Family First Prevention Services Act

Congress passed and the president signed the Family First Prevention Services Act as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act in February 2018. The Family First Act provides federal funding to states and tribes for mental health services, substance use treatment, in-home parenting support and other evidence-based services that can prevent the need for foster care by allowing children to stay safely at home with their families.

The new federal law also creates minimum standards for group home providers to ensure children are safe, appropriately treated and that families are engaged during placements in group homes.

For more information on FFPSA, check out our website or contact our team at familyfirst@umontana.edu.

FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT OVERVIEW

Stable federal funding for services that work

For the first time, the Family First Act provides permanent federal funding for services that have demonstrated effectiveness in keeping families together and preventing foster care placements. The law allows states to receive 50 percent matching federal funds for evidence-based prevention services that can strengthen families that are at risk of entering the foster care system. It funds host services through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Services will be available to all families that are at risk, not just those that historically have had to meet stringent financial requirements. States will decide which types of services to offer based on a clearinghouse list currently under development by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As of October 2019, the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse has reviewed 12 programs, rating six as well supported, one as supported, and two as promising. Three reviewed programs do not currently meet their criteria. For more information, read our brief on Programs Reviewed by Clearinghouse.

New standards for congregate care

The Family First Act requires most congregate care facilities (group homes) that seek federal funding for foster care payments for more than two weeks to meet new minimum requirements, specified in the law as qualified residential treatment programs (QRTP). States must meet QRTP requirements for youth in group care to be eligible to receive prevention services funds for at-risk youth.

Family First Prevention Services Act Also:

- Requires a statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect fatalities, which Montana has already commissioned.
- Requires state procedures for background checks on any adult working in group care settings.
- Raises the eligible age for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program from 21 to 23.
- Extends the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program through 2021 (funding through Title IV-B of the Social Security Act).
- Requires states to review their licensing requirements for foster family homes.
- Provides federal funding for:
  • Kinship navigator programs.
  • Residential family-based substance use treatment facilities.
  • Reunification services.
  • Increasing the rate of adoptions or guardianship out of foster care.
  • Regional partnership grants for substance use treatment.
  • Recruitment and retention of foster families.