

Using the Family First Act to Grow and Nurture Support Systems for Families of Young Children: *A look at promotion, prevention, and Family First Act implementation in six states*

October 11, 2023



Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



Infant-Toddler Court Program National Resource Center

The National Infant-Toddler Court Program was made possible through the support of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$7,560,000 with 0 percent financed from non-governmental sources.

The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).





ZERO TO THREE deeply appreciates Ballmer Group for its generous support of our work to scale the Safe Babies approach. We'd like to especially thank Connie Ballmer for her vision and commitment to transforming the child welfare system so that all babies thrive. Ballmer Group is committed to improving economic mobility for children and families in the United States, funding leaders and organizations that have demonstrated the ability to reshape opportunity and reduce systemic inequities.

Today's Presenters



Kendra Dunn
Director, Division of Community and
Family Support
Colorado Department of Early Childhood
kendra.dunn@state.co.us



Rebecca Vivrette, PhD
Research Scientist
Child Trends
rvivrette@childtrends.org



Kimberly Nabarro
Parent Leader, ZERO TO THREE
knabarro@zerotothree.org



Jaclyn Szrom
Sr. Policy Manager
Safe Babies, A Program of
ZERO TO THREE
jszrom@zerotothree.org

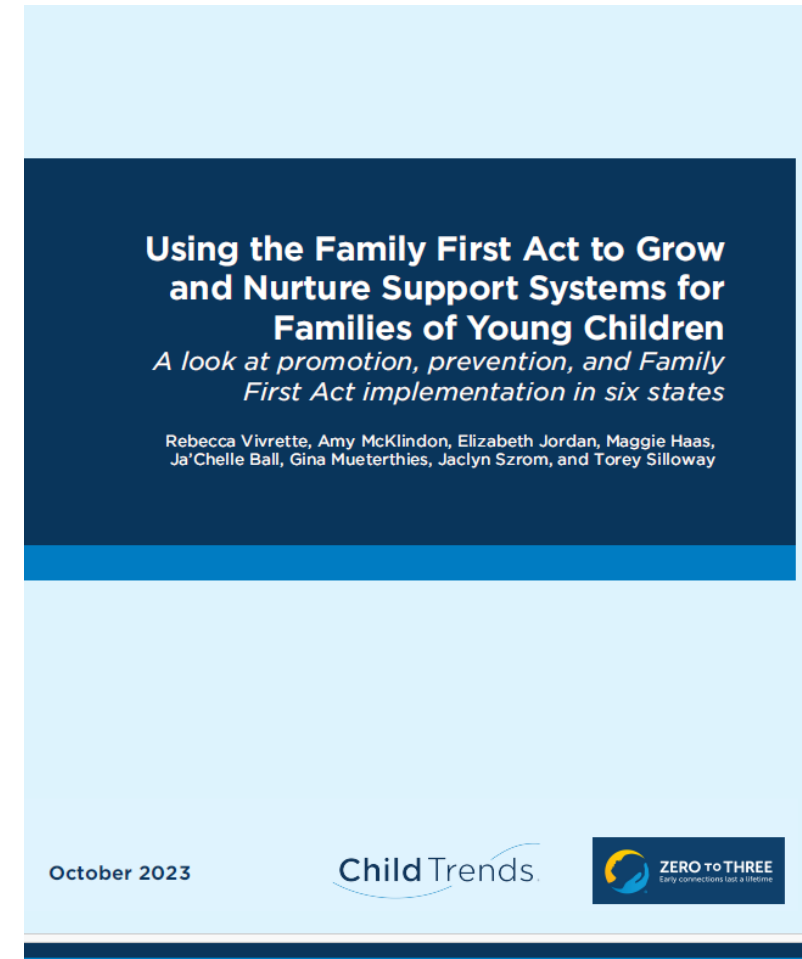
Newly Released from ZERO TO THREE and Child Trends

Using the Family First Act to Grow and Nurture Support Systems for Families of Young Children: A look at promotion, prevention, and Family First Act implementation in six states

View the new report:

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/using-the-family-first-act-to-grow-and-nurture-support-systems-for-families-of-young-children>

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/child-trends-report-2023/>



Promotion, Prevention, and Family First Act Implementation

What have we learned from 6 states?



Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE

How we selected states

- Selected six states (WA, NE, SC, NY, MI, CO) implementing or close to implementing Title IV-E Prevention Program Five Year Plans through Family First
- Reviewed information for 50 states to capture varied representation
- Points of contact (state child welfare administrator) generated referrals to additional interviewees; resulted in 47 interviews

State Snapshot

State	% CAN, ages 0-3 (FFY 2021)	% entering foster care, under age 3 (FFY 2021)	% state/local funds on prevention (SFY 2020)	% federal funds on prevention (SFY 2020)	Admin. type	ITC/Thriving Families
CO	32%	31%	26%	9%	County	Both
MI	33%	37%	3%	5%	State	ITC
NE	33%	27%	6%	1%	State	Both
NY	25%	32%	19%	2%	County	Both
SC	33%	25%	2%	22%	State	Both
WA	32%	42%	Unknown	Unknown	State	ITC
US Total	34%	34%	16%	11%		

Williams, S.C., Rosenberg, R., & Martinez, V. (2023). *State-level data for understanding child welfare in the United States*. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/state-level-data-for-understanding-child-welfare-in-the-united-states>

Children's Bureau (n.d.). *Child welfare outcomes report data: Entered foster care during FY*. <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/enteredCare/index>

Rosinsky, K., Fischer, F., & Haas, M. (2023). *Child Welfare Financing Survey SFY2020*. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/child-welfare-financing-survey-sfy2020>

Incorporating Lived Expertise and Tribal Perspectives

- Included interviews with 3 parent leaders identified by ZERO TO THREE with lived expertise in child welfare
- Did not speak directly with Tribal governments or communities; spoke with child welfare Tribal liaison or ICWA in 2 states



4 Key Themes and Findings

Prevention efforts vary widely across states and communities.

States utilize an innovative range of services for families, but there are gaps in availability across states, regions, and communities.

States are facing and tackling challenges to promote equity and parent voice in prevention.

States face implementation challenges with Family First, but it is starting to play an important role in overall prevention efforts.



Prevention efforts vary across
states and communities.

Key findings around prevention strategies

- Commitment across all states and agencies to invest in prevention at every level
- Child welfare agencies tend to be secondary/tertiary-focused, partnering with other agencies who tend to be primary-focused
- Overwhelming need for cross-agency/cross-sector coordination to do prevention well – relationships are the “secret sauce”

What else helps make prevention work well?

- Partnering and Relationships!
 - Issue-focused working groups that meet regularly with objectives
 - Holding regular cross-partner meetings (e.g., between child welfare and early childhood)
 - Sharing data between partners
 - Developing shared tools/trainings (e.g., referral pathways)
- Commitment from state leadership (both in prioritizing/changing the culture and in financial investment)
- New federal funding streams – including Family First, preschool development grants, and ARPA
- Building on successful pilots
- Legislation that requires new/more prevention services

Expanding prevention services is hard work!

What gets in the way?

- Getting all necessary partners to the table and buying-in: *prevention takes a long time and the commitment of many people over many years*
- Building authentic partnerships with families and communities who have been marginalized
- Lack of funding
- Workforce shortages in child welfare, mental health, substance use, and other areas
- Lack of services in some geographic areas

States utilize an innovative range of services for families with young children, but there are gaps in availability across states, regions, and communities.

There are some prevention efforts specific to infants and toddlers and their families

Overall, there are more general prevention efforts for children and families, but some with an infant/toddler focus

- Home visiting is central to prevention generally and often an impetus for cross-agency collaboration
- Coordinated resource & referral networks for accessing ECE services (Help Me Grow, scparents.org)
- Initiatives addressing parental substance misuse, including prenatally and POSCs
- Infant-Toddler Court Teams

Supporting infants and toddlers requires unique training and skillset

Even with awareness and investment in infant/toddler prevention programs, specialized workforce shortages can stall progress.

“It’s really difficult for us to find skilled people who come into our office all trained and ready to work with 0-3 [year olds]. That takes skill. That takes someone who is actually trained. It takes money. **We can’t just bring a counselor and say work with infants.** It takes money and training.”

-State Leader

States face implementation challenges with Family First, but it is starting to play an important role in overall prevention efforts.

Family First on the backdrop of challenging funding landscapes

"I think another challenge is funding. Sometimes we have too much or too little or too restricted. Sometimes if we have too much funding, we can't get it out the door because we've got too much in a pot and it's hard to get it out because the contracting process is a hard... **There's too little that's going to communities, too little going to families.** Sometimes our funding has so many strings attached - like we can't do this, or we can't do that. So it's funding, but **it's not just that it's scarce. It's that it's challenging.** I think one of the big the challenges is that so much of what people care about is driven by economics. **Profit first, people second."**

-State Leader

States are struggling to draw down Family First dollars

- Qualifying services are not the right ones to meet the needs of families
- Eligibility criteria is too narrow
- Billing process is too complex
- Data systems don't have the capacity to gather required information
- Confusion among partners outside of child welfare agency
- Impact of COVID-19 on families, agencies, staff, and programs

States must braid and blend funding sources in unique ways to meet the needs of families

Typical sources:

- Community-based child abuse prevention (CBCAP) grants
- CAPTA
- TANF
- Medicaid
- Title IV-E
- MIECHV
- State dollars

Some unique ones:

- CCDBG/child care subsidy
- SAMHSA's Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG)
- Preschool Development Grants
- Revenue from certain state taxes (marijuana tax, opioid settlement funds)
- Philanthropy

States are facing and tackling challenges to promote equity and parent voice in prevention.

States are aware of disparities in child welfare and envision prevention as a road to a more equitable system

“Even if I’m the nicest person and my title is the prevention administrator...**it still feels like it’s CPS [to families]**. It’s helpful for us to have another collaborative agency that can reach out and be the voice, knowing that we can be there for support. It’s important to me that **families don’t think they’re continually under surveillance**, and they can be vulnerable and open to asking for help when they need it without having to come to the department.”

-State Leader

How states are centering equity in child welfare

Specific strategies states are working towards to center equity:

- Hiring staff with lived experience
- Conduct a needs or readiness assessment to engage in equity work
- Proactively build equity efforts into plans and budgets
- Establish working groups with a primary focus on equity
- Create tools, guides, trainings, and toolkits on equity
- Leverage data to drive decisions about priorities and gaps

...but states don't always know where to focus limited resources

“We think about equity within our work quite a bit, but we struggle with really trying to identify where to focus and where can we make the most impact.”

-State Leader

Barriers to equity efforts

- Disparities in availability and access to services:
 - Rural communities
 - Services in families' preferred language
 - Limited state awareness/resources for partnering with Tribal communities
- Re-building trust between child welfare and communities that have been marginalized
- Reimbursement/funding restrictions for programs that are culturally responsive or demonstrate practice-based evidence
- Workforce shortages and turnover for positions dedicating to equity and community relationship building

Tribal partnerships

“Build the relationship with Tribes...Really understand what it means to work on a **government to government relationship, to not treat Tribes as stakeholders**. The process and the relationship is not the same as a stakeholder. **Tribes are sovereign nations**. Early engagement with Tribes, as well. When I review legislation, I'm looking at Tribal impact and am thinking also about **inviting Tribes into the conversations early on so they're not an afterthought**. I'm looking to bring [state] leadership into the advisory structures when working with Tribes. Have a presence.”

-State Leader

States are working intently on elevating parent/family voice in prevention

- In addition to equity strategies, specific state efforts to promote parent/family voice include:
 - Identifying and allocating funding for providing financial compensation to parents for their time
 - Providing child care during meetings and events
 - Including parent review of child welfare documents/policies, serving on hiring committees
 - Incorporating family-driven service planning strategies, such as peer support services
 - Collecting qualitative feedback from families about their needs
 - Promoting parent participation in legislative advocacy

Most common challenges states are facing in engaging families in service planning

- Potential of tokenizing families
- Recruitment of families (mistrust of systems, particularly child welfare)
- Limited funds to compensate families
- Need for training of staff/partners on family engagement best practices

“We need to make sure that we have a **family-led system**, and that families, parents, and guardians are at the table and **we can design a system to meet their needs**. We want to focus on the root causes of needs and using that root cause as a systematic conversation facilitated by the whole community to achieve our goals with culturally relevant strategies and an action plan. The funding comes. If there is a need, we’ll find the dollars.”

-State Leader

Overarching Recommendations

- Reduce silos across and between agencies and their partners.
- Increase supports specifically designed to meet the needs of families with very young children.
- Promote equity in policies and practice, and bring parents with lived expertise into decision-making roles.
- Facilitate the use of the federal Family First Act in their overall prevention efforts, including:
 - Increasing flexibility of Family First to provide support for concrete needs
 - Alternative prevention pathways to support families outside of Child Protective Services

Discussion with State Leaders and Parent Leaders



Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



Discussion with State Leaders and Parent Leaders

What are some unique prevention and promotion efforts specifically targeted to infants, toddlers, and their families in your state?

What's worked? What are the barriers and gaps? What has your experience been?

Discussion with State Leaders and Parent Leaders

What are the key inequities you are seeing in your state child welfare system?

What are agencies and systems in your state are doing to promote equity in child welfare, including incorporation of parent and community voice and data to inform decision-making?

Discussion with State Leaders and Parent Leaders

Can you talk about your experiences with Family First thus far, and what you would recommend to move it forward or make it more effective?

What other policy or funding levers have been effective to help meet the needs of families with young children in your state?

Questions?

Using the Family First Act to Grow and Nurture Support Systems for Families of Young Children: A look at promotion, prevention, and Family First Act implementation in six states

View the new report:

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/using-the-family-first-act-to-grow-and-nurture-support-systems-for-families-of-young-children>

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/child-trends-report-2023/>

Using the Family First Act to Grow and Nurture Support Systems for Families of Young Children
A look at promotion, prevention, and Family First Act implementation in six states

Rebecca Vivrette, Amy McKlindon, Elizabeth Jordan, Maggie Haas, Ja'Chelle Ball, Gina Mueterthies, Jaclyn Szrom, and Torey Silloway

October 2023

Child Trends.

