



BACKGROUND ON EXTENDED FOSTER CARE (EFC)

Federal and State Extended Foster Care Policies:

- In 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act, P.L. 110-351. This law provided states the option to provide Extended Foster Care up to age 21 and receive federal Title IV-E funds to share the cost of care.
- Under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, states, territories, and tribes are entitled to claim partial federal reimbursement for the cost of foster care, adoption assistance, and kinship guardianship assistance to children who meet federal eligibility criteria. It is one of the last remaining federal uncapped entitlements for children and youth.
- After intense lobbying by youth advocates, in 2008, California was one of the first states in the nation to enact a law to extend foster care, from age 18 to 21, after the passage of the federal Fostering Connections Act and California Assembly Bill 12. Maryland, Maine, Connecticut, and Illinois were other early adopters of Extended Foster Care and have established a number of good practices. Nebraska has focused on developing policies informed by young people. States, including New Mexico and Washington, have engaged in efforts to redesign and improve their Extended Foster Care programs.
- An Extended Foster Care program that is designed for the future offers the last, best chance for child welfare systems to help youth, especially those traumatized by their foster care experiences, to make a successful transition into adulthood, ensuring agencies fulfill the promise to enable youth not only to survive, but to thrive by 2035.
- In addition, the COVID stimulus package included \$400 million through Sept. 30, 2021, to help states support young people ages 14 to 26 in and transitioning from foster care – nearly 900,000 youth nationwide were eligible for these [child welfare stimulus funds](#).

Extended Foster Care by the Numbers:

- As of [May 2023](#), 33 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and seven tribes have a federally approved Extended Foster Care plan, with an additional 21 states having a state-funded program. These include AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, HI, IL, IN, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, NC, ND, NE, NH, NM, NY, OH, OR, PA, RI, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI, and WV. The seven tribes are the Pascua Yaqui Tribe (AZ), Eastern Band of Cherokee (NC), Navajo Nation (AZ, NM, UT), Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (MI), Penobscot Indian Nation (ME), Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (MA), and Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation (CA)
- Since 2014, approximately 76,248 youth have been in Extended Foster Care in California with 7,085 youth in EFC in [October 2023](#). In October of 2021, nationally, [13,380 youth](#) were in Extended Foster Care.
- Providing Extended Foster Care has also been shown to have a good return on investment. There is a [return on investment of \\$4.1 billion per year](#) per cohort of youth aging out of foster care if they are supported in achieving outcomes similar to their peers in families.

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation has on its website a [fact sheet](#) on Extended Foster care; [state-by-state information](#) on all 50-states; and a fact sheet on related issues entitled: [Fostering Youth Transitions: State and National Data to Drive Advocacy 2023](#)

The Need for Extended Foster Care:

- In today's rapidly changing economy, young people are taking more time to get the education, training and skills they need to enter the workforce as they become adults. The support of family and social networks is critical to young people well into their early twenties and throughout their lives.
- The [brains](#) of young adults are still developing in their early 20s. They continue to need a mixture of support, guidance, and freedom to optimally develop.
- [On average](#), most youth make the transition to adulthood between the ages 25 and 27.
- [Most youth](#) rely on parents for a significant amount of support as they make the transition to adulthood, amounting to, on average, \$38,000 between the time a young person is 18 and 34 and about 367 hours of family help per year.
- While returning and connecting with family remains the goal of the child welfare system, nationally [around half](#) of older youth leave the foster care system due to age and on their own rather than leaving to family.

Positive Impacts of Extended Foster Care:

- Extended foster care has been shown to improve adult outcomes and reduce poor ones like homelessness, unemployment and reliance on public benefits.
- [For example](#), nationally older youth in care at age 19 have higher odds of being employed, being enrolled in school, and receiving educational aid when compared to their 19-year-old peers not in Extended Foster Care.
- Similarly, youth in Extended Foster Care also have [lower odds](#) of being disconnected (i.e., neither employed nor enrolled in school), being homeless, and having a child, compared to their peers who leave care before their 19th birthday.
- [Research of California's Extended Care program](#) showed that for each additional year spent in Extended Foster Care there was a significant increased probability that youth completed a high school credential by about 8%; of enrolling in college by 10-11%; an Increase in the number of quarters that youth were employed between their 18th and 21st birthdays; the amount of money youth had in bank accounts by about \$404 and a decrease in the amount of money youth received in need-based public food assistance by more than \$700 and the odds of experiencing an additional economic hardship between the ages of 17 and 21 by about 12%. There was a decrease in the odds of being homeless or couch-surfing between the ages of 17 and 21 by about 28%; that youth became pregnant or impregnated a female between the ages of 17 and 21 by about 28%; and a decrease in the odds that youth had been arrested between the ages of 17 and 21 by about 41% and decreased the odds that youth had been convicted of a crime during the same period by about 40%.

Challenges in Extended Foster Care:

- COVID-19 exacerbated the impact of economic instability, particularly for the most vulnerable youth in EFC. In [one national study](#) involving 24,695 young people who were or had experience in foster care between the ages of 14 and 27, 73.8% reported experiencing high financial insecurity, with Black, biracial, or multiracial respondents experiencing the highest overall levels. A [California study](#) yielded similar results.
- While Extended Foster Care options have increased across the country, participation is still too low. [Nationally](#), only about 22% of those in foster care on their 18th birthday remained in care on their 19th birthday in 2021 — a slight decrease from 2016, despite state and national moratoriums on aging out of foster care during the COVID pandemic.
- Even though the overall number of young people in foster care nationally has declined, teenagers and young adults ages 16 to 21 are [less likely](#) to leave foster care with permanent families in 2021 than they were in 2016. Fewer than half leave foster care to live with adoptive families or guardians or return to their birth families.
- [Research](#) shows that enduring relationships have real consequences for youth in foster care and reduce the risk of negative outcomes in early adulthood, such as food insecurity, economic hardship, and homelessness. [About half](#) of the youth in Extended Foster Care in California did not have enduring relationships, Youth who identified as Native American or Black were less likely than peers to have enduring relationships.
- [About half](#) of youth experienced one or more economic and other hardships while in Extended Foster Care in California and the CA program [does not appear](#) to positively influence outcomes related to physical and behavioral health and the likelihood of experiencing victimization.
- While the data does show that Extended Foster Care in California improves outcomes for youth as compared to their peers who do not opt into extended foster care, [the data](#) also shows that youth in Extended Foster Care are faring poorly compared to their age peers across many measures of wellbeing, including their educational attainment, employment, economic self-sufficiency, physical and mental health, and involvement with the criminal justice system.
- [Two years after leaving Extended Foster Care](#) at age 21 in California, nearly one-quarter of youth surveyed reported having been homeless, nearly half had experienced economic hardship (e.g., not enough money for clothing, utilities, or rent), over one-quarter had experienced food insecurity, and about one-third reported the symptoms of a current mental health or substance use disorder.
- Multi-state [research](#) has shown that there are distinct groups of youth who are likely to struggle or be excluded from Extended Foster Care—including expectant and parenting young people, those struggling with criminal or juvenile justice involvement, and youth experiencing housing instability, mental health challenges and low levels of social support. Targeted programming has not been developed to address the needs of these groups of youth.

What's In a Word:

Aging out is a term used to describe discharging a youth from the foster care system due to age. For many years, the majority of young people “aged out” of foster care at age 18. This is in contrast to [most young people](#) who receive support, guidance, and resources from families well beyond age 18 or 21 and do not face losing services and supports due to age.

Congregate Care is often used to describe residential or group settings where children and youth live together and are cared for by staff in shifts rather than having consistent caregivers, kin, or foster parents. Large congregate care settings are often called institutions. Older youth are [over-represented](#) in such group settings and these [placements](#) are shown to produce poor outcomes. For audiences who are unfamiliar with child welfare terminology, some may think of the word congregation that relates to a religious setting

Fictive Kin are individuals who have strong and significant relationships with one another that have been developed over time but are not based on blood relationships.

Kinship Care are situations where a child has a caregiver who is a blood relative or fictive kin. While some relatives or fictive kin provide [kinship care](#) formally through the child welfare system or the domestic relations court, many are providing care informally.

Lived Experience Leaders and Experts are individuals, children, youth and adults, who have been directly impacted by the foster care and other state systems.

Out-of-home care is used to describe the wide range of living situations for children and youth who are removed from the care of their parents or guardians and are placed by the child welfare system, including, but not limited to kinship care, family foster care, supervised independent living placements for older youth, group settings, and institutions.

Outcomes has become a short-hand to describe results. For older youth in foster care, examples of outcomes may include returning to their birth family, adoption or a permanent placement with kin, close relatives or extended family, high school graduation, employment, housing security along with other situations.

Strength-based approaches aim to build on the positive resources and abilities that families already have rather than starting with the challenges or “deficits.”

Transition services are provided to youth to make a successful transition from foster care to adulthood and includes things like supporting high school graduation, entering postsecondary education, vocational training, job placement and retention programs; providing, money management and budgeting; finding housing and learning how to live on one's own. Because youth in foster care may not have opportunities to learn in families and through natural experience, “transition services” must be intentionally provided and is funded [The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood](#).

Youth in Extended Foster Care is a person-centered term and shows that a youth's identity is not only related to their foster care status as compared to foster care youth that does stigmatize a young person as they remain in the child welfare system.

National Data Sources by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Government Accounting Office:

1. [The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System \(AFCARS\)](#) collects information on children and youth who have spent at least one day in foster care during the federal fiscal year. AFCARS administrative data are collected and reported by the states and includes how many children are in foster care, their demographic characteristics, why they enter, where they are placed and when and why they exit foster care. The most recent data files are from fiscal year 2021.
2. [The National Youth in Transitions Database \(NYTD\) Services File](#) collects information on children in foster care who have received independent living services under the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood ("Chafee program"). NYTD Services administrative data are collected and reported by the states. States report annually on all youth who receive at least one federally funded independent living/transition service. The most recent data files are from 2021.
3. [The National Youth in Transition Database \(NYTD\) Outcomes File](#) collects information on young adult outcomes, including high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, employment, pregnancy and incarceration. It receives data from a cohort study: States survey young people who are 17 years old and in foster care during the baseline year and conduct follow-up surveys at ages 19 and 21. A new cohort starts every three years.
4. Government Accounting Office Report 19-411, [States with Approval to Extend Care Provide Independent Living Options for Youth up to Age 21](#), GAO Report 19-411 (May 21, 2019), reviews the living settings of states approved to use federal funds to extend foster care including those providing a range of independent living options, such as shared apartments or college dorms.

Key Academic Studies:

- [Fostering Youth Transitions 2023: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy](#) Annie E. Casey Foundation 2023. Using national and state data, this report examines how young people ages 14 to 21 were faring before and after they left foster care between 2006 and 2021 and how child welfare systems supported their transition to adulthood.
- Nathanael J. Okpych et al., [The Role of Enduring Relationships on Youth Outcomes](#) October 2023. A study showing that only about half of the youth in Extended Foster Care had enduring relationships and that these relationships had real, material consequences for youth and that the need to establish these valuable relationships was especially pressing for Black and Native American youth who were found to be less likely than their peers to have an enduring relationship.

- Melanie L. Nadon et al, [Examining Prevalence and Predictors of Economic Hardships for Transition-Age Foster Youth](#) 2022. The research showed that, while being in Extended Foster Care was a protective factor, about half of the youth in EFC experienced one or more hardship while in care.
- Keunhye Park et al., [Extended Foster Care and Juvenile Justice System Involvement](#) 2022. The research showed that the rate of youth experiencing juvenile justice involvement was lower after the effective date of the extended foster care policy than before.
- [California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study \(CalYOUTH\)](#) 2021. Quantitative and qualitative research on California's extended foster care system between 2012 and 2021.
- [Supporting Older Youth Beyond Age 18: Examining Data and Trends in Extended Foster Care](#). Child Trends 2019. Using AFCARS and NYTD data, the research showed the following trends: Extended Foster Care is associated with better adult outcomes; even a small dose of Extended Foster Care is associated with better outcomes; Extended Foster Care is associated with receipt of independent living services; permanency rates have not improved since the implementation of Extended Foster Care; older youth in care spend more time in foster care than their younger peers.
- Mark E. Courtney et al, [Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth](#) 2011. This study followed more than 700 young people from Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois as they aged out of foster care and transitioned to adulthood at age 17 or 18, 19, 21, 23 or 24, and 26 and was the leading research supporting the passage of the extended care provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.

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