Assisting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

The number of grandparents and other older relatives who are caring for children is significant and growing, in part due to the opioid crisis. Although these caregivers can benefit from their experiences, providing full-time care to children can decrease caregivers' abilities to address their own health and well-being. In addition, these caregivers also may need assistance in meeting the children’s needs.

We produced this issue brief to describe grandparent caregivers and the grandchildren they are raising, the special challenges they face, and the resources that could be available to them. The issue brief also highlights examples of programs that assist kinship care families and other efforts under way at the federal level that policymakers intend to better address the needs of this population.[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Grandparents and Grandchildren

About thirty percent of children aged 0-18 are likely to live at some point with their grandparents during childhood and 5 percent are likely to live in a grandparent-maintained household without parents present (Amorim et al., 2017). The percentage of grandfamilies varies by geographical area, with states in the South and Southwest having the highest percentages of children living in these arrangements in 2012 (Ellis & Simmons, 2014). Furthermore, in 2012, about 25 percent of children in grandparent-maintained households lived in poverty (Ellis & Simmons, 2014).

In 2012, an estimated 2.7 million grandparents were the primary caregivers for their grandchildren under age 18, who were living with them (Ellis & Simmons, 2014). Children live apart from parents for many reasons: the most frequent single cause in 2013 being substance use (about 15-19 percent) (Radel, Bramlett, Chow, & Waters, 2016). Other reasons include parental illness or death, and parental work responsibilities requiring travel, among others. The grandparents who are raising their grandchildren tend to be young, white, female, married, and working (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016).

The figure below was created using 1-year estimates data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey for the years 2013 through 2017. The figure shows the number of grandparents in the U.S. raising grandchildren under the age of 18 without parents present, separated by age category. The number of grandparents 60 and over raising grandchildren under 18 shows an increasing trend from 2016 to 2017, and the number of grandparents aged 30-59 shows a decreasing trend.

# Outcomes for Grandchildren and Grandparents

A 2017 literature review (Hayslip et al., 2017) found that grandparents positively influence the grandchildren in their care because they serve as role models; provide love, support, and discipline to their grandchildren; help ensure their health and safety; and help transmit culture. Grandchildren living with grandparents tend to experience more challenges compared to their peers in terms of poverty, health care coverage, and certain school difficulties (Bavier, 2011). Partially as a result, grandchildren whose grandparents raise them tend to have more challenges regarding emotional, social, and behavioral outcomes than their peers; these grandchildren may experience emotional disconnections from parents, peers, and, sometimes, their grandparents (Hayslip et al., 2017).

Research indicates that the impact on grandparents of helping to raise their grandchildren is mixed. After controlling for basic demographics, one study found little evidence that caring for grandchildren has major effects on grandparents aged 50 through 80 years of age; however, evidence indicated that grandmothers who care for grandchildren with no parent present showed declines in health, especially when they provide a great deal of care and have few resources available to them (Hughes et al., 2007).

The impact of kinship care on grandparents varies by race, ethnicity, and hours of care provided. White and Black grandparents experienced decreased frailty when providing 100 or more hours of care over two years (Chen et al., 2015). Chen et al. (2015) also found that Hispanic grandparents did not experience decreased frailty unless they provided 500 or more hours of care. Black grandparents in kinship care experienced negative health effects from their living arrangement and care responsibilities, although more education and financial resources tended to mitigate these effects.

Generally, grandparents may experience less frailty when raising grandchildren, but may feel challenged by the perception that they raised their own children improperly and may feel isolation from their peers (Hayslip et al., 2017). Some grandparents may be more vulnerable to stress if they do not have access to assistance or services (Hayslip et al., 2017).

# Assistance for Grandparents and Grandchildren

Although many kinship caregivers may not realize it, assistance may be available to help them with their responsibilities through federal and state programs. These programs can provide a range of financial and social supports to kinship caregivers.

* ***Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)*** provides financial assistance to help families become self-sufficient. Caregivers can receive assistance, if they fit their state’s definition of a kinship caregiver and have low incomes. Children may qualify on their own.
* ***Supplemental Security Income (SSI)*** provides financial assistance to certain children and working-age adults who have disabilities and adults aged 65 and older who have low incomes.
* ***Kinship guardianship or foster care payments***may be available to kinship caregivers who are licensed foster parents. Guardianship payments may be available when the child leaves the child welfare system in a relative's custody.
* ***Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)***provides nutrition assistance to certain households with low incomes.
* ***Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)*** cover health and other services for children with low incomes.
* ***The National Family Caregiver Support Program*** and the ***Lifespan Respite Program*** are two ACL programs targeted to caregivers that can assist grandparents raising grandchildren.
* ***The Kinship Navigator Program*** provides one-time grants for states, certain territories and tribes that wish to support the development, enhancement or evaluation of kinship navigator programs. Kinship navigator programs assist grandparents and other relatives who take primary responsibility for the care of children who are in need of a safe and stable placement by supporting kinship caregivers in learning about, finding, and using programs and services to meet their own needs and the needs of the children they are raising. These programs must operate using promising, supported or well-supported practices.
* ***Other assistance***may include subsidized housing, early childhood interventions, programs for children with special needs, child care assistance, legal assistance, and respite care.

Less than half of kinship care families, which include grandparent-maintained households, benefit from many of the financial assistance and health programs listed above (AECF, 2012). In addition, 17 percent of low-income working kinship caregivers receive assistance with childcare and 15 percent of caregivers with low incomes receive housing assistance (AECF, 2012). Availability of respite and kinship navigator programs is limited.

# State and Local Innovations that Support Kinship Care

Some states and localities have developed programs to help grandchildren and their grandparents, along with other kinship caregivers. These programs may involve providing kinship families with information about available programs, or assistance with obtaining benefits and navigating the judicial system, along with supportive services such as respite and support groups. Many programs have had funding from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). In 2018, 70 kinship navigator programs were assisting families; information about these programs is available in [State Fact Sheets for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children](http://www.grandfamilies.org/State-Fact-Sheets).

Since 2009, ACF has supported 27 kinship care programs (ACF, 2016). An evaluation of these programs found positive results for kinship care families. The ACF awarded 24 Family Connection Discretionary Grants in 2009 and commissioned an evaluation of the programs (James Bell Associates, 2013). Six of the programs focused on kinship navigation and seven additional programs included this approach in combination with other programs. The primary users of these programs were grandmothers. All grantees provided information and referral, emotional support for caregivers, and case management. Additional services, which varied by grantee, included support groups, advocacy, children’s services, legal services, as well as networking with and educating other child service agencies. Among the most popular services were access to financial and other resources. The evaluation found that these programs helped family caregivers learn about and use existing programs and services to help their families. In addition, the programs improved service coordination and helped meet families’ needs, so that caregivers made progress in accomplishing their own individual goals.

**Washington** State’s Kinship Care program provides information and assistance about accessing programs, mediation, assistance with the legal system, short-term support, and supportive listening for caregivers. The program also 1) educates and collaborates with other programs in serving kinship care families, and 2) maintains a website for kinship caregivers and service providers.

***Georgia*** has Project GRANDD in two counties (Jueschke, Rainie, 2018). This project began in a pediatric clinic to help grandchildren with disabilities who were in the care of their grandparents. It is a comprehensive program where a case manager does an assessment with home visits following as soon as possible. Families who need few services receive connections to support groups. Depending on need, families may receive food, Christmas presents, and emergency assistance with utility costs, help in securing Individual Educational Plans for the grandchildren with disabilities, and connections to legal assistance.

Building on the successes of these programs, The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 gives states federal reimbursement for up to 50 percent of their expenditures for developing or maintaining kinship navigator programs that meet certain evidence-based practices. State programs must engage in outreach, coordination, consultation with kinship caregivers and relevant agencies, and training. Programs may also establish and support a kinship care ombudsman to assist these caregivers in getting services.

Recognizing the challenges that these caregivers face, Congress passed, and the President signed, the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act in 2018. The Act creates an Advisory Council to identify, promote, coordinate, and disseminate to the public information, resources, and best practices available to help grandparents and other older relatives: 1) meet the needs of the children in their care, and 2) maintain their own health and well-being. The Council will use a public input process to develop two reports to Congress on these topics. One of the key activities of the Grandparent Act will be the collection of best practices for dissemination. The Administration for Community Living (ACL) has responsibility for supporting the Council in its work.

# Conclusion

Kinship care families, primarily led by grandparents, often form to help raise children when their parents are not able to do so. This can occur under many circumstances related to work, illness, substance use, or deployment, among other circumstances. The growth of the opioid crisis is one of the reasons grandparents may be raising their grandchildren. These grandchildren face many challenges that their peers may not and their grandparents may not know about the many programs that may help them carry out their responsibilities.

Many programs can help kinship care families, ranging from income and food assistance to health care programs. In addition, kinship navigator programs in many states and localities have arisen to help meet the needs of these families, and federal funding is helping states and others augment their programs. The findings of the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Advisory Council will help these entities serve better the needs of grandchildren and the grandparents who are raising them.

# References

ACF (Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services), *Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System*, 2016.

ACF (Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services), *The AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) Report, Preliminary FY 2016 Estimates as of October 20, 2017 No.24*, 2017.

AECF (Annie E. Casey Foundation), *Stepping Up for Kids, what government and communities should do to support kinship families*, 2012.

Amorim, M., Dunifon, R. and Pilkauskas, N., 2017. The magnitude and timing of grandparental coresidence during childhood in the United States. *Demographic Research*, *37*, pp.1695-1706.

Bavier, R., 2011. Children residing with no parent present. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*(10), pp.1891-1901.

Chen, F., Mair, C.A., Bao, L. and Yang, Y.C., 2014. Race/ethnic differentials in the health consequences of caring for grandchildren for grandparents. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *70*(5), pp.793-803.

Ellis, R.R. and Simmons, T., 2014. *Coresident grandparents and their grandchildren: 2012*. U.S. Census Bureau.

Hayslip, B., Fruhauf, C.A. and Dolbin-MacNab, M.L., 2017. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: What Have We Learned Over the Past Decade? *The Gerontologist*.

Hughes, M.E., Waite, L.J., LaPierre, T.A. and Luo, Y., 2007. All in the family: The impact of caring for grandchildren on grandparents' health. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *62*(2), pp.S108-S119.

James Bell Associates, Inc., *Family Connection Discretionary Grants 2009-Funded Grantees Cross-Site Evaluation*

Jueschke, Rainie, (Executive Director ISDD - Innovative Solutions for Disadvantage and Disability) personal communication on February 2, 2018.

Radel, L., Bramlett, M., Chow, K., and Waters, A. (2016). Children Living Apart from Their Parents: Highlights from the National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care. Washington, D: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. May 2016.

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2016. Accessed at: [American Fact Finder](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml) on January 16, 2018.

1. Kinship care families – people with a family-like relationship are raising children without parents present. Kin may be grandparents, relatives, or others who are close to the children. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)