

21st Century Research Agenda for a Child & Family Well-Being System

Project Progress, Products, and Plans

Overview

Since 2020, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, and the William T. Grant Foundation have partnered with a broad array of experts, stakeholders, national associations, and people with lived experience to craft a transformative research agenda comprised of pressing gaps that span community-based maltreatment prevention and family supports, child protective services and prevention of family separation, and out-of-home care and post-permanency services. The major activities, milestones, and key products listed below are the efforts taken to date to develop, refine, disseminate, and support execution of the Research Agenda.

Major Activities

1. **Consensus Convenings.** Nearly 400 stakeholders (lived experience experts, foundation leaders, policy makers, researchers, practitioners, juvenile court judges and personnel) attended one of three consensus convenings to provide feedback and to affirm the 21st Century Research Agenda in October 2021.
2. **Outreach to Funders.** Project leadership and lived experience experts continue to conduct outreach and provide presentations to potential federal, foundation, state, and county funders of research on the 23 high-priority gaps.
3. **Academic Engagement.** Project members have been presenting at academic conferences (e.g., SSWR, CWLA), submitting agenda material to peer-reviewed journals, and partnering with key organizations (e.g., AASWSW, APHSA, BACW, CWLA, Social Current, SSWR) to promote uptake among researchers.

Key Products

1. **Main Report & Executive Summary.** Three main expert work groups (each comprised of individuals with expertise in funding, research, policy, practice, and lived experience) produced a comprehensive report following a two-year review and consensus-building process. The report outlines 330+ research gaps, and the appendices describe the agenda development process and other details. An executive summary provides an abridged overview of the high-priority gaps and development details.
2. **DEI Framework and Research Question Assessment.** In 2020, three DEI experts developed a comprehensive framework to guide the knowledge gap identification and prioritization processes, including a DEI-centered assessment tool for evaluating potential research questions.
3. **Project Launch Videos.** Lived experience experts and foundation leaders provide their thoughts on the research agenda motivations, contents, and potential in a series of professionally produced videos for distribution.
4. **Research Gap Requests for Proposals (RFPs).** Sample RFPs are available for the 23 high-priority research gaps, to support potential funders in expediting the research funding process.
5. **Project Website.** Beginning in 2023, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) will host the official project website, which contains all public-facing project documents, a collection of targeted resources for funders and researchers, a quarterly newsletter, and other important project updates and information.
6. **Research Brief and Checklist for Funders.** Two lived experience experts and a research partner, with input from the project team, authored a brief and a checklist on how funders can promote meaningful involvement of lived experience expertise in research. Find it here: <https://wtgrantfoundation.org/new-resources-for-meaningfully-engaging-lived-expertise-in-child-welfare-research>
7. **Webinar Series.** AASWSW and Social Current both produced webinar series on a variety of topics related to the research agenda and transformative, equitable research. Recordings are available on the website.

- 8. Certificate in Community and PLE-Centered Research.** AASWSW offers a certificate requiring viewing webinars and passing a brief quiz. See <https://aaswsw.org/building-a-transformative-21st-century-research-agenda/>

Next Steps

- 1. Funding Opportunities Tool.** We are building a repository of funding opportunities, from federal, state, and foundation sources, related to each of the 23 high-priority gap areas. The listing will be updated regularly and hosted on the project website.
- 2. Crowd-Sourced Bibliography.** We invite researchers to nominate research publications that address any of the 24 highest priority research gaps, for inclusion in an online annotated bibliography outlining progress made toward addressing each key gap.

High-Priority Research Gaps

The 23 high-priority gaps cover four areas that align with the expert workgroups and the results of the national consensus convenings: Community-Based Prevention (“CBP”), Child Protective Services and Prevention of Foster Care (“CPS”), Out-of-Home Care (“OOHC”), and Workforce (“WORK”).

Community-Based Prevention

- CBP 1.** What are the core components, effectiveness, sustainability, and transferability of community mobilization efforts for increasing access and use of supports and services?
- CBP 5.** What are the core components, effectiveness, sustainability, and transferability of efforts to embed prevention programs and services within settings visited by families for increasing access and use of supports and services?
- CBP 7.** What are the impacts of local and federal policies, supports, and programs that attempt to address inequities in systems (e.g., lack of access to high-quality childcare, the criminalization of poverty) on community, family, and child well-being?
- CBP 9.** What policies, programs, services, and supports can help increase access to safe, stable, and affordable housing and how do they impact maltreatment and child, family, and community well-being?
- CBP 10.** How can Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) and other funding sources be leveraged to support the infrastructure needed to implement and sustain community-based prevention efforts?

Child Protective Services and Prevention of Foster Care

- CPS 1.** What is the level of effectiveness among existing practice and policy interventions that are aimed at preventing initial and recurrent child protective services (CPS) contact and out-of-home placement?
- CPS 2.** What can we learn from cultural practices, best practice models, and models considered less adversarial (e.g., ICWA courts, Healing to Wellness Courts) used with subpopulations (e.g., ICWA and active efforts) that can help transform our approach to child welfare?
- CPS 3.** What is the effectiveness of innovative and transformative programs and interventions that are currently in place but have not yet undergone a full-scale outcome evaluation and comparison to traditional intervention methods?
- CPS 4.** To what extent are risk factors commonly associated with CPS involvement (e.g., domestic violence, parental mental health, trauma histories, extreme poverty) experienced differently by families with varying dimensions of family diversity?
- CPS 5.** Are helplines more effective than hotlines at reducing CPS involvement, reducing out-of-home placement, and improving parent and caregiver well-being?

- CPS 6.** To what extent do income supports (e.g., universal basic income, antipoverty programs, paid family leave, tax credits) prevent CPS involvement and out-of-home placement?
- CPS 7.** How are partnerships between child welfare agencies formed with other entities, including researchers and community and institutional partners (e.g., public health, schools, legal advocates, courts, faith-based organizations, parents, foster care alumni/parents) in order to reduce CPS involvement and out-of-home placement and improve parent and caregiver well-being?

Out-of-Home Care

- OOHC 1.** Which child welfare and related policies and practices contribute to the most successful outcomes for children and youth placed in out-of-home care? This includes children and youth of all identities, acknowledging that there are certain groups that the data tell us are more vulnerable to experiencing inequities in services and outcomes, such as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ2SI+IA+ children.
- OOHC 2.** Does the involvement and consultation of foster care alumni, youth who are currently in care, parents, kinship parents, and other caregivers help improve the quality and safety of out-of-home care?
- OOHC 3.** What are ethnic-racial patterns of out-of-home care (e.g., type, quality, restrictiveness)? What factors drive these patterns, and how do they affect child well-being?
- OOHC 4.** What child welfare services are effective in promoting safe, stable, and timely reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship? Reunification services include intervention models and strategies that are based on a set of shared values concerning the centrality of family in practice.
- OOHC 5.** What are effective strategies to reduce re-entry to care for different age groups, such as infants or teens in out-of-home care? How might the provision of post-reunification services (e.g., timely in-home crisis intervention services or other services) promote stable reunification and prevent re-entry?
- OOHC 8.** What are effective strategies to promote permanency outcomes for infants and very young children in out-of-home care (including situations in which infants and young children are in out-of-home care with their mothers)? Are there any inequities in services or outcomes for these young children and their families?
- OOHC 9.** How can we develop evidence-based recruitment, screening, and matching practices to engage highly effective resource parents for children in out-of-home care? (The meaning of “highly effective” would be defined in the RFP but might include such dimensions as the ability of the resource parents to support the overall case plan, coordinate with birth parents, and support child development and well-being.)

Workforce

- WORK 1.** **Workforce effectiveness:** Some child welfare workers achieve better outcomes than others with their clients and families. As the common denominator in the child welfare system, these workers represent a key intervention “platform” that is already established. Some agencies have been more successful in hiring staff from the local communities. How can we study child welfare workers and their effectiveness, with an eye toward learning and implementing effective practices? For example, can we identify their most effective strategies – focusing initially on the most every day and fundamental practice aspects (an inductive approach).

WORK 2. *Rural and tribal community workforce issues:*

- Are the supports that are available to staff in urban communities also available to rural child welfare staff? In what ways are urban and rural workforces treated differently? Are they expected to achieve the same outcomes even with longer distances to drive and fewer resources?
- What are the challenges to finding and obtaining qualified employees in rural areas? How can we improve the training and education of child welfare staff and frontline workers, so they are well informed and confident when reaching out to families in tribal communities?
- To what extent is the difficulty in acquiring and maintaining an adequate workforce in tribal communities affecting the availability and delivery of services for children and families?

WORK 3. *Worker and system collaboration dynamics:* How effective are the partnerships between the various entities involved in a child's case? To what extent is communication and information sharing efficient? In what ways can those processes be improved?

WORK 4. *Use of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teams:* What interdisciplinary staffing strategy is most effective for each major program area within child welfare (e.g., CPS intake, home-based family support services, out-of-home care, post-permanency services)? Due to the complexity of factors that create the need for child welfare services, interdisciplinary responses are important. Future research should address how to use team-based care in building 21st-century child welfare service systems—using the best of what works well in health care and other interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary settings.

Building a 21st Century Research Agenda: 2022-24 Strategic & Engagement Roadmap

The purpose of building a 21st Century Research Agenda (to esupport child and family well-being) is to (1) form a broad-based coalition of research partners to identify research gaps to support child welfare, (2) articulate clear research questions that need to be addressed that are relevant for jurisdiction leaders and policy-makers; (3) identify and implement strategies to conduct research that will close the gaps and answer those key questions; and (4) help agencies use findings to improve policy, program and practice strategies. This visual provides activities, outcomes and goals for 2022 - 2024.

2022 Goals

- More deeply engage with the U.S. Children's Bureau
- Engage with 8-10 funders
- Publish report on engaging lived expertise in the research process
- Explore the feasibility of a certificate course for researchers with the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
- Launch website by December 31st, 2022



2022 Goals

- Funders agree to support 2-3 studies that will help complete the 21st Century Research Agenda



2023-24 Goals

- Continue to engage with funders
- Publicize the RFPs issued and research grants awarded for the high priority research gaps
- Continue promoting research that includes more community and constituent involvement, and pays attention to DEI.
- Organize and nurture a national network of child welfare researchers.
- Improve the use of research findings to scale-up good ideas.
- Enagage other systems such as behavioral health and housing.

