Title VI Native American Aging Programs and Tribal Child Welfare Partnerships to Support Relative/Kin Caregivers and Their Families

Background

Grandparents and other relatives play a vital role in Native American communities, raising roughly 200,000 Native American children whose parents are unable to care for them. Child Trends found that American Indian and Alaska Native children are being raised by a grandparent or grandparents at a rate (6.5%) that is more than three times that of all U.S. children (2.1%). The reasons for this difference are complex, rooted in both historical U.S. policy decisions and the long-standing (Native American) traditions of caring for extended family. While research shows that both children and their caregivers benefit from being in these "kinship families," studies also indicate that these families disproportionately experience financial challenges and trauma, and that their well-being improves when they receive appropriate services.

Title VI Native American Aging Programs (Title VI programs) and Tribal Child Welfare programs often offer complementary services for kinship families. Partnerships between these organizations can extend each organization's reach, holistically support entire families, and reduce service gaps. Even so, partnerships are rare. A USAging nationally representative survey of Title VI programs found that only 25% of Title VI programs engage in partnerships with child welfare programs, including Tribal Child Welfare programs.

This tip sheet describes what Title VI programs and Tribal Child Welfare programs are and what services they typically provide to kinship families, and it offers tips on how these organizations can partner to expand support for kinship families. The tip sheet is partially based on information provided by USAging and the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) at NICWA's 45th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference in April 2026.

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About Title VI Programs

Created by the United States Congress in 1978, Title VI programs provide a range of supportive services, including nutrition programs, social and cultural activities, and transportation, for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian older adults across the United States. Many also support relative/kin caregivers and their families.

A USAging nationally representative survey of Title VI programs found that 84% of Title VI programs provide at least one service specifically intended for older relative/kin caregivers. Services for this population include the services shown in the table below, as well as income assistance, child care, mental health services for children, cultural activities, and legal services.

To operate a Title VI program and receive federal funding, Tribes must apply to the U.S. Administration for Community Living. There are approximately 300 Title VI programs nationwide. Title VI programs may offer, but are not required to, provide services for relative/kin caregivers.

Table 1: Percentage of Title VI Programs Providing Services for Kin Caregivers

Key Services Provided	Percent of Title VI Programs
Any Service	84%
Information & Referral	61%
Assistance Accessing Services	55%
Training/Education	46%
Respite	44%
Caregiver Counseling	37%
Support Groups	34%

In addition to services specifically geared to kinship families, Title VI programs offer a variety of services (see table below) for any older Tribal member, including relative/kin caregivers.

Table 2: Percentage of Title VI Programs Providing Specific Services for Older Adults

Key Services Provided	Percent of Title VI Programs
Home-Delivered Meals	97%
Congregate Meals	96%
Transportation	89%
Diabetes Management	86%
Assistive Devices	86%
Senior Center Activities	80%
Mental Health Services	79%

While each Tribe defines the age at which a member qualifies for most Title VI services, federal law requires caregivers to be at least 55 years old to receive Title VI relative/kin caregiver services.

About Tribal Child Welfare

Tribal Child Welfare programs are Tribally led services that grew out of the need to protect Native American children while preserving their connections to their family, cultural teachings and practices, community, and Tribal identity. Tribal Child Welfare programs grew in importance following the enactment of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA), a federal law created in response to the disproportionate removal of Native children from their homes and communities. ICWA affirmed the role of Tribal governments in child welfare matters; established standards for state child custody proceedings involving Native children; and prioritized placement with relatives, Tribal members, or other Native families whenever removal is necessary. These are

core values that have been reflected in Tribal communities for generations. Today, Tribal Child Welfare programs continue this work by supporting families and strengthening Tribal sovereignty, promoting culturally grounded services, and maintaining vital connections to family and community.

Tribal Child Welfare programs offer a variety of services for kinship families, including kinship navigation, child protective services, reunification case management, help with food and clothing, income assistance, case management, respite, and more. Availability of specific services and eligibility for services vary across Tribal nations and depend on the available resources to manage cases and support families involved in the child welfare system.

For example, Tribal Child Welfare programs receiving funding from certain U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs programs can offer case management, help with basic needs, and child assistance payments to kinship families. However, not every Tribe can or chooses to apply to receive these funds.

Only about 5% of children raised by kin are in the foster care system. Most children and caregivers in kinship families must rely on other support systems.

As another example, Tribal Child Welfare programs receiving federal funding under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act can use that funding source to offer monthly foster care maintenance payments (FCMPs) to help meet the needs of the child(ren); caregiver training; help adopting or acquiring legal guardianship of children; and adoption or guardianship assistance. To be eligible for many of these supports, the relative/kin caregiver must be licensed or approved as a foster parent. They undergo child abuse and criminal background checks and must satisfy the Tribe's foster care licensing standards and requirements. Because licensure/approval is typically tied to ongoing monthly FCMPs, unlicensed relative/kin caregivers usually do not receive that support.

Tribal Child Welfare programs additionally may receive state and Tribal funds, each of which may have its own eligibility and service requirements.

The Kinship Parenting Program of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe in Washington State uses Title IV-E funding to provide evidence-based kinship navigation, which connects kinship families to available services. Through its kinship navigator, the Tribe also offers relative/kin caregiver training and support groups, both in person and virtual.

Read about kinship services provided by the Title VI programs of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma (p. 3), Redding Rancheria in California (p. 4), and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (p. 4).

Tips for Partnering

Though partnering with another organization can seem daunting, it doesn't have to be. Agreements don't have to be intensive or costly. Some easy ways to get started include:

- Taking time to listen, observe, and build consistent, collaborative relationships with Tribal organizations.
- Promoting one another's services in newsletters or sharing one another's literature with families.
- Referring potential clients to one another.
- Sharing lessons learned or holding joint staff trainings to build relationships and learn each other's needs. To see how a joint training might work, see the Network's recorded webinar, Aging Network and Child Welfare Collaborations to Support Kinship/Grandfamilies.
- Learning each other's terminology and communication styles.
- Participating in one another's cultural events or conducting shared relative/kin caregiver educational classes. Learn how an Area Agency on Aging and a university extension office partnered to convene shared relative/kin caregiver educational events and expanded each organization's reach while lowering per capita costs (see second case profile).

For more ambitious types of partnerships, consider collaborating on foundation or corporate grant proposals, blending or braiding funds, formalizing your partnership with a memorandum of understanding, or expanding your partnership network to other organizations. Learn about more partnership tips and examples.

The Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma's Title VI program and Tribal Child Welfare program partner through case management consultations; the Tribal Assistance Program, which offers financial assistance for both older and younger Tribal members; and cultural events, including beading, moccasin-making, and classes where older Tribal members teach younger members about the Tribe's traditions.

Tip: When recruiting Tribal elders to teach youth and children, enlist those who are well respected in the community.

Other Resources

- Collaboration Strategies for Tribes, or Non-Native Service Providers Working with Tribes, to Support Kinship/Grandfamilies, from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network (Network). This 90-minute recorded webinar, featuring Dr. Terry Cross (founder of NICWA), provides guidance on why and how Tribes can collaborate with non-Tribal service providers.
- Find designated Indian Child Welfare Act agents and Title VI program directors.
- Leveraging Partnerships to Better Support Kin Caregivers is part of the Starting a Kin Caregiver Supportive Service Toolkit produced by the Network and USAging. This document reviews the value of partnerships, describes a successful partnership between a Title VI program and a Tribal transportation provider, and offers partnership tips.
- Pathways to Partnerships: Tips for Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Aging Programs to Improve Support for Kinship/Grandfamilies, by the Network and USAging, suggests over a dozen organizations with which to consider partnerships, describes how to find them, and offers partnership tips.

Conclusion

Tribal Child Welfare and Title VI programs offer numerous services to support relative/kin caregivers and their families. Often these services are complementary. When Title VI and Tribal Child Welfare programs partner, they extend their reach, reduce service gaps, and holistically support all generations in kinship families. While few currently partner with one another, some are leading the way and showing others how to best support kinship families.

A project of Generations United, the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and non-profits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org

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