

Recommendations: Sunset Review DFPS, DSHS, HHSC, TWC Strengthening Families and Connecting Them to Resources

All families need assistance on occasion and in those moments – whether it's a crisis or not – it is important that they are able to connect with resources.

Texas communities often have a variety of connection points – some are in-person and some via technology. Unfortunately, none of these connection points are comprehensive, none are connected with each other and each contains limited, often duplicative information about community resources. This causes confusion, making it difficult for families to know where to turn.

A more coordinated, less siloed system could connect families to the resources, ultimately leading to less families in crisis. We respectfully submit the recommendations below to ensure families are connected to the needed resources.

Cross-Agency Governance, Coordination, and Accountability

- **Create a coordinated, no-wrong-door intake and referral system.** Develop a cross-agency intake and referral framework so families can access workforce, human services, education, and health programs through a single entry point, reducing duplication and ensuring families are connected to all eligible services.
- **Develop universal and shared application processes.** Implement common application forms for families and providers across HHSC, TWC, and relevant agencies, while protecting confidentiality, to reduce paperwork and administrative burden.
- **Expand the Early Childhood Interagency Workgroup by providing adequate staffing, over and above the existing one fulltime staff person funded through pooled state agency dollars.** Ensure the work aligns with other efforts within the various state agencies that support two-generational approaches to streamline and strengthen services to families with young children.

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Eligibility, Intake, and Technology Modernization

- **Modernize and strengthen Texas' eligibility technology systems.** Permanently resolve known system defects in TIERS while securing funding and planning for a transition to a modern, flexible eligibility system capable of adapting to future policy changes.
- **Improve customer experience in eligibility systems.** Enhance usability of platforms such as YourTexasBenefits by displaying case end dates, allowing document uploads during reconsideration periods, and improving mobile access to reduce coverage gaps and call center volume.
- **Improve clarity and usability of forms and notices.** Redesign Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and other benefit notices and forms using plain language and beneficiary input to reduce confusion, procedural denials, and unnecessary churn.

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Information, Referral, and Front-Door Infrastructure

- **Improve interconnectivity among community-based connectors.** Strengthen alignment and data sharing across 2-1-1, Family Resource Centers, Help Me Grow, Kinship Navigators, DFPS Parent and Youth Helpline, and other connectors so families can be seamlessly connected regardless of entry point.
- **Modernize and better leverage 2-1-1 Texas as a statewide connector.** Invest in 2-1-1 technology, staffing, and integration so it can function as a centralized, cross-agency information and referral platform, reducing duplication and improving efficiency.

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- **Expand access to Family Resource Centers (FRCs).** Increase the availability of community-based Family Resource Centers in high-need areas to provide in-person support and improve family stability, child wellbeing, and economic self-sufficiency.
- **Strengthen and sustain Kinship Navigator programs.** Ensure ongoing support and funding for kinship navigators to assist formal and informal caregivers in accessing services, avoiding foster care placements, and supporting child safety and wellbeing.
- **Align and relocate Help Me Grow oversight to HHSC.** Move statewide oversight of Help Me Grow from DSHS to HHSC's Family Health Services division to better align with related family support and early childhood programs.
- **Transition the DFPS Parent and Youth Helpline to HHSC.** Move the Parent and Youth Helpline to HHSC and increase staffing so families seeking services—not reporting abuse or neglect—are connected quickly to appropriate community supports.

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Family Supports, Mental Health, and Wellbeing

- **Elevate children's mental health coordination within HHSC.** Establish a senior executive role responsible for overseeing and aligning children's mental health services across divisions and agencies to reduce gaps and improve outcomes.

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SNAP and Nutrition Assistance

- **Streamline SNAP eligibility reviews through periodic reporting.** Adopt periodic reporting and automated data verification to reduce administrative workload, improve accuracy, and save state resources.
- **Eliminate full-family sanctions in SNAP.** End the use of full-family sanctions so children and dependent seniors do not lose food assistance due to one household member's noncompliance.

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Medicaid and CHIP Access

- **Strengthen the 2-1-1 Option 2 Medicaid call system.** Add callback features, extended hours, real-time wait estimates, and adequate staffing to reduce delays and abandonment rates.
- **Prioritize implementation of federal CHIP eligibility changes.** Fully implement required changes under the federal Eligibility & Enrollment rule, including removing waiting periods and benefit caps, with clear guidance for families and providers.
- **Align Medicaid and CHIP by adopting 60-day retroactive coverage for children.** Adopt the new federal option for retroactive CHIP coverage to reduce medical debt and align protections across programs.

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Recommendations are provided by AVANCE, CHILDREN AT RISK, Every Texan, Feeding Texas, Texans Care for Children, the Texas Pediatric Society, TexProtects, and United Ways of Texas.