



Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Meeting Summary

Introduction

On August 28th and 29th, 2019, members of the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG - the Council) convened for the first time to discuss their guiding values, establish priorities moving forward, and to begin working on the identification, promotion, coordination and dissemination to the public of information, resources and best practices to assist grandparents and older relatives. The convening of the Council is a major first step in the effort to provide information on federal resources for supporting grandparents and older relatives, including those available to help meet the health, educational, nutritional and other needs of the children in their care as well as maintain their own physical and mental health and emotional well-being. The Council must also consider the unique needs of grandparents and other relatives raising children affected by the opioid crisis and must ensure the needs of Native Americans are addressed.

The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act of 2018 (the SGRG Act) directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to undertake the following specific activities

- Conduct outreach and information collection activities asking for:
 - Information, resources and best practices to help grandparents and other relatives meet the health, educational, nutritional and other needs of those for whom they provide care.
 - Provide recommendations to fill gaps identified in the above.
- Identify, promote, coordinate and disseminate to the public, information, resources and best practices available to help grandparents and other older relatives, to:
 - Meet the health, nutritional, educational and other needs of children
 - Maintain their own physical, mental and emotional well being
- Consider the needs of those affected by the opioid crisis
- Consider the needs of members of Native American tribes

The SGRG Act also directed the Secretary to establish the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren which is charged in part for preparing a report for the Secretary to include:

- Best practices, resources and other useful information, for
 - Grandparents and older relatives; and

- If applicable, information related to the needs of children impacted by the opioid crisis.
- An identification of any gaps in helping grandparents and other older relatives meet the health, educational, nutritional, and other needs of the children in their care
- The identification of any additional Federal legislative authority necessary to help grandparents and other older relatives meet the health, educational, nutritional, and other needs of the children in their care, maintain their own physical and mental health and emotional well-being

To review the agenda for the meeting and the materials provided to Council members, please see the SGRG web page at [ACL.gov/SGRG](https://acl.gov/SGRG).

Council Members

The SGRG Act requires that the Council should consist of 13 voting members who reflect the diversity of grandparents and/or older relative caregivers. In addition, it requires the inclusion of non-voting members from the lead agency, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as follows:

- The Secretary of Health and Human Services
- The Secretary of Education
- The Administrator of the Administration for Community Living
- The Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- The Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use
- The Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families; as well as
- The head of federal agencies, departments or other government entities identified by the secretary of HHS as having responsibilities or administering programs related to issues affecting grandparents and other relatives raising children

For a complete list of both non-federal and federal Council members and their bios, please see the SGRG web page at [ACL.gov/SGRG](https://acl.gov/SGRG).

Agenda Overview and Summary of Goals

The inaugural SGRG Act Advisory Council meeting began with remarks from Lance Robertson, Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging at the Administration for Community Living, and Eric Hargan, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, both of whom emphasized the importance of the Council's work and the significance of federal investments in support of grandparents raising grandchildren. Throughout the first day, speakers shared personal experiences, results, resources and strategies from advocacy efforts, national research, and state/local initiatives to support grandparents raising grandchildren. Common threads among all presentations included but are not limited to: the importance of recognizing the cultural diversity of grandfamilies; the need to support the health, mental health, and emotional wellbeing of grandparents and older adults raising children, the impact of the opioid crisis on grandfamilies, empowering grandfamilies by connecting them to all available resources such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy families (TANF), health care system, government subsidized housing, and considering the needs of Native American tribes. During the second day of the meeting, Council members received an overview of existing federal programs and

initiatives in support of grandfamilies, and paving the way for a targeted and robust discussion of subcommittee roles, goals and next steps.

Guiding Values

Council members were asked to share the values that they see as important in guiding them in their work and as Council members. The information below represents some of the common themes and core values the group discussed, which will help them in crafting a framework that will direct the Council's work moving forward as they develop the report, and conduct outreach and information collection activities:

- Supporting people is important to communities and across the board.
- Respect and Dignity. Flourishing should be the goal.
- We need to raise the value of our families so they are respected and loved.
- Being bold. We have big issues and big possibilities for bold change.
- How to address this population legally, financially, socially.
- Respect everyone's culture. Respect for the families. We do not have the respect.
- We do not want to have to bring the child into the system in order to get services.
- Housing challenges are similar. Housing authority needs to recognize the need for bigger units.

Sub-Committees and Next Steps

On the last day of the Council meeting, members and participants from the general public broke up into seven small working groups to discuss priority areas that they feel should receive further scrutiny/examination in subsequent sub-committee deliberations. The priority areas identified included:

- Services and support
- Health, nutrition, mental health
- Education
- Special needs of grandparents and older relative caregivers
- Impact of opioid crisis
- Grandparent or relative caregiver needs: cultural differences
- Public policy: legal and financial implications

After review by ACL and the Council co-chairs, the following four sub-committees were established.

1. **Education and Outreach for Families and Professionals:** will focus on educating professionals, families, and the public on the needs and strengths of grandfamilies; outreach to connect grandfamilies with necessary services and supports; and coordinating services across agencies. This committee will also address working with schools and related systems to meet the educational needs of the children.
2. **Health Focus: Mind, Body and Soul subcommittee** will address the physical, emotional and mental well-being of both the caregivers and the children.

3. **Unique Needs and Strengths of GrandFamilies subcommittee** will consider the unique needs, strengths and circumstances of various special populations of grandfamilies with specific focus on grandparents and other relatives raising children as a result of the opioid crisis or other substance use and grandparents and other relatives raising children within tribal communities.
4. **Legal and Financial Issues, Income Supports and Housing Subcommittee** will focus on financial and legal issues facing grandfamilies as well as availability and access to income supports and housing.

The subcommittees will meet on a regular basis to guide and inform the work of ACL and the Council. Subcommittee members will guide the development of information gathering tools, drafts of reports and may ultimately engage in information dissemination, training and technical assistance activities as needed.