



Addressing Housing Instability in Child Welfare

Lack of stable housing is often a precipitating factor for a family's involvement in the child welfare system. Supportive housing offers a safe, stable, and affordable solution for families so they can stay together while improving overall safety and well-being. Children and youth who have a reliable place to call home spend fewer days in foster care, experience a reduction in subsequent abuse and neglect cases, and increase their school attendance. Local jurisdictions may also experience child welfare cost savings over time after investment in supportive housingⁱ.

To better align families' child welfare and supportive housing needs, child welfare leaders must clearly present their vision for the role of supportive housing as a part of positive child welfare outcomes. State administrators and leaders must consider critical aspects of housing within the Family First IV-E Prevention Program Five-Year State Plan (State Plan) and introduce necessary state policy, legislative, and budgetary changes to ensure that stable, supportive housing is central to long-term family stability and well-beingⁱⁱ.

Taking Action to Keep Families Together

Family First IV-E Prevention Program Five-Year Plan

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) presents states an opportunity to reimagine strategies and programs to serve families that emphasize keeping them together by building and strengthening their protective factors over time. The following sections within the State Planⁱⁱⁱ are key areas to integrate supportive housing as part of the state's strategy.

1. Service Description and Oversight

In this section, states must include the evidence-based programs (EBP) that families will be offered. Many of the initial EBPs determined eligible for the IV-E Clearinghouse are already proven interventions for child welfare involved families in supportive housing^{iv}. States should consider these programs as part of their service array. States are also asked to describe how children and parents will be assessed to determine service eligibility. As lack of stable housing can exacerbate a family's involvement with the child welfare system, it is critical for states to include questions regarding housing stability as part of this assessment.

2. Consultation and Coordination

States must also describe how they will consult with other state agencies to establish a continuum of care for children and families receiving services and how they will coordinate service delivery across all partners. It is critical that the housing sector be included. Partners to consider from the housing sector include the state agency responsible for housing, housing providers, the Public Housing Authority (PHA), Continuum of Care (CoC), and landlords. This team must work together to identify local housing resources and services, develop guidance for implementing program components, and provide a rapid problem-solving structure to address housing stability challenges as they arise.

3. Eligibility for Title IV-E Prevention Programs— Prevention Plan for the Child

As outlined in FFPSA statute, a prevention plan for the child must be established in advance of any service delivery. This plan identifies the child as a "candidate for foster care" or a "pregnant or parenting youth". The plan must include prevention strategies and services so that the child can remain safely at home. Supportive housing must be viewed as a cornerstone for serving the most vulnerable families when there is an imminent risk of a child entering foster care and the family is unstably housed. Supportive housing provides a family-centered approach for delivering EBP interventions.

State and Local Reforms

While supportive housing is not currently highlighted as an approved EBP in the IV-E Clearinghouse, by addressing the foundational elements listed above states underscore the critical intersection between housing and child welfare. States such as California, New Jersey, and New Mexico have already taken the necessary steps to legislate a Keeping Families Together framework and dedicate appropriations to invest in supportive housing for vulnerable families involved in child welfare services.

Policy & Legislation

1. Prioritize Vulnerable Families

Families who are unstably housed and also have persistent co-occurring challenges with chronic health conditions, mental illness and/or substance abuse are at greatest risk of being involved in the child welfare system. For these families, supportive housing that is tailored to their specific housing and child welfare needs is a proven solution to avoiding removal and for keeping families together^v. A prioritization methodology and a process by which families can be identified and referred for both housing and child welfare services should be established, implemented across state programs, and further codified by policy. The development of the methodology and business processes should be supported by the consultation and coordination team identified in the State Plan.

2. Link Data

The use of administrative data is critical to understanding the full scope of housing issues and the needs of the families. In addition to including questions on housing in the service eligibility assessment required by the State Plan, states should consider data sharing agreements documented in statute or through an agreed upon Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This will ensure that data from the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) and Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) are linked to gain a better understanding of the issues, as well as help identify and prioritize vulnerable families and the required services needed to support them.

3. Streamline Resources

While child welfare services are intended to be short-term interventions, supportive housing is a permanent home and includes on-going community-based services to support vulnerable families over time. An approach to working with and across multiple state agencies to streamline housing subsidies, case management, and EBPs available to families both while involved in the child welfare system and post-discharge should be established and further codified in policy^{vi}. This is critical for continued family stability once their child welfare case has been closed.

Budget & Appropriations

1. Align State Funding

Dedicated child welfare state funding typically used for emergency rental assistance, one-time foster care discharge grants, and other housing-related allowable expenses may be reviewed to determine if these funds are currently underutilized or can be repurposed. These funds may be repurposed for rental assistance, security deposit assistance, utility payments, moving cost assistance, and interim housing assistance while housing navigators seek permanent housing options.

2. Invest in Supportive Housing

States may appropriate a Keeping Families Together Fund for the purpose of providing supportive housing and services to vulnerable families. This provides housing subsidies and/or housing assistance not reimbursable under Title IV-E or financed through other federal mechanisms. Allowable uses of funds may include – state-administered Family Unification Program^{vii} and vouchers, housing navigation and search services, non-time limited intensive case management^{viii}, parent partners and recovery coaches, tenancy support and stability services, and parenting and family relationship services.

ⁱ Metis Associates (2010), Keeping Families Together: An evaluation of implementation and outcomes of a pilot of supportive housing models for families involved in the child welfare system.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (2017). Information Memorandum: Efforts by child welfare agencies, local communities, and federal agencies to end family and youth homelessness.

ⁱⁱⁱ Please see ACYF-CB-PI-18-09, Attachment B – State Title IV-E Prevention Program Five-Year Plan Pre-Print for additional details. Available: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/pi1809>

^{iv} Examples of EBPs already being used for child welfare involved families in supportive housing include –Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Health Families America, and Parents as Teachers

^v Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

^{vi} The Supportive Housing and Child Welfare 8 Steps to Partnership Road Map provides a best practice programmatic approach that States can use for guidance. Available: https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/OneRoofKFT_8-Steps-Roadmap.pdf

^{vii} State-administered FUP vouchers can be managed by state or local housing authorities or the state agency responsible for housing.

^{viii} FFPSA allows for reimbursement of approved preventive services for up to 12-months, with an additional 12-month periods possible upon determination. 12-month periods may be contiguous.