

A two generation lens: Current state policies fail to support families with young children

19 September 2014

Recent two-generation approaches to reducing poverty that help children and their parents are receiving increasing attention from researchers, advocates, and foundations. By combining education and training for parents to enable them to move to jobs that offer a path out of poverty with high-quality early care and education for children, these programs aim to improve the life opportunities of both. However, according to a new report from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), *State Policies through a Two-Generation Lens*, while research supports this poverty-reduction strategy, state policies fail to provide adequate two-generation supports to families with young children.

The report's conclusion is based on analysis of state policies that help families gain access to high-quality early care and education, child and parent health care, and supports for parenting and [family](#) economic security. "Most [states](#) have some strong policies in one or two of these areas, but none show a full set of key policies that collectively promote healthy child development and help families secure the resources children need to succeed," said Sheila Smith, PhD, director of early childhood at NCCP.

As an example, the report points to Georgia, where young children benefit from a state-funded prekindergarten program found to promote early learning in a recent evaluation, but where many families with preschoolers experience the strains of insufficient income due to low-wage jobs and high out-of-pocket health care expenses. Georgia, like 47 other states, has not set its minimum wage at a level that would bring a family of three above the federal poverty line. It is also one of 21 states currently opting out of the Medicaid expansion allowed under the Affordable Care Act, which provides health insurance to poor adults. Tables in the report show each state's major child- and family-supporting policies, making the case that states have some policies aimed at supporting

young children's development and others that undermine families' ability to help their children succeed.

"Research shows that [children](#) do better when their parents do better," says Renée Wilson-Simmons, DrPH, NCCP director. "However, it is clear from our analysis that many states give with one hand while taking away with the other."

The report recommends that states go beyond single-[policy](#) efforts to address poverty and instead package multiple policies that provide two-generation supports tailored to the needs of low-income families with [young children](#). "This approach could maximize the returns on investments in child- or adult-focused programs," says Smith. "For example, a young child whose high-quality child care program helps him enter school ready to learn is likely to do even better in school if his parents increase their education, achieve financial security, and gain access to [health care](#)."

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

APA citation: A two generation lens: Current state policies fail to support families with young children (2014, September 19) retrieved 16 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-lens-current-state-policies-families.html>

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