

Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment

Evidence Review Findings: Needs Further Study

Two-generation programs for parental employment can increase access to needed services and parents' ability to work, but evidence is mixed. Current studies do not, however, consistently link these programs to higher wages or better child outcomes. Additionally, two-generation parental employment programs have not yet been studied as a statewide policy, therefore the current evidence base does not provide clear guidance for state action. Further study, particularly on families with infants and toddlers under age 3, is needed to draw a strong conclusion, due in part to the lack of uniformity across programs and inconsistent program participation.

Two-generation programs for parent employment are services and programs that serve both children and their parents simultaneously, aiming to empower parents to secure and retain gainful employment while providing children with support needed for successful early development. Such programs maximize the benefit to families by ensuring parents are able to access employment training and other support services without sacrificing quality care for their children. Helping parents find and retain employment can provide them with the resources to foster a safe and healthy environment for their children to develop. Funding for these programs has come from all levels of government and private foundations, but initiatives to deliver two-generation programs have largely taken hold at the state and local levels, rather than federally.

What Are Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment?

Two-generation employment programs serve both children and their parents simultaneously, aiming to empower parents to secure and retain gainful employment while providing children with the child care needed for successful early development. Two-generation approaches are used widely across the early childhood field, but in this summary, we are looking only at those programs that specifically provide employment support for parents and child care for their children. Evidence suggests that positive employment outcomes for parents and educational outcomes for children are strongly linked, however programs addressing these outcomes are generally developed and delivered separately. The goal of two-generation programming is to link services to improve overall family wellbeing by targeting the interrelated factors across children and their parents that are central to children's healthy development.² Services provided through two-generation programs for children focus on early childhood education, whereas parent-focused services vary from case-management, general employment training, sector-specific training, and comprehensive economic support.² Programs commonly leverage existing services in communities, through partnerships and referrals, including Head Start and Early Head Start, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Employment Programs.³ For example, several two-generation parent employment programs operate in existing child care settings, building off of the services provided to children through child care providers to offer simultaneous programming and services for parents.^{A,14,15}

Though the idea of serving families as a whole has been around for decades, the term “two-generation program” was coined in the early 1990s, as the first set of innovative strategies emerged to explicitly link early childhood education programs to intensive parental employment services. Early programs, such as traditional Head Start (often thought of as the first national two-generation program), tended to provide less intensive programming for parents, focusing on offering family support, parenting skills, literacy programs, access to public benefits, and referrals to educational programs.⁴ In the 1990s there were several large-scale nationwide programs launched to employ the two-generation model, including the New Chance Demonstration, Head Start Family Service Centers, and the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP).² Funding has come from all levels of government, but initiatives have taken hold at the state and local level to deliver two-generation programming, not federally.

As two-generation strategies continue to evolve, they have begun to focus more on employment, life skills, and educational attainment, with an ultimate aim of helping families to reduce long-term dependency on public benefit programs. The second wave of two-generation programs emphasize the need for wraparound services for families, providing comprehensive and intensive services to both the child and the parents. Additionally, rather than setting the goal at parental employment, programs are increasingly focusing on the quality and wage of the jobs, seeking to ensure parents find quality jobs with sufficient wages to support their families.⁴

Who Participates in Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment?

Two-generation programs are targeted at low-income families, particularly unemployed or underemployed parents and their children. Exact eligibility requirements vary across programs, but the core population served remains the same. Programs that work through or with federal early childhood programming such as Head Start/Early Head Start and the CCDP serve families who receive public assistance or live at or below the federal poverty level (FPL); other programs set eligibility at 150 or 185 percent of the FPL. Further, some programs target specific populations such as single mothers or young mothers, though most target broader populations.

The overall number of families in the United States served by two-generation programs each year is unknown, but at least 12 states have implemented statewide policies and programs to support two-generation strategies and more are beginning to explore two-generation approaches as a way to disrupt cycles of intergenerational poverty.^{3,5}

We do know, however, that millions of families across the country may be eligible for two-generation programming. Approximately one in five children in the United States live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold,¹ and 39 percent live in low-income families (families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold).⁶

What Are the Funding Options for Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment?

Two-generation programs often leverage existing programs for children and their parents through partnerships between services, involving a mix of federal, state, local, and sometimes private-sector funding. Supporting two-generation strategies includes both the funding of explicitly two-generation approaches, as well as the funding of the building blocks of two-generation programming: early childhood education, parental employment services, and family supports.

Potential federal funding sources include: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Child Care Development Block Grant; Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting; Head Start/Early Head Start; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Medicaid; and Social Services Block Grants.³ Some federal funds are distributed to all states and can be directed to support two-generation programming, whereas other funds are disbursed through grants. In 2016, the Administration for Children and Families released a memo promoting the use of TANF funds for two-generation approaches.⁷

States can also fund two-generation programming through maintenance of effort (MOE) funds, general funds, dedicated funds, and workforce or child care funds. States are already funding activities that are central to two-generation strategies, such as early childhood education, training and education programs, parenting programs, and case workers for low-income families. General fund appropriation is relatively rare. Connecticut is one of the only states that has appropriated general fund dollars explicitly for two-generation initiatives, though investments were relatively low – \$25,000 in Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017.³

Local governments and private philanthropic contributions can also be critical to two-generation initiatives. Localities can apply for Community Development Block Grants and Community Service Block Grants to support two-generation programming, and supplement with local funding where available. Foundations including the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation have been instrumental in funding pilot programs to evaluate the effectiveness of two-generation approaches, and convening stakeholders to further two-generation efforts across the country.³

Why Should Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment Be Expected to Impact the Prenatal-to-3 Period?

As outlined above, two-generation strategies often work to link existing services, rather than operate as individual stand-alone programs. The unique offering of two-generation programs, however, is in providing simultaneous services to maximize the benefit to families. Syncing services for parents and children can be especially beneficial for low-income parents, who often cite lacking child care as a barrier to accessing educational and employment services.⁸





Facilitating parental employment through the two-generation approach can help parents increase family resources through increased earnings. Job insecurity or unemployment can cause heightened stress, threatening the physical and mental health of the parent, in turn undermining positive family relationships and healthy parenting behaviors.⁹ Employment, on the other hand, generates income that evidence suggests is critical to the success of parents and ultimately the healthy development and long-term wellbeing of children, including the overall condition of the home environment and access to quality health care.¹⁰ Additionally, evidence shows that for single-parents and low-income families, the positive effect of additional income associated with parental employment outweighs any potential negative effect of reduced time for parent-child interaction, provided the substitute care is of reasonable quality.¹⁰

¹ The federal poverty threshold is calculated by the Census Bureau and differs slightly from the federal poverty level determined by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The federal poverty threshold is determined by size and composition of household (number of children and adults in the home), as compared to the federal poverty level which is determined by size of household alone.

Intergenerational economic mobility in the United States is low – 60 percent of children born in the bottom economic quintile will remain in the two lowest quintiles into adulthood, and only one in ten will move to the top quintile.¹¹ Education is one of the strongest predictors of economic success in the United States, for children and adults, and educational disadvantage often compounds across generations.¹ Linking services for children and their parents through two-generation strategies may offer synergy to overcome some barriers contributing to these generational patterns. For example, providing high quality care for children can allow parents to take part in employment training. Simultaneously, increased resources from parental employment can support children's success in early childhood education and beyond. Achieving economic success can expand parents' ability to invest in their children and empower them to serve as a role model.⁸ Two-generation programs may therefore be able to disrupt patterns of generational poverty by supporting success of both parents and children.

Decades of research in the field of child development have made clear the conditions necessary for young children and their families to thrive.¹² These conditions are represented by our eight policy goals, shown in Table 1. The goals impacted by two-generation programs for parental employment are indicated below.

Table 1: Policy Goals Theoretically Aligned With Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment

Aligned	Policy Goal
	Access to Needed Services
	Parents' Ability to Work
	Sufficient Household Resources
	Healthy and Equitable Births
	Parental Health and Emotional Wellbeing
	Nurturing and Responsive Child-Parent Relationships
	Nurturing and Responsive Child Care in Safe Settings
	Optimal Child Health and Development

What Impact Do Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment Have, and for Whom?

Evidence on the effectiveness of two-generation strategies in the United States is mixed, due in part to implementation challenges and the widely varying services provided by different two-generation programs that have been evaluated (see Table 2 below). Of the four evaluations included in this summary, only one found evidence of a detrimental effect,^c but evaluations of most two-generation programs showed that they failed to substantially improve outcomes for parents and children. Some evaluations, however, demonstrated positive outcomes, indicating that two-generation approaches can advance children's wellbeing, increase employment and earnings for parents, and improve parental wellbeing metrics. Two other programs, the CareerAdvance program in Tulsa, Oklahoma¹⁴ and the Head Start Family Service Center demonstration¹⁵ have been rigorously evaluated, but serve only children ages 3 to 5, so are not included in our analysis.

Table 2: Summary of Two-Generation Parent Employment Programs

Program	Description of Services	Location	Evaluation Date
Enhanced Early Head Start with Employment Services: Hard-to-Employ Demonstration^A	Provided enhanced services to support parent employment, above and beyond the typical services provided at all Early Head Start (EHS) sites, including: a self-sufficiency specialist on staff at the EHS site; partnerships with local welfare agencies and programs that provide employment trainings and other services; trainings for all EHS staff on employment and educational resources; and targeted parent trainings on employment, education, and self-sufficiency needs.	Kansas and Missouri	2012
New Hope for Families and Children^B	Offered referrals to wage-paying community service jobs for parents who were not able to find employment after an eight-week job search. Also provided monthly earnings supplements to participants working at least 30 hours a week, but earning below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold; subsidized health insurance and child care to participants working at least 30 hours a week; and an assigned representative to provide guidance and additional information as needed.	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	2003
New Chance Demonstration^C	Program model designed to provide educational and vocational training services to young (ages 18-22) single mothers receiving AFDC benefits, while simultaneously enhancing the development of children. Programming was delivered locally by 16 different program operators, with \$300,000 in funding over the first three years. Each program defined its own focus, ranging from adult education, health services, counseling, to occupational skill training.	National (16 sites across 10 states)	1997
Comprehensive Child Development Program^D	Program charged local sites with developing a model to deliver: 1) comprehensive services to parents to enhance their ability to achieve self-sufficiency, and 2) comprehensive social services to meet developmental needs of their infant and toddler children. Each program relied on case managers to coordinate service delivery, and in some cases deliver programming directly (e.g., counseling, life skill training).	National (21 sites across 20 states ⁱⁱ)	1997

The research discussed here meets our standards of evidence for being methodologically strong and allowing for causal inference, unless otherwise noted. Each strong causal study reviewed has been assigned a letter, and a complete list of causal studies can be found at the end of this review, along with more details about our standards of evidence and review method. The findings from each strong causal study reviewed align with one of our eight policy goals from Table 1. The Evidence of Effectiveness table below displays the findings associated with two-generation programs for parental employment (beneficial, null,ⁱⁱⁱ or detrimental) for each of the strong studies (A through D) in the causal studies reference list, as well as our conclusions about the overall impact on each studied policy goal. The assessment of the overall impact for each studied policy goal weighs the timing of publication and relative strength of each study, as well as the size and direction of all measured indicators.

ⁱⁱ State counts include the District of Columbia.

ⁱⁱⁱ An impact is considered statistically significant if $p < 0.05$.

Table 3: Evidence of Effectiveness for Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment by Policy Goal

Policy Goal	Indicator	Beneficial Impacts	Null Impacts	Detrimental Impacts	Overall Impact on Goal
Access to Needed Services	Child Care Use	A, B, C			Positive
Parents' Ability to Work	Parent Employment	A*, B	A*, C, D		Mixed
	Credential/Certification		C, D		
	Parent Degree Attainment	C	D		
	Likelihood of Combining AFDC With Employment	C			
Sufficient Household Resources	Earnings	A*, B	A*, C, D,		Mostly Null
	Household Income	B	C, D		
	Material Hardship		B		
	Public Assistance Receipt		B, C, D		
Parental Health and Emotional Wellbeing	Psychosocial Wellbeing		A, B, C		Mostly Null
	Physical Health		B, C		
	Parenting Stress		B	C	
Nurturing and Responsive Child-Parent Relationships	Parenting Behaviors		A, B, D		Null
	Home Environment		C		
Optimal Child Health and Development	Educational Outcomes	B	A, B, D		Mostly Null
	School Readiness		C		
	Child Health		B, C, D		
	Child Development		A, C, D		
	Child Motivation		A, B		
	Child Behavior		A, B, D	C	

*In the Enhanced EHS study, outcomes for families with infants were positive for earnings and employment, but null for families with toddlers, so the Enhanced EHS study is represented in both columns.

Access to Needed Services

Three studies looked at the impact of two-generation programs on access to child care for participating families, and all three found increased child care use.^{A,B,C} The Enhanced Early Head Start (EHS) Hard-to-Employ Demonstration evaluation found participants used formal care for 3.6 more months than the control group, and were 44.3 percentage points more likely to receive Early Head Start or Head Start child care or family services.^A In the Enhanced EHS evaluation, families in the control group were not able to access Enhanced or traditional EHS services in their communities, and instead were encouraged to seek alternative services. The New Hope evaluation found participants used formal child care for 0.8 more months during the school year and 0.3 more months during the summer, as compared to the control group.^B Finally, the New Chance evaluation found a 17.8 percentage point increase in the likelihood children were ever in a child care or preschool center 42 months after enrollment, and a 7.4 percentage point increase in the likelihood that

children were in regular child care before age 1.^C These two-generation programs either directly provided (EHS,^A New Chance^C) or subsidized (New Hope^B) child care for participating families, so the outcome of increased access to child care is expected.

Parents' Ability to Work

Overall, evidence on the impact of two-generation programs on parents' ability to work is mixed. The New Hope evaluation in 2003, which paired services with subsidized health care, child care, and income support, found participants were 8.2 percentage points more likely to be employed in year one of the program, though effects diminished after the program ended.^B The Enhanced EHS evaluation also found that though parents of toddlers saw no significant improvement in employment, for parents who were pregnant at the time of enrollment and parents of infants, the program had a significant positive effect on employment.^A The study found that for families with infants, maternal employment increased 13.3 percentage points in the third year after enrollment. The New Chance^C and Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP)^D evaluations examined program effects on both parent employment and workforce certification attainment, and found no significant effect on either outcome.

Researchers hypothesized that the lack of significant findings related to employment may be due in part to the long-term impact of some of these training programs and the low or inconsistent service receipt. For instance, the Enhanced EHS evaluation found that participation consistency was relatively low across sites, and especially parents of toddlers chose not to engage in the intensive employment services, which study authors expect may have contributed to the lack of outcomes for that population.^A

Findings related to education were also mixed. The New Chance evaluation found participants were 8.1 percentage points more likely to receive a GED or high school diploma, as compared to the control group,^C but the CCDP evaluation found no consistent evidence of an association between program participation and GED or diploma attainment.^D

Finally, the evaluation of New Chance, which was a program specifically for young mothers receiving public assistance, found that participating mothers were 4.4 percentage points more likely to combine Aid for Dependent Families and Children (AFDC) benefits with employment at some point over the first 42 months after enrollment, as compared to the control group.^C Effects on public assistance receipt were concentrated in the first six months of program participation.

Sufficient Household Resources

Impacts on earnings largely mirrored the impacts measured on employment. The Enhanced EHS evaluation found that for parents who were pregnant at the time of enrollment and parents of infants, the program increased annual earnings by \$2,908 by year three, but there were no significant effects for parents of toddlers.^A New Hope, which offered broader wraparound supports, was the only program that showed a positive impact for all groups on parental earning, with participants earning on average \$1,088 more than the control group in the first year after enrollment and total income (earnings, EITC, supplement) \$1,615 greater for participants.^B Effects of the New Hope program on annual earnings and income diminished over time. The New Chance^C and CCDP^D evaluations also looked at program effects on parental earnings and overall household income, but did not find any significant impact.

A few studies looked beyond parental employment and earnings to examine overall material hardship in families. The New Hope evaluation looked at self-reported material hardship outcomes, and found no significant effect.^B The New Hope^B and CCDP^D evaluations examined public assistance receipt and amount as indicators of economic self-sufficiency, and found no evidence of program impact. The evaluation of New Chance measured overall AFDC participation, duration of AFDC receipt, and movement off of AFDC at the 42-month follow-up and found null effects across all metrics, though the program did increase the likelihood of simultaneously receiving AFDC and being employed, as mentioned above.^C

Parental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Findings on parental wellbeing were largely null across evaluations. Of the three studies that evaluated parental wellbeing metrics, none found consistent evidence of a significant association between program participation and parent wellbeing. The New Hope evaluation found positive, but not statistically significant effects on self-reported metrics of parent physical health and depression (significant at $p=0.10$).^B

The Enhanced EHS,^A New Hope,^B and New Chance^C evaluations, however, found null effects on parental psychosocial wellbeing metrics, including self-reported psychological distress and measures of parental depression. Additionally, the New Hope^B and New Chance^C studies collected information on self-reported parental health and did not find evidence of a significant impact.

The New Chance evaluation found that participating parents were 6.2 percentage points more likely to report feeling stressed, demonstrating some negative effect of programming.^C Study authors suggest that this outcome may be tied to feelings of increased pressure or frustration with continued unemployment even though they participated in employment training – known as the “frustrated expectations hypothesis.” The New Hope evaluation also examined parental stress, but did not find evidence of a significant effect.^B

Nurturing-and Responsive Child-Parent Relationships

Three studies evaluated impacts of two-generation programming on the parent-child relationship through changes in parenting behaviors. None of the three evaluations (Enhanced EHS,^A New Hope,^B or CCDP^D) found a consistent positive relationship between two-generation programming and parenting behaviors for families in the programs. The New Chance study looked at program impacts on the home environment, measured using the Home Observation for Measurement of Environment assessment, and also found null effects.^C

Optimal Child Health and Development

Impacts on child health and developmental outcomes were also mostly null. Of the four evaluations that evaluated impacts on child health and development, only one found positive effects. The New Hope evaluation found positive impacts on some educational outcomes, demonstrating a 0.2 point difference in a five-point scale of parent-reported reading outcomes, but no significant impact on reading and math test scores.^B The Enhanced EHS^A and CCDP^D evaluations also examined the impact on academic achievement tests and found no evidence of a significant association between program participation and academic outcomes. Finally, the New Chance study evaluated program effects on school readiness scores, and found null effects.^C

The New Hope and New Chance evaluations examined effects on parent-reported child health outcomes, and found no significant effect.^{B,C} Similarly, the CCDP evaluation found no evidence of a consistent relationship between health outcomes, measured through doctor visits and mortality rates, and program participation.^D Evidence on the impact of two-generation programs on child development^{iv} was also null, with evidence from the Enhanced EHS,^A New Chance,^C and CCDP^D evaluations showing no program effect on child developmental metrics.

The evidence also found no consistent association between two-generation programming and child motivation and behavioral measures. The Enhanced EHS^A and New Hope^B evaluations examined both child motivation and behavior metrics and found no evidence of impact, and the CCDP^D study evaluated only behavior, but also found no significant effect. The New Chance evaluation also examined child behavior, using the Behavior Problems Index (BPI) and Positive Behavior Scale (PBS), and found a slight negative effect of program participation on parent-reported child behavior (1.5 points higher on 100 point BPI, 5.3 points lower on the 250 point PBS).^C The negative impact on child behavioral ratings was concentrated among women who were at risk for depression at baseline, and authors suggested that the measured adverse effects on behavior may be due to higher levels of parental stress and depression among participating parents.

Researchers hypothesize that the null effects on child-related outcomes may be due to a lack of substantial differences in children’s service receipt across families that engage in the full two-generation approach, compared to control group families who enrolled their children in early childhood education only, as well as increased parental stress related to work required from employment programs.^{B,C}

^{iv} EHS study used survey results on parent-reported social and emotional development to measure child development, the New Chance evaluation used the Brackens Basic Concept Scale, and the CCDP evaluation used the Bayley Scales of Infant Development and the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children

Is There Evidence That Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment Reduce Disparities?^v

Several evaluations looked at subgroup impacts to analyze if two-generation programs worked better for certain population. The New Hope evaluation looked across racial and ethnic groups and other sub-populations, and found the strongest impacts for Hispanic families and families that reported higher barriers to employment at program entry (all families in the sample were un- or underemployed).^B An evaluation of a two-generation program for children ages 3 to 5 and their parents in Tulsa, Oklahoma also found that parents with higher levels of material hardship were more likely to remain in the program and eventually earn certification.¹³

However, the CCDP evaluation looked at maternal age, maternal education level, and single mother status, and found that looking across sites there was no evidence of differential impacts across subgroups. Because the CCDP served specifically unemployed and underemployed families, these metrics were used to assess how the program worked for families who were more likely to face certain employment barriers.^D

Has the Return on Investment for Two-Generation Programs for Parent Employment Been Studied?

Evidence suggests that the two-generation programs may be a cost-effective way to support families, generating positive return on investment. Though outside of the prenatal-to-3 evidence base, one simulation study found that a two-generation program combining Head Start with sector-specific job training, if successful at placing parents in sector-relevant jobs, would result in an average of \$1.30 savings per dollar invested within 5 years of implementation, and an average \$7.80 savings per dollar invested within ten years, if just 10 percent of Head Start parents participated in the two-generation programming.¹ This evidence suggests that two-generation programming can be cost effective, if it is successful at helping parents to find stable employment. A more comprehensive analysis of the return on investment is forthcoming.

What Do We Know, and What Do We Not Know?

Existing rigorous evidence on two-generation parent employment programs is mixed, and further research is needed to understand how such programs can effectively support families in the prenatal-to-3 period. Two-generation strategies represent an innovative, logical approach to addressing the challenges of generational poverty in the United States. Both an exploration of the barriers to success in other traditional approaches to supporting low income families and an analysis of the theory of change suggest that two-generation programs have potential for serving low-income families. However, past and existing programs have shown limited positive effects on parents and children. Three of the four evaluations that met our standards for review find some positive impact on relevant indicators of access to needed services, parents' ability to work, sufficient household resources, or optimal child development, but only one – the New Hope program – showed improvements in parental earnings or employment for all families. Another study of the Enhanced EHS program showed beneficial impacts on earnings and employment for parents of infants, but not toddlers.^A

Additional rigorous evidence from studies of children ages 3 to 5, though not directly relevant to the prenatal-to-3 period, may provide insight into how two-generation parental employment programs can successfully support families. An evaluation of the Tulsa, Oklahoma CareerAdvance program, which specifically trains parents for employment in the health care industry, found that though there was no difference in overall employment rates for program participants, participating parents were significantly more likely to be employed in the health care sector than employed parents in the comparison group.¹⁴ That same study also found significant increases in workforce credential receipt, education, and parental psychosocial wellbeing, but no change to parental earnings, self-reported material hardship, or parenting stress. Another evaluation, of the Head Start Family Service Center project, found participants were significantly more likely to be in an educational program 19 months after enrollment, but null effects in all other relevant outcomes measured (parental employment, educational attainment, earnings, substance abuse, and psychosocial wellbeing).¹⁵

^v Disparities are defined here as differential outcomes by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (SES).

Limited research exists in any age group, however, on what factors are key to success in two-generation strategies, particularly those factors that lead to increased employment for parents – a central goal of two-generation programs that evidence shows is not consistently achieved. Researchers suggest that relatively low intensity of programming and inconsistent participation have contributed to null findings in parental employment.¹² Further implementation studies should examine if and how dosage and differences in participation are associated with positive outcomes. The Parents and Children Thriving Together Collaborative (PACTT), a group of five states (Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey and Oregon) implementing different two-generation strategies, found engaging with parents to codesign solutions to be a promising way to increase engagement from participants, though no rigorous evaluation has been done of the program.¹⁶ Researchers should explore how the diverse strategies employed across states to develop two-generation approaches contribute to overall program success.

States and local governments employ diverse strategies to fund and support two-generation parental employment programs through policy, with a number of innovative pilots occurring across the country.³ Future research should explore what the optimal statewide mechanisms are to establish effective two-generation programming.

Additionally, more work should be done to understand the impact of two-generation programs on different racial and ethnic groups. The PACTT network stakeholders of Minnesota and Oregon found improving data collection and analysis around program participation and access to be a helpful step in applying a racial equity lens to their work.¹⁶ Both states reported using disaggregated program data to understand differential impacts of programming on racial groups, and improve upon programming to deliver better, more equitable outcomes for all participants. Future research should aim to better understand how both access and impact varies across racial groups for two-generation programs. Existing programs also serve almost exclusive mothers. As two-generation programs continue to evolve, states and localities should explore how such programs may serve fathers as well, and if and how their impact differs on that population.

Finally, to better understand the specific impact of two-generation parental employment supports for children in the prenatal-to-3 period, researchers should look specifically at how families with children in that age range respond to programming. Families in this period are facing different barriers to work, and balancing different tradeoffs with parental employment. Programs that encourage parents of young children to work outside the home may interfere with child development, especially if quality care is not accessible for families. Only the Enhanced EHS and CCDP evaluations looked specifically at children ages 0 to 3, whereas the other evaluations examined programs more broadly for parents of younger children, including families with children as old as age 10. Evidence on the prenatal-to-3 period is critical to understanding how two-generation programming can support families during that period.

Are Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment an Effective Policy for Improving Prenatal-to-3 Outcomes?

Rigorous evidence on the relationship between two-generation parent employment programs and outcomes in the prenatal-to-3 period is limited, and outcomes are mixed. Two-generation strategies to improve parental employment can be as simple as providing connections to employment services for families in formal child care settings, or as broad as wraparound services for families that target improved economic security across the board, serving both children and their parents. Existing evidence suffers from low and inconsistent participation, and was conducted on programming that varies widely, likely contributing to the mixed findings on effectiveness. Future research should explore the mechanisms through which two-generation programs can successfully support families.

Additionally, only two evaluations focus specifically on families in the prenatal-to-3 period, with the remaining studies looking at parents of young children more broadly (from under age 5 up to ages 1 to 10). Finally, to date no rigorous evidence has explored the impact of statewide policies to implement two-generation programs of this kind. Evidence has instead focused on program-level outcomes, rather than policy, providing no clear guidance for state action. Further study on two-generation programs for parental employment, and the prenatal-to-3 period specifically, is needed to better understand the relationship between two-generation programs and relevant prenatal-to-3 outcomes.

How Do Two-Generation Programs for Parental Employment Vary Across the States?

Half of states across the country have emerging or established two-generation programs at the state or local level, which vary considerably in strategy and content.¹⁷ Many more localities have implemented two-generation approaches, with some programs beginning to expand across multiple cities.^{3,5}

Seven of the states that have implemented or considered statewide two-generation supports have used legislation as a lever to support strategies, though the contents and strategies of the legislation are varied.³ For example, Massachusetts established a commission through statute to explore how the state can employ a two-generation approach to address poverty. New Jersey introduced legislation in 2018 to establish a pilot program to explore two-generation school readiness and workforce development.³

Connecticut has a dedicated state funding stream, combining general fund dollars with \$1.5 million in TANF funds, supporting a two-generation pilot program across six cities.³ Minnesota and Georgia also established pilot programs to explore the effectiveness of two-generation programs. Georgia instituted the pilot through a grant program, funding local innovative strategies to establish partnerships between child- and parent-serving organizations in three counties. Minnesota selected four counties representing areas with high disparity rates to pilot two-generation solutions in community-based organizations. Pilot programs were supported by a coordinator at the Minnesota Management and Budget Office, who helped build connections across agencies.¹⁶

Colorado has implemented two-generation strategies largely through action from leadership in the Governor's office, with a dedicated staff person who oversees coordination between stakeholders, supporting state agencies, local government leaders, and nonprofit actors in their two-generation efforts from the governor's office.¹⁶ Still other states have looked to agency leadership and coordination to achieve implementation. Agency partnerships can also be key to linking child-serving and parent-serving programming to achieve the goals of two-generation strategies. North Carolina and Maine have such partnerships in place.³

Signaling a growing interest and investment in two-generation strategies, six states have established working groups or commissions dedicated to exploring two-generation programs and other innovative strategies to interrupt cycles of intergenerational poverty. Several nationwide networks are also encouraging and supporting the use of two-generation programs in states, including the Parents and Children Thriving Together: Two Generation State Policy Network (PACTT Network), led by the National Governors Association and the Aspen Institute.³

How Did We Reach Our Conclusions?

Method of Review

This evidence review began with a broad search of all literature related to the policy and its impacts on child and family wellbeing during the prenatal-to-3 period. First, we identified and collected relevant peer-reviewed academic studies as well as research briefs, government reports, and working papers, using predefined search parameters, keywords, and trusted search engines. From this large body of work, we then singled out for more careful review those studies that endeavored to identify causal links between the policy and our outcomes of interest, taking into consideration characteristics such as the research designs put in place, the analytic methods used, and the relevance of the populations and outcomes studied. We then subjected this literature to an in-depth critique and chose only the most methodologically rigorous research to inform our conclusions about policy effectiveness. All studies considered to date for this review were released on or before March 31, 2020.

Standards of Strong Causal Evidence

When conducting a policy review, we consider only the strongest studies to be part of the evidence base for accurately assessing policy effectiveness. A strong study has a sufficiently large, representative sample, has been subjected to methodologically rigorous analyses, and has a well-executed research design allowing for causal inference—in other words, it demonstrates that changes in the outcome of interest were likely caused by the policy being studied.

The study design considered most reliable for establishing causality is a randomized control trial (RCT), an approach in which an intervention is applied to a randomly assigned subset of people. This approach is rare in policy evaluation because policies typically affect entire populations; application of a policy only to a subset of people is ethically and logistically prohibitive under most circumstances. However, when available, randomized control trials are an integral part of a policy's evidence base and an invaluable resource for understanding policy effectiveness.

The strongest designs typically used for studying policy impacts are quasi-experimental designs (QEDs) and longitudinal studies with adequate controls for internal validity (for example, using statistical methods to ensure that the policy, rather than some other variable, is the most likely cause of any changes in the outcomes of interest). Our conclusions are informed largely by these types of studies, which employ sophisticated techniques to identify causal relationships between policies and outcomes. Rigorous meta-analyses with sufficient numbers of studies, when available, also inform our conclusions.

Studies That Meet Standards of Strong Causal Evidence

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