

Building Resilience: SUPPORTING GRANDFAMILIES' MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

When children cannot be raised by their parents, research indicates that they do best being raised by grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends. These families are known as **grandfamilies**.

Grandfamilies are diverse and exist across various geographies, socio-economic statuses, races, and ethnicities. Yet, they are disproportionately Black, African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, and in some areas, Latino.

Grandfamilies are formed when events – such as parental death, mental health and substance use disorders, incarceration, deportation, divorce, or military deployment – separate children from their parents. Such events leave the children and their caregivers particularly vulnerable to trauma and mental health concerns. They have likely experienced multiple hardships like loss, neglect, abuse, and food insecurity – additional layers of trauma that intensify mental health concerns. And finally, events in recent years that have contributed to the U.S.'s mental health crisis, such as COVID-19, racial violence, and the opioid epidemic, have disproportionately impacted grandfamilies.



STRENGTHS OF GRANDFAMILIES

By virtue of their strengths, resilience, and their relationship with the children, grandfamily caregivers have the ability to mediate the mental health concerns of the children they raise, especially when they receive needed concrete material supports and mental health supports. Compared to children in foster care with non-relatives, children in grandfamilies have increased stability, higher levels of permanency, and more feelings of belonging and acceptance. They experience greater preservation of cultural identity, and community connections, as well as better behavioral and mental health outcomes.



THERE ARE AT LEAST
2.4 MILLION
CHILDREN GROWING UP IN
GRANDFAMILIES IN THE
UNITED STATES TODAY.



Read other key facts and findings in the report.

GRANDFAMILIES' CHALLENGES WITH MENTAL HEALTH

For grandfamilies, the impacts of mental health challenges span generations. They experience layers of trauma that create intense mental health concerns and are at increased risk for chronic stress.

- ▼ **Children's** mental health conditions may be rooted in their past, as they come into grandfamilies with past experiences of trauma, abuse, neglect, and more. These conditions can cause significant problems even once they are safely living in a grandfamily home. For example, children who have experienced trauma may live with learning difficulties, chronic health conditions, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- ▼ **Caregivers'** mental health is highly impacted when raising others' children, which directly affects their physical health and general wellness. They experience the chronic child-rearing stress of caring for children – and often children with special
- ▼ **Birth parents** of children living in grandfamilies often experience undiagnosed and/or untreated mental and behavioral health conditions and substance use disorders.

needs – who have experienced trauma, as well as housing strains, financial pressures, social isolation, food insecurity, and other issues often brought on by the sudden responsibility of raising children. Additionally, dealing with strained relationships with birth parents, prioritizing their own needs, and navigating family systems and services of support can be daunting – and at times impossible.

Research shows that between 2002 and 2019, **GRANDPARENTS REPORTING PARENTS' SUBSTANCE USE** as a reason for caregiving jumped from 21% to 40%.

2002 **21%**

2019 **40%**

The states with the highest percentages of **GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN** are also the states with the highest **OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATES**.



EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Research indicates that the social, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for children in grandfamilies are better when they and their caregivers receive the **right supportive services**.

SOME KEY MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR GRANDFAMILIES

- ▼ Mental, behavioral, and physical health services
- ▼ Training and education
- ▼ Peer-to-peer support groups
- ▼ Community or school-based youth programs
- ▼ Respite care
- ▼ Employee assistance programs

Even when these services may be available, they are too often difficult for grandfamilies to access and receive for multiple reasons due to lack of availability of culturally appropriate mental health services, mental health workforce shortages, lack of legal authority, lack of professionals' understanding of grandfamilies' needs, cost, stigma, ageism, and more.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS GRANDFAMILIES' MENTAL HEALTH

Generations United affirms the Administration's **recent actions** to tackle the nation's mental health crisis and to support family caregivers in line with their **national mental health strategy** and **national strategy to support family caregivers**. Some recommendations outlined in the report include:



Authentically engage kinship caregivers, birth parents, foster parents, and young people raised in grandfamilies in the **DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION** of services that impact them, and ensure that they reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the communities served.



Increase access to affordable, quality, trauma-informed **MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT AND TRAINING** for youth and caregivers in grandfamilies.



Provide health care, mental health, and educational providers **TRAINING AND RESOURCES** on issues related to grandfamilies.



Collect **NATIONAL DATA ON MENTAL HEALTH INDICATORS**, including adverse childhood experiences, for children in grandfamilies.



Encourage states and tribes to use **OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS** to support grandfamilies mental health and wellness.



Create pathways to increase **PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORTS**.



Read the full list of policy, practice, and research recommendations in the report.

Generations United calls for the recognition of the increasing need for high-quality, culturally appropriate, person-centered, affordable, easily accessible mental health services and supports for grandfamilies to help them build on their inherent strengths and resilience to thrive together.



Generations United's 2023 State of Grandfamilies report identifies ways U.S. systems and practices do not support grandfamilies' mental health and makes recommendations that can help grandfamilies thrive. The report also includes real stories from caregivers and children of grandfamilies. Read it here.



ABOUT GENERATIONS UNITED

For more than three decades, Generations United's mission has been to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. We have been the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. Critical to our mission, Generations United has two initiatives to support kinship families: its long-standing National Center on Grandfamilies, and the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, which is the first-ever federally supported national technical assistance center on the families, run in cooperation with the U.S. Administration for Community Living. Learn more at www.gu.org and www.gksnetwork.org.



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