

# EXECUTIVE REPORT

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## ECONOMIC & CONCRETE SUPPORTS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE SURVEY

 CHAPIN HALL  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

  
American Public Human Services Association

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A growing body of evidence demonstrates the effects of a broad array of economic and concrete supports to reduce risk for child maltreatment and child welfare involvement (Grewal-Kök et al., 2023; Anderson et al., 2023).

A growing body of evidence demonstrates the effects of a broad array of economic and concrete supports to reduce risk for child maltreatment and child welfare involvement (Grewal-Kök et al., 2023; Anderson et al., 2023). This evidence spans macroeconomic supports (tax credits, minimum wage, paid family leave, unemployment benefits), concrete supports (child care, housing, health care, flexible funds, direct cash transfers), and public assistance programs (TANF, SNAP, WIC). Because families of color experience deep inequities in income, wealth, and resource access (Federal Reserve, 2020) and are disproportionately more likely to face material hardship and economic insecurity due to longstanding systemic conditions and structural racism (Dettlaff et al., 2021; Shrider et al., 2021), directly addressing families' economic and material needs not only addresses child maltreatment risk factors but may also serve as an important race equity strategy.

In 2021, with generous support from the Doris Duke Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) launched the Advancing Family Economic Mobility Initiative. In 2022, through a collaboration between Chapin Hall and APHSA, the project expanded to develop and launch a national landscape survey to better understand state child welfare leaders' perceptions and practices regarding the use of economic and concrete supports (ECS) in preventing system involvement. This report presents the survey findings and offers several key recommendations for human service leaders and policymakers to consider.

## SURVEY BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES



### EXPLORE

child welfare administrators' beliefs about economic need and child welfare involvement



### EXAMINE

state child welfare agencies' approaches to identifying and meeting families' economic needs



### ASSESS

how state child welfare agencies coordinate with other human service systems to offer ECS



### IDENTIFY

barriers and solutions to offering ECS



### UNDERSTAND

how COVID-19 emergency federal assistance was used to fund ECS

The survey had high response (83%) and completion (75%) rates from child welfare executive leaders in 52 states, districts, and territories. The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS & FINDINGS

Child welfare leaders urge a shift towards a shared responsibility system, enhanced funding flexibility, updated policies, and improved access strategies to prevent child welfare involvement and bolster economic and concrete supports.

### QUESTION 1



What are child welfare administrators' beliefs about economic need and child welfare system involvement?

Respondents believe that it is the responsibility of both the child welfare agency and public benefit system to screen, refer, and help families receive ECS during a child protective services (CPS) investigation and to prevent system involvement. However, they also expressed a clear preference for the public benefit system to lead the work of helping families access ECS. Respondents noted that economic need is frequently a contributing factor in suspected maltreatment reports and that child care, money, and housing are frequently present in suspected maltreatment reports.

### QUESTION 2



What approaches are state child welfare agencies using to offer economic and concrete supports to families?

Most respondents reported that ECS needs are not assessed during the hotline screening process; these needs are assessed during a CPS investigation. Respondents also said their agencies do not track families' economic needs. Additionally, only a relatively small number of respondents indicated that their agency's mission statement included mention of economic need, and, of those, most include language about eliminating poverty and addressing economic needs. Finally, respondents indicated that a variety of funding streams are utilized to pay for case management and direct provision of ECS. State funds were the most common funding source. A clear majority were unsure of the percentage of their agency budget used to pay for direct provision of ECS.

### QUESTION 3



How do state child welfare agencies coordinate with other human service systems to offer economic and concrete supports to families?

A clear majority of respondents noted that public benefit programs are administered by another division, separate from child welfare. Child welfare agencies used similar case management approaches to help families access economic and concrete supports. Many used a multiprogram strategic plan to coordinate with public benefits programs. Data are more commonly shared with public benefits programs to coordinate access to economic and concrete supports than to track performance.

## QUESTION 4



What are the barriers to offering economic and concrete supports to families? What solutions do practitioners believe might address barriers?

Respondents reported that their agencies have some difficulty connecting families to public benefit programs. Agencies encounter a wide variety of barriers in offering economic and concrete supports to families. Staffing resources were identified as the most significant coordination barrier. Agency staff selected levels of and restrictions on federal child welfare funds as the most significant funding barrier. They noted that public benefit eligibility restrictions were the most significant policy barrier. Nearly all respondents reported that direct funding to expand access to economic and concrete supports would be very helpful.

## QUESTION 5



How is COVID-19 emergency federal assistance being used to fund economic and concrete supports?

Most respondents indicated that their agency used Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funds (CARES) to provide economic and concrete supports, but many were uncertain about the amount used. Slightly more than half of the respondents reported receiving American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from their state legislature to provide economic and concrete supports. They also reported that their agencies distributed ARPA funds through Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Titles I and II during the pandemic. ARPA funds were used most often to provide cash, utilities, food, housing, child care, employment, and home repairs. A plurality of respondents identified the state procurement processes as the most significant barrier in the ability to use CARES and ARPA funds to provide economic and concrete supports.

The final, optional, open-ended question in the survey provided an opportunity for child welfare leaders to offer direct recommendations. They were asked the following question: “Based on your experience as a child welfare leader, what needs to be done to expand access to concrete and economic supports to prevent child welfare involvement?” Common themes from the written replies provided by 31 leaders included:

(1) Upstream shared responsibility: Child welfare leaders indicated that the best way to expand access to economic and concrete supports and prevent child welfare involvement is to create a robust primary and secondary prevention system so child welfare agencies can focus on tertiary level interventions.

(2) Funding and resources: Several child welfare leaders suggested the need to be able use funds more flexibly and without restrictions. Others highlighted changes to the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and more direct funding to expand access to economic and concrete supports.

(3) Policy changes: Several leaders gave responses that included revisions to mandatory reporting requirements, narrowing definitions of child maltreatment, and update poverty definitions and income limits.

(4) Awareness and access: Leaders offered insights into specific ways to promote awareness about the benefits of economic and concrete supports in reducing child maltreatment. They suggested ways to promote better access to economic and concrete supports by colocating programs and streamlining the application process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic and concrete supports are essential for preventing child maltreatment and child welfare involvement, and for promoting family stability and well-being. Child welfare agencies face many challenges and barriers in providing access to these supports; they prefer to shift the primary role to other human service systems and community-based providers. To do so, policy and fiscal reforms are needed to increase direct and flexible funding, as are changes to policies and practices that contribute to unnecessary child welfare system involvement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We also want to thank all of the Child Welfare Leaders who donated their time to complete this survey, as well as former Leaders who helped us to develop and test the content. This project would not have been possible without all of you.

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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