

# Family First: A Policy for Preventing Child Maltreatment?

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We are the Bass Connections project "Policy Strategies for Child Maltreatment Prevention." Broadly, we investigate prevention-oriented policy strategies to combat risk factors for child maltreatment.

In 2021, there were 4 million reports of child maltreatment in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>  
What can we do about this?

Child maltreatment includes both child abuse and child neglect:

## Child Abuse

Serious nonaccidental physical or emotional injury or sexual maltreatment by a caregiver.<sup>2</sup>

## Child Neglect

Lack of appropriate care, resources, or supervision.<sup>2</sup>  
Makes up most CPS referrals.

## What is the Family First Prevention Services Act?

FFPSA expands federal child welfare funding for states to prevent children from entering foster care.

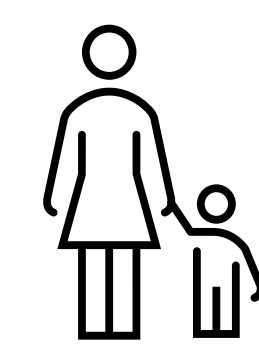
Every state has created their own implementation plan for prevention services and eligible candidates.

A federal clearinghouse approves evidence-based prevention services that are eligible to receive Title IV-E reimbursement.

Focuses on services addressing parental substance use, mental health, and parenting strategies.

## Family First Goals vs. Stakeholder Perceptions: Opportunities & Obstacles

Family First has 3 main goals, listed below. Our stakeholder interviews have provided insights into how states are actually implementing the legislation to achieve these goals:

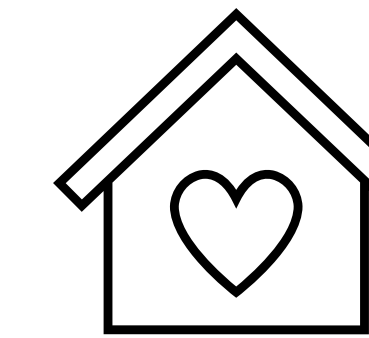


**Goal #1: Enhance Support Services to Help Children Remain at Home**

Perceptions:

- FFPSA's services clearinghouse and reporting requirements **prevent** existing community-based partners from accessing FFPSA funding
- Many states are unable to seek approval for existing services, so providers are implementing new Title 4-E eligible services (e.g., Homebuilders in NC)

"When I saw prevention [in the Family First Act], it was like 'Oh, we're going to go out and prevent child abuse.' And no, we were really preventing foster care."

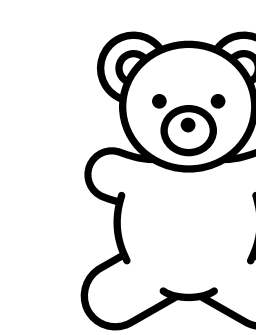


**Goal #2: Reduce Unnecessary Use of Congregate Care**

Perceptions:

- FFPSA's push away from congregate care is leading to a **decline in funding** for congregate care settings, even when its most appropriate placement
- Many children have complex needs unfit for a family-based placement

"I would say taking those funds from congregate care... has definitely impacted the children who were staying at our agency overnight without placement."



**Goal #3: Build the Capacity of Communities to Support Children and Families**

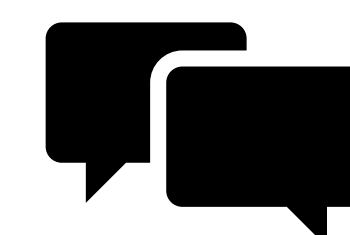
Perceptions:

- FFPSA has brought a **renewed focus to prevention**, despite constraints on when CPS can refer or fund preventative services (AG directive in NC)
- **Staffing shortages** and informal partnerships with community-based partners cause unequal access to prevention services

"It's like [the kids] are building relationships over and over again instead of being able to move through that care because of the staffing changing so often."

Overall, many unintended consequences have arisen for Child Protective Services personnel and community-based partners. Stakeholders have expressed that the goals of Family First do not align with the mission of preventing child maltreatment.

## Next Steps & Takeaways



Finish conducting interviews



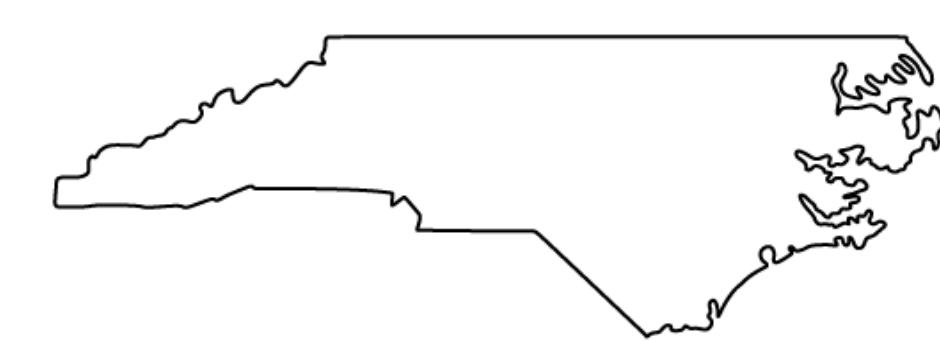
Analyze themes



Publish policy brief

By better understanding the current landscape of prevention efforts, we aim to inform stakeholders and shape policies that expand existing programs to reduce child maltreatment.

With improved alignment of goals, the Family First Prevention Services Act can be better leveraged to support children and families in preventing child maltreatment.



References  
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