generations united

GRANDFAMILIES & KINSHIP SUPPORT NETWORK
A National Technical Assistance Center

CHAPIN HALL

Kinship Care: Policy and Programmatic Innovations

Define Kinship Broadly

Defining kinship broadly is an important step in ensuring that services and supports intended for children in kinship care actually reach them. Public child welfare agencies have the flexibility to define "kin" and "relative" for the purposes of kinship navigation and other services, resource home licensing, and guardianship supports.

Resource Spotlight: The Children's Bureau and the Child Welfare Information Gateway both offer resources on policies and practices that support children in kinship care and their families.

Resource Spotlight: A collaboration of national organizations, lived experts, and state agencies developed the following recommended definition of kin as part of its Kin-Specific Foster Home Approval Standards:

"Individuals related to a child by blood, marriage, tribal custom, and/or adoption and other individuals who have an emotionally significant relationship with the child or the child's parents or other family members (often referred to as 'fictive kin')."

Support Children in Kinship Care with Effective Services

Public child welfare agencies can claim ongoing Title IV-E funding to implement kinship navigator programs that the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse rates as promising, supported, or well-supported.

State Spotlight: Ohio currently implements three kinship navigator programs: ProtectOHIO Kinship Supports Intervention, 30 Days to Family®, and the Ohio Kinship and Adoption Navigator (OhioKAN). Two features set Ohio's approach apart: a broadly defined service population that includes adoptive families, and intentional linkages among the three programs.

Work Across Systems

Working across systems is essential to supporting children in kinship care and their families.

State Spotlight: Idaho's Kinship State Plan, expected in Spring 2027, will provide a blueprint for coordinating efforts to support kinship families and for making the most of public and community-based resources.

Increase Access to Child-Only TANF Benefits

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is often the only ongoing financial support available to children in kinship care outside the child welfare system. Both the use of child-only TANF grants and their benefit amounts vary widely by state.

Resource Spotlight: The Grandfamiles & Kinship Support Network's tip sheet, State Strategies for TANF Child-Only Grants and Related Assistance, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' overview of Tribal TANF describe options for states and tribes.

Resource Spotlight: States can define good cause and other exceptions to child support cooperation requirements when pursuing support would not be in the child's best interest. The Office of Child Support Services Dear Colleague Letter ACF-OCSS-DCL-25-01 provides more detail.

Expand Social Security Support for Grandfamilies

Currently, Social Security pays child's benefits on a grandparent's work record only if the child's parents are deceased or disabled, or if the grandparent legally adopts the child. Children cannot qualify based on the work records of an aunt, uncle, or other kin caregiver raising them. A policy proposal from the Brookings Institution would create a new caregiver benefit for low-income grandparents and other relatives raising grandchildren, offset by eliminating benefits currently paid to the minor children of retired workers. Administering the benefit through Social Security, rather than through state child welfare systems, would keep benefit amounts consistent across states.

Resource Spotlight: The Brookings article Improving Social Security for Children and Young Adults in Need describes the proposal in detail.