

# Making the Case: Why Opioid Settlement Funds Should Help Grandfamilies

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## Impact of Opioid Epidemic on Grandfamilies

As state and local opioid commissions make decisions about how to use opioid settlement funds, one deeply impacted group is often overlooked: children, their grandparents, and other relatives who step forward to care for them because of their parents' opioid use. More than 2.5 million children are being raised by grandparents or other relatives in kinship families (also known as

grandfamilies) because the children's parents have died, are incarcerated, or are struggling with substance use, mental health issues, or other challenges often related to opioid use.<sup>1</sup>

The children of parents with opioid use disorders often face complex issues directly related to their parents' substance use disorder. They may have prenatal exposure to alcohol or other drugs, which can cause temporary or permanent health and developmental challenges. They may also have experienced abuse or neglect associated with their parents' substance use. Early traumatic events, such as exposure to family violence and physical abuse, can lead to a greater risk of developing PTSD and substance use disorders. Once out of their parents' home, the children may continue to face challenges associated with their trauma histories and uncertainty about their parents' welfare.

The caregivers in grandfamilies impacted by substance use disorders face unique challenges, too. Because the children may have physical or cognitive health challenges resulting from their parents' substance use, caregivers have to both navigate those challenges and access and pay for appropriate health care and developmental services. Caregivers may face grief and their own mental health issues stemming from feelings of shame, loss, or guilt about their adult child's



inability to parent due to their substance use disorder. Relative caregivers may experience social isolation and depression because they do not want their peers to know about their situation or because their peers are no longer parenting. Caregiver stress may be exacerbated by trying to maintain or navigate an ongoing relationship between the child and parent, often unaware if the parents are currently using drugs or alcohol and how their behavior will impact the child.

## **Gaps in Service and Barriers to Support**

Children and caregivers in grandfamilies face challenges accessing supports and services that can mediate the impact of opioids on their health, mental health, and stability. More than 1/3 of children removed from their homes by the child welfare system because of parental substance use are placed in homes with their grandparents or other relatives.<sup>ii</sup> In some cases, these relatives of these children become licensed foster parents and secure monthly foster care payments and supportive services that other foster families receive. However, the vast majority of kinship families are raising children outside of the foster care system with little to no access to financial assistance or other supportive services. The children they are raising have almost universally been exposed to traumatic experiences that, left untreated, have deep impacts on their behavioral, physical, and mental health outcomes.

Whether inside or outside the foster care system, grandfamilies are in need of support. Many of the caregivers are over 60, retired or living on a fixed income.<sup>iii</sup> Nearly one in five lives below the poverty line.<sup>iv</sup> Thrown into their caregiving role with little or no warning, caregivers are often not aware of supports and services for which their families may be eligible and don't know where to turn for answers. Many caregivers lack a legal relationship with the child and may have serious challenges enrolling the children in school, securing benefits for the child, consenting to health care or accessing health records. Recent cuts to services have made these challenges worse.

Although grandfamilies have been deeply impacted by the opioid epidemic, they were not directly centered in many opioid settlement agreements. Most opioid lawsuits were brought by states, counties, tribes, and municipalities seeking reimbursement for



large-scale public costs associated with the epidemic, including health care, emergency response, child welfare, and addiction treatment systems. As a result, settlement funds were largely structured around opioid abatement efforts, such as treatment, recovery, prevention, and public health infrastructure, rather than direct compensation or dedicated supports for individual grandfamilies harmed by the crisis.

## How Opioid Settlement Funds Can Help Grandfamilies

Children thrive in kinship families when they get the help they need. Research shows that compared to children in non-relative foster care, children raised by relatives have better behavioral and mental health outcomes, greater stability and permanency and a stronger sense of belonging.<sup>v</sup>



At least six states have recognized the impact of opioids on grandfamilies and have designated a portion of their opioid settlement funds to serve the families. Approaches to the use of funds vary and include providing direct assistance to families or supporting new services to families through nonprofit organizations or area agencies on aging that help kinship families.

Examples of services and supports that demonstrate improved outcomes include support groups, mental health services, case management, training and educational resources, and kinship navigator programs, which provide a single point of entry for learning about housing, household resources, physical and mental health services, and financial and legal assistance.

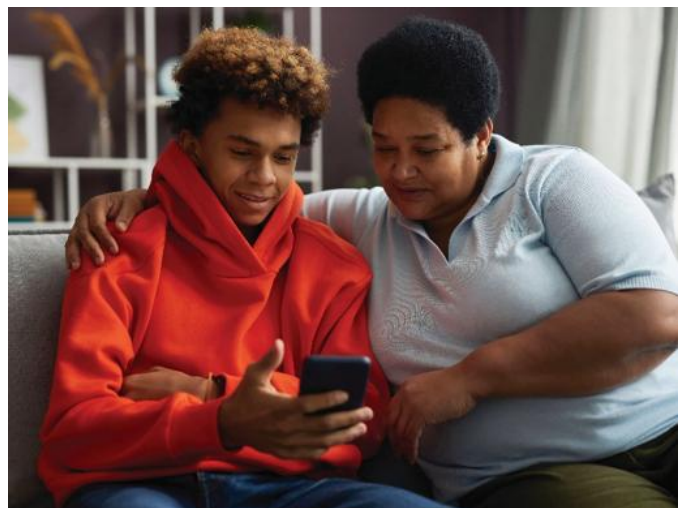
## Examples of State Use of Opioid Settlement Funds to Serve Grandfamilies

### Alabama

In 2024, advocates in Alabama secured \$280,000 in opioid settlement funds to support grandfamilies through a pilot jointly operated by the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) and the Alabama Department of Senior Services (ADSS). The pilot operated throughout 2025 in three counties (Madison, Coffee, and Escambia) in the northern, middle and southern parts of the state. Eligible families who applied received \$500 in the form of a gift card or a direct payment to provide for a specific need for the child(ren) they are raising. The families secured support by applying through their local area agency on aging. Examples of the types of support direct payments were used for include: clothes, medical expenses, utilities, sports participation fees, and school uniforms.

Following the successful pilot, the state is set to expand the program in 2026 in two ways: 1. Funds will be made available to eligible families across the state through all but three Area Agencies on Aging. 2. *Grandparents As Parents*, a local nonprofit organization serving the families, which is led by a grandfamily caregiver, will receive a grant from the Opioid Commission through ADMH. This grant will allow *Grandparents as Parents* to begin new programs for the families, as well as hire an executive director and an opioid educator. Examples of planned services and resources include: a statewide manual of resources available to grandfamilies, additional educational materials, respite care during community meetings, and an expanded video podcast to help the families.

For more information contact  
Grandparents As Parents at:  
[gapalabama.org/](http://gapalabama.org/),  
[Info@AlabamaGrandfamilies.org](mailto:Info@AlabamaGrandfamilies.org), (256)  
258-9573





## **Alaska**

In July 2024, the State of Alaska Department of Health awarded a one-year Opioid Settlement grant of \$142,857 for the Kin Support Program – Hai Yatx’u Saani (Tlingit for “Our Precious Children”), a new, independent 501c3 nonprofit based in Juneau, Alaska. The grant helped pilot Kinship Navigation wraparound services to kinship families in the Southeast Alaska region who have been destabilized by opioid and other substance abuse. The Program serves any family in the region where a relative is raising a child outside of the state foster care system, the majority of whom have a parent who is struggling with addiction or who has lost their life to it. The Program offers Family Specialists who help caregivers, parents and youth access resources, services, cultural supports, intergenerational activities, and a shared sense of community. The Program is unique in also offering in-house counsel for kin caregivers and a contracted Parent Attorney to provide legal resources on a fair and equitable basis. Services are free for families.

The program exceeded expectations in its first year of operations, serving 62 families with needs ranging from diapers and brief legal advice to complex family mediation and evidencing family safety to child protective services to close an investigation. The Department awarded a continuation grant in 2025 and will be opening applications for a third year of grant support in 2026. Besides financial support, the grant program includes collaboration opportunities among grantees and a tighter web of recovery services statewide.

For more information, contact the Kin Support Program – Haa Yats’ Saani: [southeastkin.org](https://southeastkin.org), [kinsupport@southeastkin.org](mailto:kinsupport@southeastkin.org), 907-318-6560.

## **Massachusetts**

In 2023 the [Massachusetts Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund \(ORRF\) Advisory Council](#) designated “supporting families” as one of its top priority areas. In 2024 the Massachusetts governor’s office announced a three year (2024-2027) \$275,000 grant to be given to The Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren of Massachusetts, Boston through the [Mosaic Opioid Recovery Partnership \(Mosaic\)](#), the grantmaking program designed to support communities and populations that have been historically underserved and have experienced a high rate of opioid-related overdose deaths. The grant was given to services to address trauma and grief experienced by impacted families. The Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren offers support groups across the state, educational events, workshops on understanding trauma, wellness cafes, and information to help navigate legal issues and find financial assistance.

In January 2025, the City of Boston launched a \$250,000 fund (from its opioid settlement money) to assist families who have lost an immediate family member to an overdose. This support distributed through the [Healing After Loss Overdose Initiative \(HALOS\)](#) offers up to \$5,000 per family for funeral costs, legal fees, behavioral health, and support services for children, which can assist grandparents in financial distress. In October 2025, Mosaic offered HALOS a \$1.25 million family resilience grant to expand its successful efforts in Boston to other geographical areas across the state. The investments are designed to meet an immediate need resulting from loss of a family member and assure grieving families they are not alone during their grief.

For more information, contact The Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: [massgrg.com](https://massgrg.com), [massgrg@mass.gov](mailto:massgrg@mass.gov)

### **Nevada**

Nevada is leveraging opioid settlement dollars in targeted ways to strengthen kinship families and prevent deeper system involvement for children impacted by parental substance misuse. One key strategy has been investing settlement funds in evidence-based kinship navigation services delivered statewide by [Foster Kinship](#), a nonprofit organization designed to help children in Nevada living with relative caregivers. Through this funding, Foster Kinship has expanded access to its evidence-based Kinship Navigator Program with a specific focus on “hidden” kinship families, including informal caregivers and families in rural communities who often receive little to no support after stepping in to care for children. Over the past year, this investment has allowed Foster Kinship to serve hundreds of new kinship families across Nevada, helping caregivers stabilize placements, access benefits and legal supports, and avoid unnecessary entry into formal foster care systems.

Nevada has also approved the use of opioid settlement funds to provide direct financial assistance to kinship caregivers who assume care of children due to parental substance misuse that results in child welfare involvement. These payments operate similarly to child-only TANF benefits but include several important distinctions. The application process mirrors TANF while removing the child support cooperation requirement, and the benefit amount exceeds traditional child-only TANF payments, though it remains below the level of licensed foster care reimbursement. Eligibility is limited to families whose kinship caregiving arrangement is formally connected to child welfare, with the agency attesting that substance misuse was a contributing factor to the child’s separation

from their parents. This design intentionally targets families who are identified by child welfare but can safely care for children with kin, often preventing entry into foster care altogether. This benefit is scheduled to start 3/1 although tweaks are still being made so child welfare agencies understand how they can use these funds.

While these opioid settlement dollars may also be used for formally licensed kinship families, we believe Nevada's broader strategy is to preserve these limited funds for prevention-oriented kinship arrangements whenever possible. Foster Kinship continues to work closely with state partners to support ongoing reforms to kinship licensing standards so that formal kinship caregivers can access foster care funding more quickly and consistently. This approach helps ensure that opioid settlement resources are strategically directed toward families who would otherwise receive little or no financial support, strengthening kinship placements at the earliest point of intervention and reducing the likelihood of deeper system involvement for children and families.

### **Ohio**

The Kinship Navigator Program at the Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio, Inc. (AOoA) secured \$109,630 in opioid settlement funds over two years (2025-2026), which allows them to serve an additional 240 kin caregivers (120 per year) through caregiver support groups and other resources. The program receives the funds through a contract with Lucas County Children Services, funded by the [One Ohio Recovery Foundation](#).

Funds are being utilized to provide: Information/Referral and Assistance based on caregiver needs including food, clothing and educational services; community outreach; support groups, the creation and distribution of educational materials, newsletters and resources related to empowering kinship families impacted by opioids; evidence-based "Guiding Good Choices" workshops and other educational programming; and the creation of a [Podcast](#) syndicated to public radio streaming services which discusses services to support families impacted by the opioid epidemic. For more information, contact the Kinship Navigator Program: [areaofficeonaging.com/programs](http://areaofficeonaging.com/programs), [KinshipMailGroup@areaofficeonaging.com](mailto:KinshipMailGroup@areaofficeonaging.com), 419-382-0624.

### **West Virginia**

The West Virginia First Foundation oversees West Virginia’s opioid abatement funds and awarded a series of Momentum Initiative Grants to support projects and organizations that strengthen systems of care and drive long-term impact across West Virginia’s substance use disorder response. The first round of Momentum Initiative Grants included [94 projects funded](#) to support children impacted by the opioid crisis. This included support to expand Family Centered Treatment in WV, an evidence-based family preservation model aimed at supporting children in foster care, including kinship families, across the state.

The [newest round of funding](#) is structured to prioritize one “statewide target area” — foster care and non-parental caregivers — and four regional target areas. 21.6% of funds targeted foster care and non-parental caregivers, including kinship families. The four regional focuses are: youth prevention, recovery housing, behavioral health and workforce development projects and day report programs.

For more information, contact the West Virginia First Foundation:

<https://wvfirst.org/contact/>





## Resources on Opioid Settlement Funds

[OpioidSettlementTracker.com](https://opioidsettlementtracker.com): A primary resource for information on national, state, and local spending of opioid settlements. It includes:

- [Opioidsettlementguides.com](https://opioidsettlementguides.com): Encyclopedia of all U.S. state's opioid spending and decision-making processes
- [Opioidsettlementtracker.com/globalsettlementtracker](https://opioidsettlementtracker.com/globalsettlementtracker): Information on opioid settlement amounts, payment statuses, and settlement documents.
- [Opioidsettlementtracker.com/expenditures](https://opioidsettlementtracker.com/expenditures): Details about state and local opioid settlement expenditures
- [Opioidsettlementtracker.com/communitygrantracker](https://opioidsettlementtracker.com/communitygrantracker): Lists of opioid settlement-related grant opportunities

## Resources to Help Grandfamilies and Kinship Families Impacted by Opioids

- [Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use:](#)
  - [Practicing Self-Care](#)
  - [Addressing Childhood Trauma](#)
  - [Preventing Harmful Drug Use by Children](#)
  - [Engaging with Birth Parents](#)
  - [Talking with a Child about their Birth Parent](#)
  - [Program Profile – Camp Mariposa](#)
  - [Where to Begin When Children are Suddenly in Your Care](#)
  - [Understanding the Impact of a Parent's Substance Use Disorder on the Child](#)
  - [Maintaining Your Mental Health as a Caregiver](#)
  - [When A Child Returns to the Care of Their Parent or the Parent is More Fully Integrated into the Child's Life](#)
  - [Understanding a Substance Use Disorder and How to Support Your Loved One in Recovery](#)

## About Generations United

For more than four decades, Generations United's mission has been to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. As the leading advocate for intergenerational initiatives, Generations United sparks cooperation across ages, harnessing the vibrancy and productivity that emerge when people of all ages come together. Learn more at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org).



## About the National Center on Grandfamilies

Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies is a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends. The Center's work is guided by GRAND Voices, a national network of grandfamily caregiver advocates. Through the Center, Generations United leads an advisory group of caregivers and organizations that set the national agenda to advance public interest in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy, provide training and tailored assistance to practitioners and advocates, and support grandfamilies to elevate their voices to improve policies and practices that impact them. The Center raises awareness about the strengths and needs of grandfamilies through media outreach, weekly communications, and awareness-raising events. It offers an annual State of Grandfamilies report and a broad range of guides, fact sheets, and tools for grandfamilies, which cover issues from educational and health care access to financial and legal supports and can be found at [gu.org](http://gu.org) and [grandfamilies.org](http://grandfamilies.org).

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<sup>i</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT® Data Center. (2025). *Children in kinship care in the United States, 2023–2025* [Data table]. KIDS COUNT Data Center. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/10455-children-in-kinship-care#detailed/1/any/false/2683/any/20160.20161>

<sup>ii</sup> Generations United. (2019). *Grand Resource: Help for grandfamilies impacted by opioids and other substance use* [Report]. <https://www.gu.org/resources/grand-resource-help-for-grandfamilies-impacted-by-opioids-and-other-substance-use/>

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *Table S1002: Grandparents, 2023* [American Community Survey 5-year estimates]. data.census.gov. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S1002?q=S1002&moe=false>

<sup>iv</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *Table S1002: Grandparents, 2023* [American Community Survey 5-year estimates]. data.census.gov. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2023.S1002?q=S1002&moe=false>

<sup>v</sup> Generations United. (2023). *Children thrive in grandfamilies*. <https://www.gu.org/resources/children-thrive-in-grandfamilies/>