



TANF child-only cases:

Characteristics, needs, services, and service delivery challenges

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Despite being a large portion of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload (about 50 percent in fiscal year [FY] 2016), child-only cases are often not a focus of attention for TANF programs. These cases do not help a state meet their work participation rate (WPR), and the adults caring for the children in these families are usually not required to participate in work activities. Most states have limited TANF resources, so recipients who help meet the WPR usually take precedence when it comes to receiving services.

As part of the Office of Family Assistance's Assisting Special Populations to Improve Readiness and Engagement (ASPIRE) project, Insight Policy Research and its partner Mathematica conducted a needs assessment of TANF child-only cases. For the assessment, we scanned existing literature, interviewed a select group of state and local TANF programs in California, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, and Washington, and held discussions with subject matter experts. This paper summarizes our findings.

Child-only cases arise when a parent is ineligible to receive TANF assistance but his or her child(ren) are eligible, or when a child is living with another related adult who is ineligible to receive TANF cash assistance (Golden and Hawkins 2011). Research on child-only cases has shown these families are highly vulnerable, and that many of their needs go unmet. The children who receive TANF cash assistance because they are cared for by a relative might have previously experienced abuse or neglect, and might have experienced further

trauma as a result of being separated from their parents. The caregivers of these children might have limited income and limited ability to work, due to their age, disability, or immigration status. In addition, caregivers involved in non-parent child-only cases who are caring for children affected by the current opioid crisis might face additional needs, including mental health support for their shame, isolation, and stress related to dealing with the children's parents who have substance use disorders (Generations United 2016). Relatives are increasingly caring for children whose parents are unable to because of the

Box 1. The ASPIRE Project

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the Administration for Children and Families, awarded the Assisting Special Populations to Improve Readiness and Engagement (ASPIRE) contract to Insight Policy Research and Mathematica to deliver training and technical assistance to state and local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. These training and technical assistance activities will explore and develop approaches for meeting the needs of child-only and two-parent TANF families and other special TANF subpopulations of interest to state and local programs and OFA.

opioid crisis (Generations United 2016), potentially increasing the number of non-parent caregiver child-only cases who have these additional needs.

To help meet the needs of these cases, some state and local TANF programs do provide services to these families. Others connect these families to services provided by other government agencies and community organizations that might be more appropriate. Although evaluation evidence is lacking, TANF programs who are considering doing more to serve their child-only cases can develop ideas through learning about other programs' experiences.

This paper begins by describing the TANF child-only caseload and its dynamics. It then discusses what we know about the needs of these families and the services available to them from the literature and interviews with a select group of state and local TANF programs. This paper concludes with a discussion of potentially promising approaches for serving these families gathered from the state and local programs and interviews with several subject matter experts.ⁱ

What are TANF child-only cases?

Three main categories of child-only TANF cases make up about 93 percent of child-only cases nationally:

- Non-parent caregiver cases, including kinship care and children raised by grandparents (45 percent)
- U.S. citizen children of immigrants who are ineligible for benefits (25 percent)
- Children of disabled parents receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (federal disability benefits) (22 percent)

The remaining child-only cases have a parent in the assistance unit who is no longer receiving benefits due to a sanction for not complying with TANF requirements (6 percent) or for other reasons, including meeting the 60-month federal TANF time limit (1 percent) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], Administration for Children and Families [ACF], Office of Family Assistance [OFA] 2017).

How big is the TANF child-only caseload and how has it changed over time?

Traditionally, the TANF caseload was composed primarily of single mothers with children younger than 18 living in the home. When TANF was created in 1996, replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children, only about one in five TANF cases were considered child-only, and these cases were not a policy focus (Mauldon et al. 2012; HHS, ACF, OFA 2017). Due in part to the work requirements, time limits, and incentives for states to decrease the TANF caseload, the number of adult recipient cases has continued to decrease since 1996 (Mauldon et al. 2012; Floyd et al. 2017). As a result, the share of child-only cases has increased (Golden and Hawkins 2011), significantly altering the composition of the TANF caseload.

In fiscal year (FY) 2016, child-only cases across the country totaled about 619,000, including 1.1 million children. In the 20 years since the passage of welfare reform, the proportion of child-only cases in the broader TANF caseload has more than doubled, to 51 percent (HHS, ACF, OFA 2017). Although the overall TANF caseload has fallen in recent years, the child-only caseload has fallen more slowly. The number of child-only cases decreased by roughly 193,000 cases in the past three years from 812,000 in 2013, but the share of child-only cases rose by about 4 percent during this period. The slower decline of the child-only caseload might be a result of these cases generally not being subject to the time limit or work requirements, both of which impact the size of the adult recipient caseload.

The composition of the child-only caseload varies greatly by state (see Table 1 and Appendix A for more information).ⁱⁱ On average, 45 percent of child-only cases include a non-parent caregiver, and the percentage ranges from 17 percent in California to 100 percent in Oklahoma. Although Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, and Oklahoma have no (or very few) SSI recipient parent child-only cases, more than half of child-only cases in five states—Maine, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin—involve a parent receiving SSI. Ineligible immigrant parent child-only cases account for no or very few cases in 18 states; however, they account for more than half (55 percent) of such cases in California.

Table 1. TANF child-only caseload characteristics

Child-only case category	National (% of TANF child-only caseload)	State low (% of state TANF child-only caseload) ^a	State high (% of state TANF child-only caseload) ^a
Percentage of all TANF cases that are child-only	51	Alaska (26)	Idaho (97)
Composition of child-only caseload			
Non-parent caregiver	45	California (17)	Oklahoma (100)
SSI recipient parent	22	Arizona (<1)	Rhode Island (68)
Ineligible immigrant parent	25	South Dakota (<1)	California (55)
Sanction	6	Idaho (<1)	New Jersey (19)
Other	1	Louisiana; Wisconsin (<1)	Kansas (13)

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (2017).

^a Of states with any recipients on caseload.

What needs do TANF child-only families have?

Most TANF programs we spoke with did not collect information on the characteristics and needs of child-only families, but there is some information available in the literature. The available literature and reports from some TANF programs suggest that the parents, caregivers, and children in TANF child-only cases face significant needs that hinder their ability to reach economic security and that these needs vary across the three main types of child-only cases.ⁱⁱⁱ However, the findings in the literature regarding the needs of the adults in these cases have been mixed. Many of the needs we identified for each of the types of child-only cases were based on literature focusing on a single jurisdiction; they might not be generalizable to others.

Non-parent caregiver cases

Non-parent caregiver cases are created through the foster care system, when children are placed in the care of relatives through formal or informal foster care arrangements, or when relatives step in without child welfare involvement to care for children whose parents are otherwise unable to care for them (Mauldon et al. 2012; Gibbs et al. 2004).

- **Demographics.** In FY 2016, 54 percent of children in non-parent caregiver child-only cases were living with their grandparents (HHS, ACF, OFA 2017). The caregivers in these families are usually more likely to be married than adult TANF recipients. In Maryland, 23 percent of

non-parent caregivers were married compared to 9 percent of adult recipients (Passarella 2018). Children in these cases may be older than those in other types of TANF cases, as suggested in studies of child-only cases in Maryland and California (Passarella 2018; Saunders et al. 2012; Speigman et al. 2007).

- **Economic stability.** Non-parent caregiver child-only families are generally more well off economically than other TANF families because the caregivers are not subject to the income eligibility criteria for TANF (Golden and Hawkins 2011; Mauldon et al. 2012; Saunders et al. 2012). For example, a Maryland study found that non-parent caregivers had higher educational attainment and earned almost five times as much as adult TANF recipients in the year before engaging with the TANF program, even though both groups had similar rates of employment (50 percent) (Passarella 2018). Yet earnings for non-parent caregivers were still low: \$24,000, on average, per year for working non-parent caregivers compared with \$5,000 for working adult TANF recipients (Passarella 2018). Studies of a number of jurisdictions (Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin) suggested that non-parent caregivers struggled to afford necessities for the children in their care, and this additional responsibility threatened their economic security (Charlesworth et al. 2012; Blair and Taylor 2006; Gibbs et al. 2006).

- **Health and well-being of non-parent caregivers.**

Non-parent caregivers have health and well-being needs, some of which are similar to those among adult TANF recipients and others that are unique to older adults caring for children. In studies in Tennessee and North Carolina, non-parent caregivers reported experiencing problems with their health and difficulties with daily living activities (Golden and Hawkins 2011). A recent study of the adults in child-only families in Maryland found that non-parent caregivers report having a disability at a comparable rate to adult TANF recipients (23 versus 24 percent, respectively) (Passarella 2018). In 2005, about one-quarter of the non-parent caregivers in Maryland had applied for SSI (Saunders et al. 2012), indicating they might have had a physical or mental health condition that hindered their work. A Washington State–based study found that the heads of households in these cases had fewer behavioral health issues than those in adult TANF recipient cases (Mancusco et al. 2010). A study of non-parent caregivers in one county in New York State found that about one-quarter had concerns about stress management and respite care (Blair and Taylor 2006).

- **Health and well-being of children.** The children in non-parent caregiver child-only families tend to have greater needs than other TANF families, including those related to mental health issues, educational difficulties, and trauma; these needs were comparable to those of children living in foster care (Gibbs et al. 2004). In Washington, these children were more likely than children in other TANF case types to have been abused or neglected, to have behavioral health issues, and to have an incarcerated parent (Mancusco et al. 2010). Maryland children in child-only cases were more likely than children in adult recipient cases to have been abused or neglected and to have been involved in the child welfare system (Saunders et al. 2012). These needs were confirmed during our ASPIRE interviews with three state programs.

- **Unmet service needs.** In a study of non-parent caregivers in South Carolina, the adults reported needing parenting and financial management classes, assistance from a home visitor, support groups, mental health counseling for

the children, child care, respite care (which provides caregivers a break from caregiving to help improve their well-being and decrease stress), and additional financial assistance for educational expenses (Edelhoch et al. 2002). In New Jersey, these adults typically need housing, transportation, and education, and face challenges with the children’s behavioral issues, the system of social services, and “feeling overwhelmed” (Palla et al. 2003). The children in these cases might need financial assistance to attend summer camps and after-school programs, as well as educational and employment services so they can successfully transition to adulthood (Passarella 2018).

ASPIRE interviews with three TANF programs found that these families might need additional financial support to provide for the children because the adults might be on fixed incomes or might not have the required resources. TANF staff from one state we interviewed thought grandparent caregivers might also need emotional support to cope with their adult children who can no longer care for their own children, the associated grief they experience, and the familial conflict that might arise. We also heard that these families might need support in understanding the benefits and services that are available to them.

Ineligible immigrant parent cases

Ineligible immigrant parent cases occur when low-income, non-citizen immigrants have children who are U.S. citizens. The children qualify for TANF cash assistance, but the parents do not because of their immigration status.

- **Demographics.** Ineligible immigrant parent child-only cases are more similar to cases with adult recipients than other child-only types. The children more commonly live with one or both of their parents, and the parents are usually able to and do work (Mauldon et al. 2012). In Maryland, these parents were more likely to be married than adult recipients (18 versus 9 percent, respectively) (Passarella 2018). Maryland and California studies also found the children in these cases were similar in age, on average, to those in adult recipient families (Passarella 2018; Speigman et al. 2007).

- **Economic stability.** Some state studies have found that the parents in these cases have low education compared with the general population (Golden and Hawkins 2011). The recent Maryland study found that 38 percent of ineligible immigrant parents had not attained a high school diploma, compared with 31 percent of adult recipients, and only 4 percent had completed education beyond high school, compared with 8 percent of adult recipients (Passarella 2018). Although the parents' employment rates differed among studies, their earnings were low in all states (Golden and Hawkins 2011). Staff from one state program we interviewed for ASPIRE said these families are likely living in deep poverty because they are unable to access all the benefits they need.
- **Health and well-being of adults.** A study of child-only cases in Maryland found that very few—less than half of 1 percent—of ineligible immigrant parents reported having a disability, compared with 24 percent of adults receiving assistance (Passarella 2018).
- **Health and well-being of children.** Little is known about the children in ineligible immigrant parent child-only cases, but research suggests children living with unauthorized immigrant parents face issues related to educational outcomes, language barriers, and social and legal exclusion (Mauldon et al. 2012). A study of children receiving TANF cash assistance in Washington showed that children in ineligible immigrant parent child-only families fare better than children in other TANF case types, having fewer behavioral health issues, less involvement with the child welfare system, and less homelessness (Mancusco et al. 2010).
- **Unmet service needs.** In a 2010 survey of state TANF administrators, reported needs for these families included jobs, job training, and work supports; parenting support; respite care; basic needs, nutritional assistance, or housing; and case management (Mauldon et al. 2012). We heard during one state program ASPIRE interview that these families might need support in accessing the services they are eligible for and navigating public systems, as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) services.

SSI recipient parent child-only cases

SSI recipient parent child-only cases typically arise when a parent who receives TANF cash assistance begins receiving SSI for his or her disability. When this occurs, the parent becomes ineligible for TANF, but the children can continue to receive TANF cash assistance. These types of child-only cases also arise when a parent already receiving SSI applies to TANF for his or her children (Mauldon et al. 2012).

- **Demographics.** Both the adults and the children in SSI recipient parent child-only families tend to be older than those in adult TANF recipient cases (Mauldon et al. 2012; Passarella 2018). In a study of the adults in child-only families in Maryland, these parents were less likely to be married than adult recipients, although the marriage rates were low for both groups (4 versus 9 percent, respectively) (Passarella 2018).
- **Economic stability.** One qualitative study of SSI recipient parent child-only cases in San Francisco found that most of the 60 families interviewed reported experiencing material hardship and almost one-quarter had experienced hunger in the past year (Mauldon et al. 2010). A study of SSI recipients in two California counties found that about 40 percent who had transferred to SSI from TANF struggled to pay for their utilities, about 40 percent faced food insecurity, and 20 percent struggled to pay for their rent (Sogar 2013). A Maryland study found only 15 percent of SSI recipient parents worked, and their earnings were very low (\$1,720 for the year) (Passarella 2018). The same study also found these parents had lower educational attainment than adult TANF recipients. Forty-seven percent of SSI recipient parents had not attained a high school diploma, compared with 31 percent of all adult TANF recipients, and only 3 percent had completed education beyond high school, compared with 8 percent of all adult TANF recipients (Passarella 2018).
- **Health and well-being of parents receiving SSI.** To qualify for SSI, applicants must have limited resources and must not be able to work due to their disability. Consequently, the parents in SSI recipient parent child-only cases have mental health and physical impairments, and most do

not work (Golden and Hawkins 2011). A study using survey data of 127 SSI recipients in two California counties found that about 80 percent of SSI recipients who transferred to receiving SSI from TANF had work-limiting physical health problems, about 70 percent had work-limiting mental health problems, about 30 percent had a work-limiting learning disability, and 50 percent had post-traumatic stress disorder (Sogar 2013).

- **Health and well-being of children.** Studies of children in TANF child-only cases whose parents receive SSI in California suggest that many of the children have behavioral problems (Mauldon et al. 2010) and health issues (Mauldon et al. 2010; Sogar 2013). A Washington study found that children in child-only cases with disabled parents had higher mental health needs than children in other TANF cases (Mancusco et al. 2010). Studies in California and Maryland suggest that about one-third of families had interactions with the child welfare system or experienced child abuse or neglect (Mauldon et al. 2013; Sogar 2013; Golden and Hawkins 2011).
- **Unmet service needs.** TANF administrators reported the following unmet needs for SSI recipient parent child-only cases in 2012: child care, health care, respite care, housing, funds for child's educational expenses, and transportation (Mauldon et al. 2012). In addition, the Washington study suggests these parents might have unmet needs regarding substance abuse treatment (Mancuso et al. 2010). Two state program respondents we interviewed for ASPIRE thought these families might also need parenting support due to having a disability and other complex needs that potentially limit their ability to parent.

How are states meeting these needs and what are the challenges to doing so?

Many states might not provide support or employment services beyond TANF cash assistance to child-only cases because federal law does not require states to do so. These cases are generally not subject to federal work requirements or time limits, unlike cases with adult recipients. However, some states impose time limits and work requirements on some of these cases. For example, Arizona has a 12-month time limit on

child-only cases unless the child is in the legal custody of the child welfare system (Mauldon et al. 2012; Arizona Senate Research Staff 2016). Research from 2012 showed that immigrant parent child-only cases where the parent is a lawful permanent resident and legally able to work were subject to work requirements in Massachusetts, Michigan, and Tennessee. Despite facing work requirements, these parents were not eligible for TANF cash assistance (Mauldon et al. 2012).

According to our interviews with state and local TANF staff, adults in child-only families might not be eligible for employment and training services or work supports because they are not receiving benefits. In addition, TANF staff might not provide other services to child-only families because they lack the expertise or the resources required to meet the needs of child-only families that extend beyond employment (Gibbs et al. 2006). Some of the state and local TANF programs we spoke with also identified the challenge of not knowing a lot about the child-only caseload or such families' needs. Some TANF programs do not collect or analyze data about the needs of these cases or the trends in the caseload over time.

Despite the potential disincentives and challenges to providing support or employment services to child-only cases beyond cash assistance, the available literature and our interviews with TANF programs show that some states have provided non-assistance support and services to child-only cases, although the availability of these supports and services in some states might have changed since the reports were published. Most of the supports and services identified were for non-parent caregivers. Of these, only one service—kinship navigators (discussed below)—demonstrated some level of effectiveness through evaluations (TriWest Group 2005; James Bell Associates 2013).

Few studies provide information about support and services available through TANF to child-only families with disabled or ineligible immigrant parents. The lack of services available for these groups was also confirmed in our discussion with TANF programs. Only one program provided services specifically for ineligible immigrant parent child-only families and no programs provided services specifically for SSI

recipient parent child-only families.

Services for non-parent caregiver cases

Several states offer services to non-parent caregiver child-only cases. These services range from child care subsidies and additional financial assistance to specific programs aimed at helping these families, such as kinship navigator programs and kinship care programs that provide services like respite care and counseling.

Most states now have or are working to develop, expand and/or evaluate a kinship navigator program, as a result of funding provided by Congress in FY 2018 and FY 2019 under title IV-B, subpart 2 of the Social Security Act. Previously, in 2009 and 2012, the Children's Bureau awarded Family Connection [kinship navigator grants](#) to state and community based agencies for the purpose of connecting kinship caregivers to government benefits and other supports for which they are eligible. Our ASPIRE interviews confirmed that these services are currently offered in Idaho (see Box 2), Minnesota, New York State, Ohio, and Washington. Our ASPIRE interviews confirmed that these services are currently offered in Idaho (see Box 2), Minnesota, New York State, Ohio, and Washington.

Box 2. Navigation services in Idaho

Idaho's TANF agency refers non-parent caregiver child-only cases to navigation services provided by the Family and Community Services Division, which houses the child welfare agency. These services include short-term case management, goal setting, and resource referral provided by a navigator. The navigators can also provide families additional financial assistance to meet the needs of the children, such as for buying beds or attending summer camp, which is funded with foundation support. They also can connect caregivers with relative caregiver support groups available in the community.

- In 2010, 23 states offered **child care benefits** to non-parent caregivers (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO] 2011). Washington and Oklahoma offered child care subsidies to non-parent caregivers who were working, and South Carolina offered subsidies to all non-parent caregivers (Golden and Hawkins 2011). New Jersey also offered child care subsidies to non-parent caregivers who meet the income eligibility requirements through its Kinship Child Care Program (Charlesworth et al. 2012). We confirmed during our ASPIRE interviews that New York City offers child care to non-parent caregiver families when all adults are working; these caregivers are automatically eligible without needing to meet other requirements.
- Before 2010, several jurisdictions had **collaborations between TANF and child welfare agencies** that could help serve non-parent caregiver families, including in Colorado, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin (Marynack 2010), as well as California (Berrick et al. 2006). As of 2014, many such collaborations took place between TANF and child welfare agencies in Texas counties (Beltran 2014). We learned during our ASPIRE interviews that Idaho, New York City, Ohio, Washington, and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina also coordinate with the child welfare agencies to better serve non-parent caregiver cases. These collaborations can include collocating TANF and child welfare services and having the staff in both agencies coordinate services for these families (GAO 2011).
- Ten states or localities provided non-parent caregivers with **additional financial support** for the children beyond TANF cash assistance in 2010, including California, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Denver, Colorado (Marynack 2010). In addition, according to an earlier study (Ehrle et al. 2004), Arizona, Florida, Nebraska, Tennessee, and Vermont offered monthly supplemental payments to non-parent caregivers. Idaho, Kansas, New Jersey, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah also offered one-time payments in 2004 (Ehrle et al. 2004).

Based on our needs-sensing discussions for the ASPIRE project, Union County, North Carolina, and the state of Idaho provide financial support to child-only families to help meet the needs of the children, including for attending summer camp, purchasing school supplies or beds, and participating in sports. Idaho provides these funds with support from a foundation.

- Some states also provide **other supportive services** to non-parent caregiver child-only families. According to a 2010 survey of TANF administrators, a few states offered non-parent caregivers legal assistance, transportation assistance, and a clothing allowance. At least seven states offered mental health services (Mauldon et al. 2012). In 2010, fewer than half of the states provided case management to these families (GAO 2011). In the same year, three states reported providing respite care (GAO 2011). In 2004, some states also offered support groups, including Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington (Ehrle et al. 2004; Gibbs et al. 2004). As of 2014, Nevada referred kinship caregivers to legal services to help them pursue guardianship of the children or reimburses their legal fees (Beltran 2014). According to our ASPIRE interviews, Idaho and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina offer case management to non-parent caregiver families, and Idaho and Washington offer support groups. Idaho also offers respite care. Mecklenburg County also provides educational supports to the children in these cases, including academic enrichment, tutoring, and support with applying to college (see Box 3).
- Some states operate **designated programs for kinship caregivers** that offer a collection of supports and services to these families.
 - As of 2012, Alabama had a kinship care program for non-parent caregiver families who were at risk of entering the foster care system. The program provided respite care, counseling, emergency financial assistance, and payments for clothing, furniture, and school supplies (Charlesworth et al. 2012).
 - The Family Support Team in El Paso County, Colorado, helped child-only cases by identifying their specific needs and providing available support services. The county also

Box 3. Educational support services in North Carolina

Mecklenburg County (Charlotte), North Carolina employs specialized social workers who focus on the educational achievement of children in TANF child-only families. The workers coordinate with the schools to ensure younger children are attending classes and will intervene and provide support when attendance issues arise. In the high school grades, the workers coordinate with the school guidance counselors to ensure the children have a postsecondary plan and help with the college search and application process. The county also has contracts to provide academic enrichment and tutoring during the summer and on the weekends, a homework hotline for questions, and “boot camps” to help children pass end-of-grade tests.

offered a 24-hour phone line for requests for services, support groups, and a “grandparent advocate” who provided information and referrals (Charlesworth et al. 2012).

- Nevada served child-only cases by providing supplemental payments to non-needy caregivers and through a kinship care program that provided payments that were higher than those offered through TANF to caregivers age 62 or older who had legal guardianship of the children. They also offered parenting classes, respite care, and other resources through contracted service providers (Charlesworth et al. 2012).
- New Jersey offered several resources to TANF child-only non-parent caregivers, as well as other kinship care families. These resources included a kinship navigator program, additional financial support, a kinship child care program, and a legal guardian program that provided financial assistance to caregivers who were legal guardians and helped caregivers finance the process of becoming a legal guardian (Charlesworth et al. 2012).

- As of 2014, Tennessee offered a special program for kinship caregivers, called the Relative Caregiver Program, a collaboration between the TANF and child welfare agencies. The program provided kinship caregivers and the children in their care with case management, information and referral services, support groups, respite care, mentoring, tutoring, homework assistance, emergency assistance, and child care (Beltran 2014).
- Washington State currently provides **concurrent benefits** to parents and non-parent caregivers in certain circumstances. In collaboration with the child welfare agency, the state provides TANF cash assistance to both the parent who is working to reunite with her child and the kinship caregiver for up to six months (Beltran 2014).

Services for SSI recipient parent cases

Few services are available to SSI recipient parent child-only cases. As of 2010, at least 17 states did not provide supportive services to SSI recipient parent child-only cases. The services that jurisdictions did provide to these cases typically included mental health services, case management, and one-time cash payments (Mauldon et al. 2012).

- According to a survey of 60 SSI recipient parent child-only TANF families in San Francisco, parents rarely received subsidized child care services from TANF, though many had received mental health therapy through TANF in the past (Mauldon et al. 2010).
- In 2010, parents in SSI child-only cases in Michigan were required to complete Family Self-Sufficiency Plans that included child development tasks such as reading to their children or attending their doctors' appointments (Mauldon et al. 2012).
- No TANF programs we spoke with for the ASPIRE project offered unique services for SSI recipient parent child-only families. However, New York City provides child care to child-only families when all adults are working.

Services for ineligible immigrant parent cases

Similar to SSI recipient parent cases, few services are available to ineligible immigrant parent child-

only cases. A study that included interviews of TANF administrators in California, Florida, Illinois, and New York found that the states did not have programming in place to meet the needs of immigrant parent child-only cases and that these families were eligible for few TANF-funded services (Mauldon et al. 2012). The same study surveyed state TANF administrators and found that the most commonly offered services for these families in 31 responding states were case management (in 19 percent of states); other mental health services including support groups and crisis counseling (19 percent); mental health and substance abuse treatment outside of Medicaid (13 percent); transportation subsidies (10 percent); and employment, education, and training services (10 percent) (Mauldon et al. 2012). According to our ASPIRE interviews, Idaho offers case management to ineligible immigrant families as well as employment and education services. New York City also provides child care to all child-only cases in which the adults are working.

Novel strategies for better serving TANF child-only cases

To help address some of the service delivery challenges states and local TANF programs face and to help better serve child-only cases, several programs we spoke with have implemented novel service strategies for these families. However, none of these strategies has been evaluated for effectiveness.

- **Employ specialized staff to work exclusively with child-only families.** Idaho has dedicated case managers at the state's contracted TANF service provider who work with ineligible immigrant parent cases. These case managers provide tailored supports, including connections to ESL programs and community outreach and navigation. The adults are eligible for the work program and education services, although they are exempt from work requirements. The TANF program in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, has specialized TANF social workers who work exclusively with non-parent caregiver child-only cases. These workers support the children in these cases in their educational achievement, as discussed above. The kinship

workers also provide the caregivers navigation services and connect them with employment services if they are interested.

- **Conduct child well-being assessments.** Some North Carolina counties conduct child well-being assessments to learn what barriers child-only families face and to determine what services they need. In Union County, the child well-being assessments for child-only families take place during home visits. The case managers then connect the children with the supports or services they need, such as financial assistance to participate in sports, tutoring, or mental health counseling. In Idaho, navigators in the Family and Community Services Division, which houses the child welfare agency, conduct in-depth assessments with non-parent caregiver families to determine the needs of both the child and the caregiver.
- **Create service plans for child-only cases.** Some North Carolina counties require child-only families to create “mutual responsibility agreements” so they have a plan in place to reach self-sufficiency. These agreements are similar to ones that work-eligible TANF recipients complete. Items on the plan focus on child well-being, including bringing children to doctor check-ups, ensuring children receive vaccinations, and complying with school requirements. In Idaho, non-parent caregiver child-only families can work with navigators from the Family and Community Services Division to create plans to meet their needs and goals as a family. Such plans might include securing needed financial resources or connecting to support groups.
- **Collaborate with other government agencies or community-based organizations.** TANF programs can connect families with resources provided by other agencies. Some local social services offices in Washington State post information and have staff in their lobbies advertising a wide variety of resources, including the state-funded pre-K program, child playgroups, and employment services funded outside of TANF for TANF customers. Some Ohio counties work together across government agencies and funding streams to ensure they are providing the resources families

need. Several states and localities also mentioned they coordinate with the child welfare agencies to better serve non-parent caregiver cases, as mentioned above.

- **Use a multi-generational approach to serve child-only families.** A multi-generational approach aims to improve the outcomes of both parents or caregivers and children, serving both generations simultaneously. Although approaches like these have not been rigorously evaluated, the theory behind them suggests serving adult caregivers and children together would be mutually reinforcing and would improve outcomes for the whole family (Chase-Lansdale and Brooks-Gunn 2014; Sama-Miller et al. 2017). For child-only families, a multi-generational approach could include providing employment and education services, respite care, and navigation services to the adults. For the children, the approach could include providing educational enrichment activities, employment services for older youth, and financial assistance to attend after-school programs and participate in sports. Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, implements such a multi-generational approach in serving its non-parent caregiver families. The county’s approach has two goals: (1) to ensure that the children are able to succeed in school and (2) to ensure that the parent or caregiver is motivated and supported to keep the child in the home.

Other strategies and approaches raised during our interviews with experts and TANF programs include the following:

- **Collecting and analyzing data on child-only cases.** Without access to data on the caseload composition and the needs of the caseload, TANF programs might struggle to know how to best serve their child-only cases. As a first step to better understanding these cases, TANF programs could consider analyzing existing data on the TANF caseload that must be reported to the federal government to understand which types of child-only cases are most prevalent. This could help determine what services or service delivery strategies might be most appropriate for the caseload. Programs could also consider conducting a one-time study

of their child-only cases. Such a study could include a survey or focus group of child-only families to understand their needs and desired services. Ongoing data about needs and desired services could also be collected through assessments conducted during intake and recertification interviews. States and counties could also consider linking their TANF and child welfare data to understand which child-only families are involved in the child welfare system. This information could help inform whether creating TANF-child welfare collaborations could improve services for these families.

- **Providing age-appropriate services to children.**

Although child care might be a needed service for younger children and their adult caregivers, older children in child-only cases might have different needs. These needs could include financial assistance to attend after-school or summer programs, and education and employment services as older youth transition into adulthood. Services for youth might be especially relevant for TANF programs that serve more non-parent caregiver and SSI recipient parent families, a population that some studies have found to include older children.

- **Providing services that can help children in non-parent caregiver cases achieve permanency.**

Children in non-parent caregiver child-only families might be cared for by their relatives temporarily or might stay with their relatives for a longer period. In either situation, TANF programs could support these families by helping the children achieve permanency. The programs could consider engaging the birth parent in substance abuse or employment services to help the parent work toward regaining custody of his or her child(ren). Alternatively, the programs could help families in which reunification is unlikely to pursue guardianship or adoption through collaboration with the child welfare agency.

- **Creating new or enhancing existing kinship navigator programs.** TANF programs could collaborate with their child welfare agency counterparts to create kinship navigator programs in states where they do not currently

exist or enhance existing programs to better serve kinship families. The Family First Prevention Services Act amended title IV-E of the Social Security Act to allow title IV-E agencies the option to receive title IV-E funding for kinship navigator programs that meet certain criteria, including operating in accordance with promising, supported, or well-supported practices (as those terms are defined for the new title IV-E Prevention Services option). To assist title IV-E agencies in preparing to participate in the newly authorized title IV-E kinship navigator funding option, Congress appropriated approximately \$19 million in funding under title IV-B subpart 2 of the Social Security Act in FY 2018 and FY 2019, to support state and tribal child welfare agencies in developing, enhancing, or evaluating kinship navigator programs. All states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands and a number of Indian tribes plan to use their kinship funding to design and develop a kinship navigator program.^{iv}

Conclusion

TANF child-only families are a highly vulnerable group with needs that go unmet in many states. TANF programs face several challenges in meeting the needs of these families. These challenges include limited resources and work participation requirements that cause states to focus their attention and resources on work-eligible families; a limited understanding of these families' needs; and a lack of resources to meet needs that extend beyond employment services. Despite these challenges, several states have implemented novel approaches to better serve these families that could provide lessons to other states.

An important first step TANF programs can take to improve child-only service delivery and engagement is to collect and analyze more information about the needs of these families. At the national level, a useful next step would be to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the services that are currently available and the novel or innovative strategies that are being implemented nationwide, then disseminate the findings to state and local programs.

Endnotes

ⁱ During summer 2018, we interviewed state and local TANF programs in the following states: California, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, and Washington. We also held discussions with the following subject matter experts: Ana Beltran, Generations United; Elizabeth Lower-Basch, Center on Law and Social Policy; Robert Geen, The Annie E. Casey Foundation; Mark Testa, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work; and Letitia Logan Passarella and Lisa Nicoli, University of Maryland School of Social Work.

ⁱⁱ Our discussion of states excluded territories because the scope of this project is limited to TANF programs administered in the states.

ⁱⁱⁱ Following Mauldon et al.'s (2012) approach, we exclude sanctioned and time-limited cases in our discussion of child-only families' needs and services because these cases are still subject to work requirements and time limits. States might choose to provide child-only benefits to these families, and many that do count these cases as adult-aided (Mauldon et al. 2012). In addition, the services provided to these families generally focus on bringing the parent into compliance with work requirements (Kauff et al. 2007), which differs from the focus of services for other child-only families.

^{iv} To learn more about the FY 2019 Kinship Navigator funding, visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/pi1901>. To learn more about the requirements for participating in the Title IV-E Kinship Navigator Program, visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/pi1811>.

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Additional ASPIRE TANF child-only resources

Infographic: Trends and Services for Child-only TANF Caseload

Research-to-practice Brief: Doing More to Engage and Serve TANF Child-only Cases

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Appendix A. Child-only caseload, by state

State	Number of child-only cases	Total share of TANF caseload (%)	Child-only caseload composition				
			Non-parent caregiver (%)	Parent in assistance unit but not receiving assistance			
				SSI recipient parent (%)	Ineligible immigrant parent (%)	Sanction (%)	Other (%)
U.S. total	618,672	51.3	45.3	22.2	25.1	6.3	1.1
Alabama	5,827	51.9	60.6	35.0	0.0	1.6	2.8
Alaska	789	26.2	96.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5
Arizona	6,228	62.8	84.3	0.1	7.9	2.1	5.6
Arkansas	1,732	45.3	51.5	41.0	4.8	0.0	2.7
California	190,216	47.2	17.0	11.9	55.1	14.9	1.1
Colorado	5,271	32.0	85.8	0.0	13.2	0.0	1.0
Connecticut	5,228	45.9	59.9	32.1	6.3	0.0	1.7
Delaware	2,996	70.5	81.0	8.6	7.5	1.3	1.6
District of Columbia	2,176	39.8	32.6	43.3	21.7	2.4	0.0
Florida	36,052	75.8	75.6	15.4	7.4	1.3	0.3
Georgia	10,406	81.0	77.2	19.4	2.6	0.8	0.0
Hawaii	1,839	28.7	69.1	29.4	0.7	0.0	0.8
Idaho	1,856	96.8	99.1	0.0	0.8	0.1	0.0
Illinois	10,272	65.3	50.5	36.0	9.4	0.0	4.1
Indiana	6,524	81.4	50.4	30.6	9.8	0.0	9.2
Iowa	4,701	44.1	59.0	26.9	8.0	6.1	0.0
Kansas	2,740	51.9	67.4	19.7	0.0	0.0	12.9
Kentucky	15,624	68.6	77.3	20.5	1.0	1.2	0.0
Louisiana	3,621	64.0	72.5	26.9	0.5	0.0	0.1
Maine	1,668	41.5	35.5	53.1	0.9	9.0	1.5
Maryland	8,493	40.0	74.8	9.6	0.0	15.6	0.0
Massachusetts	13,249	41.5	33.4	37.2	22.3	7.1	0.0
Michigan	9,868	58.2	35.6	59.5	4.5	0.0	0.4
Minnesota	9,399	48.7	43.1	40.3	15.7	0.5	0.4
Mississippi	3,273	55.3	51.8	42.4	1.9	3.9	0.0
Missouri	6,520	39.3	41.9	38.5	7.7	0.0	11.9
Montana	1,676	53.9	82.3	15.3	0.0	0.0	2.4
Nebraska	3,017	66.3	47.3	22.3	28.1	0.6	1.7

Appendix A. Child-only caseload, by state (continued)

State	Number of child-only cases	Total share of TANF caseload (%)	Child-only caseload composition				
			Non-parent caregiver (%)	Parent in assistance unit but not receiving assistance			
				SSI recipient parent (%)	Ineligible immigrant parent (%)	Sanction (%)	Other (%)
Nevada	4,617	49.4	46.6	21.3	31.9	0.0	0.2
New Hampshire	1,376	55.8	94.4	1.9	0.0	0.0	3.7
New Jersey	7,752	42.6	29.3	24.4	23.5	19.4	3.4
New Mexico	5,283	45.6	41.5	19.6	33.8	5.1	0.0
New York	44,709	42.0	37.4	28.9	28.6	4.1	1.0
North Carolina	13,154	76.1	68.0	16.4	14.8	0.7	0.1
North Dakota	641	58.0	65.8	13.5	0.7	19.0	1.0
Ohio	45,513	79.0	71.4	23.8	4.7	0.0	0.1
Oklahoma	4,877	68.1	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Oregon	6,661	38.6	47.3	22.5	17.5	5.6	7.1
Pennsylvania	20,698	35.8	31.5	50.9	3.7	5.4	8.5
Rhode Island	1,651	40.5	27.7	67.5	0.0	4.8	0.0
South Carolina	6,228	65.3	75.8	20.8	2.2	1.2	0.0
South Dakota	2,442	80.2	88.3	10.7	0.4	0.0	0.6
Tennessee	14,854	48.3	66.1	28.3	5.4	0.2	0.0
Texas	21,794	73.7	45.4	11.6	38.5	0.0	4.5
Utah	1,961	54.1	82.7	12.3	4.9	0.0	0.1
Vermont	1,389	52.2	53.2	45.2	0.0	1.6	0.0
Virginia	10,486	48.5	61.1	25.2	7.2	5.6	0.9
Washington	13,844	45.7	56.8	28.3	14.6	0.3	0.0
West Virginia	4,921	67.9	74.9	23.7	0.0	0.0	1.4
Wisconsin	10,669	57.2	44.1	55.6	0.0	0.1	0.2
Wyoming	242	56.8	83.2	15.9	0.0	0.9	0.0

Note: The light shading in each column indicates the bottom five states and the dark shading indicates the top five states in each category except ineligible immigrant parent, sanction, and other. For these, the light shading indicates states with less than 1 percent of cases in each category. The dark shading represents the states with the highest percentages (15 percent or higher for ineligible immigrant parent, 50 percent or higher for sanction, and 10 percent or higher for other).

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (2017).

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