

# Post-adoption and guardianship support across the country

Between 2019 and 2021, AdoptUSKids surveyed states and territories to learn more about what post-adoption and guardianship services look like across the country. We collected this information from public agency adoption managers or their designees so that prospective and current adoptive families could learn about the support available in their communities.

With responses from 46 states and three territories, we knew it would also be helpful for child welfare professionals to learn about the support services offered by other child welfare systems.

Publicly funded post-adoption and guardianship support services are critical for adoptive and guardianship families. Ensuring that families have timely access to a wide range of support services helps improve the well-being outcomes of children and caregivers and helps prevent children from entering or reentering foster care.

By learning more broadly about what is happening with post-adoption and guardianship support, you can better understand how your jurisdiction compares with other states and territories and consider changes that could benefit the families you serve.

## Questions to reflect on as you learn from other jurisdictions

- What support services are most common across the country? How many of these services does my jurisdiction provide? Do we provide similar services as our peers? If not, why not?
- What funding streams are most commonly used to fund post-adoption and guardianship support? Should we tap into available funding that we haven't been using so we can expand our support services?
- Is our post-adoption and guardianship support budget in line with the size of the population of families we seek to serve? This is especially relevant as the number of adoptions and guardianships continues to grow throughout the country.
- Does my jurisdiction have more broad or more limited eligibility requirements compared to our peers?
- How are states and territories administering these services? What can we learn from this?

## What services are jurisdictions providing?

To meet the complex needs of adoptive and guardianship families, a comprehensive support program should offer a wide array of support services—including basic, enhanced, and intensive services. Here are the specific services that states and territories report that they provide to adoptive and guardianship families.

### Service provided as part of a publicly funded post-adoption and guardianship support program (n=49)

Basic services	Total responses (n=51)	Percent of total responses
Information (e.g., websites, fact sheets, articles)	42	82%
Navigation, advocacy, referral to services	41	80%
Child and youth assessments	24	47%

Enhanced services	Total responses (n=51)	Percent of total responses
Training, other knowledge/skill development	38	74%
Education support, educational advocacy	36	71%
Peer support for parents and caregivers	33	65%
Birth family mediation, adoption search	30	59%
Peer support for children and teens	26	51%
Case management	25	49%
Mentoring for parents and caregivers	23	45%
Camps, retreats, events	23	45%
Respite	20	39%
Financial or material support (other than adoption subsidy)	20	39%
Mentoring for children and teens	19	37%

<b>Intensive services</b>	<b>Total responses (n=51)</b>	<b>Percent of total responses</b>
Community-based therapeutic services	31	60%
Crisis intervention	30	59%
In-home therapeutic services	20	39%
Residential therapeutic services	15	29%

<b>No services</b>	<b>Total responses (n=51)</b>	<b>Percent of total responses</b>
No specific services offered	7	14%

## Who is eligible to receive services?

Which families are eligible for publicly funded support services varies widely across jurisdictions. When more families are provided easy access to support services, jurisdictions are better able to preserve adoptive families.

<b>Breadth of eligibility</b>	<b>Total responses (n=48)</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
Serves all adoptive families, including those who adopted privately or internationally	22	45%
Serves only those who adopted from any jurisdiction's foster care system	3	6%
Serves only those who adopted from that jurisdiction's foster care system	23	48%
Includes those who took guardianship of a child from foster care	30	62%

## Take action!

An important question for all jurisdictions to ask is if all eligible families know about your post-adoption and guardianship services. Do you know if families are aware of your services and how to access them? If you're not sure, consider:

- Planning an outreach campaign. Many jurisdictions have had success in reaching out to families.
- Surveying post-adoption and guardianship families. Ask if they know about, know how to access, and plan to use available services.
- Partnering with independent parent groups to spread the word about available services.
- Educating providers in your community who interact with families—such as pediatricians, school social workers, and other clinicians—about the support available to adoptive and guardianship families so they can refer them as appropriate.

## How are these services funded?

For post-adoption and guardianship support programs to be most successful, they need to be sustainably funded by the public agency so families can count on those services being provided over time. We asked jurisdictions to tell us which funding sources they are using and what their annual budgets are for their post-adoption support programs.

The most commonly used federal sources of funding for post-adoption and guardianship support are:

- **Title IV-B, Part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families**—The four categories of covered services include adoption promotion and support, family preservation, family reunification, and family support. The law requires states to spend a “significant portion” of Title IV-B, Part 2, funds on each category. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services instructs states to spend at least 20 percent in each area, including adoption promotion and support, although states can obtain waivers that allow them to spend less than 20 percent.
- **Delink funds** (Title IV-E savings reinvestment after the enactment of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act)—Passed in 2008, the Fostering Connections Act expanded federal eligibility for adoption assistance benefits, which has resulted in savings for states, tribes, and territories receiving Title IV-E Adoption funding. The law requires these jurisdictions to reinvest these savings in child welfare services. The

Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, passed in 2014, requires states to invest at least 20 percent of these savings on post-adoption and post-guardianship services.

- **Adoption/Guardianship Incentive Program**—These federal incentive funds must be spent on child welfare services such as those covered by Titles IV-B and IV-E.

Funding source (n=33)	States indicating this was one of the top three funding sources	Percent of total responses
IV-B, Part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, <b>adoption support and promotion</b>	20	61%
Delink funds (IV-E savings reinvestment following Fostering Connections Act)	16	48%
State child welfare funds	13	39%
Adoption/Guardianship Incentive Funds	12	36%
Medicaid (including EPSDT)	4	12%
Title IV-B, Part 1, Child Welfare Services	4	12%
Federal grants, e.g. Adoption Opportunities, or other federal funds	3	9%
Title XX, social services block grants	2	6%
Title IV-A (TANF)	1	3%

## Take action!

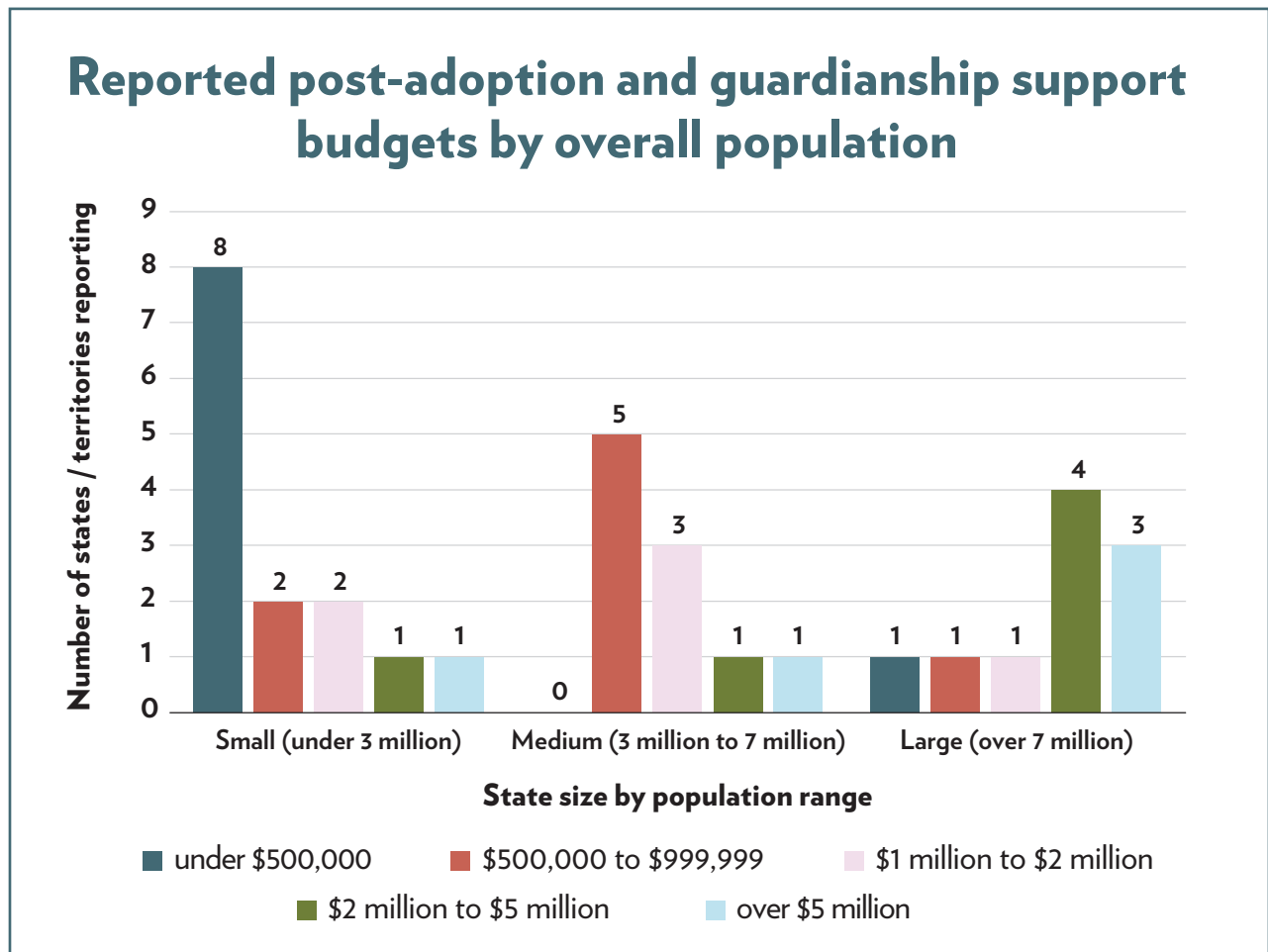
- Do you know if your state or territory is spending their delink savings and what they are spending it on? A 2021 [report from the US Government Accountability Office](#) found that 23 of the 52 responding states and territories identified at least one significant barrier to reinvesting their adoption savings. Check out the [Children’s Bureau’s adoption savings data](#) to learn about your state’s savings and spending amounts. Advocate to your leadership about spending delink savings on post-adoption and guardianship support.

- The Family First Prevention Services Act allows federal Title IV-E funding to be used on evidence-based services provided to families whose children are at risk of entering the child welfare system. The law includes all families who are at risk of out-of-home placement, including adoptive and guardianship families.<sup>1</sup> Has your state or territory considered using IV-E money made available by Family First to fund post-adoption and guardianship support services?

<sup>1</sup> Section 475(13) of the Social Security Act [42 USC 675] defines a child who is a candidate for foster care to include “a child whose adoption or guardianship arrangement is at risk of a disruption or dissolution that would result in a foster care placement.”

## Annual budgets by overall population

Of course, the amount of money allocated toward post-adoption and guardianship support is going to vary widely across the country. Budgets are best understood in the context of the size of the population that the program serves; we would expect states with smaller populations to have smaller budgets. Here, we’ve separated the states and territories by the size of their overall populations.



## How are systems providing these services?

Most jurisdictions contract with private agencies to provide post-adoption and guardianship support services. Of 49 respondents, 30 jurisdictions contract with one or more private providers (61%). The remaining 19 states and territories provide services directly to families.

We also found that many jurisdictions contract with multiple providers across different regions of the state, meaning that where and how families access services often depends on what region or county they are in. This could be a good thing—agencies with more local connections may be better equipped to meet the unique needs of the communities they serve. However, it’s important for jurisdictions with multiple support providers to clearly communicate with families about what services are available in which areas. They should also offer guidance on how to access the services they need.

## Themes and opportunities

As we make observations about these survey results, it’s important to remember that states and territories are incredibly diverse. Support approaches work best when they are tailored to the populations they seek to help. Each jurisdiction’s support priorities should be guided by the needs of those they serve, and those with lived experience in foster care, adoption, and guardianship should be at the table when decisions are made.

With that in mind, here are some broad takeaways from the survey results, including some opportunities for improvement.

- **Respite care**—When resource parents are surveyed about their needs, they often report both a high need for respite care and difficulty in accessing it. A majority of states and territories (61%) reported that they don’t include respite services in their post-adoption and guardianship support programs. If your jurisdiction does not currently offer respite care to these families, consider adding respite care and/or thinking creatively about how to incorporate more respite care into existing services. Learn more about creating and sustaining respite services in this AdoptUSKids [guide](#) and [tip sheet](#).
- **Intensive therapeutic services**—We know that many adoptive and guardianship families will need intensive therapeutic services throughout their lives. Though community-based therapeutic services are available in 60% of sites, other intensive services, like in-home or residential therapeutic services, are only included in post-adoption and guardianship services in a minority of jurisdictions (29%). When families experience access barriers to intensive therapeutic services, those families are at increased risk of adoption or guardianship dissolution. This is especially true in jurisdictions where youth may need to enter—or reenter—foster care in order to access residential therapeutic services, as out-of-home placements are known to increase the likelihood of adoption or guardianship dissolution.

- **Guardianship families**—It was great to see that a majority of jurisdictions offer publicly funded support to guardians. Some jurisdictions reported even broader eligibility, including private guardianships or other kinship arrangements. Additionally, many jurisdictions that do not currently provide support services to guardians indicated that they were hoping to offer it in their next budget cycle. The support available to guardians, however, is not always equal to that which is available to adoptive families. When states indicated that guardianship families are eligible for support services, many states require them to be receiving a guardianship subsidy to access support.
- **Support tied to subsidy agreements**—In many states and territories, several of their support services were only available as part of an individual child’s negotiated subsidy agreement. When support services are only available to those who are receiving an adoption or guardianship subsidy, many families with the same challenges are left without needed support.
- **Less support for private or international adoptions**—Only 46% of states and territories are providing post-adoption support services to those families who adopt privately or internationally. While it is understandable that many states prioritize support for those who adopted children from the US child welfare system, we know that families who have adopted privately face many of the same challenges as families who adopt from foster care. Children in these families are also at risk for foster care entry and additional trauma experiences if they do not have access to support services.
- **Budget increases**—It was encouraging to learn that 10 states and territories reported having increased their budgets for post-adoption and guardianship support in the last five years. Two of those jurisdictions even increased their budgets by more than 50 percent. However, adoptions have been increasing over the last five years across the country, and we would hope all jurisdictions’ post-adoption support budgets would increase as those programs serve more families. It’s important for child welfare leaders to advocate for, and prioritize, post-adoption and guardianship support budgets.

Access to post-permanency support services is critical for the preservation of adoption and guardianship families. It is encouraging that so many leaders are seeing the importance of post-adoption and guardianship support and are prioritizing it.

If you are considering improving your post-adoption and guardianship support programs, AdoptUSKids may be able to help you! Contact our Capacity Building and Engagement Team at [consultation@adoptuskids.org](mailto:consultation@adoptuskids.org) to talk with us about your needs.

For specific information about individual states or territories, check out our [post-adoption and guardianship support pages](#).





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