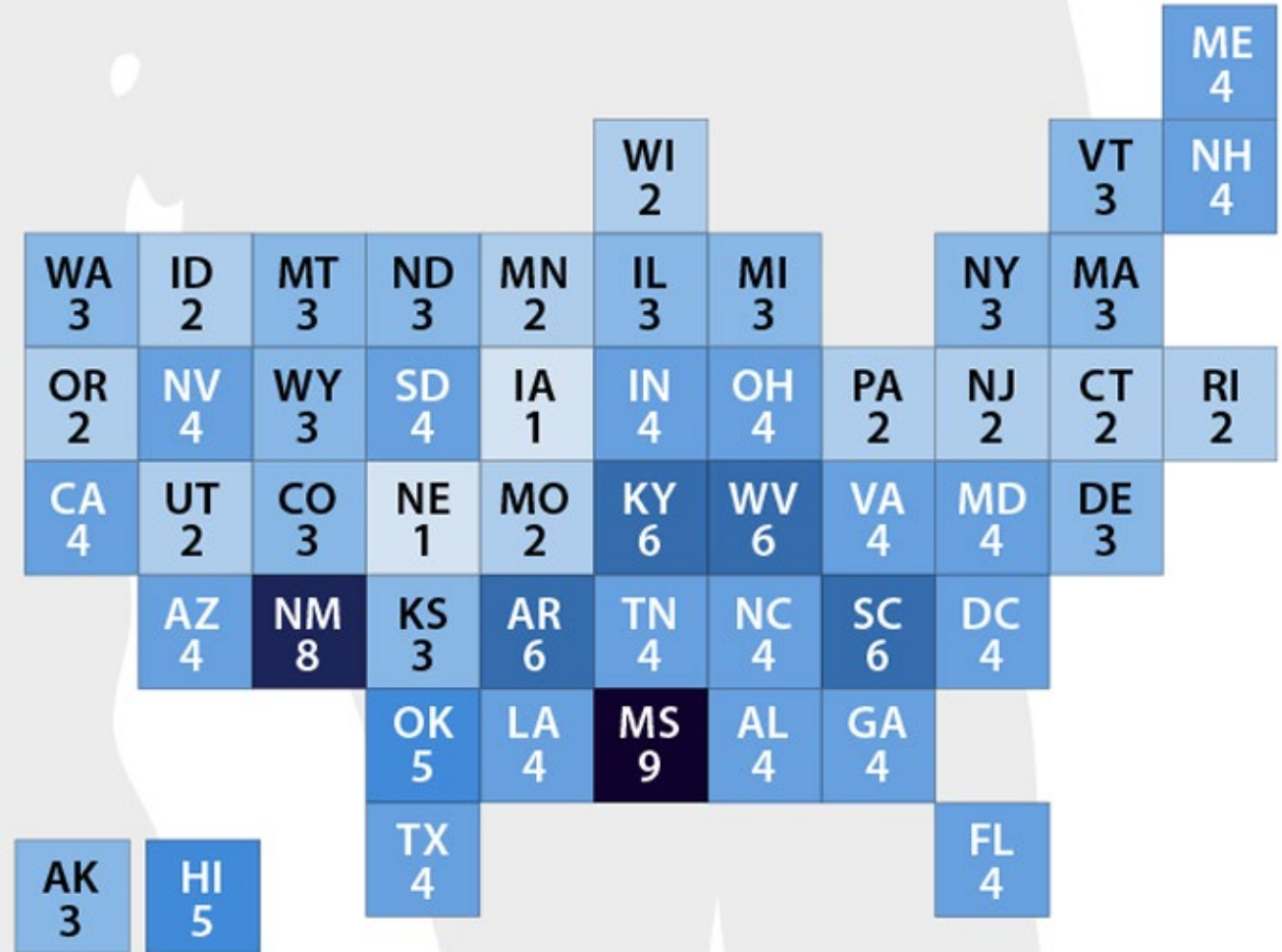
Children in Kinship Care: State

Source: 2026 CRS Kinship Care report
<https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/IG10016.html>

3-year average estimate (2023-2025)
Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Percent of children living in kinship care by state

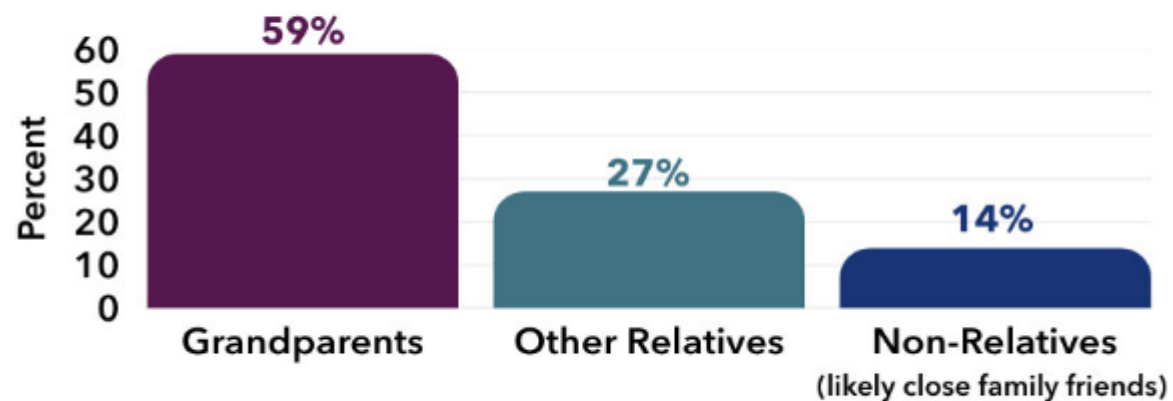
Percent Nationally: 4%



The Grandparents & Other Kin



Head of Household for Children Living with Kin Caregivers, 2023



Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Relatives Raising Children: Federal Support Helps, but Challenges Persist*, GAO-26-107658, December 10, 2025

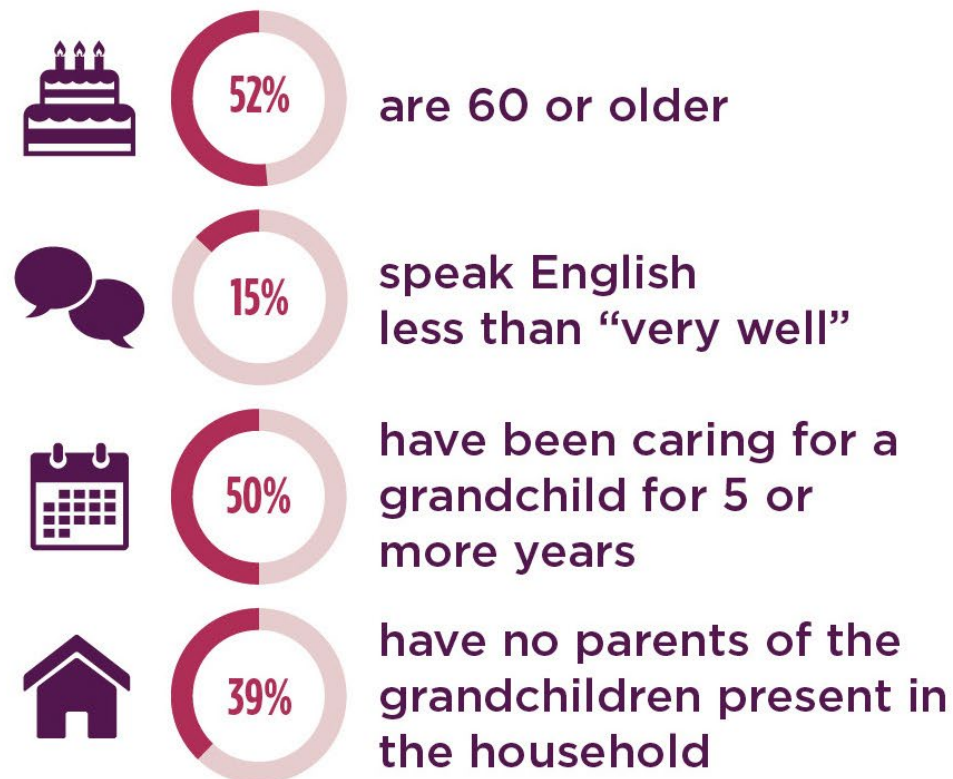
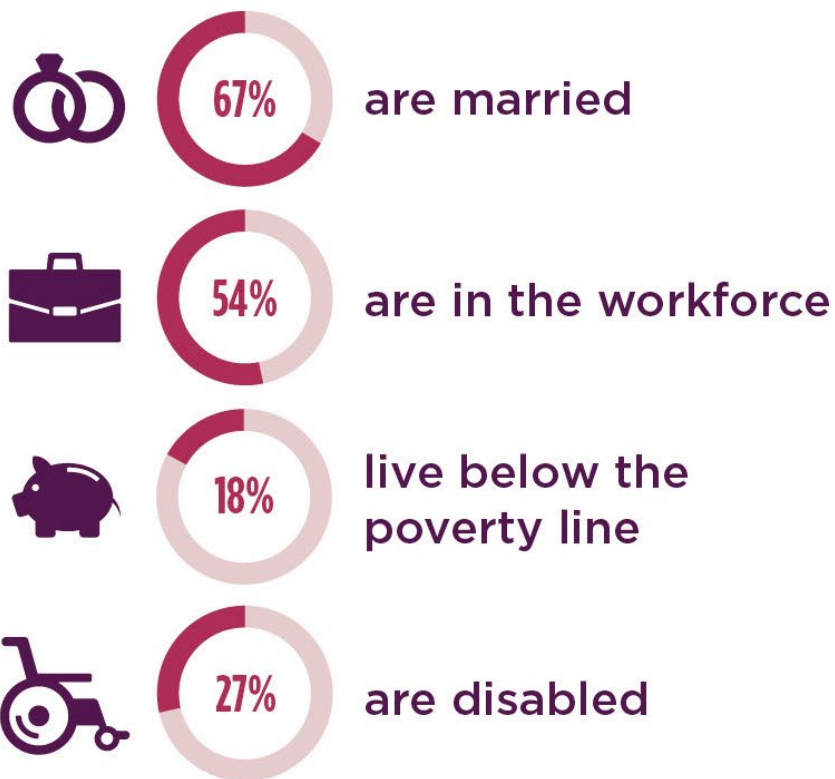
www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-107658.pdf



Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren

MORE THAN 2 MILLION

grandparents are responsible for caring for their grandchildren living with them



Where can I find the latest kinship data?

www.gksnetwork.org/kinship-grandfamilies-data/



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SUPPORT NETWORK
A National Technical Assistance Center

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Kinship/Grandfamilies Data



Ver la versión en español de la página.
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National Sources for Kinship/Grandfamilies Data

There are three main sources of data on kinship/grandfamilies at the national level: the U.S. Census Bureau, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center. All of these data sources provide state-level data and, as noted, data for Tribes, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Please note: the following national data are the latest publicly available statistics as of September 2026.

Kinship Strengths: Children Thrive



Summary of Research

Child Mental & Behavioral Health



Kinship children show fewer behavioral problems than non-kin foster peers, though the gap narrows among children with similar characteristics; relationship quality matters more.

Academic Outcomes



Formal* kinship compares with never-separated children in academic outcomes; both informal and formal kinship homes outperform non-kin foster care in math, not reading.

Placement Stability & Permanency



Kin-first placement leads to fewer moves than non-kin foster care; navigator support raises guardianship rates.

Caregiver Well-Being & Financial Strain



Caregiver mental health, social support, and financial strain predict outcomes as much as placement type; the caregiver's health matters as much as income.

*Formal = child welfare has custody, child is in foster care. Voluntary/Diversion = child welfare involved but no formal case opened. Informal = private family arrangement, no child welfare involvement.

Child Mental and Behavioral Health

FORMAL KINSHIP FOSTER CARE

- Kinship children show fewer behavioral and mental health problems than children in non-kin foster care.

Winokur et al., 2018 — combined analysis of 102 studies

- The kinship advantage diminishes once children are matched on starting traits.

Ferraro et al., 2022

- In African American kinship families, lower caregiver stress was linked to fewer depression and anxiety symptoms in children, and stronger child–birth mother relationships were linked to fewer depressive symptoms in particular.

Washington, Coley, et al., 2025



102 studies

gathered in the largest kinship mental-health study of its kind

WHAT THIS MEANS

Children and youth in kinship care consistently show better behavioral and mental health outcomes than those in non-relative foster homes—though the gap narrows once you account for which children tend to start out more stable. Relationship quality may also matter more than placement type alone.

Academic Outcomes

FORMAL & INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE

- **Formal kinship care shows academic performance trajectories similar to children never separated from their families. Both formal and informal kinship care outperform non-kin foster care in math, though not for reading.**

Washington, Stewart, & Rose, 2021 — 500,000+ NC youth, four linked data sources

- **Informal kinship children who need special education are far less likely to get an IEP (a school plan for special-ed services) than similar children in non-kin foster care (22% vs. 54%).**

Casanueva et al., 2020 — national child welfare survey

- **A 39-study review found no consistent placement-type effect on achievement — gender, ethnicity, and special-education need mattered more.**

O'Higgins, Sebba, & Gardner, 2017 — systematic review



500,000+

North Carolina youth tracked across
four linked data sources

WHAT THIS MEANS

Formal kinship care is similar to children never separated from their families, and both formal and informal kinship outperform non-kin foster care in math specifically, not reading. Older, smaller studies found no consistent placement-type effect at all — a reminder that access gaps, like who actually gets an IEP, may matter as much as placement type itself.

Placement Stability & Permanency

FORMAL & INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE

- Kinship placement meant fewer disruptions across a child's first three placements, not just the first, even after accounting for behavior problems.

Osborne, Hindt, et al., 2021

- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children placed with relatives had fewer disruptions, despite relative caregivers getting foster payments less often.

Lee, Ogilvie, et al., 2022

- Families supported by a kinship navigator program were almost 4x more likely to reach guardianship or another stable legal outcome.

Lee, Huerta, & Farmer, 2021

- A randomized kinship navigator study found fewer substantiated maltreatment reports and greater stability through 36 months.

Littlewood, Cooper, & Pandey, 2020



~4x

more likely to reach guardianship
with kinship navigator support

WHAT THIS MEANS

Children placed with relatives from the start move between homes less often, and that holds up after accounting for behavior problems and other risk factors. Funded navigator support adds to this, helping more children reach guardianship and stay safely, stably placed, though neither study moved reunification.

Caregiver Well-Being and Financial Strain

FORMAL & INFORMAL CAREGIVERS

- Kinship caregivers who feel more socially supported report lower stress and better well-being — regardless of income.

Sharda et al., 2019

- Kinship-care households are more likely than comparable households nationally to struggle covering expenses, have income that does not stretch far enough, and have no emergency savings.

Washington & Despard, 2024 — national data

- Beyond income, caregiver race, family role, and access to structural supports all shape kinship care experiences in their own right.

Foluso et al., 2023 — review of 28 studies



28 studies

point to caregiver characteristics —
not just placement type — as
shaping kinship care experiences

WHAT THIS MEANS

Caregiver mental health, social support, and financial stability predict how kinship families do — sometimes as strongly as placement type itself — and caregivers' own characteristics (race, family role, access to structural supports) shape that experience just as much as income does.

Notable Findings and Opportunities

ACROSS FORMAL & INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE

- Informal kinship care has roughly double the cumulative investigation rate, but the lowest rate month by month, because those placements tend to last longer.

Font, 2015

- In every placement type, investigation risk peaks in the first three months and then drops sharply; families need more support early, not oversight indefinitely.

Font, 2015

- Abuse rates are lower in kinship care than in other out-of-home settings, but neglect is higher, and highest in informal arrangements, where oversight and training are thinnest.

Hallett, Garstang, & Taylor, 2023 (26 studies)

- Kinship placements had more maltreatment investigations than non-relative foster care, and those investigations predicted worse adult outcomes.

Sattler, Herd, & Font, 2023



~2x

the cumulative investigation rate for informal kinship, but the lowest rate per month

WHAT THIS MEANS

This is a case for investing in kin, not watching them longer: front-load support in the first months, when risk peaks; aim concrete help and training at informal caregivers, where neglect is highest and oversight thinnest; and pair investigations with support, since the investigation, not the placement, tracked worse outcomes.

Caregiving, Stress, and Health

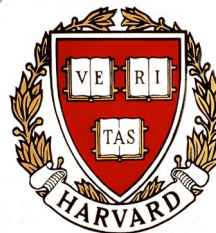


Tyreasa Washington, PhD, MSW, LCSW

Harvard Medical School, Research Associate

Cambridge Health Alliance, Faculty

Agape Therapeutic Services, PLLC, President and CEO



Agape Therapeutic Services



What Is Stress — and How Much Are Caregivers Carrying?

Stress = the impact of stimuli on psychological, emotional, and physical well-being



Non-Financial Stressors

Physical and Emotional Demands

Physical and emotional demands of caregiving

Complex Relationships

Navigating complex relationships with birth parents

Role Overload

Role overload from caring for multiple family members

Social Isolation

Social isolation and depressive symptoms

Structural Barriers

Structural barriers



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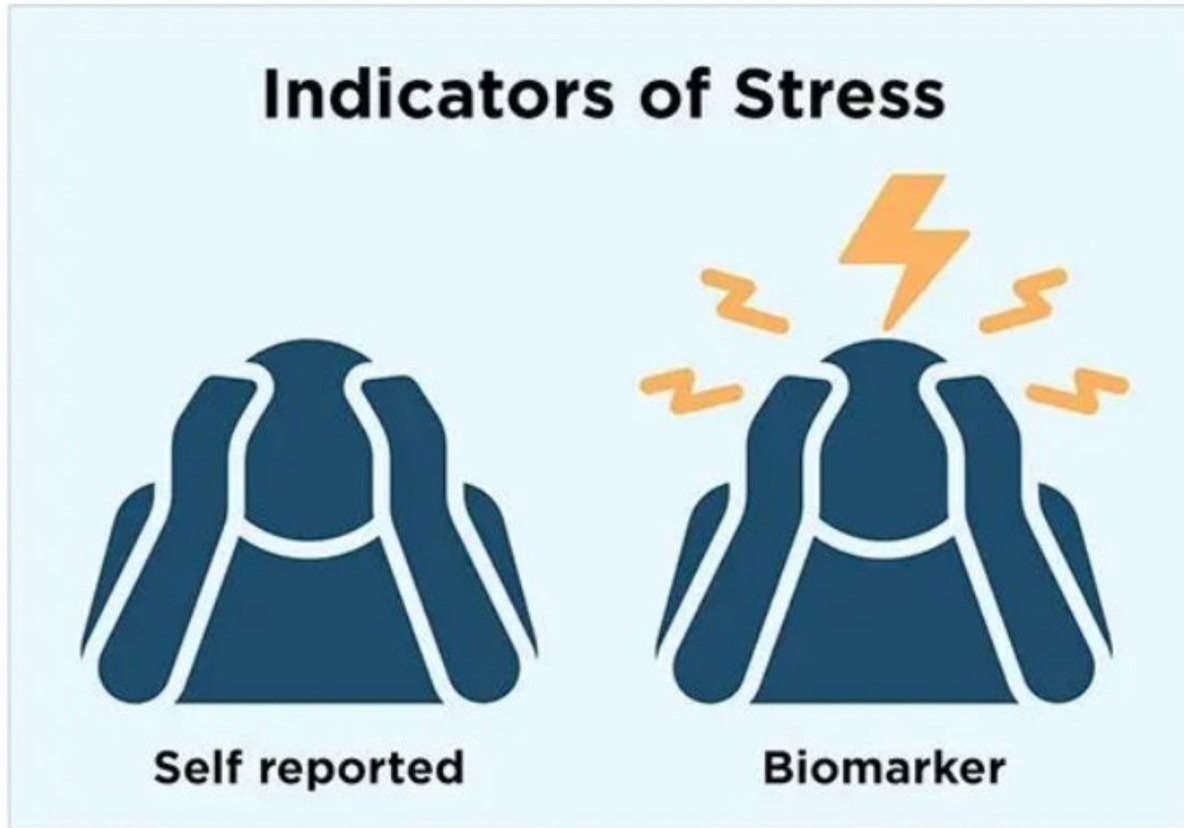
Reducing Alzheimer's Risk Among African-American Kinship Caregivers



Eunice Kennedy Shriver
National Institute of
Child Health and
Human Development

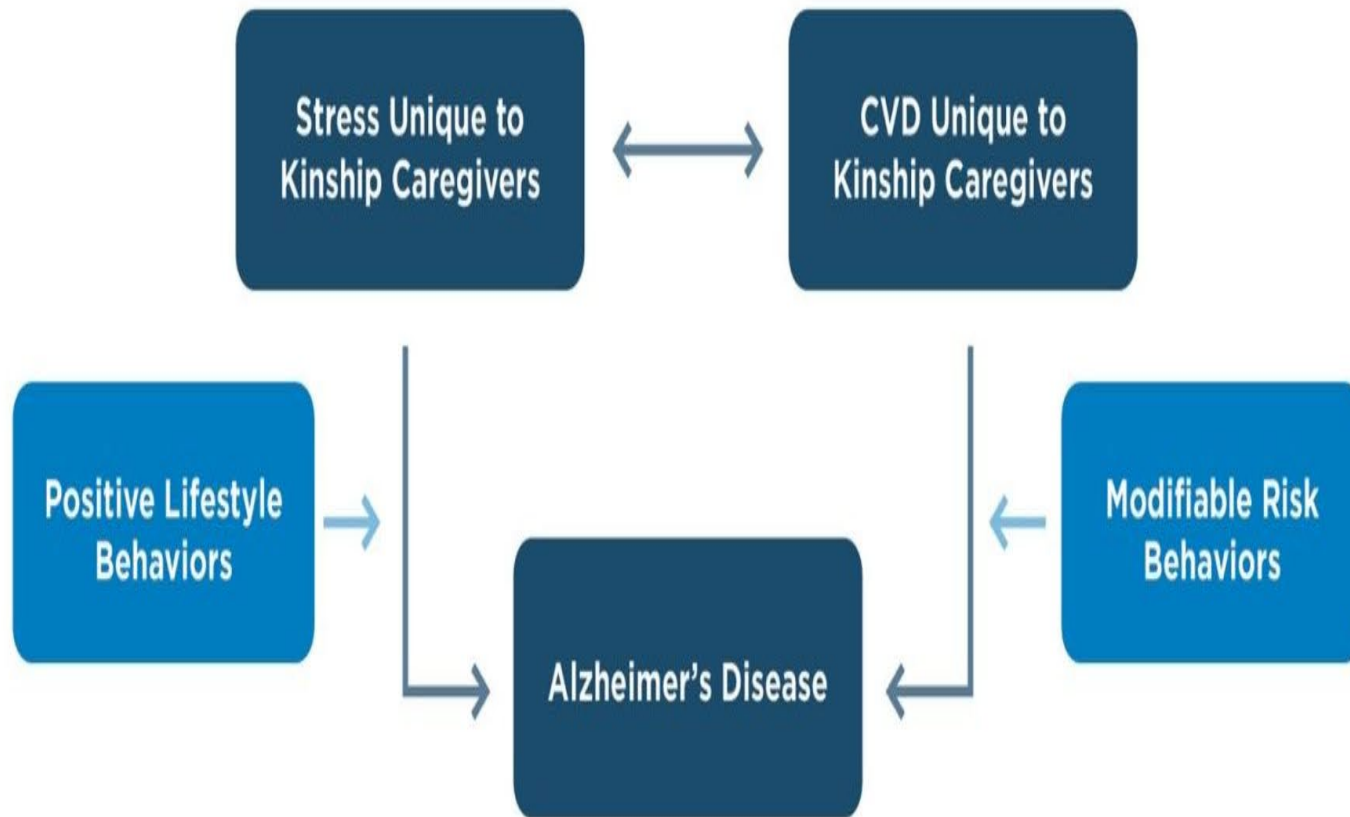


National Institute
on Aging



Discrepancies Black Kinship Caregiver Report Stress

Washington, T., & Martinez, D. N. (2025). Prioritizing Black kinship caregivers' health means reducing their stress. *Child Trends*. DOI: 10.56417/6730w6505z



Stress Is Harming Caregivers' Health

Model Adapted from Washington, T., Coley, S., Blakey et al., (2024). Conceptual framework for African American kinship caregiver's susceptibility to Alzheimer's disease. Healthcare, 12(23), Article 2379.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12232379>

- **Research:** Short vs Long-term health outcomes



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What Can Help?

When Caregivers Struggle, Children Feel It Too



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Selected Sources

- Caregiver stress, parenting, and child outcomes among kinship caregivers – Children and Youth Services Review
- Caregiver and Birth Parent Influences on Depression – Washington, et al., 2025
- Parenting stress of grandparents and other kin as informal kinship caregivers: A mixed methods study – Lee et al., 2016
- Caregiving to Children and Grandchildren and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in Women – Lee et al., 2003
- The Mental Health Well-Being of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis – Kelley et al., 2020
- Are the grandparents alright? The health consequences of grandparental childcare provision – Eibich & Zai, 2024
- Children's Behavioural Issues and Kinship Caregiver Depression – Shao et al., 2024
- Conceptual Framework for African American Kinship Caregiver's Susceptibility to Alzheimer's Disease – Washington et al.
- Exploring self-care practices of African American informal kinship caregivers – Washington, et al., 2024



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Join Us for our Next Webinar!

A photograph of a silver laptop on a wooden desk. The laptop screen displays the webinar title in purple text.

How Washington State Is Reshaping Kin Search and Engagement

Monday, September 14, 2026

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. ET

Register Here



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We will add you to our monthly newsletter list, unless you ask us not to. To see past issues: www.gksnetwork.org/the-network-connection-newsletter/

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The Network is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and \$523,684 and 5 percentage funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.