

FAMILY FIRST BASICS

Family First will restructure how the federal government spends money on child welfare to improve outcomes for children.

Family First gives Iowa increased funding for foster care prevention services – but also requires these services to be evidence-based.

When children must be placed out of the home, states are expected to find and support relatives and fictive kin placements.

If relatives and fictive kin cannot be located to care for the child, then stranger foster parents can be accessed.

Congregate care is permitted if the youth has clinical needs that require residentially-based treatment. These providers must have the clinical skill to provide treatment that helps youth stabilize and improve.

Iowa is preparing for implementation of Family First in the following ways:

- ▶ Signing a strategic agreement with Annie E. Casey Foundation for intensive technical assistance with implementing Family First
- ▶ Beginning subsidized guardianship
- ▶ Supporting further implementation of Evidence-based programs – such as SafeCare
- ▶ Updating the risk assessment tool
- ▶ Limiting problematic sexualized behavior beds in group care to youth with established clinical needs
- ▶ Initiating a kinship navigator program in Johnson and Linn Counties
- ▶ Developing a research-based safety assessment and plan document
- ▶ Further implementation of Total Outcome Package (TOP) for all youth 12+yo in out-of-home placement

Basic information about **Family First** is outlined below. DHS will continue to provide updates to internal and external partners as our child welfare system evolves.

What funds are impacted by Family First?

Family First makes changes in how states can receive and spend Title IV-E funds. Historically, these funds have been used to pay for foster care placements. Under Family First, states will receive IV-E funds to prevent foster care placements.

So is this just about funding streams?

No! Family First represents a significant change in quality of interventions, practice, and treatment approaches.





For example:

- ▶ Services must be provided to prevent out-of-home placements.
- ▶ If children must be placed outside the parental home, kin/relative placements must be used, with resources provided to make the placement successful.
- ▶ If congregate care settings are used, the youth must have a clinical need and the treatment services must meet those assessed needs.
- ▶ Congregate care settings must be a Qualified Residential Treatment Program (QRTP).

Aren't we doing most of this already?

No – Not in the manner Family First requires.

In the past few years, Iowa has moved toward a system of care that aligns with many of Family First's practice values. Recent contracts have included requirements regarding use of evidence-based practice. Use of relative/kin care has been part of practice for many years. Our contracts with Safety/FSRP providers have included work to prevent placements and facilitate reunification. Juvenile Courts have made out-of-home placement decisions based on whether reasonable efforts were made to prevent placement and reunite families.

However, Iowa will need to increase the intensity and quality of services used to prevent placement and keep children safely with their parent(s). We will need to ensure that families receive mental health and substance abuse treatment that can prevent removal of children or speed up reunification. Iowa needs to develop programs and resources to support relative and fictive kin placements. Further, Iowa must develop clinical assessment requirements to ensure youth are going to congregate care only when treatment is necessary.

If evidence-based treatment and interventions must be provided under Family First, who gets to decide what is 'evidence-based'?

Although the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for child welfare lists all services that are researched and are identified as well-supported, supported, or a promising practice, the Federal Children's Bureau will be making the determination about which evidence-based program are eligible for funding.

What other opportunities and flexibilities does Family First offer?

Family First will also help with the following:

- ▶ Streamlining licensure of relative foster homes;
- ▶ Support development of kinship navigator program
- ▶ Further implementation of evidence-based, family preservation services

When will Family First be implemented?

Many of the program enhancements required under Family First will take some time and effort to implement, therefore Iowa has determined that the official date will be July 1, 2020.