



The number of children in foster care increased by 10 percent during the years 2012 – 2016, from 397,000 to 437,500, a jump that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services largely attributes to the opioid epidemic.¹ Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, Minnesota, Montana and New Hampshire saw increases of more than 50 percent in their foster care populations during that same time.

New opportunities and supports

The Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) offers new supports for prevention and treating families struggling with substance abuse disorders. For the first time, the law provides an opportunity to help parents get drug rehabilitation treatment without their children going into foster care, so child/parent bonds are not broken and parents are more likely to recover.

It also provides increased support for grandparents and other relatives to care for children and funding to help children stay in treatment programs with their parents.

- In 2014, more than a third of children removed from their homes because of a parent's drug or alcohol abuse were placed with relatives, according to a 2017 Generations United report.²

Parts of Family First are intended to help newborns whose mothers were addicted to opioids, including heroin, during pregnancy.

- More than 110 opioid-dependent babies died between 2010 and 2015 after being sent home with parents ill-equipped to care for them, a 2015 Reuters investigation found.³

Ongoing federal, state and community opportunities have also been renewed under Family First to jointly fund preventive services and reach across child- and family-serving agencies to develop an effective continuum of help for kids and families under the Regional Partnership Grants program.

Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, one of the lead sponsors of Family First, said the law and additional funding resources “will usher in the most significant improvements to the child welfare system in decades and provide real help to families to fight the opioid epidemic.”

The overall budget agreement includes:

- about \$6 billion for opioid and mental health issues; and,
- an estimated \$1.5 billion over 10 years to be used to prevent children and teens from entering foster care.

To learn more

- “What Does Quality Treatment Look Like? Identifying Effective Substance Use Disorder Treatment for Families” by Theresa Lemus, National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare, June 1, 2018
www.nadcpconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/B-16.pdf
- *The Opioid Crisis: Implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act*, July 24, 2018, congressional hearing, featuring Jerry Milner, associate commissioner of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/asl/testimony/2018-07/opioid-crisis-implementation-ffpsa.html

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2018). *Substance use, the opioid epidemic and the child welfare system: Key findings from a mixed methods study*. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/258836/SubstanceUseChildWelfareOverview.pdf>

² Generations United. (2017). *In loving arms: The protective role of grandparents and other relatives in raising children exposed to trauma*. Retrieved from www.gu.org/resources/the-state-of-grandfamilies-in-america-2017/

³ The most vulnerable victims of America’s opioid epidemic. *Reuters*. (2015). Retrieved from www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/baby-opioids/