



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Office of the Commissioner

James Hunter Williams
Commissioner

December 20, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair, Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee

Michael Maul
Director, Virginia Department of Planning & Budget

FROM: James H. Williams *James Williams*

SUBJECT: Plan for Access to Kinship Navigator Program

The attached report is submitted pursuant to Item 329.P. of the 2024 Appropriation Act, which provides:

P. The Department of Social Services shall develop a plan to provide access statewide to a Kinship Navigator Program which will provide services to kinship caregivers who are having trouble finding assistance for their unique needs and to help these caregivers navigate their locality's service system, as well as federal and state benefits. The plan shall be submitted to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees, and Director, Department of Planning and Budget by September 1, 2024.

Please contact me if you have questions.

JW:kc


Attachment

cc: The Honorable Janet V. Kelly, Secretary of Health and Human Services



Plan for Access to the Kinship Navigator Program

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Plan for Access to the Kinship Navigator Program

A Report for the Virginia General Assembly

October 01, 2024

Report Mandate

Item 329.P. of the 2024 Appropriation Act

The Department of Social Services shall develop a plan to provide access statewide to a Kinship Navigator Program. This plan will provide services to kinship caregivers who are having trouble finding assistance for their unique needs and help caregivers navigate their locality's service system, as well as federal and state benefits. The plan shall be submitted to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees, and Director, Department of Planning and Budget by September 1, 2024.

Executive Summary

The Virginia Kinship Navigator Pilot Program has established a robust framework for supporting kinship families throughout the Commonwealth. This initiative has highlighted the critical need for expanded access to services statewide. To achieve this, it is essential to secure consistent and sustainable funding.

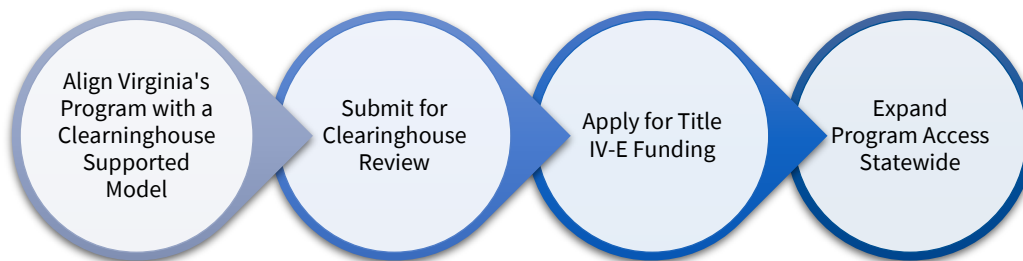
The plan in Virginia is to expand the Kinship Navigator Program statewide once a model is approved through the federal clearinghouse, allowing Virginia to draw down federal funds to match state general funds.

About VDSS and Kinship Navigator Programs

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) partners with local departments of social services and community organizations, to promote the well-being of children and families across the Commonwealth. We proudly serve alongside nearly 13,000 state and local human services professionals throughout the Social Services System, who ensure that thousands of Virginias most vulnerable citizens have access to the best services and benefits available to them.

Together, we work each day to serve, empower, and create opportunities for brighter futures.

The Kinship Navigator Programs provide information, referral, education, and advocacy for kinship families. Our goal is to identify private (informal) kinship families and to connect them to the Kinship Navigator and local resources. Kinship Navigator Programs in Virginia provide services and supports to strengthen the kinship caregivers' capacity to provide a safe, nurturing home for the child and to help achieve permanency for the child. Additionally, supports and services should assist the kinship caregiver in addressing the effects that maltreatment may have had on the child in their care.



Definitions

Kinship Care

Kinship care is the full-time care and nurturing of a child by a relative or someone who has a significant emotional relationship with a child not born to them. When children are raised by kinship caregivers, they experience greater continuity of care and family preservation. Children living with kin have a sense of permanency, nurturing, safety, and well-being. Kinship care also assists in maintaining the family's culture, traditions, values, and goals, and kinship placements help children maintain connections not only to family members, but often to their schools and communities.

Kinship Navigator Programs

The Kinship Navigator Programs provide information, referral, education and advocacy for kinship families.

Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse

The Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse "The Clearinghouse" was established by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct an objective and transparent review of research on programs and services intended to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements.

Program Overview

The Kinship Navigator Programs provide information, referral, education and advocacy for kinship families. Collaborations are based upon the Kinship Navigator's federal Children's Bureau grant associated with the passing of the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) on February 8, 2018, where the goal is to identify private (informal) kinship families and to connect them to the Kinship Navigator and local resources.

Kinship Navigator Programs in Virginia provide services and supports to strengthen the kinship caregivers' capacity to provide a safe, nurturing home for the child and to help achieve permanency for the child. Additionally, supports and services should assist the kinship caregiver in addressing the effects that maltreatment may have had on the child in their care.

Contacts

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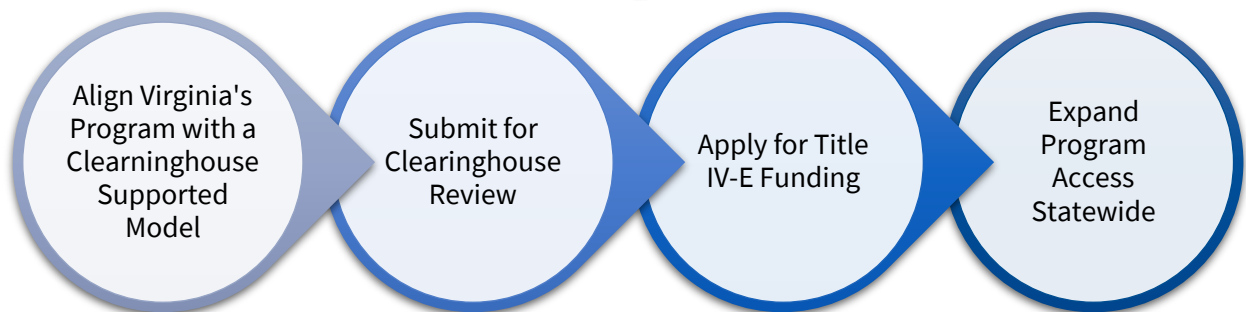
Plan for Access to the Kinship Navigator Program

SECTION 1: AN OVERVIEW OF VIRGINIA’S PLAN

Virginia’s Kinship Navigator Pilot program received grant funding from the Children’s Bureau through 2025; information on the pilot can be found in the [2020 Kinship report](#). Our pilot program laid the groundwork for current initiatives, which are operating with limited availability. In addition to state general funds received in fiscal year 2024, the agency has applied for grant funding through the [Opioid Abatement Authority](#) which, if awarded, will provide six new regions access to the program through a competitive bid process. Each of these funding streams expands access to the program, albeit limited. The ability to offer this program statewide depends on consistent funding.

The plan in Virginia is to expand the Kinship Navigator Program statewide once a model is approved through the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse (the Clearinghouse), allowing Virginia to draw down federal funds to match state general funds.

Overview of Virginia’s Plan



SECTION 2: PROGRAM INCEPTION

PILOT

VDSS selected 6 localities to participate in the pilot program through a competitive bid process. Grant recipients were strategically selected based on their geographic location, population, and community needs.

Virginia’s Kinship Navigator Programs are reflective of the unique geographic and demographic nature of each area.

REGIONAL PROGRAMS

The Virginia Beach program was initially part of the pilot initiative, however, this locality made the decision to launch the program with funding outside the federal grant.

The remaining five federally supported programs focused on providing information, referral, education, and advocacy to kinship families, aiming to strengthen caregivers' ability to provide safe, nurturing homes and achieve permanency for children. More information on current programs can be found on [Kinship Navigator Program website](#).

Data Collection and Analysis

In Virginia and across the country, Kinship Navigator Programs are determining how to best build their programs and what specific outcomes and measures should be evaluated in order to maximize results and ultimately secure federal funding.

To date, each region has implemented strategies tailored to its specific needs. Currently Virginia's Kinship Navigator Programs provide quarterly statistical and narrative reports. These reports include metrics on the number of children served, number of kinship caregivers served, demographic information on both children and kinship caregivers, and the number of referrals requested and provided.

Data collected will be analyzed to identify which services are most beneficial and have the greatest impact. VDSS will begin utilizing this information to develop a standardized program model that aligns with a reviewed and approved model from the federal clearinghouse.

SECTION 3: ALIGNING TO A SUPPORTED MODEL

Title IV-E Kinship Navigator Program requires use of program models that have been reviewed and rated by the Clearinghouse as meeting *promising*, *supported*, or *well-supported* practice standards.

SELECTING A SUPPORTED MODEL

As of March 2024, the federal clearinghouse determined three Kinship Navigator Programs either *supported* or *well-supported* a research evidence review. The longest standing supported program is the Arizona Kinship Support Services (AKSS); the AKSS program received a supported rating in September of 2022.

AKSS coordinates and connects families with various family support services, including guardianship clinics, kinship information and permanency sessions, adoption or guardianship training, support groups, education on topics identified by caregivers, and family recreational events. Services end when the family and Kinship Navigator determine that the family has met their goals, or another mutually agreed upon reason.

ALIGNING VIRGINIA'S PROGRAM

While Virginia's Kinship Navigator Program is structured on the AKSS program, further efforts are required to fully align our approach with their model.

Virginia's program is currently aligned with the AKSS model in some areas. Key elements in this alignment includes assessing the program's intake process, screening and assessment tools, and practice protocols. Additionally, the alignment will require creating standardized and consistent guidance for services and referrals, alongside best practices. At the end of FY2023, development of new statewide outcome measures began.

The statewide Kinship Navigator Program will also incorporate a program database and evaluation team that will partner with formal training on data collection and data fidelity for current and newly hired **Kinship Navigator staff**.

SECTION 4: SUBMITTING PROGRAM EVALUATION

Upon achieving alignment with a supported model, VDSS will submit Virginia's Kinship Navigator Program for federal clearinghouse review as a peer-reviewed study.

The federal clearinghouse uses a systematic review process that is consistent and has transparent standards and procedures. Clearinghouse staff use this systematic review process to conduct a literature search to locate research studies on the effectiveness of the prioritized programs and services. The clearinghouse will also conduct an evidence review to rate the strength of evidence of the studies using the design and execution standards. Details and information about the federal clearinghouse review process can be found on their [website](#); additionally an overview graphic can be accessed [here](#).

PEER REVIEWED STUDY

VDSS will transform the data collected in quarterly program reports into a peer-reviewed study and leverage strong partnerships within the academic community, particularly with a local school of social work to assist in fidelity monitoring.

To support this initiative enhancements in the Kinship Navigator Program will be included in the 2025 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). In July 2024, to operationalize these enhancements, VDSS applied for \$172,129 in federal funds available in the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program in [title IV-B, subpart 2](#). This application included the intent to submit an update to the Virginia Family First Prevention Plan in March 2025.

SECTION 5: APPLYING FOR FEDERAL FUNDING

As stated above, Title IV-E agencies approved to operate the Kinship Navigator Program may claim 50 percent Federal Financial Participation (FFP) for allowable Kinship Navigator Programs. VDSS will apply for these federal funds upon receipt of a required rating from the federal clearinghouse.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

The Virginia Kinship Navigator Pilot Program has laid a strong foundation for supporting kinship families across the Commonwealth. While the pilot program has demonstrated the value and necessity of these services, there remains a pressing need to expand access statewide. Expanding statewide access will require securing consistent and sustainable funding sources, such as the pending grants from the Opioid Abatement Authority and federal Title IV-E support.

Going forward, VDSS will align programming with a federally approved model from the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, ensuring that Virginia meets the highest standards of effectiveness. By leveraging partnerships with academic institutions and focusing on rigorous data collection and analysis, VDSS will position the Virginia Kinship Navigator Program to not only provide immediate support to kinship families but also establish a model that can be evaluated and recognized at the federal level.

Offering access to this program statewide will expand the capacity of kinship caregivers to provide safe, nurturing homes and ensure that all kinship families have access to the resources and support they need to thrive.

Appendix A: Item 329.P. of the 2024 Appropriation Act

The Department of Social Services shall develop a plan to provide access statewide to a Kinship Navigator Program which will provide services to kinship caregivers who are having trouble finding assistance for their unique needs and to help these caregivers navigate their locality's service system, as well as federal and state benefits. The plan shall be submitted to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees, and Director, Department of Planning and Budget by September 1, 2024.