

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

KEY MESSAGES

THE PROBLEM

- ▶ Nationwide, more than 2.6 million people are raising grandkids. That number is rising rapidly as more parents are jailed, are forced into treatment centers or die from drug and opioid overdoses (AARP 2017).
- ▶ In New Mexico (NM), a similar trend is troubling grandparents raising grandchildren, which has been increasing over the past 30 years.
 - From 1970 to 2015, the percentage of grandparents raising children in NM almost doubled-increasing from 6.3% in to 11%.
 - In Rio Arriba County, 60% to 65% of grandparents and great-grandparents have been raising their grandchildren and great-grand children with little to no financial or social support.
- ▶ Structural and deep-rooted social inequities continue the cycle of intergenerational trauma, poverty, unemployment and intergenerational trauma and alcohol and drug abuse.
 - Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even great-grandparents are making sacrifices and taking on life-changing responsibility of raising children that parents are unable or unwilling to take care of. Grandparents are locked out of state aid. It creates a tremendous level of disparities for those raising grandchildren.

Grandparents raising grandchildren face income and other barriers to accessing subsidized childcare (average cost of childcare for one child in New Mexico is \$8,865 a year, or \$738.75 per month).

The behavioral and mental health consequences impact the grandparents and grandchildren.

“The War on Drugs that even today is still on the rise, the aftermath of this, shattered family and divided community. We need to bring together a plan to support our struggling at risk population. This is not just addiction, it’s mental health, behavioral health and the fact that many have been institutionalized and the brokenness is devastating.”

“We all know of a friend or neighbor that cannot afford their own medications because they have a grandchild or two. Self-care is critical!”

“These children were born from trauma and lived in trauma till they were brought to their grandparents.”

“Our current healthcare system is failing our communities. We can now come together and make a difference, at the very least try!”

POLICY CONTEXT

The NM State Legislative Taskforce on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren has been in existence since 2015. In 2018, Senate Memorial 94 included advocates and community-based organizations to participate in the task force in addition to the Children, Youth & Families Department, the Aging & Long-Term Services Department, Public Education Department, Health and Human Services Department, and the Attorney General’s Office. The SM 94 Taskforce mandated a study and recommend concrete policy changes that could be implemented to expand the availability of resources and assistance to grandparents raising grandchildren, including financial resources; legal services; food and housing assistance; and programs relating to medical care, child care, transportation and education. Following, are three viable policy options that draw from the Task Force’s recommendations. These are policy strategies that would bring immediate aide and support to grandparents and, in turn, foster the development, health, welfare and education of the grandchildren while tackling the long-term impacts of structural racism and intergenerational trauma.



POLICY OPTIONS

Policy Option 1: Provide legal aid at no-cost to grandparents.

State, county and city funds should be leveraged to provide legal services for grandparents so that they can apply for guardianship of their grandchildren (guardianship fees can range from \$6,000-\$8,000). Additionally, grandparents attempting to enroll their grandchildren in school or who seek medical services for their grandchildren are sometimes turned away because they do not have documentation of legal custody or guardianship. The state legislature appropriated \$248,000 for kinship care in 2019. Pegasus Legal Services, the primary provider of services with these funds, "has calculated that an additional \$100,000 is needed to fully serve the needs of the state, including active outreach to potential clients and social work/case management services to connect clients to needed resources and assistance."

Policy Option 2: Amend the NM Administrative Code to make grandparents and other kinship caregivers eligible for child care subsidy regardless of income or their status as legal guardians.

The State of New Mexico needs to create state aid and services to grandparents raising grandchildren without creating navigational bureaucratic barriers that discourage grandparents from seeking assistance because it also threatens their own pension or retirement benefits. Current regulations make it easy for grandparents to access childcare if they first apply for child-only Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), cash assistance (maximum monthly benefit is \$227). Grandparents applying for TANF cash assistance will not have their income taken into account regardless of their status as legal guardians. However, if the grandparent does not need or want cash assistance, but does need the childcare subsidy in order to make ends meet, their income will be taken into account if they have legal guardianship. Since at least 50% of grandparents raising grandchildren have incomes below the federal poverty level, the addition of one or more children to the household places an immediate strain on their finances.

Policy Option 3: Invest and leverage federal, state, county and local funds to improve the quality and availability of behavioral health services to grandparents and the grandchildren.

Grandchildren need early intervention services, developmentally appropriate outpatient therapy, and home-based services. Improving the long-term outcomes for these vulnerable children depends on early and effective intervention. The grandchildren have experienced various forms of trauma and yet are not formally provided Individual Evaluation Plans (IEP) in the public school system. An IEP would enable them to receive some type of evaluation for trauma, access to speech therapy, mental health and counseling services including wrap-around home services to address developmental issues.

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