

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Further Incorporating Family Input

What is the background for the study?

Seeking and obtaining feedback from families on how programs can better operate, improve services, and serve future families can create more effective and equitable social programs. Some federally funded human services programs already seek and incorporate feedback from families, particularly in the fields of child welfare, youth homelessness prevention, teen pregnancy prevention, and home visiting programs. Additionally, Tribal communities have often used storytelling as a way to capture families' perspectives. However, obtaining and using input from families to inform program service delivery and operational improvements appears to be much less common in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child support programs.

What is the study's focus?

Through this study, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services seeks to (1) understand how TANF, child support, and other human services programs gather and use input from the families they have served, currently serve, or could serve for program improvement; (2) identify ways for TANF and child support programs to incorporate family input for program improvement; and (3) identify the successes and challenges these programs face in gathering and using family input.

This study will explore approaches to gathering family input, create program resources to support programs in gathering and using family input, engage TANF and child support programs in formative learning cycles to test and refine the resources, and report on findings. OPRE has contracted with Mathematica and its partner, MEF Associates, to design and conduct the study.

How will the study be conducted?

The TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Further Incorporating Family Input study includes several key activities:

- Conduct knowledge development activities, such as literature scans and consultations with key informants, to better understand the usage of family input in State, Tribal, and Local TANF and child support programs.
- Convene and consult with an Expert Work Group consisting of members with diverse identities and experiences, including TANF and child support program staff and former or current families, to provide input and feedback on major study activities.
- In partnership with the Expert Work Group, develop family input resources to support TANF and child support programs to design, obtain, and analyze input from the families they serve to inform program improvement.
- Pilot the family input resources with several TANF and child support programs.
- Update and re-publish the family input resources based on pilot test findings.

When will the study happen?

The study began in September 2021 and will continue through September 2026.

What will the study produce?

The study team will develop family input resources that can help TANF and child support programs design, obtain, and analyze family input to improve their programs. A final report will be produced that summarizes the process used to develop the family input resources and synthesizes lessons learned through the course of the study; the family resources prepared by the study team will be appended to the final report.

To find out more

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