

2020

ACF

Research & Evaluation Agenda

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ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

OPRE

Introduction

The mission of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is to foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership, and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services. Our vision is children, youth, families, individuals, and communities who are resilient, safe, healthy, and economically secure. The importance of these goals demands that we continually innovate and improve, and that we evaluate our activities and those of our partners. Through research and evaluation, ACF and our partners can learn systematically so that we can make our services as effective as possible.

A learning organization requires many types of evidence, including not only research and evaluation but also performance measures, financial and cost data, survey statistics, and program administrative data. Further, continual improvement requires systematic approaches to using information, such as regular data-driven reviews of performance and progress. This agenda focuses on research and evaluation. We hope in future iterations to expand its scope to include other types of learning as well.

[ACF's evaluation policy](#) includes five principles that guide our work: rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics.

- **Rigor.** ACF is committed to using the most rigorous methods that are appropriate to the evaluation questions and feasible within budget and other constraints. Rigor is not restricted to impact evaluations, but is also necessary in implementation or process evaluations, descriptive studies, outcome evaluations, and formative evaluations, and in both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Rigor requires ensuring that inferences about cause and effect are well founded (internal validity); requires clarity about the populations, settings, or circumstances to which results can be generalized (external validity); and requires the use of measures that accurately capture the intended information (measurement reliability and validity). Maintaining rigor requires a skilled workforce, adequate budget, a robust private sector to compete for grants and contracts, and active consultation with leaders in relevant fields.
- **Relevance.** Research and evaluation priorities should take into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests and should reflect the interests and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners such as states, territories, tribes, and local grantees; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. Evaluations should be designed to represent the diverse populations that ACF programs serve, and ACF should encourage diversity among those carrying out the work, through building awareness of opportunities and building evaluation capacity among underrepresented groups.

Relevance requires strong partnerships among evaluation staff, program staff, policy-makers and service providers. Policy-makers and practitioners should have the opportunity to influence evaluation priorities to meet their interests and needs. Further, for new initiatives and demonstrations in particular, evaluations will be more feasible and useful when planned in concert with the planning of the initiative or demonstration, rather than as an afterthought.



It is important to disseminate findings in ways that are accessible and useful to policy-makers and practitioners. ACF develops dissemination plans tailored to each study's goals and intended audiences, and pursues broad dissemination channels such as social media, newsletters, blogs, videos, data visualizations, and conferences.

It is ACF's policy to integrate both use of existing evidence and opportunities for further learning into all of our activities. Where an evidence base is lacking, we will build evidence through strong evaluations. Where evidence exists, we will use it. Discretionary funding opportunity announcements will require that successful applicants cooperate with any federal evaluations if selected to participate. As legally allowed, programs with waiver authorities should require rigorous evaluations as a condition of waivers. As appropriate, ACF will encourage, incentivize, or require grantees to use existing evidence of effective strategies in designing or selecting service approaches. The emphasis on evidence is meant to support, not inhibit, innovation, improvement, and learning.

- **Transparency.** ACF will make information about planned and ongoing research and evaluation studies easily accessible, typically through posting on the web information about the contractor or grantee conducting the work and descriptions of the questions, methods to be used, and expected timeline for reporting results. ACF will present information about study designs, implementation, and findings at professional conferences.

Study plans will be published in advance. ACF will release results regardless of the findings. Evaluation reports will describe the methods used, including strengths and weaknesses, and discuss the generalizability of the findings. Reports will present comprehensive results, including favorable, unfavorable, and null findings. ACF will release results timely – usually within two months of a report's completion. ACF will archive evaluation data for secondary use by interested researchers.

- **Independence.** Independence and objectivity are core principles of evaluation. Agency and program leadership, program staff, service providers, and others should participate actively in setting evaluation priorities, identifying evaluation questions, and assessing the implications of findings. However, it is important to insulate evaluation functions from undue influence and from both the appearance and the reality of bias. To promote objectivity, ACF protects independence in the design, conduct, and analysis of evaluations. To this end:
 - ACF conducts evaluations through the competitive award of grants and contracts to external experts who are free from conflicts of interest.
 - The director of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation reports directly to the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families; has authority to approve the design of evaluation projects and analysis plans; and has authority to approve, release, and disseminate evaluation reports.
- **Ethics.** ACF-sponsored studies will be conducted in an ethical manner and safeguard the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants. ACF-sponsored studies will comply with both the spirit and the letter of relevant requirements such as regulations governing research involving human subjects.

ACF has established a [common framework](#) for research and evaluation that includes three types of descriptive studies (foundational, exploratory, and design and development studies), and three types of impact studies (efficacy, effectiveness, and scale-up studies).



ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) is responsible for advising the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of programs to improve the economic and social well-being of children and families. OPRE studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through research and evaluation; collaborates with ACF programs on research and evaluation and other learning activities; provides technical assistance related to research, evaluation, data, and evidence; and supports data-driven decision making by increasing the quality, usefulness, sharing, and analysis of data while protecting privacy and confidentiality. OPRE includes four divisions: the Division of Economic Independence, the Division of Child and Family Development, the Division of Family Strengthening, and the Division of Data and Improvement.

OPRE includes 68 federal staff with training and degrees in fields such as public policy, social work, educational policy, psychology, quantitative methodology, human development, family studies, statistics, evaluation, social policy, sociology, government, public health, and epidemiology. In FY 2020, ACF's total budget for research and evaluation was \$208 million, including over 100 contracts and several dozen grants. This document includes both recently completed projects, as well as projects active as of the end of FY 2020.

ACF is pursuing learning agendas and related activities at multiple levels. At the broadest level, ACF contributes to the HHS multi-year evidence plan and HHS annual evaluation plan required by the Foundations of Evidence-Based Policy Making Act. At a more focused level, OPRE and ACF program offices are developing detailed and comprehensive learning agendas related to specific ACF programs. This research and evaluation agenda draws upon and includes selected examples of research and evaluation activities from those more detailed efforts.

Partnerships between ACF program offices and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, as well as stakeholder engagements, drive the identification of research and evaluation needs. ACF's program offices include:

- [Administration for Native Americans \(ANA\)](#)
- [Administration on Children, Youth and Families \(ACYF\)](#)
- [Children's Bureau \(CB\)](#)
- [Office of Early Childhood Development \(ECD\)](#)
- [Family and Youth Services Bureau \(FYSB\)](#)
- [Office of Child Care \(OCC\)](#)
- [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSE\)](#)
- [Office of Community Services \(OCS\)](#)
- [Office of Family Assistance \(OFA\)](#)
- [Office of Head Start \(OHS\)](#)
- [Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response \(OHSEPR\)](#)
- [Office of Refugee Resettlement \(ORR\)](#)
- [Office on Trafficking in Persons \(OTIP\)](#)



The sections that follow summarize ACF’s research and evaluation activities and plans in the areas of adolescent pregnancy prevention and sexual risk avoidance, child care, child support enforcement, child welfare, Head Start, Health Profession Opportunity Grants, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, home visiting, and welfare and family self-sufficiency. Each section includes an overview of the programmatic area, a description of past research and evaluation, a discussion of stakeholder engagement, examples of broad questions and recent and ongoing research and evaluation activities, and a discussion of future directions. Each section also lists relevant measures by which we monitor performance under the Government Performance and Results Act.



ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION AND SEXUAL RISK AVOIDANCE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

To help reduce non-marital sexual activity, teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and other risk behaviors, ACF's [Family and Youth Services Bureau](#) oversees two funding streams within the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) program:

- **Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP):** The Social Security Act § 513 funds four personal responsibility education programs: (a) state formula grants (State PREP); (b) competitive grants in states that do not apply for State PREP (Competitive PREP); (c) Tribal competitive grants (Tribal PREP); and (d) competitive grants for innovative strategies (PREIS). In FY19, ACF provided \$66.75 million in PREP grants. According to the legislation, PREP programs educate adolescents on both abstinence and contraception for the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and at least three of six adulthood preparation subjects (APS).¹
- **Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) Program:** Title V of the Social Security Act § 510 authorizes and funds (a) state formula grants and (b) competitive grants in states that do not apply for funding. In accordance with Title XI of the Social Security Act § 1110, the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2019 also authorized and funded competitive, discretionary grants which exclusively implement education in sexual risk avoidance. In FY19, ACF provided \$90.6 million in SRAE grants.

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measure related to Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Sexual Risk Avoidance:

For out-of-school-time program participants (where participation is generally not mandatory), percentage of participants completing at least 75 percent of program coursework - *Performance Measure 5B* (PREP; [p. 285](#))

ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, and program improvement. ACF coordinates research and evaluation with other offices that oversee teen pregnancy prevention programming and evaluation, including the HHS Office of Population Affairs (OPA), the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Reproductive Health (DRH).

¹ The six Adulthood Preparation Subjects are Adolescent Development, Educational and Career Success, Financial Literacy, Healthy Life Skills, Healthy Relationships, and Parent-Child Communication.



Past Research and Evaluation

In 2018, the number of births to females aged 15-19 in the U.S. was 179,607, down eight percent from 2017.² Despite recent declines in teen childbirth rates, teen pregnancy rates in the U.S. are much higher than in other western industrialized nations³ and racial/ethnic and geographic disparities in teen birth rates persist.⁴ More research and programming innovations are needed to identify effective ways to decrease rates of teen sexual risk behavior and associated negative outcomes.

Since 2009, ACF has supported research and evaluation efforts in teen pregnancy prevention and, more recently, sexual risk avoidance. Past ACF research includes the completion of a multi-component evaluation which included multiple substudies, including national descriptive and performance analysis studies and an impact and implementation study of four PREP sites. Key findings from the 2018-2019 performance measures show that 141,586 youth were served during that reporting period. The most commonly implemented APS by grantees were healthy relationships, healthy life skills, and adolescent development. Nearly 90 percent of the youth reported that they felt respected as people (89 percent) and that the material presented was clear (88 percent) most or all of the time. Large majorities of youth reported that the discussions or activities helped them to learn program lessons (85 percent) and that they had a chance to ask questions (81 percent) most or all of the time.

Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting sexual risk avoidance and adolescent pregnancy prevention research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit PREP and SRAE administrators and staff
- PREP and SRAE training and technical assistance providers
- Curriculum developers, including those working on PREP and SRAE curricula
- Youth, including those served by PREP and SRAE programs, and their parents
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Office of Global Affairs (OGA), the Office of Population Affairs in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH/OPA), and the Division of Reproductive Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC/DRH)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as Power to Decide and Ascend

² Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., Osterman, M.J.K, & Rossen, L. M. (2019). Births: Provisional data for 2018. *National Center for Health Statistics Vital Statistics Rapid Release* (007), 1-25. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr-007-508.pdf>

³ Sedgh, G., Finer, L. B., Bankole, A., Eilers, M. A., & Singh, S. (2015). Adolescent pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates across countries: Levels and recent trends. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(2), 223-30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.09.007>

⁴ Romero, L., Pazol, K., Warner, L., et al. (2016). Reduced Disparities in Birth Rates Among Teens Aged 15-19 Years – United States, 2006-2007 and 2013-2014. *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 65(16), 409-414. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6516a1>



- Partners in the fields of adolescent development, healthy relationships, healthy life skills, parent-child communication, education and career success, and financial literacy

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the Society for Research in Adolescence (SRA), Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS), National Association of Relationship and Marriage Education (NARME), Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM), American Evaluation Association (AEA), and the American Public Health Association (APHA)
- APP Grantee Conference, webinars, and group calls with grantees
- Engagement with PREP and SRAE training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Interagency collaborations, such as the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evaluation Coordination Workgroup
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation (SRAENE) project, which is soliciting stakeholder feedback on the research and evaluation project plan; and webinars and websites for PREP and SRAE grantees to ask questions, request technical assistance, and offer feedback (e.g., [PrepEval](#), [SRAE PAS](#), [SRAENE](#), and [The Exchange](#))

Examples of Broad Questions

1. Who is participating in PREP and SRAE programs and how are they faring?
2. How can PREP and SRAE programs use data and evidence to strengthen their program implementation in order to improve outcomes?
3. Which components of PREP and SRAE programs or curricula can be identified as effective in order to inform others? How can they be shared?
4. How do PREP and SRAE programs build data capacity and support local evaluations?
5. In what ways are PREP and SRAE programs associated with youth outcomes and how can these associations be measured?



Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question				
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation (SRAENE)	X	X	X	X	X
Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Performance Analysis Study (SRAE PAS)	X	X		X	X
Personal Responsibility Education Program Multi-Component Evaluation (PREP-MCE)	X	X	X		X
PREP Promising Youth Programs (PYP)	X		X	X	X
PREP Studies of Performance Measures and Adulthood Preparation Subjects (PMAPS)	X	X	X		X

- **Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation (SRAENE)**: is a rigorous evaluation comprised of three substudies: (1) National Descriptive Study to provide a nationwide description of how grantees and provider organizations implement SRAE programs, (2) Program Components Impacts Study to implement innovative evaluation designs to assess the effectiveness of SRAE program components, and (3) Data and Evaluation Support to both build grantee data capacity and support local evaluations. (#1) (#2) (#3) (#4) (#5)
- **Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Performance Analysis Study (SRAE PAS)**: is a multi-component project to: (a) finalize and/or revise SRAE performance measures; (b) develop an SRAE Performance Measures Portal for submission of program implementation performance measures annually and individual-level participant performance measures biannually; (c) develop an SRAE Performance Dashboard; (d) support and provide technical assistance to grantees to collect, submit, and interpret SRAE performance data; and (e) analyze, report, and disseminate SRAE performance data. (#1) (#2) (#4) (#5)
- **Personal Responsibility Education Program Multi-Component Evaluation (PREP-MCE)**: is a multi-component evaluation that aimed to (1) document how programs funded through the State PREP program were designed and implemented in the field, (2) collect and analyze performance data for all State, Tribal, and Competitive PREP grantees, and (3) conduct random assignment impact and in-depth implementation evaluations in four specific PREP-funded sites. (#1) (#2) (#3) (#5)
- **PREP Promising Youth Programs (PYP)**: is a collaborative effort to (1) support the local evaluations of the second cohort of Tribal PREP and PREIS grantees through training and technical assistance and (2) develop curricula to address the sexual health and other PREP-related needs of underserved youth populations. (#1) (#3) (#4) (#5)
- **PREP Studies of Performance Measures and Adulthood Preparation Subjections (PMAPS)**: is a multi-component study to revise measures used for PREP grantee reporting of performance data; to collect, analyze, and report on performance data; to create a performance dashboard tool that supports stakeholders in monitoring data quality and performance related to the PREP programs; and to develop APS conceptual models that demonstrate how inclusion of APS topics can enhance or expand on the outcomes for youth participating in PREP programs. (#1) (#2) (#3) (#5)



Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF's research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with adolescent pregnancy prevention and sexual risk avoidance stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Analyzing grantee, provider, and youth participant data from grantees receiving PREP and SRAE funds
- Analyzing promising program approaches of SRAE grantees, and the effectiveness of individual SRAE program components
- Building capacity for PREP and SRAE grantees to collect and use their data for grantee-funded evaluations to ultimately inform programming and evaluation efforts
- Collecting data on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects operations, programming, and service delivery for PREP and SRAE grantees
- Developing evidence-informed curricula for underserved youth, including parents of youth in foster care and youth with intellectual disabilities
- Providing training and technical assistance to support local evaluations of Tribal PREP and PREIS grantees



CHILD CARE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

ACF supports low-income working families by providing funding and implementing policies intended to increase access to affordable, quality child care and early education programs serving children birth through age 13.

ACF's [Office of Child Care](#) administers the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which is authorized under the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) enacted under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990. The CCDBG Act was most recently reauthorized in 2014. CCDF made \$8.2 billion available to states, territories, and tribes in fiscal year 2019. CCDF is a block grant to state, territory, and tribal governments that provides support for children and their families with paying for child care that will fit their needs and will support children's development and well-being. CCDF also provides funding to improve the quality of care by supporting efforts such as child care licensing, quality improvement systems to help programs meet higher standards, and training and education for child care workers.

ACF establishes and oversees the implementation of child care policies, and provides guidance and technical assistance to states, tribes, and territories as they administer CCDF programs. ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance on research and evaluation of CCDF policies, stakeholder and expert engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

Past Research and Evaluation

A growing body of research on child care and early education has highlighted the benefits of subsidies and investments in the quality of services received by families and children from low-income households. Research has shown positive outcomes of subsidy policies⁵, especially those that promote employment and economic outcomes⁶ and increase the

⁵ Loeb, S., et al. (2003). Child care in poor communities: Early learning effects of type, quality, and stability. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series* (9954). <http://papers.nber.org/papers/w9954.pdf>; De Schipper, J., et al. (2008). Children's attachment relationships with day care caregivers: Associations with positive caregiving and the child's temperament. *Social Development*, 17(3), 454-470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2007.00448.x>

⁶ Forry, N. D. (2007). *The impact of child care subsidies on child care problems, child care-related work disruptions, and mothers' desire to switch care*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Maryland, College Park; Ha, Y., & Meyer, D. R. (2010). Child care subsidy patterns: Are exits related to economic setbacks or economic successes? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32(3), 346-355.

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Child Care:

Maintain the proportion of children served through Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) child care funding as compared to the number of children in families with income equal to or less than 85% of State Median Income - *Performance Measure 2A* ([p. 92](#))

Increase the number of states that implement Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that meet high quality benchmarks - *Performance Measure 2B* ([p. 92](#))

Increase the number or percentage of low-income children receiving CCDF subsidies who are enrolled in high quality care settings - *Performance Measure 2C* ([p. 92](#))

Increase the number or percentage of licensed child care providers serving children receiving CCDF subsidies - *Performance Measure 2D* ([p. 93](#))



stability of child care subsidy receipt by allowing receipt of subsidy for a longer period of time without the need for eligibility redetermination, as well policies that streamline administrative practices that affect access to subsidies for families who are at-risk.⁷

Research demonstrating the link between subsidies, quality child care and early education, and positive child and family outcomes⁸ has encouraged efforts to enhance early care and education programs through investments of the CCDF quality set aside funds. Quality child care and early education programs are a critical resource for families, support young children’s development in a variety of domains⁹, and assist parents in accessing comprehensive services for their families.¹⁰ Research in this area focuses on early learning standards, improving quality in care settings, innovative interventions, and supporting parental employment through access to high quality care.

Recent studies such as the National Survey of Early Care and Education ([NSECE:2012](#); [NSECE:2019](#)) have contributed to our understanding of the child care and early education system in the United States. The NSECE:2012 provided the first national picture in more than 20 years of the demand for, and supply of, child care and early education, and of the early childhood workforce. This occurred during a time of great expansion in the funding of early childhood programs, federal and state supports for improvements in the quality of those programs, and availability of subsidies for low-income families to access care and education for their children. Data from the NSECE has allowed for analyses of the interactions between the availability of care that meets families’ needs and preferences, and the demand for care of families with young children that will meet their care needs in order to participate in employment and in support of their children’s development and learning. Data from the NSECE: 2019 will permit analyses to track changes in child care and early education availability and use in the seven years between the two survey cohorts.

Projects funded under the child care subsidy policy research portfolio are meant to increase our knowledge about the efficacy of child care subsidy policies and programs in enhancing employment and economic self-sufficiency of low-income families, and in improving quality in child care and early education settings to support learning and development of children from birth through age 13.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2009.10.004>

⁷ Forry, N. D., et al. (2013). *Child care subsidy literature review* (OPRE Report #2013-60). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/subsidy_literature_review.pdf.

⁸ Danziger, S. K., et al. (2003). Childcare subsidies and the transition from welfare to work. *National Poverty Center Working Paper Series* (03-11).

http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/paper11/03-11.pdf; Brooks, F., et al. (2002). Impacts of child care subsidies on family and child well-being. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17, 498-511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.07.005>; Michalopoulos, C. (2010). *Effects of reducing child care subsidy copayments in Washington State: Final report* (OPRE Report #2011-2). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/ccs_strategies/reports/washington/ccse_washington.pdf; Michalopoulos, C., et al. (2010). *The effect of child care subsidies for moderate-income families in Cook County, Illinois: Final report* (OPRE Report #2011-3). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/cc/ccs_strategies/reports/cook_county_illinois/cook_county.pdf.

⁹ Burchinal, M., et al. (2016). Quality thresholds, features, and dosage in early care and education: Secondary data analyses of child outcomes [Special issue]. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 81(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12248>

¹⁰ National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2015). *Measuring predictors of quality in early care and education settings in the National Survey of Early Care and Education* (OPRE Report #2015-93). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/measuring_predictors_of_quality_mpoq_in_the_nsece_final_092315_b508.pdf.



Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting CCDF research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit CCDF administrators and staff
- CCDF training and technical assistance providers
- The child care and early education workforce and providers in multiple settings (e.g., center- and home-based providers)
- Children and families served by CCDF
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Institute of Education Sciences at the Department of Education (ED/IES)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Child Care Aware of America (CCA), the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) National Learning Network, the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), Ascend at the Aspen Institute, and the Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD)
- Partners in the fields of early care and education, education, child development, economics, demography, social work, and other related fields

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC) and the Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC) Annual Meeting
- CCDF State and Territory Administrators Meeting (STAM) and other meetings with grantees (CCDBG Implementation Grants; Child Care Policy Research Partnerships; Child Care Dissertation Grants)
- Engagement with CCDF training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as roundtables and technical work groups

Examples of Broad Questions

1. What are the effects of implementing the changes introduced by the 2014 CCDBG reauthorization?
2. How is the CCDF program supporting quality improvements in child care?



3. What policy and programmatic levers are most related to program supply and access? And quality?
4. What are effective approaches to supporting the early childhood workforce and their professional development in order to deliver better quality teaching and caregiving?
5. How is the licensing system supporting early care and education quality and positive outcomes for children, families, and key stakeholders (e.g. providers, licensing agencies)?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question				
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
CCDBG Implementation Research and Evaluation Grants	X		X		
CCDF Policies Database	X				
Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis (CCEEPRA)	X	X	X	X	X
Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grants	X		X		
Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL)				X	
Home-based Child Care Supply and Quality			X	X	
Infants and Toddlers Teacher and Caregiver Competencies (ITTC)				X	
Initial Effects of CCDBG Reauthorization		X			
National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)			X		
Study of Coaching Practices in ECE Settings (SCOPE)				X	
Understanding the Role of Licensing in ECE (TRLECE)					X
Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI)				X	
We Grow Together				X	

- **CCDBG Implementation Research and Evaluation Grants:** provide CCDF Lead Agencies the opportunity to plan for and evaluate the initiatives and policies that they are implementing in response to the goals of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 (#1), including how new policies are affecting access to programs by families who have low incomes and receive subsidies. b. (#3)
- **CCDF Policies Database:** develops data files annually of CCDF policies in all states and territories and makes these accessible to analysts and researchers for secondary analyses and linking with state administrative data. Analysts and researchers can explore the relationships between policies and outcomes related to children, families, and child care and early education providers. (#1)
- **Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis (CCEEPRA) Project:** supports research activities that address high-priority early care and education issues and questions while also building the capacity for new research and evaluation efforts. Recent CCEEPRA research activities include:
 - Developing a literature review of research on subsidy stability and the relationship to key outcomes for families who are low-income. (#1)
 - Describing state quality improvement efforts, including refinements to states’ Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) and engagement of home-based providers in quality improvement initiatives. (#2)



- Analyzing CCDF State and Territory Plans, [ACF-801 Child Care Monthly Case Record Data](#), and [ACF-218 Annual Quality Progress Reports](#), focusing on understanding the interactions between the level of generosity of child care subsidy policies and outcomes related to children, families, and providers. This effort also produced a review of the research literature on access to child care and early education using a family-focused definition of access. (#3)
 - Examining professional development systems for the child care and early education workforce and how these are built to increase competencies of workers and create career pathways. (#4)
 - Developing a conceptual framework of licensing as a support for quality in child care and early education programs and to identify relevant research questions. (#5)
- **[Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grants](#)**: support research on child care policy issues conducted by state agencies, researchers, and other partner organizations in.¹¹ (#1) Some of these grants study how specific policies are related to the supply of quality child care and early education and access to those programs by families receiving subsidies. For example, one study examines policies related to provider reimbursement rates that vary by the level of quality of the program. (#3)
 - **[Culture of Continuous Learning \(CCL\)](#)**: used the Breakthrough Series Collaborative model to test the feasibility of implementation of this model to create a culture of continuous learning in child care and Head Start programs. (#4)
 - **[Home-based Child Care Supply and Quality](#)**: seeks to identify and better understand the key components of quality and supply in home-based child care, including research on the decrease of home-based care supply and the factors associated with programs leaving the care market. (#3) This project also looks at models of engagement of home-based providers in professional development and quality improvement initiatives, and examines which approaches are most successful in increasing qualifications and retention of these providers. (#4)
 - **[Infants and Toddlers Teacher and Caregiver Competencies \(ITTCC\)](#)**: explores approaches to the implementation and assessment of competencies and builds a conceptual foundation for measurement, research, and evaluation in order to support ACF's efforts to improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers in community-based child care and Early Head Start. (#4)
 - **[Initial Effects of CCDBG Reauthorization](#)**: conducted an analysis of CCDF administrative data, CCDF State and Territories' plans, and Quality Performance Reports to assess how states are investing their quality set-aside dollars to improve quality. (#2)
 - **[National Survey of Early Care and Education \(NSECE\)](#)**: documents the nation's utilization and availability of early care and education (as well as school-age care) in order to deepen the understanding of the extent to which families' needs and preferences coordinate well with provider's offerings and constraints. Analyses of NSECE data are creating profiles of child care and early education supply in communities and the demand for programs based on characteristics of households in those communities. (#3)

¹¹ Partnerships must include the CCDF State Lead Agency and at least one research group.



- **[Study of Coaching Practices in ECE Settings \(SCOPE\)](#)**: studies how coaching practices are implemented in early care and education (ECE) classrooms serving children supported by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies or Head Start grants, how core features of coaching vary by key contextual factors, and which core coaching features are ripe for more rigorous evaluation. (#4)
- **[Understanding the Role of Licensing in ECE \(TRLECE\)](#)**: looks at the relationship between licensing standards, monitoring, and administrative practices and its impact on the effectiveness of licensing systems in supporting quality of child care and early education. Work includes secondary analyses of licensing data, case studies, and formative data collection to identify questions of interest to licensing agencies in need of new research to improve the licensing systems across states and localities. (#5)
- **[Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions \(VIQI\)](#)**: tests how different levels and features of classroom quality relate to children’s developmental outcomes. The study looks at the relationship of initial child care and early education classroom quality to changes in observed quality and children’s outcomes through a rigorous experimental design. The study is testing the implementation of a quality initiative encompassing training of teachers and caregivers in curricula that address the key features of instructional quality hypothesized to affect children’s outcomes. (#4)
- **[We Grow Together](#)**: seeks to develop and test a professional development model aimed at improving teachers’ responsiveness and support for infant/toddler development, based on the Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions for Infants and Toddlers (Q-CCIT) measure. (#4)

Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF’s research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with CCDF stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Conducting follow-up surveys with the child care and early education providers (center- and home-based) and the workforce who participated in the NSECE 2019 study on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath
- Analyzing data from the NSECE 2012 and 2019 surveys to track changes in demand for care, supply of care, and access to care to support parents’ and children’s needs
- Identifying and evaluating strategies to retain the early childhood workforce working in center- and home-based settings
- Documenting and evaluating consumer education efforts in states and localities to better understand parents’ use of information to make choices about care for their children
- Synthesizing the evidence from ongoing descriptive and evaluation studies on changes in subsidy policies and new investments in quality initiatives and related outcomes for families, children and care providers



CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

The child support program operates under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act with the vision that children can count on their parents for the financial, medical, and emotional support they need to be healthy and successful even when they live in different households. The program functions in 54 states and territories, and 60 tribes. In FY19, the federal government provided 4.6 billion in payments to states and tribes to operate their child support programs. ACF's [Office of Child Support Enforcement](#) partners with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and others to promote parental responsibility so that children receive reliable support from both of their parents as they grow to adulthood.

State, tribal, and local child support agencies provide services to families, including:

- Locating noncustodial parents
- Establishing paternity
- Establishing and enforce support orders
- Modifying orders when appropriate
- Collecting and disbursing child support payments

ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement. Under authority of Section 1115(a) of the Social Security Act, ACF administers grant-funded demonstration projects, waivers, and other research-related partnerships to produce the best outcomes for children and families involved with the child support program.

Past Research and Evaluation

Child support is an important income support for families. According to a 2018 U.S. Census Bureau survey, child support represents 42 percent of income for custodial parents with income below the poverty level who receive child support.¹² In recent years, the child support program has shifted its focus from welfare cost reimbursement to family support, with an emphasis on obtaining regular support for children and removing barriers to consistent payment. Prior research

¹² Grall, T. (2020). *Custodial Mothers and Their Child Support: 2017*. U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports, P60-269. Detailed Tables. (Table 5). <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/families/2017/chlds17.pdf>

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Child Support Enforcement:

Maintain annual child support distributed collections - *Performance Measure 20.1LT* ([p. 238](#))

Maintain the paternity establishment percentage (PEP) among children born out-of-wedlock - *Performance Measure 20A* ([p. 238](#))

Increase the percentage of IV-D (child support) cases having support orders - *Performance Measure 20B* ([p. 238](#))

Maintain the IV-D (child support) collection rate for current support - *Performance Measure 20C* ([p. 239](#))

Increase the percentage of paying cases among IV-D (child support) arrearage cases - *Performance Measure 20D* ([p. 239](#))

Maintain the cost-effectiveness ratio (total dollars collected per \$1 of expenditures) - *Performance Measure 20E* ([p. 239](#))



suggests that there is a positive correlation between noncustodial fathers' involvement with their children and their payment of child support.¹³ However, not all parents have the same level of financial security. Just like custodial parents, some noncustodial parents struggle to make ends meet.

An enduring question in the child support field is how to increase the reliability of child support payments among the different types of noncustodial parents who do not regularly pay child support: 1) those willing but unable to pay; 2) those unwilling but able to pay; and 3) those unwilling and unable to pay. Past ACF-supported research has attempted to answer this question using several different approaches. For example, the [Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration \(CSPED\)](#) was designed to increase reliable child support payments among noncustodial parents who were unable to pay their child support by providing them with child support agency-led employment programs. Programs were led by child support agencies and combined case management, enhanced child support services, employment services, and parenting classes with peer support. Other studies, such as the [Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\)](#) and the [Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services \(BICS\) demonstrations](#), have examined how principles of behavioral economics can be applied to child support business practices to improve the reliability of child support payments through order modifications, parental involvement in order establishment, setting up automatic withholding on new child support orders, and other practices.

Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting child support research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, and local child support administrators and staff
- Child support training and technical assistance providers
- Employers
- Individuals and families engaging with the child support system
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Department of Justice (DOJ)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as the National Child Support Enforcement Association (NCSEA), the National Council of Child Support Directors (NCCSD), the Western Intergovernmental Child Support Engagement Council (WICSEC), the Eastern Regional Interstate Child Support Association (ERICSA), the National Tribal Child Support Association (NTCSA), the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National Center on State Courts

¹³ Peters, H. E., Argys, L. M., Howard, H. W., & Butler, J. S. (2004). Legislating Love: The Effect of Child Support and Welfare Policies on Father-child Contact. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 2, 255–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-004-5647-5>



- Partners in fatherhood programs, workforce development agencies, correctional institutions, re-entry organizations, and other human services programs

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as NCSEA Annual Policy Forum and Annual Leadership Symposium, NCCSD Annual Meeting, WICSEC Annual Conference, ERICSA Annual Conference, and NTCSA Annual Conference
- Regional meetings with IV-D Directors
- Engagement with child support training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, demonstration projects, waiver projects, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as a recent [Request for Information](#) in the Federal Register on innovative approaches and knowledge gaps related to enhancing nonresident parents' ability to support their children economically and emotionally.

Examples of Broad Questions

1. What strategies are effective at increasing the reliability of child support payments among the different types of noncustodial parents?
2. What strategies are most effective for improving employment and earnings among noncustodial parents with low income who are willing but unable to pay their child support?
3. How can child support programs improve communication and engagement with families, and build trust and confidence in the child support program?
4. How can programs apply principles of behavioral economics and procedural justice to child support business practices?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question			
	#1	#2	#3	#4
Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services (BICS)	X		X	X
Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS)	X		X	X
Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES)	X	X		
Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)	X	X	X	
Families Forward Demonstration (FFD)	X	X	X	
Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Grants			X	X
Procedural Justice Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC)	X		X	X
Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED)	X	X		
Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program			X	



- **[Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services \(BICS\)](#)**: was a national demonstration that explored the application of behavioral economics principles to child support services. BICS interventions addressed a range of child support challenges, including initial payments on newly established child support orders, parent engagement prior to and during order establishment, and the order review and modification process. (#1) (#3) (#4)
- **[Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\)](#)**: was the first major opportunity to apply a behavioral economics lens to human services programs that serve vulnerable families with low income in the United States. BIAS worked with four child support programs to design and test behaviorally-informed interventions that aimed to increase applications for child support order modifications, increase child support payments from noncustodial parents who do not have income withholding and need to take action to make a payment, and increase the percentage of parents who made child support payments and the dollar amount of payments made per parent. (#1) (#3) (#4)
- **[Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families \(BEES\)](#)**: is evaluating the effectiveness of innovative programs designed to boost employment and earnings among Americans with low income, including noncustodial parents. BEES has a special interest in programs that are state-initiated and programs that serve adults whose employment prospects have been affected by opioid use disorder, abuse of other substances, or mental health conditions. (#1) (#2)
- **[Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration \(CSPED\)](#)**: was a national demonstration designed to increase reliable child support payments among noncustodial parents who were unable to pay their child support by providing them with child support agency-led employment programs. Programs were led by child support agencies and combined case management, enhanced child support services, employment services, and parenting classes with peer support. (#1) (#2) (#3)
- **[Families Forward Demonstration \(FFD\)](#)**: is a Section 1115 waiver project designed to increase employment and earnings of noncustodial parents by providing short-term job skills training in high demand occupations. Along with the job skills training, FFD provides noncustodial parents with supportive employment services, financial capacity-building services, and enhanced child support case management. (#1) (#2) (#3)
- **[Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Grants](#)**: are testing how child support agencies increase payments and improve case processing efficiency and customer service on intergovernmental cases. Grantees are encouraged to apply principles of behavioral economics and procedural justice to their designed interventions. (#3) (#4)
- **[Procedural Justice Alternatives to Contempt \(PJAC\)](#)**: is a national demonstration testing whether incorporating procedural justice principles into child support business practices increases reliable child support payments and increases trust and confidence in the child support agency and its processes. Procedural justice is “fairness in processes that resolve disputes and result in decisions. Research has shown that if people perceive a process to be



fair, they will be more likely to comply with the outcome of that process whether or not the outcome was favorable to them”¹⁴ (#1) (#3) (#4)

- **Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED)**: is evaluating the effectiveness of the latest generation of subsidized and transitional employment approaches for populations with low income. In two sites, the demonstration includes noncustodial parents and examines the impacts on child support payments. STED also includes an evaluation of the Paycheck Plus Demonstration in Atlanta, which provides a more generous refundable tax credit to eligible workers without dependent children, compared to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). (#1) (#2)
- **Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program**: is a demonstration testing digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services and to create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement with parents. (#3)

Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF’s research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with child support stakeholders. Responses to the recent Request for Information in the Federal Register on innovative approaches and knowledge gaps related to enhancing nonresident parents’ ability to support their children economically and emotionally are also expected to inform future learning efforts.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Analyzing implementation, impact, and benefit-cost data from the PJAC Demonstration
- Supporting grantee-led evaluations of digital marketing campaigns and innovations in intergovernmental case processing
- Collecting information on how the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery affect PJAC programs, service delivery, and the noncustodial parents enrolled in the study
- Supporting grantee-led implementation and evaluations of interventions to educate teens and young adults about the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood

¹⁴ Swaner, R., Ramdath, C., Martinez, A., Hahn, J., & Walker, S. (2018). *What Do Defendants Really Think? Procedural Justice and Legitimacy in the Criminal Justice System*. New York: Center for Court Innovation. https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2018-09/what_do_defendants_really_think.pdf



CHILD WELFARE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

ACF seeks to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children through leadership, support for necessary services, and productive partnerships with states, tribes, and communities. ACF's [Children's Bureau](#) has the primary responsibility for administering federal programs that support state child welfare services. ACF provides matching federal funds to states, tribes, and communities to help them operate every aspect of their child welfare (CW) systems. This includes the prevention of child abuse and neglect, the support of permanent placements through adoption and subsidized guardianship, and the creation and maintenance of information systems necessary to support these programs. In fiscal year 2019, ACF had a budget of approximately \$9 billion dollars to administer entitlement, formula, and discretionary grants. The authorities to carry out federal, state, and tribal child welfare programs include, but are not limited to:

- Title IV-E Foster Care
- Title IV-E Adoption Assistance
- Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance
- Tribal Participation in Title IV-E
- Title IV-E Plan Development Grants
- Child Welfare (Title IV-E) Demonstration Projects
- John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood
- Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program: Title IV-B, Subpart 1 of the Social Security Act
- Promoting Safe and Stable Families: Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) State Grants
- Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (CBCAP)
- Children's Justice Act
- Court Improvement Program

Current legislation and appropriations support the following child welfare discretionary grant program areas:

- Adoption Opportunities
- Child Welfare Training
- Child Abuse and Prevention Act Research Demonstration Project
- Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Program
- Regional Partnership Grants (RPG)
- Family Connections Grants

ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities relevant to child welfare such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, developing systems to oversee and use data, and continuous quality improvement. ACF also analyzes and reports information on administrative data such as the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD).



ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Child Welfare:

Decrease the percentage of children with substantiated or indicated reports of maltreatment that have a repeated substantiated or indicated report of maltreatment within six months - *Performance Measure 7B* (CAPTA; [p. 148](#))

Improve states' average response time between maltreatment report and investigation, based on the median of states' reported average response time in hours from screened-in reports to the initiation of the investigation - *Performance Measure 7C* (CAPTA; [p. 148](#))

Decrease the rate of first-time victims per 1,000 children - *Performance Measure 7A* (CBCAP; [p. 157](#))

Increase the percentage of Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) total funding that supports evidence-based and evidence-informed child abuse prevention programs and practices - *Performance Measure 7D* (CBCAP; [p. 158](#))

For those children who had been in care less than 12 months, maintain the percentage that has no more than two placement settings - *Performance Measure 7Q* (Child Welfare Services; [p. 164](#))

Decrease the percent of foster children in care 12 or more months with no case plan goal (including case plan goal "Not Yet Determined") - *Performance Measure 7R* (Child Welfare Services, PSSF, Foster Care; [p. 164](#))

Increase the adoption rate - *Performance Measures 7T & 7.8LT* (Foster Care, Adoption Opportunities, Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentives, Adoption Assistance; [p. 173](#) & [p. 314](#))

Decrease the gap between the percentage of children nine and older waiting to be adopted and those actually adopted - *Performance Measure 7U* (Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payment Program; [p. 177](#))

Of all children to exit foster care in less than 24 months, maintain the percentage who exit to permanency (reunification, living with relative, guardianship or adoption) - *Performance Measure 7P1* (PSSF, Guardianship Assistance; [p. 284](#))

Of all children who exit foster care after 24 or more months, maintain the percentage who exit to permanency (reunification, living with relative, guardianship or adoption) - *Performance Measure 7P2* (PSSF, Guardianship Assistance; [p. 284](#))

Decrease improper payments in the title IV-E foster care program by lowering the national error rate - *Performance Measure 7S* (Foster Care; [p. 313](#))

Increase or maintain the percentage of youth currently or formerly in foster care who report in the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) survey having a connection to at least one adult to whom they can go for advice or emotional support - *Performance Measure 7W* (Chafee; [p. 315](#))

Increase the percentage of youth currently or formerly in foster care who report in the NYTD survey having at least a high school diploma or GED - *Performance Measure 7X* (Chafee; [p. 315](#))

Promote efficient use of CFCIP funds by increasing the number of jurisdictions that completely expend their allocations within the two-year expenditure period - *Performance Measure 7Y1* (Chafee; [p. 316](#))

Promote efficient use of CFCIP funds by decreasing the total amount of funds that remain unexpended by states at the end of the prescribed period - *Performance Measure 7Y2* (Chafee; [p. 316](#))



Past Research and Evaluation

Over the past several decades, research and evaluation activities in child welfare have increased significantly.¹⁵ This body of knowledge has shown that child maltreatment is a complex problem associated with multiple, interrelated risk and protective factors at individual, family, community, and contextual levels. This research has demonstrated that child abuse and neglect may have long-lasting and cumulative effects on the well-being of children into adulthood. There is burgeoning research examining the potential effectiveness of preventative and intervention treatments to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of children and their families. However, much still remains unknown about why child maltreatment incidence may vary over time, across types of child abuse and neglect, and across states or localities; the interplay of risk factors, protective factors, and child and family outcomes; and the evidence of effectiveness for current and ongoing prevention and treatment practices.

The promotion of children’s safety, permanence, and well-being are the principles that guide child welfare practice and policy. ACF’s child welfare research portfolio includes studies of children who have experienced or are at risk for maltreatment, families who are investigated by Child Protective Services, and children and families who access child welfare services, as well as research covering a broad array of related topics, including identification of antecedents and consequences of child maltreatment, strategies for its prevention, and service needs and outcomes for children who experience it. Past ACF research includes the completion of large national surveys, such as the first and second cohorts of the [National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being \(NSCAW\)](#) and [National Incidence Studies \(NIS\) 1-4](#). Additionally, ACF has conducted multi-site demonstration projects that integrate implementation science and rigorous evaluation to build an evidence base for child welfare policy and practice, including the [Permanency Innovations Initiative \(PII\) Evaluation](#), [Multi-site Evaluation of Foster Care Youth Programs \(Chafee Independent Living Evaluation Project\)](#), Regional Partnership Grants¹⁶, Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System¹⁷, [Family Connections Grants: Family Group Decision Making](#), [Grants to Address Trafficking within the Child Welfare Population](#), and [Youth at Risk of Homeless \(YARH\) Grants](#).

Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting child welfare research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

¹⁵ IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council). (2014). *New directions in child abuse and neglect research*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK195985/>

¹⁶ For more details on the Regional Partnership Grants, see Discretionary Grant Program descriptions at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2012>, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2014>, and <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2019> as well as a program description at <https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/technical/rpg.aspx>.

¹⁷ For more details on Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System, see Discretionary Grant Program Description at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2012>.



Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit child welfare administrators and staff
- Child welfare training and technical assistance providers, such as the Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative; Family Resource Information, Education, and Network Development Service (FRIENDS) National Center; and Child Welfare Information Gateway
- Child welfare curriculum and model developers
- Law enforcement and court systems
- Youth and families served by the child welfare system
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Department of Education (ED), the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, resource centers, and legal associations, such as Child Welfare League of America, Foster Youth in Action, National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the American Bar Association
- Partners in the fields of health care, mental health, substance use, early care and education, parenting, self-sufficiency and employment, financial assistance, housing, domestic violence prevention and intervention, etc.

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the National Child Welfare Evaluation Summit, the National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN), and Society for Social Work and Research
- Children's Bureau Annual Grantee Meeting, Discretionary and Formula Grantee Annual Meetings, and the State Team Planning Meeting
- Engagement with child welfare training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Interagency collaborations, such as the Federal Interagency Work Group on Child Abuse and Neglect
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as a [request for comments](#) in the Federal Register on the Children's Bureau Proposed Research Priorities for Fiscal Years 2018-2020

Examples of Broad Questions

1. What are promising approaches and strategies for establishing and maintaining primary prevention strategies to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of all families? What factors promote or impede implementation of primary prevention?
2. What is the incidence of child abuse and neglect across states? What risk and protective factors are associated with child maltreatment incidence? Why does incidence of child abuse and neglect vary across states?



3. Who are the children and families that come into contact with the child welfare system? What programs and services are being provided to children and families involved with the child welfare system? What are the short- and longer-term outcomes for these children and families?
4. How effective are the programs and services currently available and/or being provided to children and families involved with the child welfare system? How do these programs and services support improved outcomes for children and families?
5. How can programs, services, and judicial oversight for children and families involved with the child welfare system be improved?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question				
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Building Capacity to Evaluate Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve	X				X
Building Capacity to Evaluate Interventions for Youth at Risk for Homelessness (YARH)				X	X
Chafee Independent Living Evaluation Projects				X	X
Child Maltreatment Incidence Data Linkages (CMI Data Linkages):		X			
Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families	X				
Definitions and Policies Related to the Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect and Related Risk		X			
Domestic Human Trafficking and the Child Welfare Population			X		X
Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives: A Continuous Quality Improvement Approach in the Child Welfare System					X
Expanding Evidence on Replicable Recovery and Reunification Interventions for Families				X	X
Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare:					X
National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW)			X		X
Postadoption and Guardianship Instability for Children and Youth Who Exit Foster Care (PAGI)					X
Regional Partnership Grants (RPG) to Increase the Well-Being of, and to Improve the Permanency Outcomes for, Children and Families Affected By Substance Abuse				X	
RPG Cross-Site Evaluation and Evaluation-Related Technical Assistance Project				X	X
Supporting Evidence Building in Child Welfare				X	X
Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse				X	
Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration National Study			X	X	

- **Building Capacity to Evaluate Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve:** provides technical assistance for organizations awarded cooperative agreement grants that support the development, implementation, and evaluation of primary prevention. An additional objective is conducting a cross-site process evaluation of grantees’ implementation processes and outcomes. (#1) (#5)
- **Building Capacity to Evaluate Interventions for Youth at Risk for Homelessness (YARH):** supports efforts to build evidence on how to end homelessness for at risk youth by continuing work with organizations who conducted



foundational work as part of Phases I and II of the YARH project. Phase III of YARH will continue to provide important information to the field by supporting organizations from Phase II in evidence-building activities. (#4) (#5)

- **[Chafee Independent Living Evaluation Projects](#)**: are multi-site evaluations of selected programs funded through the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Chafee Program). The current project supports the implementation of a “Next Generation” evaluation agenda for the Chafee Program. This project will implement program evaluation designs that enable ACF to continue to fulfill the legislative mandate specified in the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. Formative evaluations of employment and college success programs are currently underway, as well as an analysis of the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program usage and outcomes. (#4) (#5)
- **[Child Maltreatment Incidence Data Linkages \(CMI Data Linkages\)](#)**: explores how enhancing and scaling innovative data linkage practices can improve our understanding of child maltreatment incidence and related risk and protective factors. (#2)
- **[Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families](#)**: are cooperative agreements that support the development, implementation, and evaluation of primary prevention strategies to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of all families through a continuum of community-based services and supports. (#1)
- **[Definitions and Policies Related to the Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect and Related Risk](#)**: supports the creation of a database of state definitions and policies related to the surveillance of child maltreatment to address important questions about how variations in these definitions and policies are associated with child welfare intake, screening practices, substantiation decisions, service provision, and child safety and well-being. (#2)
- **[Domestic Human Trafficking and the Child Welfare Population](#)**: supports a review of the literature, examination of state policies, and design and implementation of studies to better understand domestic human trafficking in the child welfare population. A recent Report to Congress, *The Child Welfare Response to Sex Trafficking of Children*, was published in 2019. (#3) (#5)
- **[Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives: A Continuous Quality Improvement Approach in the Child Welfare System](#)**: uses a collaborative continuous learning approach to work with child welfare agencies and their system partners to identify, implement, and test strategies and interventions that can be used to improve father and paternal relative engagement. (#5)
- **[Expanding Evidence on Replicable Recovery and Reunification Interventions for Families](#)**: lays the foundation for a three-part evaluation. This first phase of the evaluation aims to compile and disseminate a synthesis on the existing body of evidence of recovery and reunification interventions that utilize coaching models in the field. It will also determine the feasibility of conducting a rigorous impact evaluation of one or more potentially replicable and scalable interventions. (#4) (#5)
- **[Judicial Decision-Making and Hearing Quality in Child Welfare](#)**: supports the design and implementation of a study or group of studies that would examine judicial decision-making during the life of a child welfare case as well as the quality of child welfare court proceedings. (#5)



- **[National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being \(NSCAW\)](#)**: is a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of the functioning and well-being, service needs, and service utilization of children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system. NSCAW examines data from first-hand reports of children, parents, and other caregivers, as well as reports from caseworkers, teachers, and administrative records data. (#3) (#5)
- **[Postadoption and Guardianship Instability for Children and Youth Who Exit Foster Care \(PAGI\)](#)**: supports a review of the literature, examination of state policies, and design and implementation of a study or studies to better understand post-permanency instability for children and youth who exit foster care through adoption or guardianship. (#5)
- **Regional Partnership Grants (RPG) to Increase the Well-Being of, and to Improve the Permanency Outcomes for, Children and Families Affected By Substance Abuse¹⁸**: is a cooperative agreement of regional partnership grant projects designed to increase well-being, improve permanency, and enhance the safety of children who are in, or at risk of, an out-of-home placement as a result of a parent's or caregiver's opioid or other substance use. (#4)
- **RPG Cross-Site Evaluation and Evaluation-Related Technical Assistance Project¹⁹**: is a rigorous national cross-site evaluation of the RPG Grant Program that provides legislatively mandated performance measurement to grantees, furnishes evaluation-related technical assistance to the grantees in order to improve the quality and rigor of their local evaluations, and supports their participation in the cross-site evaluation. (#4) (#5)
- **[Supporting Evidence Building in Child Welfare](#)**: supports an increase in the number of evidence-supported interventions for the child welfare population by conducting rigorous evaluations and supporting the field in moving toward rigorous evaluations. (#4) (#5)
- **[Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#)**: conducts an independent systematic review of research on programs and services intended to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements. The Clearinghouse was developed in accordance with the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018, as codified in Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. (#4)
- **[Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration National Study](#)**: is a national study that examined the collective experience of 23 jurisdictions approved for a Title IV-E waiver in federal fiscal years 2012–2014 in implementing their demonstrations and operating with increased fiscal flexibility. The study consisted of four data collection components: the Web-Based Survey, the Fiscal Flexibility Telephone Survey, the Measuring Well-Being Telephone Survey, and the Interim Evaluation Report Review. A supplemental outcomes report based on the final evaluation reports of the waiver demonstrations projects will be available in 2021. (#3) (#4)

¹⁸ For more details on the Regional Partnership Grants, see Discretionary Grant Program descriptions at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2019>

¹⁹ For more details on the Regional Partnership Grants, see Discretionary Grant Program descriptions at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2007>, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2012>, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2014>, and <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/discretionary-grant-awards-2019> as well as a program description at https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/files/rpg_bifold_final_508.pdf



Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF's research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with child welfare stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting the implementation and rigorous evaluation of prevention and intervention programs to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of children and families
- Collecting information on states' use of linked administrative data to enhance understanding of child maltreatment incidence and related risk
- Gathering nationally representative data about the CW workforce, including the potential influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on CW agencies and practice
- Collecting and analyzing data on permanency and stability of children's living situations (in-home, foster care, kinship care, and adoptive families) to better support the continuity and preservation of family relationships and connections
- Building the evidence of effectiveness of programs and services in improving outcomes for kinship caregivers and the children they are raising
- Examining tribally-defined program effectiveness for tribal child welfare and court processes
- Developing and disseminating products (such as webinars, toolkits, and briefs) to provide technical assistance to states and other key stakeholders that help to build evidence, strengthen practice, and inform policy
- Planning national evaluation summits and conferences to provide child welfare leaders, members of the research and evaluation community, and their partners and stakeholders with



HEAD START RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

Established in 1965, Head Start was designed to promote the school readiness of children, ages three to five, from families with low income by supporting the development of the whole child through high-quality, comprehensive services. In 1994, the Early Head Start program was established to provide these same comprehensive services to families with low income who have infants and toddlers, as well as pregnant women. Today, the ACF [Office of Head Start](#) oversees approximately 1,600 Head Start and Early Head Start grantees run by local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies throughout all 50 States, the District of Columbia, six territories, and in tribal and migrant and seasonal farm-working communities.

Nearly one million children, birth to age five, are currently enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start. Children and their families receive services through a variety of models, including center-based, family child care, and home-based (home visiting). Programs tailor their service models to the needs of the local community and to be ethnically, culturally, and linguistically responsive to the families they serve. Children's growth and development is supported through individualized early learning experiences, health and nutritional services, and supports for family well-being.

Head Start is authorized by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. In fiscal year 2019, just over \$10 billion were appropriated for Head Start and Early Head Start. ACF administers these funds through grants to local agencies and provides oversight, policy direction, guidance, technical assistance, and other supports for Head Start and Early Head Start grantees. ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, grantee monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

Past Research and Evaluation

The science of early childhood development demonstrates the importance of children's earliest experiences for long-term development and learning and highlights the potential for early care and education (ECE) programs to help close the school readiness gap observed between

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Head Start:

Reduce the proportion of Head Start preschool grantees receiving a score in the low range on any of the three domains on the basis of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS: Pre-K) - *Performance Measure 3A* ([p. 124](#))

Increase the percentage of Early Head Start children who become up-to-date during the program year on a schedule of age-appropriate preventive and primary health care, according to their state's EPSDT schedule - *Performance Measure 3B & 3.6LT* ([p. 124](#))

Increase the percentage of Head Start preschool teachers with an AA, BA, or Advanced degree in early childhood education or a related field - *Performance Measure 3C* ([p. 124](#))

Increase the percentage of Head Start preschool teachers that have a BA degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field - *Performance Measure 3D* ([p. 124](#))

Decrease under-enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, thereby increasing the number of children served per dollar - *Performance Measure 3E* ([p. 124](#))

Percentage of parents of children in Head Start preschool who report reading to child three times per week - *Performance Measure 3.7LT* ([p. 125](#))



children from families with low income and their more affluent peers. There is a large and growing body of evidence indicating high-quality ECE programs can produce meaningful improvements in children’s language, literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional development. Research further shows, however, that the quality of ECE programs varies considerably. As such, ECE research has given extensive attention to identifying the components of ECE programs that best improve children’s well-being and to effective mechanisms for enhancing quality.²⁰ For over 50 years, Head Start research has contributed to this still growing research base and provided valuable information not only for guiding program improvements in Head Start itself, but also for the larger field of ECE.

The [Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey \(FACES\) studies](#), which have collected descriptive data on Head Start programs and families since 1997, made (and continue to make) significant contributions to our understanding of Head Start program performance and how quality has improved over time; the changing population of families served by Head Start; families’ engagement in children’s learning and the importance of parents’ well-being to children’s growth; the development and well-being of children from families with low-income; and how features of program quality and familial characteristics/processes predict child outcomes. Through rigorous evaluations, Head Start examined the impact of its programs as a whole and how those impacts vary for different populations, communities, or program characteristics. Lessons from past descriptive and impact studies have guided a robust portfolio of research targeting strategies for improving program quality and child and family outcomes. Through partnerships between researchers and local programs, Head Start has developed and evaluated innovations in Head Start practice related to infant mental health, parenting, dual language learning, curricular enhancements, caregiver-child interactions, dual-generation approaches, and other topics.

Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting Head Start research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit Head Start administrators and staff
- Head Start training and technical assistance providers
- Head Start curriculum and model developers
- Children and families served by Head Start
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Institute of Education Sciences at the Department of Education (ED/IES)
- Researchers and policy experts

²⁰ Burchinal, M., et al. (2016). Quality thresholds, features, and dosage in early care and education: Secondary data analyses of child outcomes [Special issue]. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 81(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12248>; Camilli, G., et al. (2010). Meta-analysis of the effects of early education interventions on cognitive and social development. *The Teachers College Record*, 112, 579-620; Phillips, D.A., et al. (2017) *Puzzling it out: The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects*. Washington, DC: Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/puzzling-it-out-the-current-state-of-scientific-knowledge-on-pre-kindergarten-effects/>



- National organizations, such as the National Head Start Association (NHSA) and the Society for the Research on Child Development (SRCD)
- Partners in the broad array of community-based service systems that support children and families

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC), the Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC) Annual Meeting and Steering Committee, and the Network of Infant and Toddler Researchers (NiTR) Annual Meeting
- Engagement with Head Start training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as the Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation

Examples of Broad Questions

1. Who are the children and families served by Head Start and Early Head Start? How are they faring?
2. What services are provided by Head Start and Early Head Start programs? What is the quality of those services and how do they support improved outcomes for children and families?
3. How effective are Head Start and Early Head Start programs? How does their effectiveness vary by features of the program, services, children/families, or communities served?²¹
4. How can Head Start and Early Head Start services be improved? Can innovative or promising practices be implemented in Head Start and Early Head Start settings and are they effective in improving quality and/or outcomes?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question			
	#1	#2	#3	#4
American Indian/Alaskan Native FACES (AIAN FACES)	X	X		
Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL)				X
Early Head Start FACES (Baby FACES)	X	X		
Head Start and Early Head Start University Partnership Grants				X
Head Start Classroom-based Approaches and Resources for Emotion and Social Skill Promotion (CARES)				X
Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES)	X	X		
Infants and Toddlers Teacher and Caregiver Competencies (ITTCC)				X
Study of Coaching Practices in ECE Settings (SCOPE)				X
Study of Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP)		X		
Study of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS)	X	X		
Variations in the Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI)				X
We Grow Together				X

²¹ See section on [Future Directions for Research and Evaluation](#) in Head Start.



- **[American Indian/Alaskan Native FACES \(AIAN FACES\)](#)**: is a series of studies providing descriptive, nationally representative information on the characteristics, experiences, and development of Tribal Head Start preschool-aged children, their families, and the programs and staff who serve them in Region XI. (#1) (#2)
- **[Culture of Continuous Learning \(CCL\)](#)**: used the Breakthrough Series Collaborative model to test the feasibility of implementation of this model to create a culture of continuous learning in child care and Head Start programs. (#4)
- **[Early Head Start FACES \(Baby FACES\)](#)**: is a series of studies providing descriptive, nationally representative information on the characteristics, experiences, and development of Early Head Start infants, toddlers, pregnant women, their families, and the programs and staff who serve them in Regions I-X. (#1) (#2)
- **[Head Start and Early Head Start University Partnership Grants](#)**²²: is a series of grants programs in which university researchers partner with local Head Start or Early Head Start programs to test innovative strategies for improving service quality and/or child/family outcomes. Past grants programs have examined promising parenting interventions, dual-generation approaches, integrated interventions in center-based Early Head Start, and approaches for working with dual language learners. (#4)
- **[Head Start Classroom-based Approaches and Resources for Emotion and Social Skill Promotion \(CARES\)](#)**: was a large-scale, group-randomized implementation and impact evaluation of three social-emotional program enhancements within Head Start classrooms. (#4)
- **[Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey \(FACES\)](#)**: is a series of studies providing descriptive, nationally representative information on the characteristics, experiences, and development of Head Start preschool-aged children, their families, and the programs and staff who serve them in Regions I-X. (#1) (#2)
- **[Infants and Toddlers Teacher and Caregiver Competencies \(ITTCC\)](#)**: is exploring approaches to the implementation and assessment of competencies, working to build a conceptual foundation for measurement, research, and evaluation, in order to support ACF's efforts to improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers in community-based child care and Early Head Start. (#4)
- **[Study of Coaching Practices in ECE Settings \(SCOPE\)](#)**: is studying how coaching practices are implemented in ECE classrooms serving children supported by Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies or Head Start grants; how core features of coaching vary by key contextual factors; and which core coaching features are ripe for more rigorous evaluation. (#4)

²² For more details on the most recent Head Start University Partnership Grants, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/head-start-university-partnership-grants-dual-generation-approaches> and for Early Head Start University Partnership Grants, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/early-head-start-university-partnerships-building-the-evidence-base-for-infant/toddler-center-based-programs-2015-2020>. Details on all past Head Start and Early Head Start University Partnership Grants are searchable at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/topic/project-index>.



- [**Study of Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships \(EHS-CCP\)**](#): is a national descriptive study of the characteristics of ACF’s 2015 EHS-CCP grantees; their efforts to improve the availability and quality of center-based and family child care services for infants, toddlers, and their families; and the sustainability of partnerships over time. (#2)
- [**Study of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start \(MSHS\)**](#): was a descriptive, nationally representative study on the characteristics, experiences, and development of the children (birth through age five) and their migrant and seasonal farm-working families, and the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs and staff who serve them. (#1) (#2)
- [**Variations in the Implementation of Quality Interventions \(VIQI\)**](#): is an experimental study of how changes in ECE classroom quality relate to changes in preschool-aged children’s school readiness outcomes. (#4)
- [**We Grow Together**](#): is a study to develop and test a professional development model aimed at improving teachers’ responsiveness and support for infant/toddler development, based on the Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions for Infants and Toddlers (Q-CCIT) measure. (#4)

Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF’s research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with Head Start stakeholders. ACF has previously completed studies on the effectiveness of Head Start and Early Head Start programs (Broad Question #3) but is not currently supporting research on this topic. ACF plans to continue this line of inquiry by exploring and testing the effectiveness of strategies informed by behavioral science in the context of Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs in upcoming research and evaluation efforts.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Gathering data on the sustainability of EHS-child care partnerships over time and examining factors that predict sustained partnerships
- Exploring the implementation of strategies to support improved access to high quality infant-toddler care in EHS-Child Care partnerships
- Conducting secondary analyses to examine the quality of EHS-child care partnership classrooms
- Testing the effects of changes in quality of ECE classroom practices on preschool children’s outcomes
- Examining the processes through which Head Start programs respond to families’ needs and provide family support services
- Gathering data on Head Start’s provision of services for children with disabilities and the role of the Head Start Disabilities Coordinator
- Developing measurement strategies for understanding how effective leaders can improve quality experiences for children in early care and education settings
- Designing a study to examine recruitment, selection, enrollment, and retention of eligible families in Head Start programs



- Conducting a series of case studies to examine how the conversion of enrollment slots from Head Start to Early Head Start supports community needs
- Conducting secondary analyses to assess the drivers of workforce turnover in early care and education
- Examining the challenges faced by Head Start/Early Head Start programs and the families they serve during the COVID-19 pandemic, how programs have responded to those challenges, and the extent to which programs are able to support families and meet their needs related to COVID-19



HEALTH PROFESSION OPPORTUNITY GRANTS RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

ACF's [Office of Family Assistance](#) administers the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), which provide education and training to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other individuals with low income for occupations in the health care field that pay well and are expected to experience labor shortages or be in high demand.

In 2010, 32 organizations across 23 states received the first round of HPOG grant awards (HPOG 1.0) to carry out five-year programs in their areas. In 2015, ACF awarded a second round of HPOG grants (HPOG 2.0) to 32 organizations located across 21 states for a new five-year period. This second round of grant awards has since been extended an additional 12 months, ending September 2021. Each round of grants included five Tribal grantees. HPOG target skills and competencies demanded by the healthcare industry; support clearly defined career pathways; result in an employer- or industry-recognized certificate or degree; combine supportive services with education and training services to help participants overcome barriers to employment; and provide services at times and locations that are easily accessible to targeted populations.

HPOG, an \$85 million discretionary grant program, is authorized by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 and extended by subsequent legislation. ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

Past Research and Evaluation

There is a large body of research on education and training interventions for individuals with low income which seek to build individuals' skills and/or human capital to help them qualify for higher paying or more stable jobs. Among the earliest studies was ACF's [National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies \(1989-2002\)](#), which directly compared two approaches—mandatory education-or-training-first and mandatory job-search-first. It found that both strategies increased individuals' earnings, but the gains were not long-lasting. However, the training provided under the education-or-training-first approach was primarily basic education, not occupational skills training.²³ Since then, the field has shifted to focusing on the provision of occupational skills training aligned with local employer demand. In particular, the career pathways framework has attracted increasing attention as a promising approach to post-secondary education

²³ Fishman, M., et al. (2020). *Employment and Training Programs Serving Low-Income Populations: Next Steps for Research* (OPRE Report #2020-72). Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/employment-and-training-programs-serving-low-income-populations-next-steps-for-research>



and training for adults with low income and educational attainment. Its central feature is instruction organized as a series of manageable and well-articulated steps accompanied by strong supports and connections to employment.

Beginning in 2007, with the launch of the [Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education \(PACE\) project](#) and continuing with the [evaluations of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) Program](#), OPRE has developed a robust portfolio of research on the career pathways approach. OPRE uses a multi-pronged research and evaluation strategy to assess the success of the HPOG Program. The strategy aims to provide information on program implementation, systems change, participant outcomes, impacts, and costs and benefits.

Promising findings are emerging regarding the effectiveness of HPOG. An experimental impact evaluation of HPOG 1.0 found that in both the short- and intermediate-term (15 months and three years after random assignment, respectively), HPOG produced significant, positive impacts on educational progress, employment in the healthcare sector, and access to employer-provided health insurance. In the intermediate term, HPOG also produced significant, positive impacts on career progress, defined as a combination of training completion and earnings growth and general employment. HPOG produced a small, positive impact on quarterly earnings in the short-term but did not produce an impact on quarterly earnings at the intermediate-term follow-up. Subgroup analyses show that some outcomes are related to participants' baseline characteristics. For example, at the short-term follow-up, HPOG had larger impacts on educational progress for those who were receiving TANF or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) at baseline, relative to those who were not receiving any public assistance at baseline. In contrast, labor market gains have accrued only to those who had traits at baseline commonly associated with labor market success, such as higher levels of education or fewer barriers to school or work.²⁴

An analysis of HPOG 1.0's long-term impacts, assessed at six years after random assignment, is underway. Evaluations of the HPOG 2.0 grants are also in progress, including an impact evaluation, descriptive evaluation (which includes implementation, outcomes, and systems studies), and cost-benefit analysis of the non-tribal grantees; and an implementation and outcomes study of the tribal grantees.

²⁴ Peck, L. R., et al. (2019). *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 1.0) Impact Study: Three-Year Impacts Report* (OPRE Report #2019-114). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/health-profession-opportunity-grants-hpog-10-impact-study-three-year-impacts-report>



Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting HPOG research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit TANF, other human services, and workforce development administrators and staff
- HPOG technical assistance providers
- Institutions that operate or partner with HPOG programs including state entities, local Workforce Investment Boards, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, institutions of higher education, tribal colleges and universities, community-based organizations, and employers
- HPOG program participants and their families
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Chief Evaluation Office at the Department of Labor (DOL/CEO), the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the Department of Labor (DOL/ODEP), the Institute of Education Sciences at the Department of Education (ED/IES), the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the Department of Education (ED/OCTAE), the Food and Nutrition Service at the Department of Agriculture (USDA/FNS), and the Office of Policy Development and Research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD/PD&R)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as the American Public Human Services Association
- Partners in research and evaluation on education and training interventions for individuals with low income and career pathways programs

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS), the National Association of Welfare Research and Statistics (NAWRS) conference, Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) conference, Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE) conference, American Evaluation Association (AEA) conference, ACF TANF and Tribal TANF Summits, National Indian Health Board (NIHB) Tribal Public Health Summit, and National Rural Health Association (NRHA) conference
- HPOG Grantee Annual Meeting and Grantee Roundtables
- Engagement with TANF technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies



- Interagency collaborations, such as the Interagency Working Group on Career Pathways; the Federal Employment, Training, and Education Working Group (FETE); and the Adult and Career Education (ACE) Meeting
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as the Family Self-Sufficiency Research Technical Working Group, the ACF Tribal Advisory Committee, and the Secretary’s Tribal Advisory Council

Examples of Broad Questions

1. What are the characteristics of and outputs and outcomes for HPOG participants?
2. How are HPOG programs designed and implemented?
3. What impacts do HPOG programs have on the outcomes of participants and their families? To what extent do impacts vary across selected subpopulations? What are the impact drivers of HPOG?
4. To what extent do the education and employment experiences of HPOG participants over time suggest that they are following a career pathway?
5. What changes to the service delivery system are associated with HPOG program implementation?
6. Do the benefits resulting from HPOG/PACE programs exceed the costs of those programs?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question					
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
HPOG 1.0 Research and Evaluation Activities						
HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcomes Project	X	X				
HPOG National Implementation Evaluation	X	X			X	
HPOG Impact Study			X			
Evaluation of Tribal HPOG	X	X				
Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education		X	X			
Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes Study			X	X		X
Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes Study			X	X		X
Career Pathways Secondary Analysis Grants	X	X		X		
HPOG 2.0 Research and Evaluation Activities						
HPOG 2.0 Evaluation and System Design	X	X		X		
HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation	X	X	X	X	X	X
HPOG 2.0 Tribal Evaluation	X	X				
HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants	X	X		X		

HPOG 1.0 Research and Evaluation Activities

- [HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcomes Project](#): provided recommendations for the design of an evaluation to assess implementation, systems change, and outcomes of the non-tribal HPOG 1.0 programs. The project also built and maintained the HPOG Performance Reporting System, a web-based management information system, to track grantee progress for program management and to record grantee and participant data for use in HPOG 1.0 evaluations. (#1) (#2)



- **[HPOG National Implementation Evaluation \(HPOG NIE\)](#)**: carried out an in-depth examination of the non-tribal HPOG 1.0 programs' design and implementation, a systems analysis of networks created by the programs, and an analysis of program outputs and outcomes. (#1) (#2) (#5)
- **[HPOG Impact Study](#)**: used an experimental design to examine the short-term impacts of HPOG 1.0 on participants' educational and economic outcomes at about 15 months after random assignment. The study included 42 local HPOG programs implemented by 23 non-tribal HPOG 1.0 grantees. In 19 of the 42 programs, the evaluation also conducted a three-armed test to analyze the impacts of three specific program enhancements—emergency assistance, non-cash incentives, and facilitated peer support. Additionally, the evaluation used non-experimental methods to examine the relative contributions of various program characteristics. (#3)
- **[Evaluation of Tribal HPOG](#)**: conducted a comprehensive implementation and outcomes study of the five Tribal HPOG 1.0 grantees. (#1) (#2)
- **[Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education \(PACE\)](#)**: conducted implementation and impact evaluations of nine innovative career pathways programs around the country, including three HPOG 1.0 grantees. The project assessed program implementation and short-term impacts at 15-18 months after random assignment. (#2) (#3)
- **[Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes Study](#)**: is rigorously evaluating the intermediate impacts (those assessed at about 36 months after random assignment) of the programs first studied in the HPOG Impact Study and PACE project on participants' educational progress, labor market outcomes, and family well-being. The study will also conduct cost benefit analyses for selected PACE programs. (#3) (#4) (#6)
- **[Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes Study](#)**: is rigorously evaluating the long-term impacts (those assessed at about 72 months after random assignment) of the programs first studied in the HPOG Impact Study and PACE project on participants' educational progress, labor market outcomes, and family well-being. (#3) (#4) (#6)
- **[Career Pathways Secondary Analysis Grants](#)**: are supporting rigorous, policy-relevant secondary analysis of data collected through PACE, the HPOG NIE, and the HPOG Impact Study to add to the body of knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of career pathways programs. (#1) (#2) (#4)

HPOG 2.0 Research and Evaluation Activities

- **[HPOG 2.0 Evaluation and System Design](#)**: provided recommendations for the design of an evaluation to assess the implementation, outcomes, systems change, and impacts of HPOG 2.0 programs. The project also built and provides ongoing support for the HPOG Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES), a web-based management information system, to track grantee progress for program management and to record grantee and participant data for use in HPOG 2.0 evaluations. The project uses PAGES data to develop annual reports of program and participant characteristics and outcomes. (#1) (#2) (#4)



- **HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation:** is a rigorous evaluation of the non-tribal HPOG 2.0 programs that includes three key components: (1) an impact evaluation, which is using an experimental design to assess the impacts of the HPOG 2.0 programs; (2) a descriptive evaluation, which includes implementation, systems change, and outcomes studies; and (3) a cost-benefit analysis to assess the costs and benefits of a standard HPOG 2.0 program. (#1) (#2) (#3) (#4) (#5) (#6)
- **HPOG 2.0 Tribal Evaluation:** is a comprehensive implementation and outcomes study of the Tribal HPOG 2.0 programs. The evaluation is grounded in culturally appropriate practices and using a mixed-methods approach to answer research questions focused on the Tribal HPOG 2.0 programs' structure, processes, and outcomes. (#1) (#2)
- **HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants:** are funding university research teams that partner with HPOG 2.0 program grantees to conduct research and evaluation studies focused on questions relevant to HPOG program goals and objectives and that benefit the broader employment and self-sufficiency research field. (#1) (#2) (#4)

Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF's research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with HPOG stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Analyzing the long-term impacts of PACE and HPOG 1.0 programs on participants' educational progress, labor market outcomes, and family well-being
- Analyzing the short-, intermediate-, and long-term impacts of HPOG 2.0 programs on participants' educational progress, labor market outcomes, and family well-being
- Analyzing HPOG 2.0 programs' implementation, systems change, and participant outcomes
- Analyzing participants' perspectives on HPOG 2.0 programs, healthcare training, support services, and career pathways
- Assessing the costs and benefits of a standard HPOG 2.0 program
- Synthesizing findings across programs participating in PACE and/or HPOG evaluations
- Continued secondary analysis of data collected through PACE and previous and currently ongoing HPOG evaluations
- Collecting information on how the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery affect HPOG 2.0 program implementation and service delivery, and individuals' participation in healthcare training and employment
- Analyzing secondary and publicly available data to assess how COVID-19 has changed the demand for healthcare workers and their wages more broadly



HEALTHY MARRIAGE AND RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) program is part of ACF's strategy to improve the long-term well-being of children and families. ACF's [Office of Family Assistance](#) funds grants for the purpose of carrying out healthy marriage promotion activities and activities promoting responsible fatherhood. Healthy marriage promotion activities include:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting
- Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement
- Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage
- Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in communities that are at risk
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs

Activities promoting responsible fatherhood include:

- Activities to promote marriage or sustain marriage
- Activities to promote responsible parenting
- Activities to foster economic stability

HMRF is a \$150 million discretionary grant program originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood:

(For adult-serving programs)
Increase the proportion of participants who, at program exit, express positive attitudes towards marriage - *Performance Measure 22F* ([p. 361](#))

(For adult-serving programs)
Increase the proportion of married couples who, at program exit, view their marriage as lifelong - *Performance Measure 22G* ([p. 362](#))

(For youth-serving programs)
Increase the proportion of youth who express attitudes supporting of the success sequence - *Performance Measure 22H* ([p. 362](#))



Past Research and Evaluation

Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE)

A large body of research has shown that, on average, children raised in stable, two-parent families have better outcomes on a range of measures, even into adulthood.^{25,26,27,28} Research has also identified dimensions of couples' relationship functioning (e.g., positive communication, effective conflict management, problem solving, etc.) that could be modified or enhanced through relationship- focused educational programming.²⁹ Some evaluations have found that such programming can produce improvement in multiple dimensions of relationship quality and reductions in break-up or divorce.^{30,31} While early research focused primarily on middle-class, white couples who were engaged or married³², ACF has supported research on healthy marriage and relationship education for more diverse populations. Past ACF research includes the completion of three large scale randomized controlled trials of healthy marriage and relationship education programs (the [Supporting Healthy Marriages](#), [Building Strong Families](#), and [Parents and Children Together](#) evaluations) and one quasi-experimental trial of healthy marriage community initiatives (the [Community Healthy Marriages Initiatives](#) evaluation).

Responsible Fatherhood (RF)

In recent decades, efforts to support and promote responsible fatherhood have been spurred by research that shows a link between supportive fathering and positive child outcomes.^{33,34,35} Responsible fatherhood programs aim to provide resources and supports to fathers around healthy marriage and relationships, parenting, and economic stability. Much of the early research in the area of fatherhood had focused on fathers with middle-income or who were divorced. The

²⁵ Waldfogel, J., Craigie, T., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2010). Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing. *Future Child*, 20(2), 87-112. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ901824.pdf>

²⁶ Lee, D., & McLanahan, S. (2015). Family structure transitions and child development: instability, selection, and population heterogeneity. *American Sociological Review*, 80(4), 738-763. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0003122415592129>

²⁷ Wu, L., & Martinson, B. (1993). Family structure and the risk of premarital birth. *American Sociological Review*, 58(2), 210-232. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095967>

²⁸ Biglan, A., Flay B. R., Embry, D. D., & Sandler, I. N. (2012). The Critical Role of Nurturing Environments for Promoting Human Well-Being. *American Psychologist*, 67(4), 257-271. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026796>

²⁹ Blanchard, V. L., et al. (2009). Investigating the Effects of Marriage and Relationship Education on Couples' Communication Skills: A Meta-Analytic Study. *Journal of Family Psychology* 23(2), 203-214. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015211>

³⁰ Hawkins, A. J., et al. (2008). Does Marriage and Relationship Education Work? A Meta-Analytic Study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 76(5), 723-734. <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2008-13625-002.pdf>

³¹ Moore, Q., Avellar, S., Patnaik, A., Covington, R., & Wu, A. (2018). Parents and Children Together: Effects of Two Healthy Marriage Programs for Low-Income Couples (OPRE Report #2018-58). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/parents-and-children-together-effects-of-two-healthy-marriage-programs-for-low-income-couples>

³² Johnson, M. D. (2012). Healthy marriage initiatives: On the need for empiricism in policy implementation. *American Psychologist*, 67(4), 296-308. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0027743>

³³ Adamsons, K. & Johnson, S. K. (2013). An Updated and Expanded Meta-Analysis of Nonresident Fathering and Child Well-Being. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(4), 589-599. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0033786>

³⁴ Cabrera, N.J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11, 208-213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888690701762100>

³⁵ Yoder, J.R., Brisson, D., & Lopez, A. (2016). Moving Beyond Fatherhood Involvement: The Association Between Father-Child Relationship Quality and Youth Delinquency Trajectories. *Family Relations*, 65(3), 462-476. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12197>



field of research on responsible fatherhood with men with low incomes or who have never married is growing. Though the field can draw from some of the past research, the unique circumstances of men with low-income, particularly fathers who do not reside with their children, necessitate a distinct line of inquiry. ACF has completed one large scale randomized controlled trial of responsible fatherhood programs as part of the Parents and Children Together evaluation.

Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting HMRF research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit HMRF administrators and staff
- HMRF training and technical assistance providers
- HMRF curriculum or model developers
- Populations served by HMRF programs, including adult couples, adult individuals, youth of high school age, fathers involved in the justice system, and fathers in communities
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the National Institutes of Justice at the Department of Justice (DOJ/NIJ), and the Department of Labor (DOL)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, resource centers, and clearinghouses, such as the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriages and Families and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse
- Partners in the fields of child welfare, child support and enforcement, domestic violence prevention and intervention, and the criminal justice system

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the National Fatherhood Summit and other national conferences that include an emphasis on HMRF programs, such as the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS)
- HMRF Grantee Conference
- Engagement with HMRF training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as the [Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation \(FRAMING\) Research Project](#), which is working to understand how stakeholders make use of existing research, and is identifying gaps in the knowledge base related to HMRF programs



Examples of Broad Questions

1. Who do HMRF programs serve and how are HMRF programs implemented?
2. How can HMRF programs use data and evidence to strengthen their program implementation in order to improve outcomes?
3. How can HMRF programs better serve specific sub-populations, including:
 - a. Youth and young adults
 - b. Non-resident fathers
 - c. Fathers involved with the justice system
 - d. Adults participating in healthy marriage programs as individuals
 - e. Adults and youth experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) or teen dating violence?
 - f. Families in rural contexts
4. How do HMRF programs affect marriage/relationship, parenting, and economic stability outcomes for program participants and how can these effects be measured?
5. How do HMRF programs affect the well-being of program participant's children and how can these effects be measured?
6. What strategies are most effective for recruiting, engaging, and retaining participants in HMRF programs?



Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question										
	#1	#2	#3a	#3b	#3c	#3d	#3e	#3f	#4	#5	#6
Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) Evaluation	X	X		X	X				X	X	X
Coparenting and Healthy Relationship And Marriage Education for Dads (CHaRMED)	X			X							
Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives: A Continuous Quality Improvement Approach in the Child Welfare System				X							
Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site (FaMLE Cross-Site)	X	X									
Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research)										X	
HMRP Compliance Assessment and Performance (CAPstone) Grantee Review		X									
Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts								X			
Parents and Children Together (PACT)		X			X				X		
Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence when Engaging Dads (PAIVED)	X						X				
Responding to Intimate Violence in Relationship Programs (RIViR)	X						X				
Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth (SARHM)			X								
Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS)	X	X	X			X			X	X	X
Strengthening the Implementation of Marriage and Relationship Programs (SIMR)		X									X
Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (SIRF)		X									X

- **[Building Bridges and Bonds \(B3\) Evaluation](#)**: is a rigorous evaluation that includes six fatherhood programs. B3 is designed to test innovative, evidence-informed programming for fathers, with the goal of building practical evidence that can be used to improve services. (#1) (#2) (#3b) (#3c) (#4) (#5) (#6)
- **[Coparenting and Healthy Relationship And Marriage Education for Dads \(CHaRMED\)](#)**: is an evaluation to use existing data, focus groups with fathers, and semi-structured interviews with RF program staff partners, curriculum developers, and fathers to better understand how RF programs support healthy marriages/relationships and coparenting and inform the RF field about potential future directions in HMRE and coparenting programming. (#1) (#3b)



- [Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives: A Continuous Quality Improvement Approach in the Child Welfare System](#): is a study of the use of a collaborative continuous quality improvement approach to identify, implement, and test strategies and interventions to engage fathers and paternal relatives of children involved in the child welfare system. (#3b)
- [Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site \(FaMLE Cross-Site\)](#): is a project to support HMRF grantees through fostering high-quality data collection, strengthening grantee-led local evaluations, and conducting cross-site performance measures analysis. (#1) FaMLE Cross-Site supports HMRF grantees and cross-grantee learning through:
 - **Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management (nFORM) development, maintenance, and use:** nFORM is a program-specific management information system that HMRF grantees and ACF staff use to collect, track, and report data on HMRF program performance metrics. (#2)
 - **Local evaluation technical assistance:** providing technical assistance to HMRF grantees and independent evaluators to conduct grantee-specific evaluations that answer questions most relevant to the program. (#2)
 - **Continuous quality improvement technical assistance:** providing technical assistance to HMRF grantees to use their nFORM data to identify, describe, and analyze strengths and problems, then test, implement, learn from, and revise solutions. (#2)
 - **Analysis and dissemination of cross-grantee data:** to help researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and other stakeholders understand program services, participants, and implementation. (#2)
- [Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research \(FRAMING Research\)](#): is a project to summarize gaps in current knowledge and existing approaches in HMRF programs, synthesize implications for HMRF learning, and describe implications of associated topics and areas for HMRF (e.g., adult learning, implementation science, employment services, substance use and mental health services, etc.) (#5)
- **HMRF Compliance Assessment and Performance (CAPstone) Grantee Review:** is a process by which federal staff and technical assistance providers collaboratively review nFORM data and other grantee documents summarizing grant activities to assess grantee progress toward and achievement in meeting programmatic, data, evaluation, and implementation goals. The results of the CAPstone process guide federal directives and future technical assistance. (#2)
- [Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts](#): is a study to provide a rich description of current and past human services programs in rural contexts; determine the unmet need for human services in those communities; and identify opportunities for strengthening the capacity of human services to promote the economic and social well-being of individuals, families, and communities in rural contexts (#3f)
- [Parents and Children Together \(PACT\) Evaluation](#): was a multiple-component evaluation to assess both implementation processes and measurable impacts of responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage relationship education programs. (#4)



- **Parents and Children Together (PACT) Pathways to Outcomes substudy:** a substudy to visually depict evidence-informed hypotheses about how RF and HM program activities may contribute to intended outcomes, using results from rigorous evaluations, discussions with researchers and practitioners, and a targeted literature search. (#2)
- **Trauma-Informed Approaches for Serving Justice-Involved Parents substudy:** a PACT substudy to understand how RF grantees serving incarcerated and recently released fathers incorporate a trauma-informed approach into their services, and how grantees can strengthen this perspective in their programming. (#3c)
- **[Preventing and Addressing Intimate Violence when Engaging Dads \(PAIVED\)](#):** is a study that aims to outline approaches that RF programs could take to address and contribute to the prevention of IPV among fathers using information gathered from RF grantee fatherhood programs, relevant curricula and discussion with curriculum developers, and interviews and program observations with RF program and partner organization staff. (#1) (#3e)
- **[Responding to Intimate Violence in Relationship Programs \(RIViR\)](#):** is a study to examine how IPV and teen dating violence assessment tools and approaches work for identifying HMRE program participants who are experiencing violence so that they can be referred for further assessment and services (#1) (#3e)
- **[Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth \(SARHM\)](#):** is a study to use a self-regulation framework and formative rapid-cycle approaches to increase the impact of HMRE programs for youth by identifying, developing, and evaluating co-regulation focused training resources for staff who implement youth HMRE programs. (#3a)
- **[Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services \(STREAMS\)](#):** is a large multi-site random assignment impact and process evaluation of HMRE programs serving adults and youth, designed to answer multiple practice-relevant questions regarding the effectiveness of specific programming and curricula. STREAMS will emphasize program improvement and answering questions of particular policy relevance, with a focus on outcomes for adult individuals, adult couples, and youth populations served by HMRE programs at five sites across the country. (#1) (#2) (#3d) (#4) (#5) (#6)
 - **STREAMS youth substudy:** a substudy to use rapid learning approaches to identify and test facilitator training and coaching strategies for HMRE facilitators of programs for youth. (#3a)
- **[Strengthening the Implementation of Marriage and Relationship Programs \(SIMR\)](#):** is a multi-site study that aims to 1) identify and test promising practices for addressing critical implementation challenges in healthy marriage and relationship education programs using a rapid learning approach and 2) support grantee-led local evaluations. (#2) (#6)
- **[Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs \(SIRF\)](#):** is a multi-site study that aims to 1) identify and test promising practices for addressing critical implementation challenges in responsible fatherhood programs using a rapid learning approach and 2) support grantee-led local evaluations. (#2) (#6)



Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF's research and evaluation activity in this area, including engagement with the three new HMRF grant programs that ACF has forecast for FY21: Adult HMRE programs; Adult Responsible Fatherhood programs; and HMRE, parenting, and job and career advancement programs for youth. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with HMRF stakeholders.

For this portfolio, the Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research) project—which is working to summarize gaps in current knowledge and existing approaches in HMRF programs, synthesize implications for HMRF learning, and describe implications of associated topics and areas for HMRF—will be particularly useful for guiding future directions for research and evaluation activities.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Collecting and analyzing longer-term follow up data from adult individuals and youth participating in HMRE programs
- Conducting rapid cycle tests of implementation approaches in HMRE and RF programs
- Conducting case studies and interviews to provide a rich description of human services programs (including HMRE and RF) in rural contexts
- Conducting a case study of an HMRE program's transition from in-person workshop sessions to all virtual content due to the COVID-19 pandemic



HOME VISITING RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

Home visiting is a service delivery strategy that aims to support the healthy development and well-being of children and families. While each home visiting model has its unique aspects, in general, home visiting involves three main intervention activities conducted through one-on-one interactions between home visitors and families: assessing family needs, educating and supporting parents, and referring families to needed services in the community. Early childhood home visiting programs aim to improve a wide range of outcomes including maternal health, child health and development, child maltreatment prevention, and family economic self-sufficiency.

The federal investment in home visiting – and related research and evaluation – has greatly expanded through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, which was established in 2010. The MIECHV Program facilitates collaboration and partnership at the federal, state, and community levels to improve the health and well-being of children who are at risk, through evidence-based, voluntary home visiting programs. MIECHV-funded home visiting programs reach pregnant women, expectant fathers, and parents and caregivers of young children from birth through kindergarten entry. Through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Congress appropriated \$400 million per year to the MIECHV program, through fiscal year 2022.

HRSA's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measure related to Home Visiting:

Number and percent of grantees that meet benchmark area data requirements for demonstrating improvement - *Performance Measure 37.2* (p. 232)

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) administers [MIECHV](#) in collaboration with ACF. HRSA oversees the state and territory MIECHV Program, which provides grants to states, territories, and eligible non-profit organizations to develop and implement statewide home visiting programs. ACF oversees the Tribal MIECHV program, which provides grants to tribes, tribal organizations, and Urban Indian Organizations to develop, implement, and evaluate home visiting programs in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

In collaboration with HRSA and with ACF's Tribal MIECHV program, ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation manages and partners on numerous evaluation activities related to MIECHV and home visiting.³⁶ ACF and HRSA worked together to develop, and continues to collaboratively update the MIECHV Learning Agenda, which includes the research and evaluation activities mentioned below as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

Past Research and Evaluation

³⁶ As per the authorizing statute, the MIECHV Program is engaged in a continuous program of research and evaluation using the 3% of appropriated funds set aside for research, evaluation, and corrective action TA.



The home visiting field has engaged in research and evaluation for decades, generating a rich literature on the effects of home visiting. Studies have found home visiting impacts on child development, school readiness, family economic self-sufficiency, maternal health, reductions in child maltreatment, child health, positive parenting practices, juvenile delinquency, family violence, and crime.³⁷ While effects have varied across studies, overall the research indicates that home visiting has had modest benefits for families on average.^{38,39} However, there are still significant gaps in our understanding – and still more to learn if we want to keep improving the effectiveness and efficiency of services.

For instance, evaluations of home visiting prior to 2015 rarely collected detailed information on the services provided to families, resulting in a lack of information on what services are actually delivered and how. This lack of implementation information makes it difficult to know whether impacts on particular outcomes of interest are associated with implementation or features of the home visiting model.⁴⁰ Most studies also tend to evaluate single models, so little is known about aspects of home visiting that may be important across models. Most studies have generally included relatively small samples, making it difficult to examine impacts for subgroups of families or examine differences between local programs.⁴¹ Finally, there are also gaps in our understanding of the home visiting workforce and the infrastructure needed to support effective home visiting programs and services.⁴²

Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting home visiting research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HRSA, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

³⁷ Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness Review (HomVEE)*. <https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/outcomes>

³⁸ Michalopoulos, C., Faucetta, K., Hill, C. J., Portilla, X. A., Burrell, L., Lee, H., Duggan, A., & Knox, V. (2019). *Impacts on Family Outcomes of Evidence-Based Early Childhood Home Visiting: Results from the Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation* (OPRE Report #2019-07). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/impacts-family-outcomes-evidence-based-early-childhood-home-visiting-results-mother-infant-home-visiting-program-evaluation>

³⁹ Filene, J. H., Kaminski, J. W., Valle, L. A., & Cachat, P. (2013). Components Associated with Home Visiting Program Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis. *Pediatrics*, 132(2), S100-S109. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-1021H>

⁴⁰ Duggan, A., Portilla, X. A., Filene, J. H., Crowne, S. S., Hill, C. J., Lee, H., & Knox, V. (2018). *Implementation of Evidence-Based Early Childhood Home Visiting: Results from the Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation* (OPRE Report #2018-76A). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/implementation-evidence-based-early-childhood-home-visiting-results-mother-infant-home-visiting-program-evaluation>

⁴¹ Michalopoulos, C., Faucetta, K., Hill, C. J., Portilla, X. A., Burrell, L., Lee, H., Duggan, A., & Knox, V. (2019). *Impacts on Family Outcomes of Evidence-Based Early Childhood Home Visiting: Results from the Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation* (OPRE Report #2019-07). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/impacts-family-outcomes-evidence-based-early-childhood-home-visiting-results-mother-infant-home-visiting-program-evaluation>

⁴² Sandstrom, H., Benatar, S., Peters, R., Genua, D., Coffey, A., Lou, C., Adelstein, S., & Greenberg E. (2020). *Home Visiting Career Trajectories: Final Report* (OPRE Report #2020-11). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/home-visiting-career-trajectories>



Who

- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit home visiting administrators and staff
- Home visiting training and technical assistance providers
- Home visiting model developers
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as the National Alliance of Home Visiting Models, the Association of State and Tribal Home Visiting Initiatives, the Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative, and the Home Visiting Network Advisory Committee
- Partners in other health and human services programs, such as early care and education, child development, health care, child welfare, family self-sufficiency, family violence prevention, mental health, and substance use prevention and treatment

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the National Home Visiting Summit, the National Alliance of Home Visiting Models meetings, the Home Visiting Network Advisory Committee meetings, the Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative Annual Meeting, and other national conferences for early childhood policy and practice
- MIECHV All Grantee Meeting
- Engagement with home visiting training and technical assistance networks
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as requests for comment through the Federal Register and the Secretary's Advisory Committee on the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program Evaluation

Examples of Broad Questions

1. Who is participating in MIECHV-funded programs and how are they faring?
2. How are MIECHV-funded home visiting programs being implemented, and what can be done to improve implementation?
3. Does MIECHV help participants (i.e., are participants better off than nonparticipants) overall and are there differences in impacts for subgroups?
4. What is the relationship between program implementation and child and family outcomes?
5. What is the evidence of effectiveness for home visiting models?
6. How can MIECHV support capacity building in the home visiting field around research and evidence?



Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question					
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Approaches to Father Engagement and Fathers' Experiences in Home Visiting Programs (Fathers in Home Visiting)		X				
Assessment and Mapping of Community Connections in Home Visiting (AMC-HV)		X				
Family-Level Assessment and State of Home Visiting (FLASH-V)	X	X				
Home Visiting Career Trajectories (HVCT)	X	X				
Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) Review		X			X	
Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts (HSPRC)	X	X				
The Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation (MIHOPE)	X	X	X	X		
The Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal MIECHV (MUSE)	X	X				
Touchpoints for Addressing Substance Abuse in Home Visiting (Touchpoints)		X			X	
Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC)						X
Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute (TEI)						X

- **[Approaches to Father Engagement and Fathers' Experiences in Home Visiting Programs \(Fathers in Home Visiting\)](#)**: described (1) approaches that home visiting programs use to engage fathers, (2) challenges staff face in doing this work and strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and (3) benefits of fathers' participation in home visiting from both the perspective of the fathers and the program staff. (#2)
- **[Assessment and Mapping of Community Connections in Home Visiting \(AMC-HV\)](#)**: designed a prototype for a tool to enhance home visiting stakeholders' understanding of the relationships between home visiting programs and other community service providers, such as those offering mental health services, child care, substance use services, etc. (#2)
- **[Family-Level Assessment and State of Home Visiting \(FLASH-V\)](#)**: is examining how families are selected to receive home visiting services in MIECHV-funded home visiting programs, and how programs at capacity decide to whom to offer available openings. (#1) (#2)
- **[Home Visiting Career Trajectories \(HVCT\)](#)**: describes the early childhood home visiting workforce, jobs, and career pathways, including how programs recruit and retain staff and the opportunities and challenges that exist for professional development and training of home visiting program staff. (#1) (#2)
- **[Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness \(HomVEE\) Review](#)**: is a transparent, systematic review of the evidence of effectiveness of home visiting program models serving pregnant women and young children birth to age 5. (#2) (#5)
- **[Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts \(HSPRC\)](#)**: is identifying opportunities for strengthening the capacity of human services programs to promote the economic and social well-being of individuals, families, and communities in rural contexts. It includes all human services programs within HHS, with a particular focus on Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Health Professions Opportunity Grants (HPOG), and MIECHV programs. (#1) (#2)



- **[The Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation \(MIHOPE\)](#)**: is the legislatively mandated evaluation of MIECHV. MIHOPE examined the implementation of MIECHV-funded programs and is examining effects of MIECHV-funded programs on a wide array of child and family outcomes (including maternal health, family economic self-sufficiency, parenting, child maltreatment, child health, and child development) at multiple points in time. (#1) (#2) (#3) (#4)
- **[The Multi-Site Implementation Evaluation of Tribal MIECHV \(MUSE\)](#)**: is a mixed-methods, multi-site evaluation that is building the knowledge base regarding implementation of home visiting in tribal communities by exploring how program planning and implementation relate to quality of services and near-term outcomes. (#1) (#2)
- **[Touchpoints for Addressing Substance Abuse in Home Visiting \(Touchpoints\)](#)**: is examining how home visiting programs engage and support families around prevention, treatment, and recovery from substance use issues. (#2) (#5)
- **[Tribal Early Childhood Research Center \(TRC\)](#)**: Through partnerships with Tribal MIECHV, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care practitioners and researchers, the TRC works to advance research into young children’s development and early childhood programs and to facilitate the translation of research findings to inform early childhood practice with American Indian and Alaska Native children and families. (#6)
- **[Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute \(TEI\)](#)**: provides technical assistance to promote rigorous and relevant performance measurement, data management, continuous quality improvement (CQI), and evaluation activities in the Tribal MIECHV Program. (#6)



Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF's research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with home visiting stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Completing Kindergarten follow-up data collection (surveys, administrative data, and direct assessments of children and families) with children and families participating in MIHOPE
- Conducting surveys and interviews to (1) learn about the impact of COVID-19 on families residing in communities that are at risk and are typically served by MIECHV, (2) inform ACF's and HRSA's continued response during the pandemic to the needs of the populations they serve, and (3) provide context for analyses of the MIHOPE Kindergarten follow-up data
- Developing conceptual models and reviewing current research, measures, and practice in (1) professional well-being and (2) reflective supervision to advance understanding of how to support and strengthen the early childhood home visiting workforce
- Conducting additional analyses of quantitative survey data on topics related to the home visiting workforce, such as training needs, indicators of professional well-being, program management practices, and caseload size



WELFARE AND FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Overview

ACF's [Office of Family Assistance](#) administers the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Established by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, the TANF block grant provides funds to States, eligible territories, and tribes, which decide on the design of the program, the type and amount of assistance payments to families, and the range of other services to be provided. The law also authorized funding for evaluation and research efforts to test the effectiveness of State innovations and demonstrations in promoting economic self-sufficiency and family well-being. ACF supports a number of research and evaluation activities as well as learning from a broad array of other activities such as performance management, technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, site monitoring, and continuous quality improvement.

In FY19, ACF provided \$16.4 billion in TANF funding. Approximately one million families nationwide received assistance through TANF in an average month in 2018.⁴³ The program supports a wide range of efforts to promote family economic stability. For example, TANF grant dollars are used for programs that promote job readiness through education and training; provide assistance with child care, transportation, or other services that support employment activities; and improve services that support family strengthening.

Past Research and Evaluation

When PRWORA replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program with TANF, the law provided States with flexibility to implement a variety of rule changes, many of which had been piloted in a series of reforms prior to 1996 through waivers of AFDC program rules authorized by Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. These changes included various forms of benefit time limits, strengthened training and work requirements, and other administrative rule modifications. During this transition, ACF's research and evaluation portfolio shifted from individual state AFDC demonstration studies to initiatives focused on testing program models that TANF programs had interest in implementing. Early post-AFDC learning included studies to understand the circumstances of people leaving TANF and evaluations of state interventions to improve employment retention among applicants and recipients subject to

ACF's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures related to Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency:

Increase the percentage of state work participation rates that meet or exceed requirements - *Performance Measure 22A* ([p. 360](#))

Increase the percentage of adult Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients who become newly employed - *Performance Measure 22B* ([p. 361](#))

Increase the percentage of adult TANF recipients/former recipients employed in one quarter that were still employed in the next two consecutive quarters - *Performance Measure 22C* ([p. 361](#))

Increase the percentage rate of earnings gained by employed adult TANF recipients/former recipients between a base quarter and a second subsequent quarter - *Performance Measure 22D* ([p. 361](#))

Increase the rate of case closures related to employment, child support collected, and marriage - *Performance Measure 22E* ([p. 361](#))

⁴³ Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *2018 TANF Monthly Caseload*. (2019, March 25). https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/2018tanf_monthlycaseload03252019_508.pdf



program participation requirements. As states broadened the types of employment activities they implemented, ACF launched tests to study particular barriers to employment and related questions.

ACF's recent TANF-related research and evaluation has sought to understand and inform how TANF and other programs that serve TANF or TANF-eligible populations can best support their self-sufficiency and economic well-being. Rigorous studies funded by ACF and others have demonstrated that different types of interventions can improve labor market outcomes for disadvantaged groups, with variation in the magnitude and duration of impacts. For example, subsidized employment can increase employment and earnings in the short-term, and earnings supplements can increase both employment and income, at least while supplements remain in place. Career pathways models can improve educational progress and employment in the occupational sector targeted, and in some cases have been found to produce lasting earnings gains for individuals who meet program entrance criteria.⁴⁴

A recent OPRE study used a quantitative meta-analysis to draw lessons from across more than 200 rigorous studies of 93 distinct employment and training interventions. The analysis found that interventions bundling multiple strategies are more effective than interventions using a single strategy. It also pointed to the importance of implementation quality, regardless of the intervention's specific design.⁴⁵

Still, many questions remain. For example, the most successful training programs are generally inaccessible to individuals with low literacy or numeracy levels or significant personal barriers. Interventions targeting individuals who face complex barriers to employment, even when these programs boost employment and earnings, typically leave most participants with low earnings or inconsistent employment. Current and future ACF research will seek to explore these issues. Additionally, ACF has research underway to better understand how TANF and other ACF programs related to self-sufficiency are delivered and could be improved, and to explore how broader social context and environmental factors, including public policy and economic conditions, can impact the path to self-sufficiency.

⁴⁴ Fishman, M., et al., (2020). Employment and Training Programs Serving Low-Income Populations: Next Steps for Research (OPRE Report #2020-72). Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/employment-and-training-programs-serving-low-income-populations-next-steps-for-research>

⁴⁵ Vollmer, L., et al. (2017). The Right Tool for the Job: A Meta-Regression of Employment Strategies' Effects on Different Outcomes - Appendices (OPRE Report #2017-40B). Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/eser_ib_meta_analysis_appendix_042817_508.pdf



Research and Evaluation Stakeholders

In setting welfare and family self-sufficiency research and evaluation priorities, ACF takes into account legislative requirements and Congressional interests; the interest and needs of ACF, HHS, and Administration leadership; program office staff and leadership; ACF partners; the populations served; researchers; and other stakeholders. ACF routinely interacts with these stakeholders through a variety of engagement activities. These activities inform our ongoing research and evaluation planning processes.

Who

- State, territory, tribal, local, and non-profit TANF and other human services administrators and staff
- TANF training and technical assistance providers
- Employers
- Individuals and families served by TANF and other human services programs
- Federal partners in HHS and other agencies, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Office of Policy Development and Research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD/PD&R), the Chief Evaluation Office at the Department of Labor (DOL/CEO), the Employment and Training Administration at the Department of Labor (DOL/ETA), the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the Department of Labor (DOL/ODEP), the Food and Nutrition Service at the Department of Agriculture (USDA/FNS), the Institute of Education Sciences at the Department of Education (ED/IES), the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the Department of Education (ED/OCTAE), and the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support at the Social Security Administration (SSA/ORDES)
- Researchers and policy experts
- National organizations, such as the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the American Public Human Services Association
- Partners in other human services fields that serve families with low income

How

- Conferences and meetings, such as the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS), National Association of Welfare Research and Statistics (NAWRS) conference, Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) conference, and periodic topic-specific meetings such as the Next Steps for Employment and Training Research Roundtable
- TANF and Tribal TANF Summits
- Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as part of research and evaluation studies
- Interagency collaborations, such as the Federal Employment, Training, and Education Working Group (FETE)
- Structured mechanisms for broad stakeholder engagement, such as the Family Self-Sufficiency Research Technical Working Group



Examples of Broad Questions

1. **Human Capital Development** – Which interventions build or improve individuals’ occupational and non-occupational skills in order to help them obtain employment and advance toward economic self-sufficiency?
2. **Employment Attainment and Retention** – How do individual programs and approaches move TANF recipients and other low-income individuals into jobs and help them retain employment?
3. **Social Services Delivery Systems** – How are TANF and other ACF programs related to self-sufficiency delivered; how does TANF coordinate with or otherwise intersect with other social services programs; and how could service delivery within these programs be improved?
4. **Social Context and Environment** – How does the broader social context, including public policies, labor market forces, and economic conditions, affect low-income families’ ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency?
5. **Evaluation Capacity Building** – How can training and technical assistance build human services providers’ capacity to learn from and contribute to the evidence base about what works to improve family self-sufficiency?
6. **Dissemination and Knowledge Building** – How can ACF ensure that research on programs and policies to advance family self-sufficiency is accessible and actionable for key stakeholders?

Examples of Recent and Ongoing Research and Evaluation Activities

	Broad Question					
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS)			X			
Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) and Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project		X				
Career Pathways Research Portfolio	X					
Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations	X					
Human-Centered Design for Human Services			X			
Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation (JSA)		X				
Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches			X			
Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse: The What Works Clearinghouse of Proven and Promising Approaches to Move Welfare Recipients to Work						X
Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data					X	
Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution Project (RED-X)			X			
State TANF Case Studies			X			
State TANF Policies Database						X
Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED)		X				
Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (SPARK)					X	
Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences				X		
Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture			X			



- **[Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\)](#)**: This portfolio of multi-site studies explores the application of behavioral economics, which combines findings from psychology and economics, to improve outcomes among ACF's programs and target populations. (#3)
- **[Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families \(BEES\)](#)** and **[Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies \(NextGen\) Project](#)**: These projects are evaluating the effectiveness of innovative programs designed to boost employment and earnings among individuals with low income. BEES has a special interest in programs that are state-initiated and programs that serve adults whose employment prospects have been affected by opioid use disorder, abuse of other substances, or mental health conditions. The NextGen Project has a special interest in interventions that are market-oriented and/or employer-driven. BEES and the NextGen Project are closely coordinated, and both projects are working closely with the Social Security Administration to incorporate a focus on employment-related early interventions for individuals with current or foreseeable disabilities who have limited work history and are at-risk of applying for Supplemental Security Income. (#2)
- **[Career Pathways Research Portfolio](#)**: This portfolio of work examines the implementation and effectiveness of career pathways programs and is comprised of the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project and the evaluations of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program.⁴⁶ (#1)
- **[Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations](#)**: This project is evaluating interventions that apply coaching practices to promote job entry and retention among TANF populations and other individuals with low income. It is examining the impact of coaching on self-regulation skills and the role of these skills in generating impacts on employment outcomes. (#1)
- **[Human-Centered Design for Human Services](#)**: This project explores the application of human-centered design (HCD) across the delivery of human services programs at the federal, state, and local levels. The project is defining HCD in the context of human services; identifying programs that have experience implementing HCD approaches in social welfare contexts; and conducting a pilot study to help understand the feasibility of this approach in human services programs. (#3)
- **[Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation \(JSA\)](#)**: This project is evaluating the relative impact of different TANF job search approaches on short-term labor market outcomes. (#2)
- **[Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches](#)**: This project builds on earlier efforts that investigated the design and evaluability of integrated approaches to alleviating poverty that address the needs of both parents and children. The project is conducting formative research to prepare promising programs for evaluations of effectiveness; building the evaluation capacity of programs and researchers to conduct rigorous evaluations of integrated approaches to supporting child development and improving family economic security; and addressing measurement issues to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of processes and outcomes of two-generation programs. (#3)

⁴⁶ See the [HPOG snapshot](#) for additional details about the Career Pathways Research Portfolio.



- [**Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse: The What Works Clearinghouse of Proven and Promising Approaches to Move Welfare Recipients to Work**](#): This Congressionally-mandated clearinghouse provides a comprehensive, transparent, and systematic assessment of the effectiveness of interventions designed to help job seekers with low income succeed in the labor market. It shares the results on a user-friendly website and will create and disseminate synthesis reports regarding the overall state of evidence in the field. It builds on the previously completed Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review by including newer and wider reaching research and assessing the effectiveness of the interventions reviewed. (#6)
- [**Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data**](#): This project supports innovation and improved effectiveness of state TANF programs by enhancing the use of data from TANF and related human services programs. This work may include encouraging and strengthening state integrated data systems, promoting proper payments and program integrity, and enabling data analytics for TANF program improvement. Across its activities, the project supports the use of data for understanding the broad impact that TANF has on families and improving knowledge of how the federal government and state partners can use data to more efficiently and effectively serve TANF clients. (#5)
- [**Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution Project \(RED-X\)**](#): This project builds on a predecessor study, which helped build a base of knowledge to inform ACF’s identification and understanding of ethnic and racial differences in access to and take-up of human services; in the nature and quality of services received; and in the outcomes of services. RED-X is analyzing program administrative and survey data from two ACF programs—TANF and the Child Care Development Fund—to identify and analyze potential racial and ethnic disparities. (#3)
- [**State TANF Case Studies**](#): This project is identifying promising and innovative employment and training programs for individuals with low income that include TANF recipients, and producing case studies of the selected programs. The programs profiled include approaches that provide or link families to child care services and other work support services. (#3)
- [**State TANF Policies Database**](#): The State TANF Policies Database, also known as the Welfare Rules Database, serves as a single location where information on TANF program rules can be researched across states and/or across years. (#6)
- [**Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration \(STED\)**](#): This project is evaluating subsidized employment strategies designed to address two distinct goals: 1) to provide work-based income support for individuals who are not able to find regular, unsubsidized jobs; and; 2) to improve the employability of disadvantaged groups. The project is conducting impact and implementation evaluations in eight sites and is closely coordinating with the Department of Labor’s Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration. (#2)



- **[Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge \(SPARK\)](#)**: This project builds on existing technical assistance (TA) efforts to support state, local, and tribal TANF agencies with evaluating program changes or innovations and sharing findings, lessons learned, and resources with other sites that may benefit from their experiences. The project also will document the landscape of current or previous evaluation TA activities in human services program contexts, what can be learned from other fields that have examined this question, and what lessons can be drawn to inform future federal evaluation capacity-building efforts. (#5)
- **[Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences](#)**: This study is examining the experiences and perspectives of children and families living in poverty, including those who apply for and access TANF and other safety net benefits. (#4)
- **[Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture](#)**: This project is exploring how organizational culture, office design, and office procedures contribute to shaping clients' experiences with TANF, the services provided to them, and potentially their outcomes. (#3)

Future Directions for Research and Evaluation

The broad questions listed above will continue to drive much of ACF's research and evaluation activity in this area. Future activities will also be informed by emerging findings from ongoing research and evaluation activities, other learning activities, and continued engagement with welfare and family self-sufficiency stakeholders.

Examples of activities planned for the next few years include:

- Conducting rigorous evaluations of interventions designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with complex barriers to employment including physical and mental health conditions, substance use disorder, opioid dependency, criminal history, or limited work skills and experience
- Designing and testing interventions that apply behavioral science principles to challenges facing human services programs
- Analyzing labor market information to inform service planning and job placement for populations with low income
- Conducting research activities to identify racial and ethnic disparities across human services delivery systems
- Supporting the provision of technical assistance to strengthen the evaluation capacity of human services agencies
- Supporting state-initiated research and evaluation on innovative approaches for increasing economic self-sufficiency and reducing public assistance dependency
- Collecting information on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the support service needs, employment, and economic and personal well-being of families with low income
- Convening the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency to stimulate discussion on cutting-edge research from evaluations of programs, policies, and services that support families with low income on the path to economic self-sufficiency

