



CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION IN TEXAS AND NATIONALLY

The old proverb that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is especially relevant in terms of prevention of child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect *are* preventable, yet in 2006, nearly 68,000 Texas children were confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect. Nationwide that number jumps to one million. While the federal government spent over 7 billion dollars on child welfare in 2007, most of the federal funding available for state use is restricted to spending on children who have been removed from their homes and placed in foster care. Little money is left to provide the prevention services that can prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring and children from coming into foster care in the first place.

Prevention Nationally

- On average, states may only use about 10 percent of dedicated federal child welfare funds for family services and supports, including prevention or reunification services. According to a new report by Kids Are Waiting, an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, the current federal financing structure does not adequately support prevention services. The report, *Time for Reform: Investing in Prevention, Keeping Children Safe at Home*, is available online at www.kidsarewaiting.org.
- Child victims of abuse and neglect are more likely to experience poor physical, emotional, or mental health, social difficulties, cognitive dysfunction, high-risk health behaviors such as teen pregnancy or alcohol and substance abuse, and behavioral problems, including juvenile delinquency and adult criminality.
- Society bears the costs of child abuse and neglect, as well. A recent national study by Prevent Child Abuse America found that child abuse and neglect cost nearly \$104 billion and that some of these costs may be avoided if states were able to invest more in prevention programs. The study, *Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States*, is also available online at www.kidsarewaiting.org.

Prevention in Texas

- According to data from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), 83 percent of confirmed victims of child maltreatment involved allegations of physical or medical neglect, or neglectful supervision in 2006. Neglect often results from families having difficulty accessing needed services and supports. Preventative services are important in fighting neglect, yet Texas is restricted in its use of federal funds to support prevention programs.
- Texas needs to commit more state funds for prevention. Although a bill approving and appropriating funds for one specific prevention program—the Nurse-Family Partnership (a nurse home visiting program for low-income, first time parents and their children)—passed in 2007, no increased funds were appropriated for other new or existing prevention programs.

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- In fact, Texas is still catching up in terms of prevention. In 2003, Texas significantly cut its budget for prevention programs. The 2007 legislature only partially restored this money. In the current budget, prevention programs are getting 3.5% less than they did five years ago before the legislative cuts.

Recommendations

The Kids Are Waiting report recommends specific federal policy options to keep children safe and strengthen families:

- Ensure a sufficient, flexible and reliable federal resource to help support the continuum of services needed by at-risk children and families. States need to be able to spend federal funds flexibly in order to provide services that can help more children safely stay in their home or return to their families from foster care.
- Reward states for safely reducing the number of children in foster care and achieving all forms of permanence.
- Make all abused and neglected children eligible for federal foster care support.

On the state level, Texas should:

- Restore the state contribution to prevention programs to pre-2003 levels. While the pre-2003 levels will not cover all of the needs in Texas, it will be a step in the right direction.
- Build on 2007 legislation by funding more programs aimed at keeping families together.
- Address the larger issue that is plaguing so many families—poverty. Since neglect is so large a part of the problem of child maltreatment, helping families earn more is an important prevention strategy. Approximately 60% of children who enter foster care come from families with annual earnings of \$10,000 or less.

To learn more, sign up for e-mails, or make a donation, go to www.cppp.org.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans.