

2021 State of Grandfamilies Report Summary

Reinforcing a Strong Foundation: Equitable Supports for Basic Needs of Grandfamilies

All children deserve a safe, loving home, healthy food, a good education, and timely, quality health care. But many grandfamilies — where children are raised by relatives or family friends without parents in the home — lack access to services to help meet these basic needs.



Research shows when children cannot stay with their parents, they do best with relatives. Grandfamilies have increased stability, higher levels of permanency and greater safety. Children in grandfamilies experience better behavioral and mental health outcomes. They maintain a greater preservation of cultural identity and more community connections.

WHAT IS A GRANDFAMILY?

A grandfamily is a family in which a child is raised by...



CLOSE FRIENDS of FAMILY



**GRANDPARENTS or
GREAT-GRANDPARENTS**



**OTHER RELATIVES
(AUNTS, UNCLAS, COUSINS, SIBLINGS)**

Despite evidence of the strength of grandfamilies, grandfamily caregivers experience significant and unnecessary barriers to helping the children they raise thrive. The systems and services that help U.S. families were not designed for grandfamilies. For grandfamily caregivers, something as simple as enrolling children in school or taking them to the doctor can be difficult, if not impossible.



Generations United's 2021 State of Grandfamilies report, *Reinforcing a Strong Foundation: Equitable Supports for Basic Needs of Grandfamilies*, identifies ways that our policies, systems, and services fail to support this family type and offers solutions. [Click here to view the full report.](#)

WHY NOW?

Grandfamilies form out of events that separate children from their parents, such as parental death, including from COVID-19, substance use and drug overdoses, incarceration, deportation, mental illness, divorce, or military deployment.

THERE ARE

2.6 MILLION

**CHILDREN GROWING UP IN GRANDFAMILIES IN
THE UNITED STATES TODAY.**

Yet family systems and services in areas such as housing, education, and health care were often not designed for grandfamilies. The way our country determines the quality and level of support for families is unjust, and services too often are unavailable or inaccessible.

SNAPSHOT OF WHAT THE INEQUITIES LOOK LIKE

In the United States, the quality and level of support and services a family can receive depend on personal characteristics, like sex, age, race, socioeconomic status, or a caregiver's legal or personal relationship with a child. Unlike parents who have an automatic legal relationship with their children, grandparents and other relative caregivers do not have inherent legal rights and responsibilities for the children they are raising. To obtain such a relationship takes time and money — money that is likely already stretched thin because they are raising children they did not plan or expect to raise. Furthermore, in some cultures, it is not appropriate and considered disrespectful to formally adopt children.

Compounding these challenges, grandfamilies must navigate complicated, fragmented systems of support, often aimed at “parents,” that differ within and among communities, are underfunded nationwide, and do not consider diverse cultural norms. For example:

- Without a legal relationship, caregivers are often unable to access key benefits for the child, enroll them in school, or consent to their health care.
- The vast majority of children in grandfamilies do not get the same financial assistance and support as children in traditional foster care.
- Fathers, uncles, or other male family members are often overlooked by the child welfare system as potential caregivers for children.
- A caregiver's age or relationship to the child can be a barrier to support. In some states, great-grandparents can't access the same services as grandparents.
- In some states, a caregiver who is not related by blood or marriage cannot apply on a child's behalf for benefits such as Medicaid or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).



Read more about the persistent inequities faced by grandfamilies on page 11.

SNAPSHOT ON THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Inequities are particularly prominent for grandfamilies outside the foster care system. They lose the opportunity to secure key financial assistance, child care, respite, education and training, and other support for the child.

For example, families within the foster care system receive, on average, \$511 per month in financial assistance for one child, compared with an average of just \$249 for those outside the system. The disparities become substantially larger with multiple children.

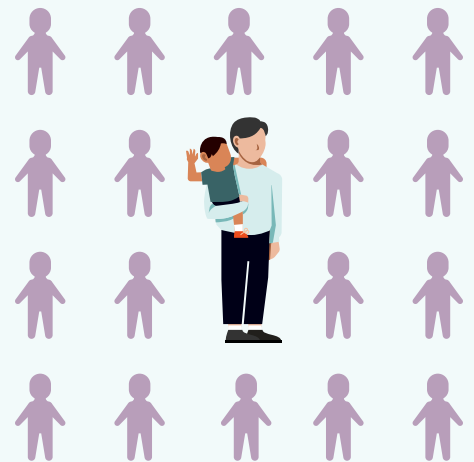
Foster care relies heavily on relatives and close family friends to step up to care for children. Without them the system would be completely overwhelmed. But not all children in grandfamilies are in the foster care system, nor should they be if the grandfamily just needs some basic support in order to care for a child. They should not be forced into foster care simply to receive needed services.

We cannot ask grandfamily caregivers to take on the responsibility of raising children without helping them to meet children's basic needs in return.



Read more about the inequities that persist for those outside of the foster care system on page 46.

For every **1 child** being raised by kin in foster care, there are **18 children** being raised by kin outside foster care.



SOLUTIONS

Research indicates that children in grandfamilies who receive services and support, such as financial and legal assistance, housing, and health services, experience better outcomes than those whose grandfamilies don't receive services.

GIVE GRANDFAMILIES THE HELP THEY NEED. Access to support groups and programs, legal services, education and training, financial support, child care, health care, nutrition assistance programs, housing, and more should be based on a family's needs, not its characteristics.

Grandfamily caregivers should not face needless bureaucratic barriers to providing children with basic needs. Generations United calls on federal, state, and local policymakers and decision-makers to support grandfamilies.

Some recommendations outlined in the report include:



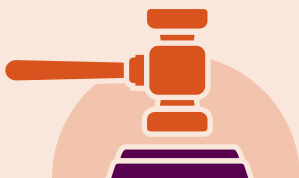
Support the development and sustained use of quality **kinship navigator programs**. These programs offer information, referral, and follow-up services to grandparents and other relatives raising children to link them to the benefits and services that they or the children need.



Promote financial equity for grandfamilies by creating a **kinship caregiver tax credit, improving access to foster-care maintenance payments and TANF**.



Implement the recommendations of the initial [Report to Congress from the Federal Advisory Council to Support Grandfamilies Raising Grandchildren](#). Important recommendations include changing **workplace policies to recognize the caregiving needs of grandfamily caregivers and improving grandfamilies' access to respite care, child care, and counseling**.



Support grandfamilies as **part of opioid settlement funds**.



Read a complete list of solutions that can help grandfamilies to thrive on [page 66](#).

ABOUT GENERATIONS UNITED

For more than three decades, Generations United has been the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if generational diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged. The National Center on Grandfamilies is a critical part of Generations United's mission and strives to enact policies and promote programs that support relative caregivers and the children they raise, and Generations United's new National Technical Assistance Center on Grandfamilies and Kinship Families seeks to help systems break down their silos and improve supports for the families.