Tribal Leaders Guide for Supporting Relative Caregiving

Kinship Statistics

For more, please visit the Grandfamilies & Kinship Network Data Page

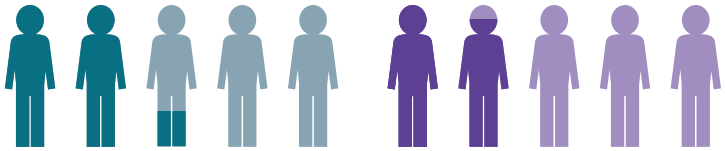
As of September 2024, about **2.5 million U.S. children** were being raised in kinship families or grandfamilies. American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) grandparents are more likely than grandparents in other racial and ethnic groups to be responsible for raising grandchildren. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 39% of co-resident AI/AN grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren's care.

This resource uses "grandfamilies," "relative care," and "kinship care" interchangeably for families (as defined by the Tribe and the family) in which relatives/community members raise children whose parents cannot.

In state child welfare systems, kinship placements average **45% for non-Native children**, compared with **38% for Native children** (in 2020). Tribal child welfare systems typically place more children with kin, both formally and informally.

Average Percentage of Children Placed in Kinship Care

**In state child welfare systems (2020)*



45% of Non-Native Children

38% of Native Children

Benefits of Relative Care

For a comprehensive overview, consult "Kinship Care for Children who are American Indian/Alaska Native: State of the Evidence" (Sahota 2019). Children in kinship families have better outcomes than children who are placed in non-kin homes, including:

Cultural Connection—opportunities for stronger cultural connection and stronger cultural identity

Improved Well-Being—fewer behavioral problems, mental health disorders, and placement disruptions, and better overall well-being

Education and Employment—more likely to be employed and enrolled in formal education

Reduced Adverse Outcomes—less likely to need public assistance, experience homelessness, and to be incarcerated by age 21

Recruiting/Engaging and Licensing Kin Caregivers

Tribes have the sovereign authority to approve and license their own kinship, foster, and adoptive homes. For more information, see NICWA's resource, Development and Implementation of Tribal Foster Care and Relative/Kinship Care Standards: Second Edition. A 2023 final rule allows title IV-E agencies to use **kin-specific licensing or approval standards** for relative homes to expand kinship placements, and states and Tribes must provide licensed or approved relative providers the same maintenance payments as non-kin foster homes. See Kin Specific Foster Home Approval: Recommended Standards of National Organizations for more information.

Additional information is available from the following sources.

AdoptUSKids: How Tribal Values and Traditions Can Guide Recruitment, Development, and Support of Resource Families

NICWA and the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: Policy Issues Overview: Kinship in Tribal Child Welfare

Supporting Kin Caregivers

Kinship Navigator Programs: Kinship navigator programs can help families find the services that are needed to help them meet the needs of the children in their care. Here is a resource on kinship navigator programs around the country.

Legal Assistance: Tribal courts and child welfare systems can build capacity to offer free legal assistance/guidance. The Tribal Court Improvement Program and Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation (CTAS) are programs that could help build capacity. Here is a guide for families looking for legal assistance.

Mental and Emotional Support: Relative caregivers may benefit from training (such as the National Training and Development Curriculum [NTDC]), peer support groups, and appreciation events with other caregivers.

Funding Support for Kinship Families

Supporting kinship families is not the responsibility of a single Tribal department. Tribal programs can coordinate services, share resources, and use flexible funding to provide families with comprehensive, strengths-based support. Considerations for funding include

- Strengths-based and culturally appropriate approaches
- Access to prevention, foster care, adoption, and post-permanency support services and Title IV-E (if applicable)
- Contracts with the state to provide child welfare services or funding for your Tribe (something that is possible with many of the grants listed below)
- Foundation grants for culturally based services that strengthen relative caregivers' physical, social, emotional, and cultural/spiritual wellness
- Child Welfare Services (Title IV-B, Subpart 1)
- Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (Title IV-B, Subpart 2)
- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention grants
- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program
- Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310)
- National Family Caregiver Support Program
- Title VI Native American Aging Programs, including the Native American Caregiver Support Program
- CTAS—Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) programs
- Tribal Court Improvement Project Grants
- Information on Tribal TANF Programs
- Bureau of Indian Affairs—Child Assistance, ICWA, ICWA Off-Reservation

Cross-Department Collaboration to Support Kinship Families

Cultural programming supports community well-being by connecting Elders, children, caregivers, and families across generations. Investing in these programs allows Elders to share language, cultural, and craft knowledge through traditional, informal teaching while strengthening relationships throughout the community. For information on supporting cultural programming, watch this webinar: Collaboration Strategies for Tribes, or Non-Native Service Providers Working with Tribes, to Support Kinship/Grandfamilies, featuring NICWA founder Dr. Terry Cross.



The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

The Network is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $9,950,000 with 95 percentage funded by ACL/HHS and $523,684 and 5 percentage funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

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The Network is a project of Generations United.

NICWA
National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

NICWA'S MISSION

The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) protects the safety, health, and cultural identity of all Native children and families—today and for future generations—by upholding culturally based services, community strength, and Tribal sovereignty.

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