



Advancing Family-Centered Child Support Services: Lessons from a Multi-State Initiative

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Presenters



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Land & Trauma Acknowledgements

Land

We collectively acknowledge that we are located on the traditional land of Indigenous people that once and still is occupied by the Catawba, Cheraw, Sugeree (Sugaree) peoples—Indigenous nations who have lived, traded, and cared for this land since time immemorial. These lands hold great historical, spiritual, cultural, and personal significance for these Native nations.

We recognize, support and advocate for the sovereignty of these nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgement, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will hold ourselves accountable to the American Indian people and nations.

Trauma

We acknowledge that the United States emerged out of great historical, spiritual, and personal trauma for indigenous and minoritized communities in the United States and welcomed people from around the world emigrating from often traumatic situations.

We hold this moment to remember the generations of people from all over the world who have migrated to the United States by force or by choice. We recognize and continually support the need for community specific reparations or healing processes needed for healing to take place for violation of systematic policies against people.

By offering this acknowledgment of trauma, we affirm the right of people to bring their whole selves and stories into this space or aim to use our resources and time to arrive at a more connected and respectful place in the world.



About the Child Support Program, Advancing Equity in Child Support Grant

Shaneen Moore, Ph.D. | Assistant Commissioner, Family Well-Being Administration,
Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families

The Child Support Program

Began with the establishment of the Office of Child Support in 1975

Regulations found in Title IV-D of the Social Security Act

Federally regulated / state administered

Services available to parents and caretakers, regardless of income

Ability to work across state and international borders

The Child Support Program: Basic Functions



Locating the other
parent (if
necessary)



Paternity
establishment



Establishment of
orders for
financial and
medical support



Child support
enforcement



Order
modification

The Child Support Program: Key Metrics and Successes

1 in 5

Proportion of U.S. children served

12.7 million

Number of children served

73%

Percent of current support collected

\$29.6 billion

Total amount of child support collected

\$4.37:1

Return on investment

Why is this Work Important?



Advancing Equity in Child Support Grant

Funded through the HHS Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Support Services, this grant aims to:

- Assess disproportional access to child support services
- Determine if child support orders reflect the noncustodial parents' abilities to pay
- Improve child support services to customers
- Share promising practices and recommendations to promote equitable access to child support services

Marks a significant milestone in addressing systemic disparities and promoting equity within the child support program

Lead & Co-Lead States



Shaneen Moore, Ph.D.

Minnesota

Lead State



Andre Lockett, Ph.D.

California

Co-lead State



Erin Frisch

Michigan

Co-lead State



Partners: Roles and Involvement

CGI

- Project manager

Center for Policy Research

- Environmental scan & literature review, data compilation

Child Trends

- Equity assessment & final evaluation

Research In Action

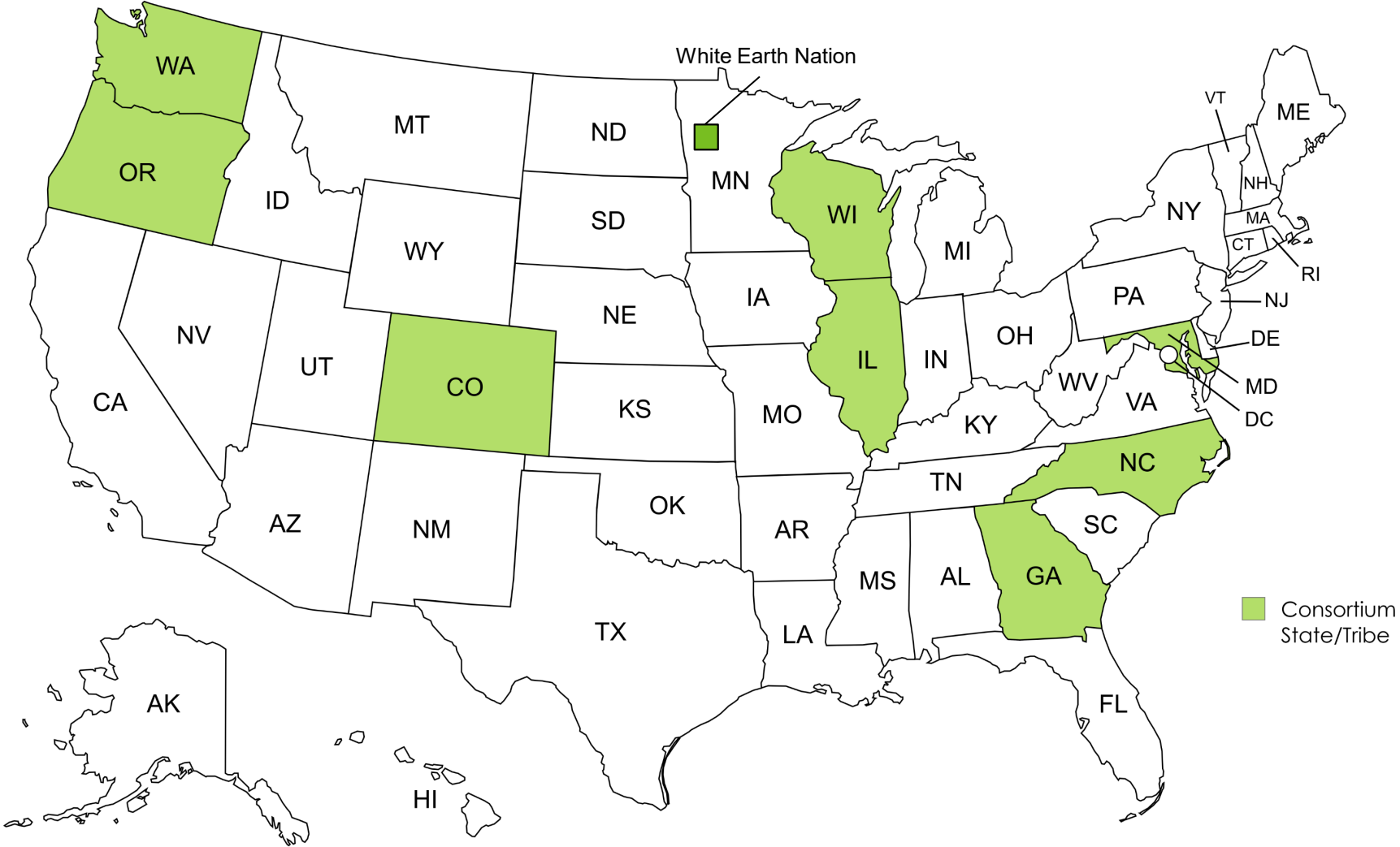
- Parent Advisory Council & statewide survey

National Fatherhood Initiative

- Consultant to Parent Advisory Council & statewide survey



Consortium States



Grant Activities

Literature Review & Environmental Scan

- Analysis of existing research about equity in child support practices and policies, and generation of key recommendations

Equity Assessment & Use of Data

- Equity Assessment for each co-lead state using qualitative and quantitative data

Recommendations & Model Resources

- Reports and resources created based on the Equity Assessment results and the [Intercultural Development Inventory \(IDI\)](#)

National Dissemination & Technical Assistance

- Quarterly consortium meetings and opportunity to participate in an equity activity

Sustainability Planning

- Ensuring resources are available to the child support community and that grant activities in Minnesota are ongoing



Unequal by Design? Examining Inequities in the Child Support Program

Jacqueline Whearty, Ph.D. | Research Associate, Center for Policy Research

Review of the Literature: Methods

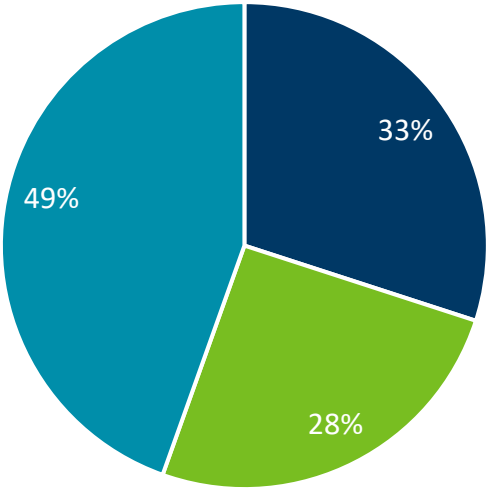
- Research questions:
 1. What does recent research tell us about racial/ethnic disproportionalities, inequities, or disparities in the child support program?
 2. To what extent do states systematically examine how various groups are affected by the child support program?
 3. What do these sources of literature suggest can be done to advance equity in the child support program?
- Reviewed over 200 articles
 - Assessed for disproportionalities, disparities, and their underlying sources

Who Does the Program Serve?

Sorensen, 2021

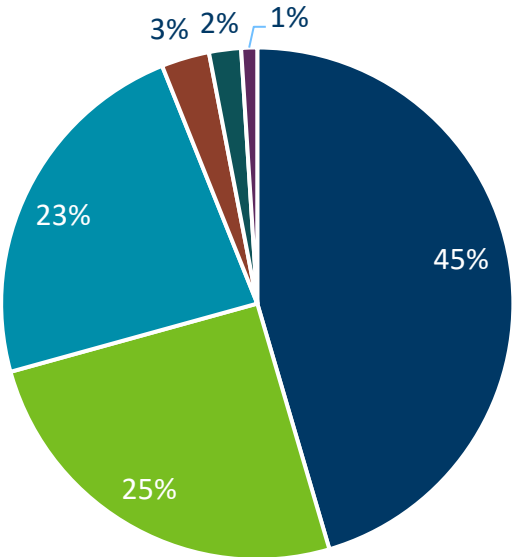
8 million custodial parents; 12.6 million children

Poverty status



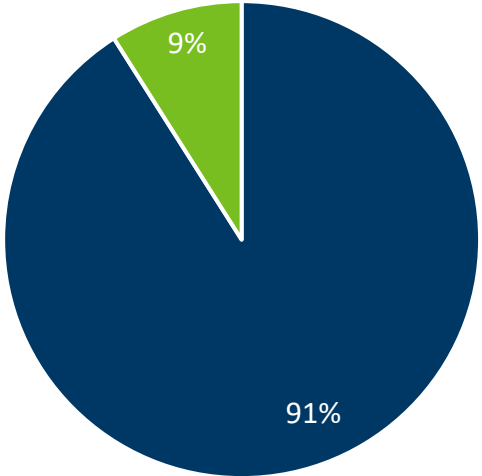
- Live in poverty
- Live near poverty
- Not living in or near poverty

Race and ethnicity



- White
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- American Indian or Alaska native

Gender



- Female
- Male

Key Stages of the Child Support Program



Cooperation Requirements and Enrollment

- TANF recipients must “cooperate” with child support to receive benefits
 - This cooperation includes signing over rights to support
 - Most TANF recipients are women of color^{1, 2, 3}
- In Illinois, Black and Hispanic custodial parents more likely to be sanctioned for noncooperation³
- Both cooperation and sanctions for noncooperation lead to reduced benefits^{1, 3, 4, 5, 6}

Order Establishment: Based on Ability to Pay?

- Orders are established through state income guidelines
 - However, orders often based on imputed income, not actual earnings
 - Imputation assumes 40 hours per week x minimum wage
 - Defaults common when parents can't appear in court
- Low-income parents of color disproportionately affected by income imputation^{7, 8}
- Low-income parents of color have higher child support order burdens when compared to higher income and White parents^{7, 8}
 - Orders often exceed parents' realistic ability to pay

Child Support Arrears

- Debt accumulates quickly—especially during incarceration or unemployment
 - Incarceration is often treated as voluntary unemployment, meaning payments aren't paused and arrears grow rapidly—compounded by interest charges as high as 12% in some states
- Most debt is uncollectable and owed by parents with barriers to employment and incomes < \$10,000⁹
- Black and Latino fathers disproportionately owe large arrears^{10, 11, 12}
- Debt linked to food insecurity, housing instability, and poor mental health, exacerbating challenges to health, wellbeing, and employment^{13, 14}

Child Support Enforcement: More than Just Collections

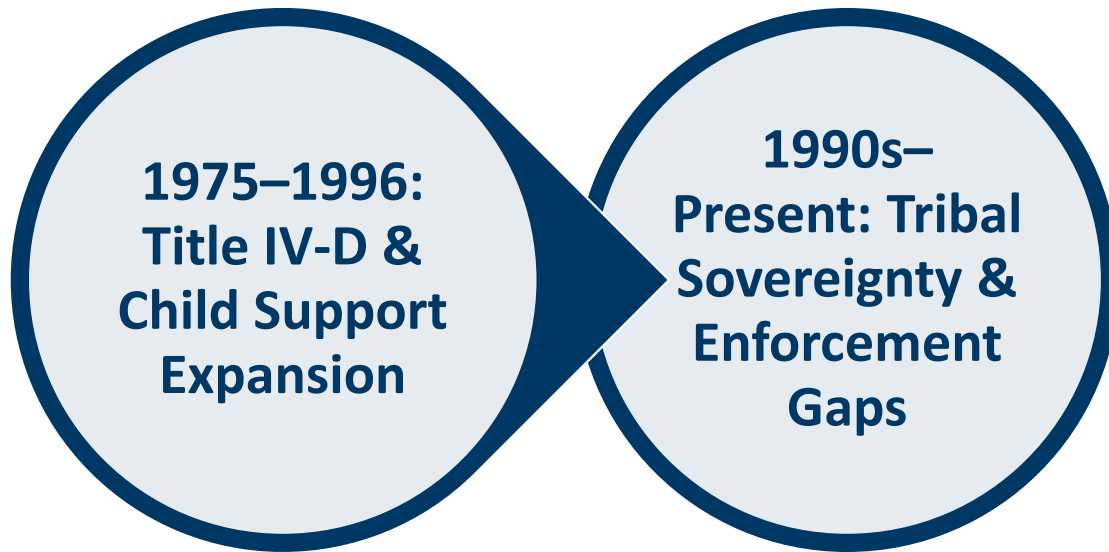
- One key function of state child support agencies = child support enforcement
 - Examples include: Driver's license suspension, wage garnishment, civil contempt
 - Enforcement continues (and escalates) even when ability to pay is lacking
- Noncustodial parents of color in Wisconsin are much more likely to face child support enforcement actions than White parents⁷
 - Black parents were 5x more likely to be subject to enforcement relative to their share of the population
- In Minnesota, driver's license suspensions were more common among American Indian (42%) and Black (29%) noncustodial parents than among White parents (19%)¹⁵
- Black fathers are 10x more likely to be incarcerated for nonpayment of child support¹⁶
- Punitive enforcement actions undermine employment, housing, and child involvement

Parents' Experiences with Child Support Staff

- Many parents' engagement with the child support program is directly associated with how they feel they are perceived by the agency and staff^{5, 6, 17}
 - Many parents feel criminalized, confused, or invisible
 - Poor communication and complex forms hinder compliance
 - Racial bias and systemic poverty amplify these issues

How Did We Get Here?

Chen & Harper, 2025



- **IV-D (1975):** Created Office of Child Support Enforcement
- **1980s–90s:** Stronger enforcement (e.g., wage garnishment, tax intercepts)
- **PRWORA (1996):** Welfare reform → TANF; increased work and support requirements

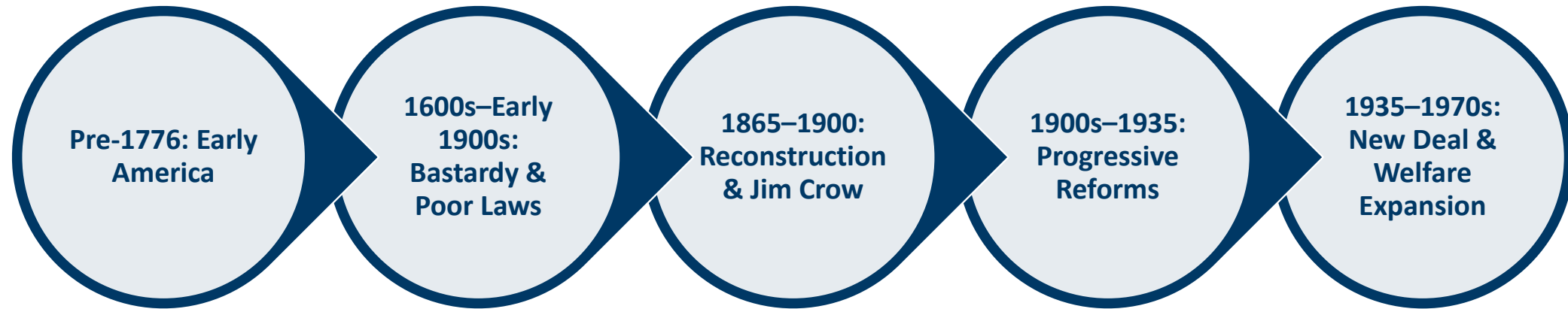
- **Tribal child support programs:** 60+ programs established since 1996
- Enforcement benefits some (stable jobs) but leaves others behind
- Persistent disparities in access, outcomes, and eligibility by race and income

The Child Support Program

- Assumed all noncustodial parents had stable income and needed pressure to pay
- Largely built around White, middle-class norms
- Lacked flexibility for low-income or racially marginalized families

How Did We Get Here?: Historical Impetus

Chen & Harper, 2025



- **Indigenous kinship systems:** Extended family-based childrearing
- **Colonial practices:** Family-based and church-led support; child servitude and placements

- **Bastardy laws:** Criminalized unwed parents; weak promotion of fatherhood
- **English Poor Laws:** Harsh, minimal aid; aid based on “worthiness”
- **Slavery:** No legal recognition of Black families; separation and forced labor

- **Freedmen’s Bureau (1865–1872):** Short-term aid, schooling, marriage recognition
- **Jim Crow era:** Segregated economies; limited aid for Black families
- **Native boarding schools:** Family separation, forced assimilation

- **Mothers’ pensions:** State-based aid to “worthy” mothers (mostly White widows)
- Exclusion of Black, Indigenous, immigrant mothers

- **Social Security Act (1935):** ADC program for single mothers
- **Discriminatory enforcement:** “Suitable home” rules, employable mother laws
- **Civil Rights era:** Legal challenges to exclusionary practices

How to Move Forward

1

Reassess
cooperation
requirements

2

Base orders
on real
income

3

Reduce or
eliminate
interest on
arrears

4

Improve
access to
modifications

5

Improve child
support
communicati
on

6

Provide
employment
training and
parenting
time services

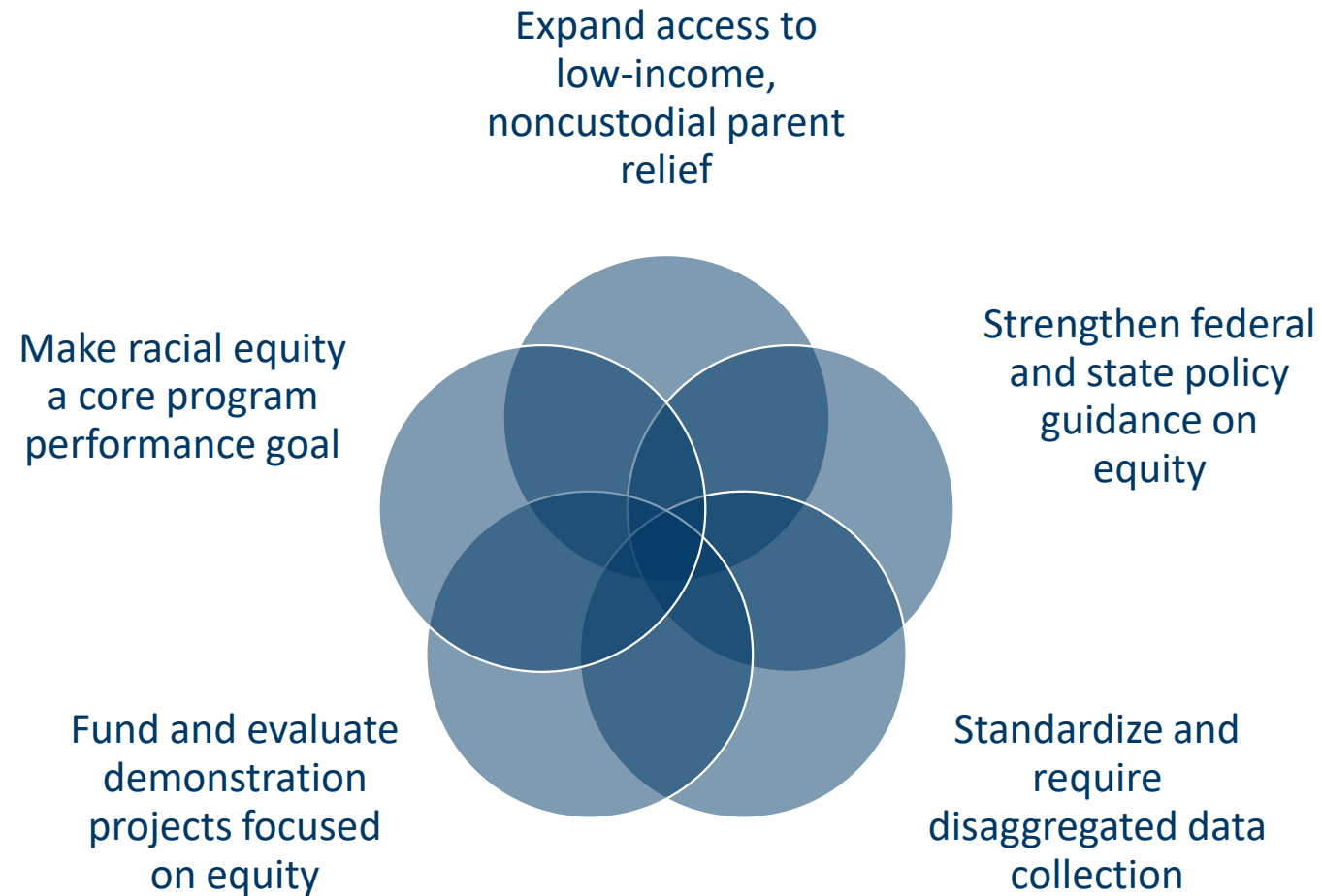
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Track race
and ethnicity
to monitor
equity

Recent Policy Initiatives to Advance Equity

- Shifts (e.g., counties in Minnesota and California, Georgia, Texas) toward procedural fairness and family-centered services
- **2016** Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization (FEM) of Child Support Programs Rule:
 - Use of actual income in order calculation, forbids treatment of incarceration as voluntary unemployment, establishes guidelines for self-support reserves for noncustodial parents
- **2025** Employment Rule: allows job supports for noncustodial parents
- Some states (e.g., CA, CO, MI, MN) developing equity assessment tools

Next Steps to Promote Equity in Child Support Policy



Research to Promote Child Support Equity: Key Challenges

- **Limited focus on noncustodial parents of color**

- Little research exists on the experiences of fathers—especially Black, Latino, and Indigenous fathers—in child support, welfare, and human services systems.

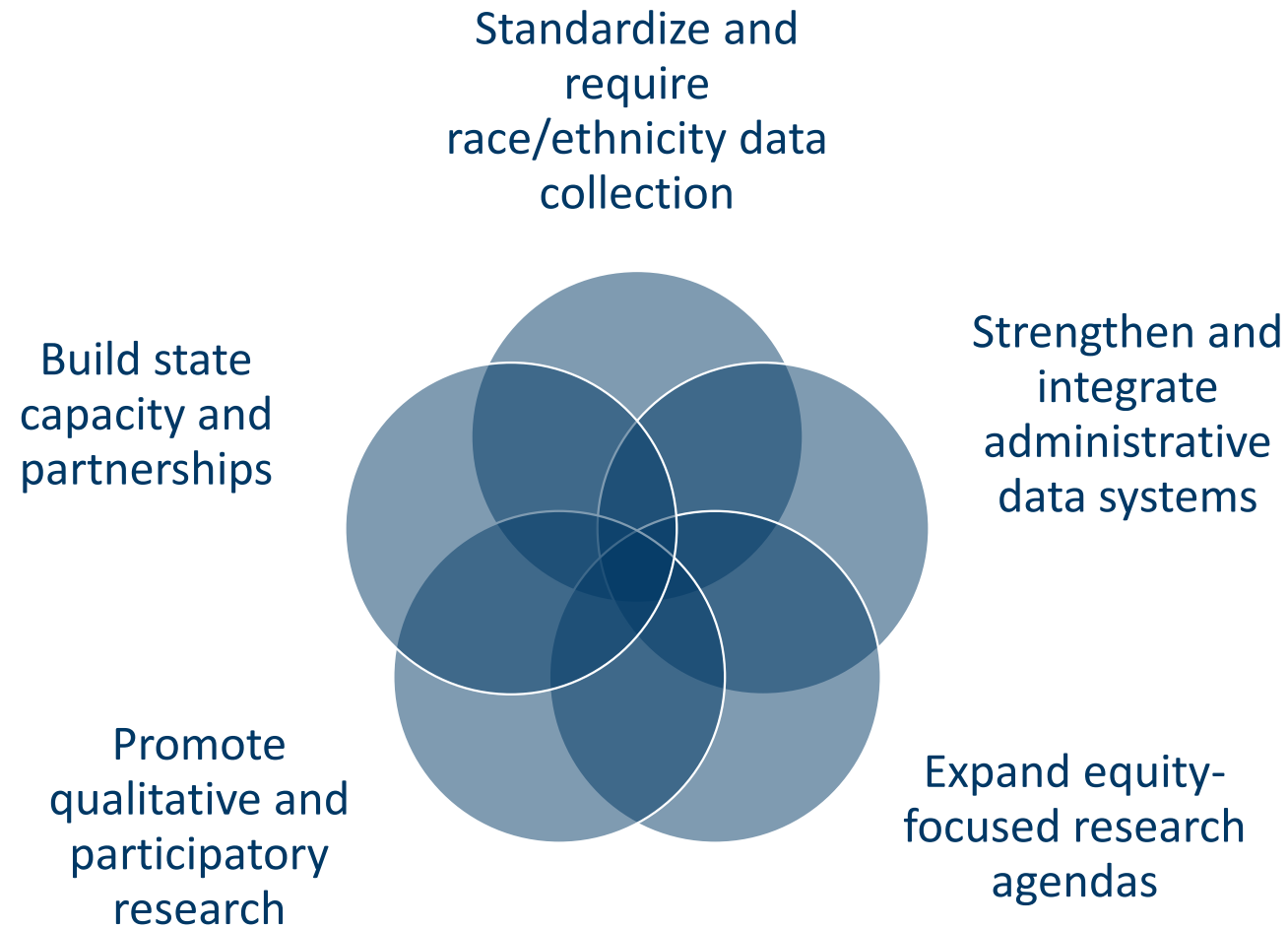
- **Data limitations**

- Race and ethnicity often missing or inconsistently captured in automated systems
- Inconsistent definitions and measurement across jurisdictions
- Barriers to accessing integrated, cross-system data (e.g., IRS, child welfare, incarceration, TANF)
- Data security and privacy concerns hinder research partnerships

- **Structural and resource constraints**

- Limited funding for equity-focused child support research
- Few incentives for states to prioritize data modernization or support external research
- Difficulty linking administrative and qualitative data for deeper insights

Research to Promote Child Support Equity: Next Steps





Co-Lead State Equity Assessments

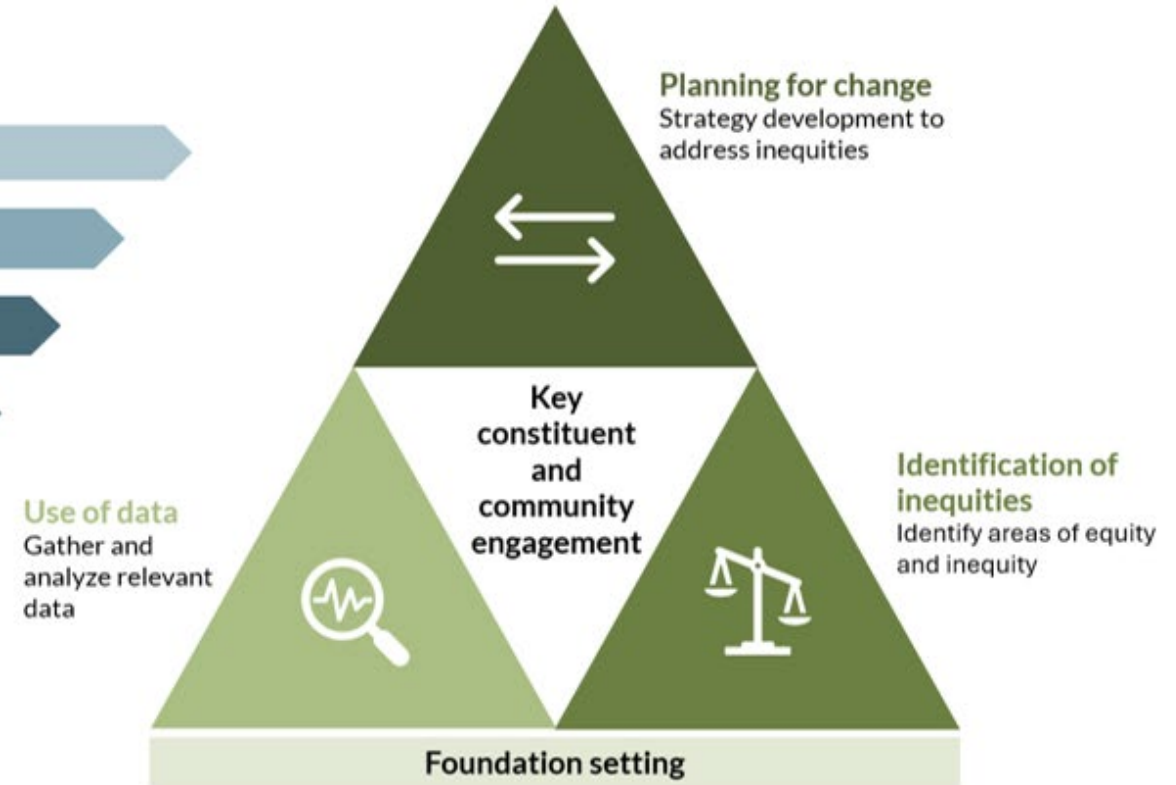
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Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families

Equity Assessment Conceptual Model

Step 1: Identify level of policy and/or practice



Step 2: Engage in equity assessment activities



Activity 1 – Set the Foundation

- Goal: Create the conditions for success
- Key tasks:
 - Define equity assessment purposes and scope
 - Assemble team
 - Determine the policy, practice and outcomes of focus



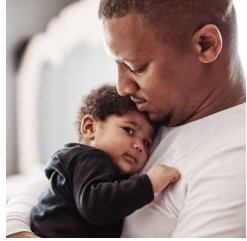
State assessment topics

State	Title	Research question
MN	Promoting equitable child support strategies for parents who have been incarcerated (working)	In Minnesota, how do child support policies address equity and disparities in child support order modification and arrears management strategies for parents who are or have been recently incarcerated? How are parents equitably engaged in the process and informed about their child support options during and after incarceration? (working)
MI	Promoting family-centering child support strategies for Michigan families with low incomes	For Michigan families who have received support, currently or previously, under either Medicaid or the Family Independence Program, how does the state's approach to cost recovery affect how its child support services center families?
CA	Promoting Family-Centered Child Support Policies for California Families with Low Incomes	With respect to the cost recovery policy: How can the state child support program better communicate policies and program rules with families; how can the program engage families in making decisions about their child support cases; how can the program involve families in overall program decision-making processes?

Activity 2 – Engaging Service Users and Communities

- Goal: Partner with affected family members and communities to co-lead, design, and implement the assessment
- Key tasks:
 - Build intentional and authentic partnerships
 - Partner with community and family member champions
 - Approach engagement as long-term partnership





Selection process

Extensive outreach

Created landing page for those interested to access Parent Interest Form

300 applications

First meeting 7/29/2025

DCYF Parent Advisory Council



Council Demographics

18 total members

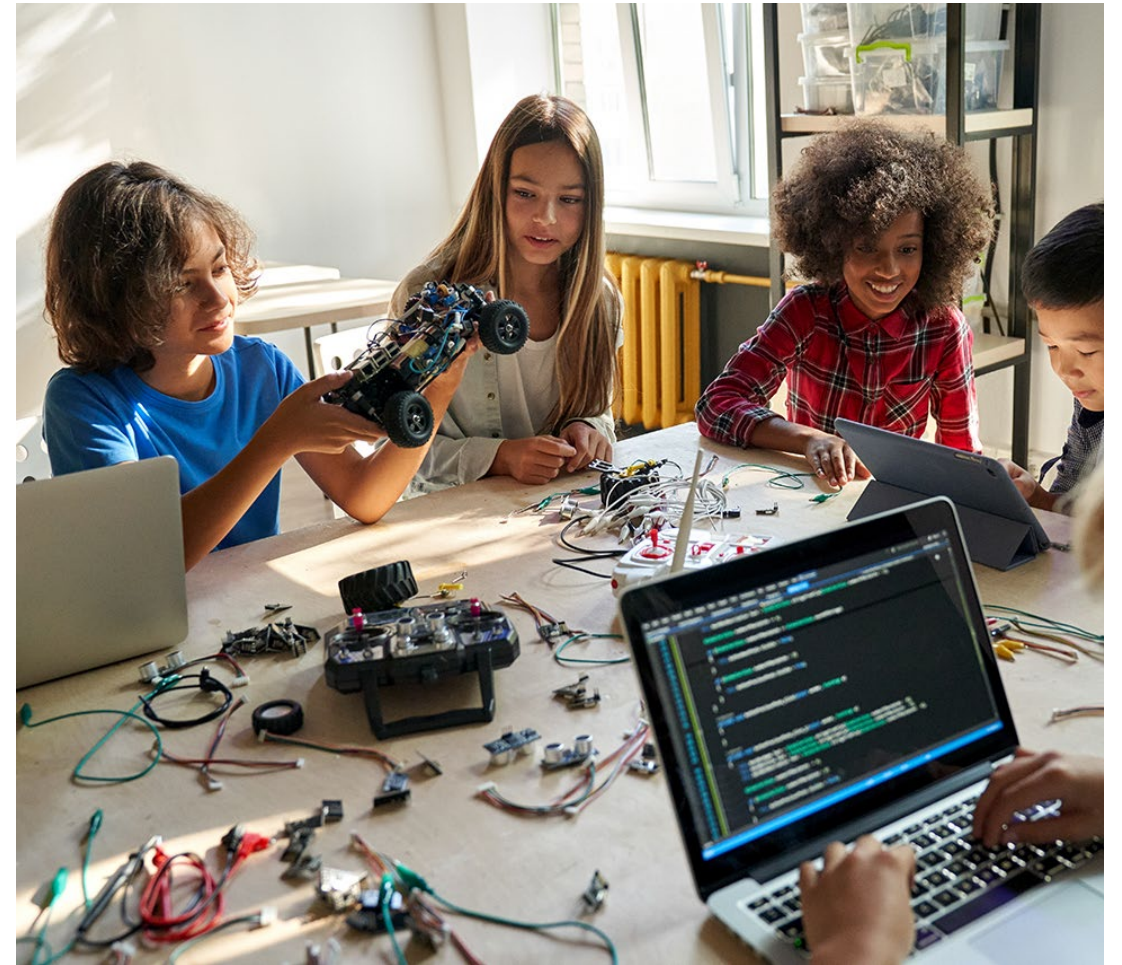
8 women, 8 men

9 PRS, 7 PPS

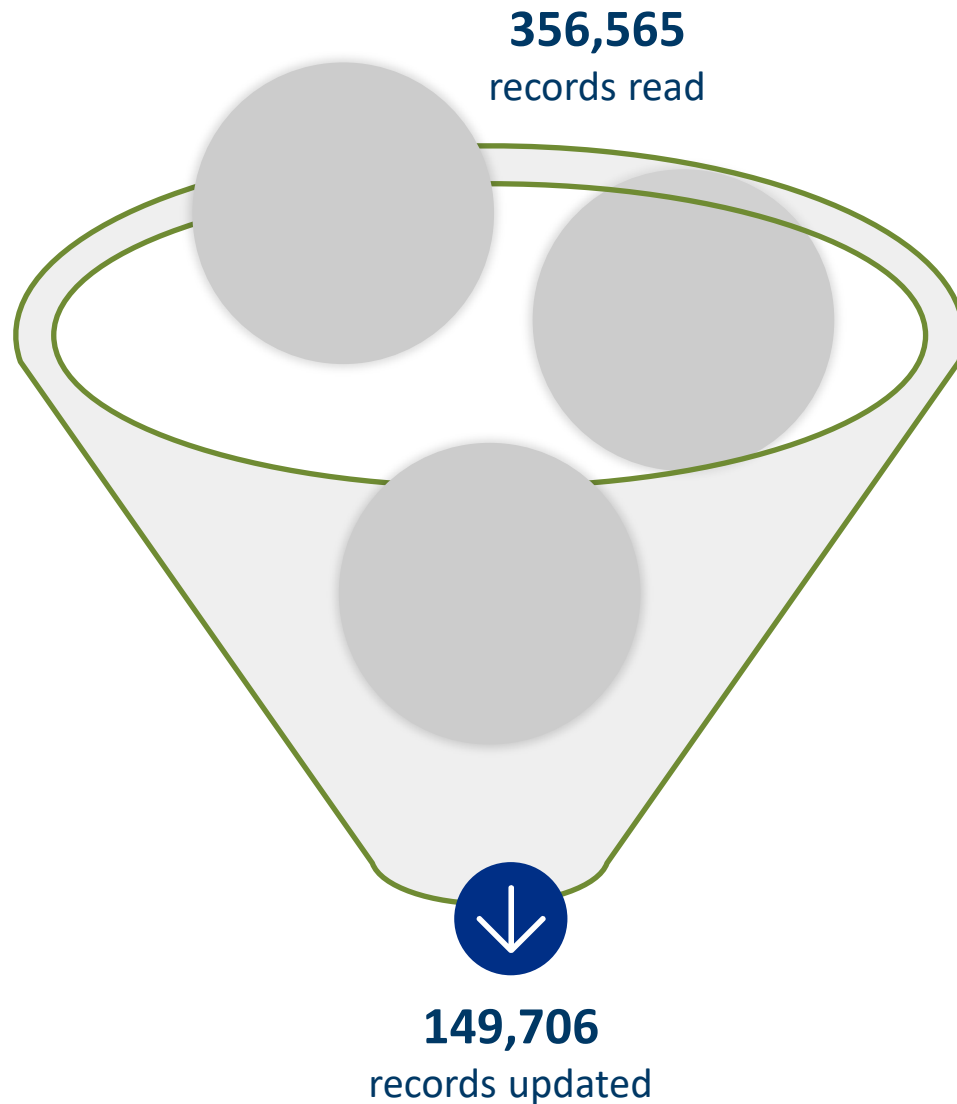
6 African American, 3 American Indian, 3 Latino, 2 Asian, 2 White

Activity 3 – Leveraging Data

- Goal: Collect and analyze data to inform decision making
- Key tasks:
 - Propose questions and objectives to be analyzed with data
 - Identify the population of interest and sample
 - Determine the types of data needed and method of collection
 - Develop the data collections tools
 - Analyze the data



The Numbers



Wrote batch process

Repopulated the PRISM Race/Ethnicity Group field info for PPS from MAXIS, so that the systems synced.

Ran PRISM process/report

Compared the number of Hispanic PRS to the number of Hispanic PPS after the re-population process was run.

The Numbers – prior to 8/1/2024

Ethnic Group	Child Count	PPS Count	PRS Count
AFA – African American/Black	66,333	42,836	39,018
AMI – American Indian	15,457	8,687	9,293
ASI – Asian	7,526	3,026	4,393
HIS – Hispanic	1,021	6,958	1,240
OTH – Other	42,343	33,319	20,251
PAC – Pacific Islander	423	126	354
UNK – Unknown (inc. Blank)	23,820	7,711	10,209
WHI – White	110,065	71,325	92,110

The Numbers – post 8/1/2024

Ethnic Group	Child Count	PPS Count	PRS Count
AFA – African American/Black	55,510	41,525	36,367
AMI – American Indian	12,408	8,114	7,977
ASI – Asian	6,291	2,947	4,141
Blank	23,739	7,712	10,170
HIS – Hispanic	2,220	6,344	1,743
MUL – Multiple Race/Ethnicity	30,916	5,188	13,344
OTH – Other	35,941	32,735	16,943
PAC – Pacific Islander	282	114	267
UNK – Unknown	114	1	18
WHI – White	99,582	69,251	85,849

Activity 4 – Identify Family-Centered Considerations

- Goal: Analyze policy and practice areas to identify opportunities and challenges
- Key tasks:
 - Identify the policy/practice for exploration
 - Interpret the findings from empirical analysis
 - Identify any external factors or other limitations



Activity 5 – Planning for Sustainability and Change

- Goal: Translate assessment findings into a plan of action
- Key tasks:
 - Determine level and scope of change
 - Foster a family-centered environment
 - Develop plans for monitoring
 - Specific implementation details



Questions?

Thank You!

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