

CREATING A NETWORK OF FAMILY NAVIGATION MODELS



**CONSIDERATIONS
FROM MINNESOTA'S
LOCAL COMMUNITY
RESOURCE HUBS PILOT**



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A young girl with her hair in a bun, wearing a colorful floral jacket, is crawling on a grassy field. In the background, a woman with long dark hair is smiling and looking towards the girl. The scene is outdoors with a blurred background of other people and greenery.

Minnesota’s families can be better served by public programs through the expansion of community-driven, relationship-based approaches that improve service navigation and delivery. This report presents findings regarding the implementation of [local community resource hubs](#), an approach piloted by 13 Minnesota organizations and dozens of designated partner agencies, with the support of federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) funds, along with considerations to promote the expansion of similar family and community resource hub models through a supportive state- local infrastructure.

The Problem

Families face difficulties in accessing services because the service systems are complex and uncoordinated.

Multiple programs are available to expecting and parenting families in Minnesota, including but not limited to supports for health care, housing, food and cash, childcare, education, transportation, mental health, and home visiting services. These programs are supported through various local, state, and federal funding streams, each with its own set of legislatively mandated eligibility criteria, accountability mechanisms, rules, and regulations. The programs often have insufficient resources, infrastructures, and staff capacity to develop the strong partnerships with the multiple state and local agencies (e.g., counties, school districts, Community Action Programs, public health entities) needed to coordinate services and effectively support families in finding the services they need. The lack of coordination generates systemic inefficiencies and hinders families’ access to services. Families are often asked to share their stories with multiple programs and complete redundant paperwork to receive services for which they are eligible. Many Minnesota families struggle to navigate the disjointed systems and enrollment processes, especially when the entry points for programs are not welcoming or when families cannot find someone to guide them. To coordinate systems and ease families’ service access, it is necessary to develop localized partnerships across the agencies involved in whole-family services and to provide families with both culturally responsive tools and human guides who share their language, race/ethnicity, and geography. Community-informed family navigation services are essential in reaching communities that face barriers to accessing public benefit systems.¹



1 Cohen, S., Spielfogel, J., Alves, S., & Kirby, G. (2022). *Supporting child and family well-being: A call for coordinated early childhood systems; federal, state, local, tribal, and parent perspectives from key informant interviews*. Early Childhood Systems Collective Impact Project, Center for the Study of Social Policy and Mathematica. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/3b051ca14a2ed5428a298d20448419ca/ECS-Project-Collective-Impact-Project.pdf>

The Opportunity

Minnesota has implemented several successful *community-informed family navigation models*.

These models involve locally rooted and relationship-based strategies intended to guide families through the complex state-local systems and to connect families to services, resources, information, and support. The models include the community resource hubs, family resource centers, full-service community schools, Community Action Programs, family service collaboratives, and more. The implementation of these models has helped increase families' access to resources in multiple settings and supported communities in creating service strategies that work for local families.²

The community resource hubs pilot has demonstrated that families' access to services is improved by investing in community-rooted organizations, relationship-based strategies, and system navigation infrastructure.

As part of the community resource hub grant, the state provided 13 community-oriented organizations with funding, training, coaching, and ongoing consultation on equity-oriented services, trauma-informed reflective approaches, and statewide systems.³ The grant has enabled the hub organizations to lead state-local coordination efforts and deploy relationship-based, preventative strategies tailored to local communities' preferences and needs. Each hub has a designated *system navigator*, a staff member who engages families and refers them to additional services or supports. And as illustrated in the accompanying textbox, "Hubs by the Numbers," the hubs' relationship-based efforts have paid off; they have served almost 10,000 families and contributed to advancing equity by focusing on Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and/or multiracial families. The hubs have also helped test and refine Minnesota's online tools, such as [Help Me Connect](#) (resource database), [Bridge to Benefits](#) (Children's Defense Fund Minnesota's service eligibility assessment), and [MNBenefits](#) (combined application for benefits), among others. The hub pilot has served as "proof of concept" for pairing community-informed, relationship-based navigation with the development of an underlying navigation infrastructure. Yet more funding and supports are needed to further develop the hubs and the overall family navigation network in Minnesota.

Hubs by the Numbers

- The hubs served more than 9,698 Minnesotans during the time frame of this report.
- Almost half (45%) of the people served by the hubs and their partners are Indigenous families and families of color.
- Hub staff used Bridge to Benefits and/or Help Me Connect in almost a third of the family consultations.



2 Jacobson, C. (2012). *Minnesota Kinship Navigator Project: Final progress report*. Wilder Research. https://www.wilder.org/sites/default/files/imports/MKCA_Report_12-12.pdf

3 One of the 13 organizations (Scott County) did not receive direct funding, due to funding constraints.



The Ask

Provide additional funding to expand a statewide infrastructure to implement local, community-informed family navigation models.

With the additional investments, the community resource hubs and other proven community-informed family navigation models could be refined and expanded to serve more families and communities. The investments would not only increase program capacity and state-local coordination but also strengthen the underlying state infrastructure. State leaders can help Minnesota families by streamlining regulations and supporting direct investments into the community resource hubs and other community-informed family navigation initiatives. Key recommendations for refining the family navigation infrastructure are offered below.

Key Recommendations to Create a Supportive Infrastructure for the Expansion of Community-Informed Family Navigation Models in Minnesota


The findings in this report demonstrate that the community resource hubs are successfully improving service navigation and delivery to families with young children and are well positioned to expand into additional communities. The ongoing success of similar navigation efforts will depend on intentional action on the part of the state to help community partners overcome resource and capacity gaps and strengthen their work. Based on our findings, we recommend that state and local leaders keep the following considerations in mind as they work to create a supportive infrastructure for further expansion of family navigation models, including community resource hubs:

1. Direct funding to create a network of community-informed and culturally responsive family navigation models within underserved communities.
2. Maintain the focus on coordination and collaboration at the state level to support and expand infrastructure to implement local, community-informed family navigation models.
3. Expand the combined benefits application MNBenefits to help more hubs efficiently close the loop and ensure families receive what they need.
4. Extend the reach of the Help Me Connect tool alongside the expansion of family service navigation models into more communities.

5. Continue offering training, coaching, and technical assistance to hub staff, partners, and navigators.
6. Support the capacity of local communities to inform data collection and leverage data to support the effective delivery of early childhood and family services.
7. Ensure that navigation partners are available across the state and that they are effectively partnering with service providers to meet identified demand for services.
8. Invest in local capacity and leadership to encourage collaboration and partnerships between programs and systems serving families, allowing communities to better respond and generate customized solutions to policy and program barriers experienced by families.
9. Build off existing hub implementation efforts in Minnesota and other states.
10. Continue facilitating families' access to social safety net programs and concrete supports.

As the efforts of PDG B-5 wind down, Minnesota decision-makers face an opportunity to sustain the successes of the past few years, including the community resource hubs. The state should dedicate funding toward hub expansion and networking with other similar models while elevating the experiences of the pilot to inform the growth of community-driven and culturally responsive solutions in additional parts of the state. Creating a supportive state-local infrastructure on top of maximizing existing efforts will illuminate needed systems change and help inform state agency strategic efforts. Further, taking these important steps will help improve service navigation and delivery, thus better ensuring that Minnesota families with young children are well positioned to thrive.



A woman wearing a brown bear hat and a grey coat is smiling and pulling a child on a yellow sled in a snowy field. The child is wearing a pink and grey striped hat and a grey jacket. The background is a snowy landscape with trees.

**INTRODUCTION:
SUPPORTING
FAMILY
NAVIGATION
AND THE
COMMUNITY
RESOURCE
HUBS**



How Is Family Navigation Supported in Minnesota?

Minnesota is committed to supporting children and the whole family. The state has prioritized a whole-family system approach, offering intentional supports and services for both children and adults to help entire families thrive.⁴ This multigenerational approach has helped reduce system inefficiencies and built connections across service areas, levels of government, and sectors. And, as a result, many Minnesotan families have access to more holistic and streamlined services and opportunities. Still, the child- and family-service landscape is often complex and hard to navigate.

Minnesota has implemented several successful community-informed family navigation models. These models involve locally-rooted and relationship-based strategies intended to guide families through the complex state-local systems and to connect families to services, resources, information, and support. The models include the community resource hubs, family resource centers, family service collaboratives, full-service community schools, community action programs, education partnerships grants, kinship navigation programs, Head Start family advocates, and more. The implementation of these family navigation models has led to very positive outcomes for both children and adults, including increased access to needed services and improvements in children’s well-being.⁵

Similar family navigation models have been effective in other states. In Oregon, for example, various entities—such as school districts, county governments, nonprofits, community colleges, and coordinated care organizations—are serving as backbone organizations for the state’s Early Learning Hubs. As in Minnesota’s model, Oregon’s hubs are collaborating with entities or providers involved in services related to early learning services, education, and health and human services. In Colorado, half of the state’s 34 Early Childhood Councils are independent nonprofit organizations, while the other half operate under a fiscal agent such as a local school district or community college. Colorado’s councils coordinate strategies and action across a wider array of partners: they work with community-based nonprofit organizations, health care providers, childcare providers, childcare resource and referral agencies, local public health agencies, school districts, libraries, higher education institutions, and the Department of Human Services. Other states (e.g., New York, New Jersey, Kentucky, and Vermont) have invested in family resource centers (FRCs), which are community-based spaces where parents and caregivers can find support services so that they can develop family advocacy skills, access child development activities, and obtain referrals to relevant services and resources.⁶ FRCs generally use a culturally responsive, multigenerational, strength-based approach in order to serve as “one-stop service shops” for the whole family.⁷ Research has shown that FRCs can effectively improve family’s well-being, boost family protective factors, prevent child abuse and neglect, and reduce child welfare

4 See [Minnesota’s Preschool Development Grant Strategic Plan 2020–22](#).

5 Jacobson, C. (2012). Minnesota Kinship Navigator Project.; Waid, J., Tomfohrde, O., & Kutzler, C. (2022, October 27). Promoting health and social equity through family navigation to prevention and early intervention services: A proof of concept study. *BMC Public Health*, 22, 1972.

6 National Family Support Network. (n.d.). [What Is a Family Resource Center?](#)

7 Casey Family Programs. (2019, June). Do place-based programs, such as Family Resource Centers, reduce risk of child maltreatment and entry into foster care? Issue Brief: Supportive Communities. https://www.casey.org/media/SComm_Family-Resource-Centers.pdf

involvement—all of which yield socioeconomic benefits for local communities and states.⁸ Although the family navigation models and partnerships vary across counties and states, the key success factor is that all the models (and their backbone entities) are rooted in common policy goals, strong local-state partnerships, and the local community’s unique needs and assets. In other words, family navigation models align with targeted universalism, a policy framework whereby policies and programs are designed so that everyone can achieve a common policy goal through targeted, group-based strategies.⁹ Targeted universalism supports greater flexibility at the local level and more equitable access to services, advancing the state’s overarching goals.

What Are the Hubs, and How Do They Work?

Community resource hubs are state-local partnerships aimed at helping expecting and parenting families navigate Minnesota’s fragmented systems. The

Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, in partnership with the Children’s Cabinet, received the federal [Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five \(PDG B-5\)](#), which awarded Minnesota \$26.8 million over 3 years (December 2019–December 2022)

to support better systems and services for children under the age of 5. As part of PDG B-5 fulfillment, Minnesota was able to invest approximately \$6 million in 12 community-based partnerships across the state. The state also offered technical assistance and training to the organizations involved in the partnerships and to an additional partner (Scott County).¹⁰ The hubs are intended to serve as a pilot for the state to determine what to promote for a statewide network of family navigation, supported by online navigation tools such as Help Me Connect (a resource database) and [Bridge to Benefits](#) (a service eligibility assessment).¹¹ The 13 pilot hubs focus on helping expecting and parenting families navigate Minnesota’s early childhood system and access additional services; communities can modify their approach to best meet the needs of their local families.¹² Ultimately, hubs are designed to improve access to needed services, with direct impacts on child and family outcomes. See Figure 1 for the primary goals of the community resource hubs being piloted in Minnesota as part of the PDG B-5 effort. Funding for the hub pilot will expire in June 2023.



8 Ibid.

9 powell, j. a., Menendian, S., & Ake, W. (2019). Targeted universalism: Policy and practice. Haas Institute. https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/targeted_universalism_primer.pdf?file=1&force=1

10 Scott County was not funded through the PDG B-5 grant, yet the county was willing to pilot the hub model. The state offered Scott County access to the same online navigation tools and opportunities for training, coaching, and technical assistance as the hub grantees.

11 Minnesota Department of Education (n.d.). Local community resource hubs. <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/local/>

12 In this document, we describe 13 hubs in total: 12 were supported with federal funds, and a 13th hub (Scott County) is a collaborative partner.



Figure 1. Primary Goals of Minnesota PDG B-5 Community Resource Hubs Pilot



Make it easier for families to get what they need. Develop universal access for families, paired with culturally appropriate, relationship-based navigation of programs and systems.



Increase access to services. Collaborate with state agencies to test and evaluate Help Me Connect paired with culturally appropriate, relationship-based navigation.

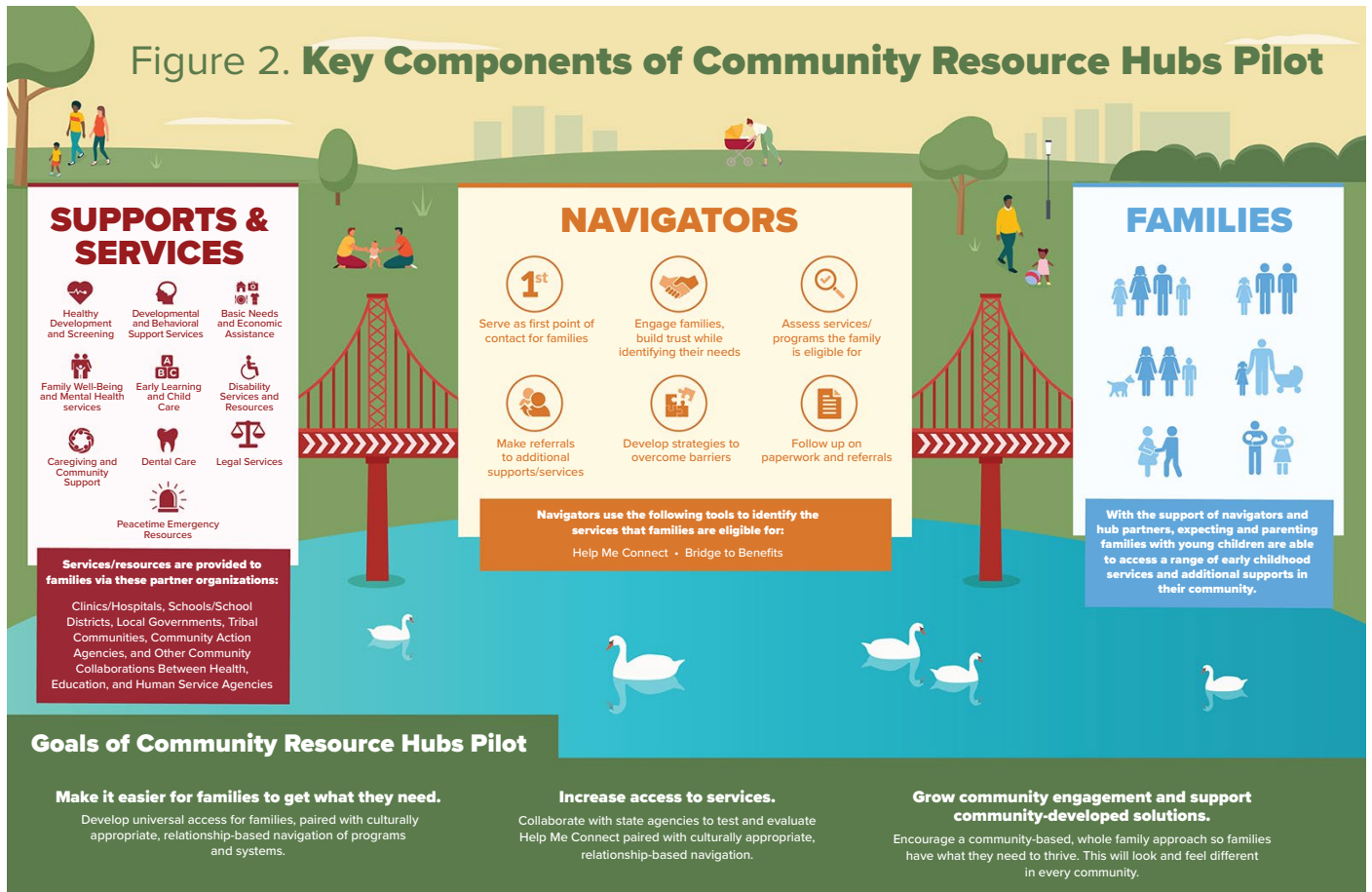


Grow community engagement and support community-developed solutions. Encourage a community-based whole family approach so families have what they need to thrive. This will look and feel different in every community.

Note: The goals listed above were copied verbatim from the Minnesota Department of Education’s website, *Local Community Resource Hubs*, <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/local/>.

A critical role within the relationship-based hub model is the “navigator.” As the first point of contact with families, navigators are trusted people within, and ideally from, the communities that a hub is focused on serving. The navigator initiates conversations with families and spends time building trust. After engaging families, navigators assess the types of services and programs families are eligible for and then make referrals to additional supportive services, as appropriate. For example, a family may first interact with a navigator when searching for childcare options and learn during the process that the family is also eligible for child nutrition services. Some families may have concerns about interacting with social service agencies or completing paperwork due to their immigration status or previous challenges with long waiting lists when trying to access services. Navigators and hub partners spend time with families to develop a strategy to overcome these types of barriers, often following up with phone calls, text messages, emails, home visits, and virtual visits to assist families with paperwork and referrals. See Figure 2 for additional information on the key components of this process.

Figure 2. **Key Components of Community Resource Hubs Pilot**



The backbone of the hubs consists of community-oriented organizations that lead cross-sector coordination efforts and that are committed to increasing families’ service access across the state.

The hubs develop preventative strategies that focus on addressing local needs through collaboration across agencies and sectors. Each hub hinges on a backbone organization that offers direct services to families. Of the 13 community resource hubs (12 funded by PDG B-5 plus one collaborative hub), seven are nonprofit organizations that provide direct services (e.g., childcare, health care, and housing) to expecting and parenting families and that seek to connect families with additional services. Two hubs (Northland Foundation and Northwest Minnesota Foundation) are part of a consortium of six Minnesota Initiative Foundations that respond to regional needs and opportunities. Each foundation serves its region with unique grants, business loans, leadership programs, and donor services, including for local early childhood needs.



Two hubs are local governments (Ramsey County and Scott County), one is a Tribal Nation (Red Lake Nation), and one is a government organization (Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board). Currently, the Minnesota community resource hubs feature partnerships with clinics/hospitals (e.g., Minnesota Community Care), schools/school districts (e.g., Cook County School District), local governments (e.g., Hennepin County), Tribal Nations (e.g., White Earth Nation), Community Action Agencies (e.g., Mahube-Otwa), and other community collaborations between health, education, and human service agencies. See Table 1 and Figure 3 for additional characteristics of the pilot hubs, including partners and service areas. While hubs may vary in the direct services offered, they all help local families navigate numerous supports and services, including economic assistance, housing, transportation, disability services, healthy development and screening, developmental and behavioral concerns, family well-being and mental health, early learning and childcare, dental care, legal services, and culturally specific services. As a community-driven model, the hubs increase efficiency of funds and access to services.¹³

13 Connors-Tadros, L. (2022). Coordinating funds to support the sustainability of comprehensive early childhood systems. SRI International. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdgb5_policyanalysis_coordinatingfunds_acc.pdf

Table 1. Characteristics of Hubs Currently Supported by Minnesota PDG B-5

Note: The asterisk (*) indicates the organizations (n = 5) that serve Indigenous communities/Tribal Nations. The list of partners is not exhaustive, and partnerships continuously grow and change.

Organization/ Hub Name and Description	Purpose of the Grant Funds	Hub Partners	Service Area (Cities, Counties, or Reservations Served)
<i>Baby's Space</i> *: Nonprofit organization offering child and family services, including child care and K-3 education	Coordinate support for children and families in the Little Earth housing development	Hennepin County; Minneapolis Public Schools; Washburn Center for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minneapolis (Hennepin County)
<i>Fraser</i> : Nonprofit organization offering health care, housing, and education services to children and families with special needs	Partner with primary care providers to improve service referral processes and help reduce barriers to service access	Allina Health; HealthPartners (Park Nicollet); Minnesota Community Care; South Lake Pediatrics; other local primary care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anoka County • Dakota County • Hennepin County • Ramsey County • Washington County
<i>Guiding Star Wakota</i> : Nonprofit organization offering education and health care services for families who are expecting or parenting children	Provide expecting and parenting families with mental health services, system navigation, and reduced service inequities	Cradle of Hope Neighborhood House; Dakota County Service Center; local mental health professionals; Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dakota County • Ramsey County

Organization/ Hub Name and Description	Purpose of the Grant Funds	Hub Partners	Service Area (Cities, Counties, or Reservations Served)
<p><u>Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS):</u> Statewide nonprofit organization providing social services (e.g., counseling and housing) to children and families</p>	<p>Create a systematic approach to intake, needs assessment, access, and parent and community engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Internal partnerships:</i> LifeHaven Transitional Living for Teen Moms; LSS Adoption Services; LSS Behavioral Health Services; LSS Financial Services; LSS Housing Services; LSS Kinship Family Support Services; LSS Refugee Services; LSS Youth and Family Services. • <i>External partnerships:</i> Duluth Area Crisis Nursery; Metro Housing Services; Mankato Area Crisis Nursery; St. Cloud Area Crisis Nursery; Wright County Crisis Nursery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crow Wing County • Hennepin County • Kandiyohi County • Ramsey County • St. Louis County
<p><u>Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board:</u> Organization that advocates for children and youth at Minneapolis public jurisdictions</p>	<p>Hire and train community members from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities to work as navigators in their own communities</p>	<p>Joyce Preschool; La Crèche Early Childhood Centers; local family, friend, and neighbor care providers; The Family Partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minneapolis (Hennepin County)
<p><u>Northland Foundation*:</u> Publicly supported foundation that, through the Early Childhood Initiative, has established and provided training to 12 early childhood grassroots coalitions in northeastern Minnesota</p>	<p>Support navigators in seven locations to help expecting and parenting families connect with local resources</p>	<p>Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency; Carlton County; Duluth Public Schools; Fond du Lac Human Services Division; Invest Early / Itasca Area Schools Collaborative; Itasca and Koochiching Counties; McGregor School District</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aitkin County • Carlton County • Cook County • Itasca County • Koochiching County • Lake County • St. Louis County • Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

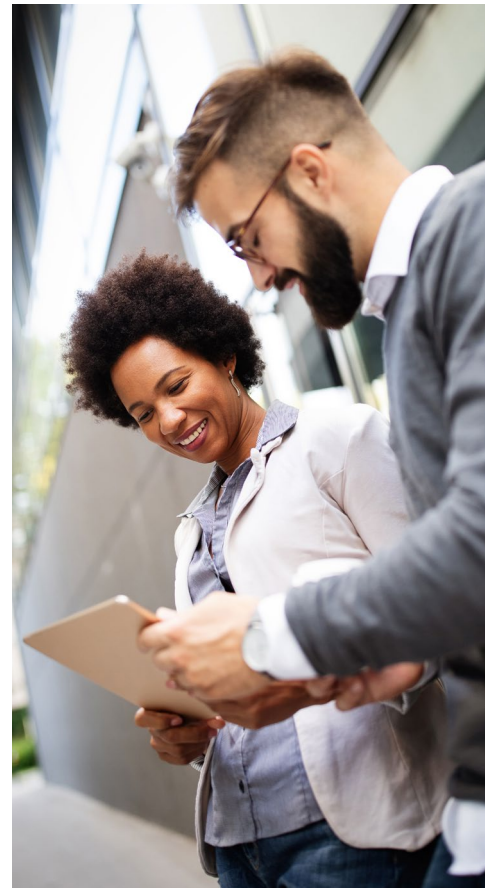
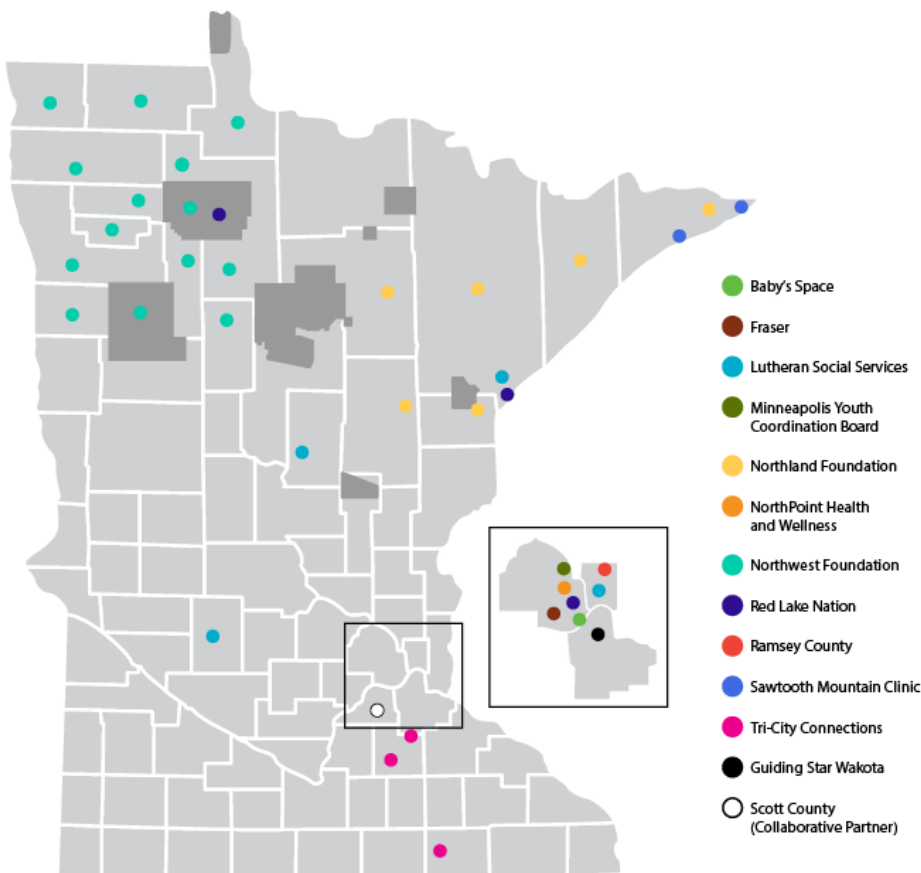
Organization/ Hub Name and Description	Purpose of the Grant Funds	Hub Partners	Service Area (Cities, Counties, or Reservations Served)
<p><u>NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center</u>: Nonprofit organization that offers holistic health care and education</p>	<p>Reach out to families with infants and toddlers and those who are expecting in Hennepin County</p>	<p>City of Bloomington Public Health Department; City of Minneapolis Health Department; Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative; Hennepin County Family Service Collaboratives; Hennepin County Public Health and Human Services; Helping Us Grow (HUG) Home Visiting Program; Minnesota Association for Children’s Mental Health; Redleaf Center for Family Healing; ThinkSmall; Way 2 Grow</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hennepin County
<p><u>Northwest Minnesota Foundation*</u>: Publicly supported organization that, as part of the Early Childhood Initiative, has formed and funded grassroots early childhood coalitions in northwest Minnesota</p>	<p>Help families navigate systems and access resources</p>	<p>Bi-CAP (Community Action Program serving Beltrami and Cass Counties); Inter-County Community Council; Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership; Northwest Community Action; Tri-Valley Opportunity Council; Tribes’ childcare services (Red Lake Nation and White Earth Nation); Red Lake Nation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beltrami County • Kittson County • Marshall County • Norman County • Pennington County • Polk County • Red Lake County • Roseau County • Clearwater County • Hubbard County • Lake of the Woods County • Mahnomon County • Red Lake Nation • White Earth Nation
<p><u>Ramsey County</u>: Local government working to strengthen the well-being of its residents</p>	<p>Implement a community-based navigation model for families of young children with a network of family coaches who have a deep, culturally responsive understanding of local families’ needs</p>	<p>CollegeBound Saint Paul; Equity Action Circle–Family & Youth Committee (community advisory group); Family Values for Life; Ramsey County Navigators; SPARK & CLUES (early partners); Saint Paul Public Libraries; Suburban Ramsey Family Collaborative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramsey County



Organization/ Hub Name and Description	Purpose of the Grant Funds	Hub Partners	Service Area (Cities, Counties, or Reservations Served)
<p><u>Red Lake Nation*</u>: Tribal government</p>	<p>Purchase two vans to increase outreach and provide services (e.g., counseling, rehabilitation, referral) to Red Lake Nation children and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Internal partnerships:</i> Red Lake Nation Children and Family Services' "Om-bimindwaa Gidinanwemaaganinaadog" (Uplifting Our Relatives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minneapolis–St. Paul Metropolitan Area
<p><u>Sawtooth Mountain Clinic*</u>: Nonprofit organization offering health care services</p>	<p>Expand programming, provide liaisons between facilities and programs, and provide community education about available resources in the community</p>	<p>Cook County School District; Cook County Child Care Providers; Cook County Public Health & Human Services; Fraser; Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cook County Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
<p><u>Scott County</u>: Family Resource Centers of Scott County—partnership of public, nonprofit, and faith communities supporting children and families</p>	<p>Increase service access and service array and move interventions upstream to better support children and families and to prevent entry into involuntary systems</p>	<p>Community Action Partnership of Scott, Carver, and Dakota Counties; Isuroon; Jordan Area Food Shelf; National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); Scott County Health and Human Services; Scott County Libraries; Scott County Mental Health Center; Scott County Parks; University of Minnesota Extension; YMCA–River Valley</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scott County

Organization/ Hub Name and Description	Purpose of the Grant Funds	Hub Partners	Service Area (Cities, Counties, or Reservations Served)
<p>Tri-City Connections: Nonprofit organization</p>	<p>Fund five bilingual early childhood navigators to support 500 southeastern Minnesota families annually in a culturally and trauma-responsive manner to access early learning resources; establish a centralized physical hub and virtual hub for each community</p>	<p>Austin Aspires; Austin’s Community Learning Center (part of Austin Public Schools); Community Action Center; Faribault and Northfield Public Schools; Faribault Community Schools; Greenvale Park Community School in Northfield; Growing Up Healthy–Faribault and Northfield; local public libraries; Mayo Clinic Health System; Rice County Ready for Kindergarten Council; Semcac</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austin (Mower County) • Faribault (Rice County) • Northfield (Rice County)

Figure 3. Map of PDG B-5 Community Resource Hubs





SRC's Examination of the Hubs

School Readiness Consulting (SRC) partnered with Minnesota's Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services and the Children's Cabinet to document efforts related to the federal PDG grant in Minnesota, including the community resource hubs. SRC's examination of the hubs centered on two questions:

- 1 What is working well in the community resource hubs?**
- 2 What is still needed to support the community resource hubs and develop a statewide family navigation network?**

To address the guiding questions, SRC examined quantitative and qualitative data. Specifically, we engaged in participant observation of the grantees' convenings and reviewed key existing documents (provided by Minnesota state agencies and their partners). We also obtained hub grantees' responses to the quarterly survey administered by PDG B-5 from July 2021 to November 2022. The SRC team analyzed the quantitative data through descriptive statistics and the qualitative data through content analysis. We verified findings by comparing multiple data sources.

FINDINGS



Our data analysis revealed that the state grant and supports have helped the 13 hubs better reach and serve families, especially those from historically underserved communities. The funding, training opportunities, and system navigation tools have allowed hubs to customize service strategies and connect local families to a wide range of services. Our findings also suggest that hubs are more likely to be impactful and sustainable when they have strong cross-sector partnerships. Still, the hubs need additional resources to serve multilingual and rural families. The hubs would also benefit from having better coordination supports and more streamlined processes at the state and federal levels.



What's Working Well?

Community resource hub staff have received training, coaching, and ongoing consultation on equity-oriented services, trauma-informed reflective approaches, and statewide systems, which have helped staff improve their services to families. Hub staff members had access to training opportunities and technical support from equity-grounded organizations that specialize in early childhood and family systems, such as the [BUILD Initiative](#) and School Readiness Consulting (SRC). The training sessions covered such topics as equity-oriented outreach, partnerships, evaluation, sustainability, and funding. The state has also hosted hub quarterly meetings, where staff and navigators from all the hubs can come together to dive into resource topics, share updates, learn about navigation-related topics, or raise concerns to state agencies. And the state has partnered with BUILD to guide the hubs in building a community of practice. In the community of practice sessions, staff members and navigators from different

hubs meet to discuss the challenges that they are facing (e.g., closing feedback loops), identify possible solutions to those challenges, and share promising practices. Hub staff have also participated in infant and early childhood mental health consultation, in which they receive training and reflective support in addressing the mental health needs of young children and their families. Through consultation, hub staff also receive support in managing how the work and related stress impacts them and how their personal experiences intersect with their navigation work. As a result of these training and networking opportunities, hub staff have strengthened their outreach strategies for families and providers, identified community-based risk factors, created solutions to mitigate risks and lower access barriers, and enhanced their practices by drawing on trauma-informed and culturally responsive principles. Hub organizations are also knitting a network of services and referrals throughout the state.

“I love the collaboration part [of the hub grant]. I have come to the hub community of practice and said, ‘We can’t figure out, we are struggling with this, or has anyone found a way to help connect this better.’ And then, we’ve had some of the greatest conversations with people who are in the Metro area, even though we’re way up here [in the north] . . . I’m like, wow, we never thought of that. Let’s try that. We could try that, you know, and the same, we may come up with something that helps them. So, it is just building that network that we feel like we’re all in this together and serving families . . . And this hub grant, we really are all kind of the same working with similar populations, and those barriers are brought down. So, I really do like the collaboration that’s involved with [the] community of practice.”

– **Grantee lead**

“Knowing that I get a chance to speak and connect so deeply with others doing the same work as me is huge. It helps build relationships with them, makes us all better as workers to relate to our families we work with, and overall know we have support.”

– **Grantee lead**

“The quarterly hub meetings have been helpful in lifting up our thoughts to the state level.”

– **Grantee lead**

Additionally, hub staff have been trained on how to use two innovative electronic tools.

Help Me Connect (HMC) is an online database of resources and services developed through a collaboration between Minnesota's Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services. Bridge to Benefits (B2B) is an electronic assessment tool, developed by Children's Defense Fund, that helps families identify the services they are eligible for. Hub grantees have not only benefited from the training but also contributed to the improvement of statewide systems and tools. For example, some hub grantees have field-tested the Help Me Connect and Bridge to Benefits tools and provided feedback on how to enhance those tools. Navigators and other hub staff have found that both tools (HMC and B2B) greatly support culturally appropriate, relationship-based navigation and help families identify services and programs.

What Do Visitors Typically Look for Using Help Me Connect?

Minnesota's Help Me Connect launched in May 2021 to help expecting families, families with young children (prenatal to 8 years of age), and those working with families find and connect to services in their local communities that support healthy child development and family well-being. The searchable website includes more than 12,000 listings of programs and services that support healthy prenatal and early childhood development, education, mental health, basic needs, safety, and well-being of children and families.

Help Me Connect has welcomed more than 130,000 unique visitors over the past 18 months from all regions of Minnesota and neighboring states. The leading topics of interest are related to developmental and behavior concerns, early learning and childcare, and basic needs. The top five most frequently entered search terms on the site are "autism," "housing," "transportation," "diapers," and "food."

Enhancements are routinely made to Help Me Connect based on user analytics and feedback from providers and families. More than 1,000 new listings have been added during the past year to all 11 categories of the site. Help Me Connect was also recently translated into Spanish, Somali, Hmong, and Karen. Additional translations will be added based on user feedback. Community resource hub navigators are primary contributors to these improvements, especially through their recommendations to add programs that support local cultural connections. A dedicated section of Help Me Connect directs users to the community resource hub navigators that are available around the state. Navigators can download marketing materials, including rack cards, posters, and videos, directly from the site to share with families. Help Me Connect is a joint initiative of Minnesota's Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, and the Children's Cabinet. For more information, see www.helpmeconnectmn.org.



The community resource hubs are actively addressing needs that have emerged since the state’s 2020 Preschool Development Grant Needs Assessment. Community resource hubs are playing a significant role in helping the state to meet families’ emerging priorities, many of which were heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hubs are on the front lines serving families at the local level through relationship-based, culturally responsive navigation and community-driven approaches to help families with young children access mental health supports, aid with basic needs such as financial assistance (e.g., workforce training and financial literacy workshops), services for children with disabilities, and information and supports for families involved in the child welfare system.



Hub Spotlight: Ramsey County

Ramsey County offers a wealth of direct services and information to families, yet many county residents—especially those who are Black or Indigenous—do not receive what they need. Findings from a 2019 Parent’s Voice Survey show that Ramsey County parents of young children (0–8 years old) wanted more information about early childhood resources and perceived the county as responsible for providing that information and for streamlining early childhood systems. Ramsey County’s Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) launched with the goal of connecting families with young children to the resources and supports that they desired.

In 2021, Ramsey County received the hub grant to implement a community-informed early childhood plan that advanced equity and coordination within early childhood systems. With the hub grant and guidance from the Equity Action Circle Family and Youth (EAC–F&Y) Committee, Ramsey County began the process of piloting family-centered coaching services in local communities. The family coaches would partner with community-rooted organizations and follow the Kellogg Family-Centered Coaching model. The pilot focused on providing services to Black and Indigenous families with young children who have been historically oppressed and impacted by socioeconomic and health disparities.

In spring 2022, Ramsey County’s partner Family Values for Life began providing coaching services for African American families living in Ramsey County. The family coaches are similar to hub navigators in that they help families access and navigate culturally responsive, community-based resources and services for adults and children. Yet, the family coaches take a long-term, participant-led approach: families set specific goals, and coaches help achieve them by offering information, referrals, and advice for 6 months to 1 year. The county and its partners are showing that targeted approaches help historically underserved families get the services that they deserve.

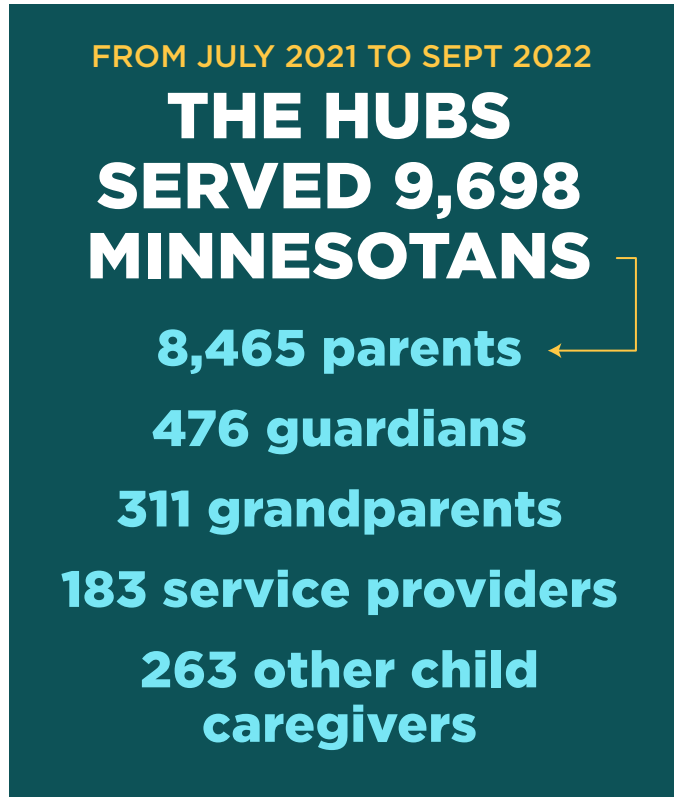
“The [hub] grant has given us the opportunity to dive deeper for some of the families as well as more of a ‘whole-family look’ for our care coordinators.”

– Hub grantee



Hubs and navigators are developing tailored outreach strategies and effectively connecting families to services.

The hub model draws on a highly effective policy framework called targeted universalism, whereby policies and programs are designed so that everyone can achieve a common policy goal through targeted, group-based strategies.¹⁴ The hubs’ common policy goal is to ensure that every child in Minnesota receives an equitable and comprehensive opportunity to reach their full potential. Yet, the strategies that the hubs use to achieve that goal vary widely, depending on the needs and circumstances of communities they serve—especially those of parents/caregivers and providers. As a result, these efforts may differ from one community to another. Through this approach, hubs are well positioned to advance equity and address local needs in a culturally responsive and efficient way. Hub grantees and partners employ a range of outreach strategies to connect families with hub resources, including community engagement teams, navigators, and family coaches (see Figure 4 to understand the racial/ethnic backgrounds of those served from April through June 2022, as compared with the racial/ethnic demographics in the state). Hub partners employ a variety of methods to connect with families they are assisting, including virtual meetings, email, phone calls, texts, and in-person meetings. With many families facing significant transportation and childcare issues, virtual contact may be best suited for ongoing service navigation and delivery (e.g., counseling via telemedicine). Between July 2021 and September 2022, the hubs served 9,698 Minnesotans—including 8,465 parents, 476 guardians, 311 grandparents, 183 service providers, and 263 other child caregivers. To serve 2,917 of those Minnesotans, hub staff and their partners used Bridge to Benefits and/or Help Me Connect.¹⁵



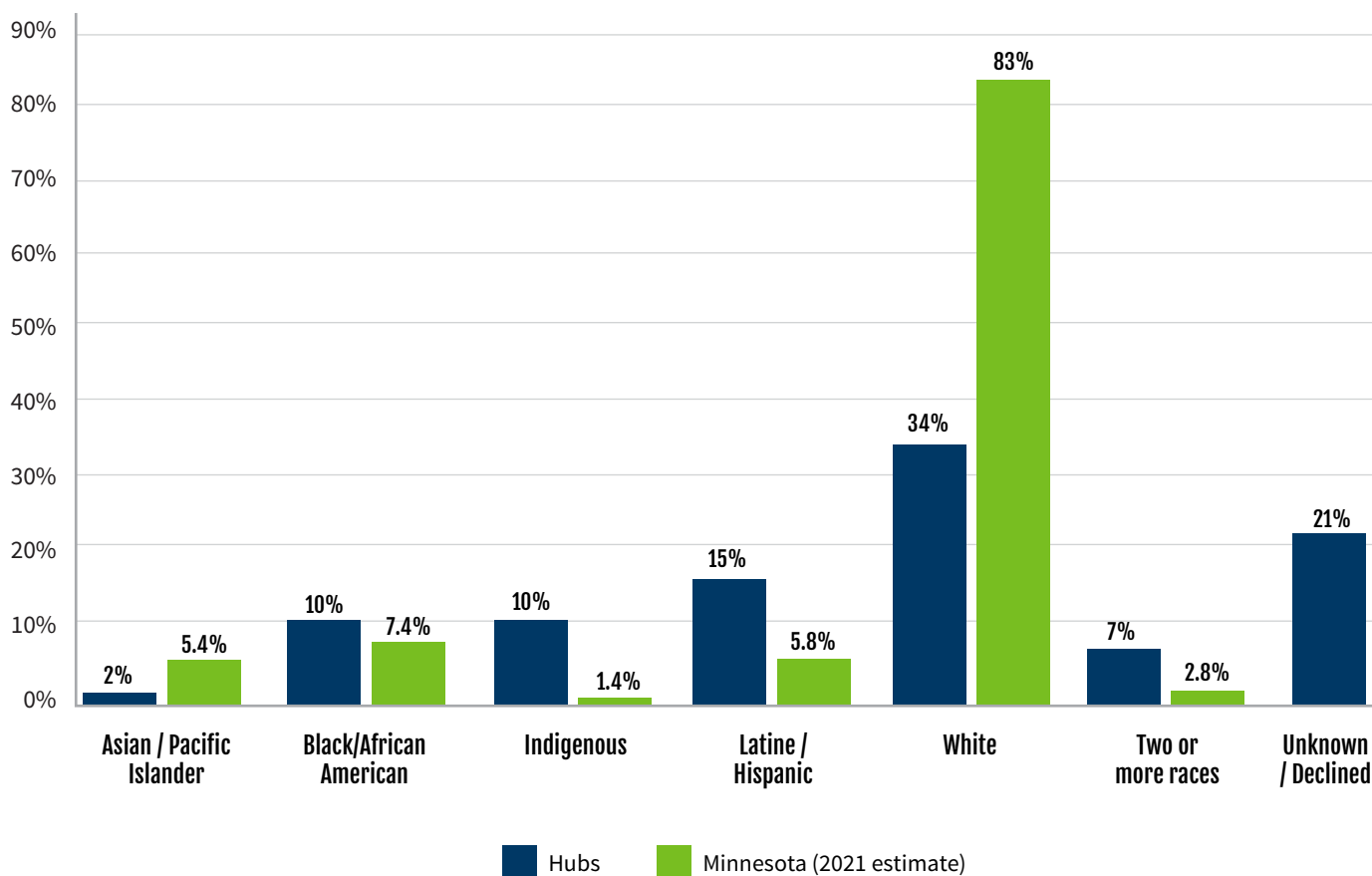
14 Powell, J. A., Menendian, S., & Ake, W. (2019). *Targeted universalism: Policy and practice*. Haas Institute. https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/targeted_universalism_primer.pdf?file=1&force=1

15 These data were taken from hub grantees’ responses to the quarterly survey administered by PDG B-5, which covered hub-provided services between July 2021 and September 2022.

And, as shown in Figure 4, almost half (45%) of the people served by the hubs and their partners were people of color (i.e., Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and multiracial people).¹⁶ The services most frequently sought by families via hubs were food, childcare needs/ access, financial assistance, and affordable housing (see Figure 5), which aligns with findings in the strategic refresh report. Hubs are contributing to the execution of Minnesota’s PDG B-5 strategic plan by cultivating community engagement practices and leveraging community-developed solutions.

Minnesota community resource hubs have served a greater percentage of Latine, Black, and Indigenous families than their respective populations in the state.

Figure 4. U.S. Census Bureau 2021 population estimates for Minnesota,¹⁷ by race and ethnicity, compared to community resource hubs’ reports of Minnesotans served, by race and ethnicity



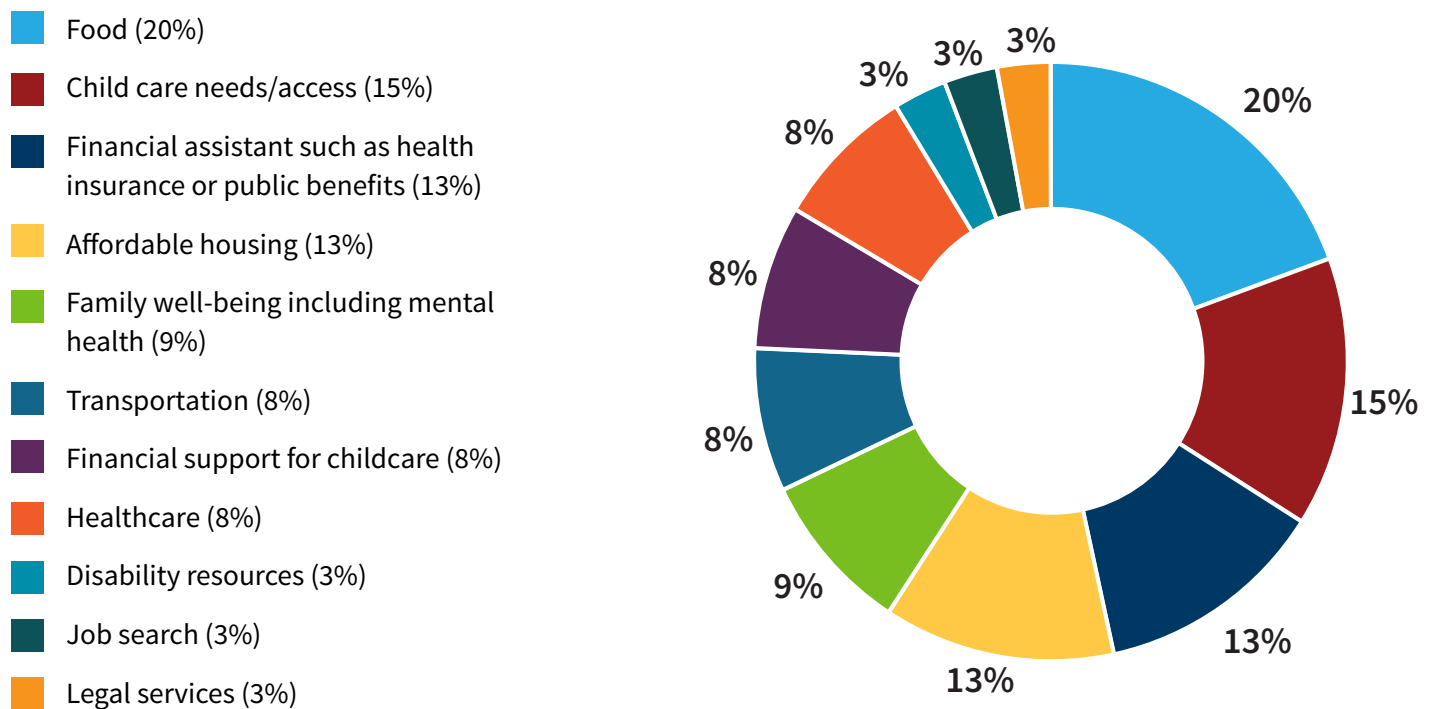
16 Figure 4 is based on hub grantees’ responses to the quarterly survey administered by PDG B-5, which covered hub-provided services between July 2021 and September 2022. The survey asked respondents to report the number of people served in each of the following racial/ethnic categories: African American / Black, American Indian, Asian / Pacific Islander, White, two or more races, Hispanic (any race), not Hispanic, unknown/declined. In Figure 4, the percentages of the Minnesotans served by the hubs do not add to 100% because the original responses for the race/ethnicity survey item did not add to 9,698 (the total number of people served by the hubs). Figure 4 does not include the percentage of non-Hispanic Minnesotans served by the hubs.

17 U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Quick facts: Minnesota. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MN/PST045221>



Between July 2021 and September 2022, the services most frequently sought by families through Minnesota community resource hubs were food, childcare needs/access, financial assistance, and affordable housing.

Figure 5. Minnesota community resource hubs’ reports of services to which families were referred



Note: “Childcare needs/access” is related to families looking for a childcare slot for their child, and “financial support for childcare” is related to families getting connected to the state Childcare Assistance Program funding for childcare.

Hub Spotlight: Sawtooth Mountain Clinic Community Hub

Families in Cook County need to travel hundreds of miles to have access to health care services. And in many cases, the families do not have the means to access those services. Still, Cook County families and organizations are resourceful and have developed tight-knit partnerships. These partnerships are the foundation for Cook County's community resource hub.

In early 2021, Sawtooth Mountain Clinic (SMC) and its partners received the community resource hub grant in order to improve early childhood services in Cook County and the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. SMC is a Federally Qualified Community Health Center, and its partners include Grand Portage Health Services, Cook County School District, Cook County Childcare Providers, Cook County Public Health and Human Services, and Fraser. With the hub grant, these organizations are working together to increase families' access to health services and facilitate system navigation.

“

“What we're trying to do with our [hub] grant is build these interagency collaborations because, honestly, when you're in a rural area, you can't afford not to collaborate with everyone . . . So however we can work together to be able to spread the word about what we have going and [our] services, try not to duplicate them, and see where we have gaps. That's a huge part of what we do in our work.”

- Grantee lead

”



The SMC hub has made important progress over the past 2 grant years. As part of the grant, the SMC hub team collaborated with Wilder Research in 2021 to conduct a [community-wide early childhood needs assessment](#) and identified collective strategies to better serve local families. These strategies were deployed in the second grant year (2022); SMC created a system navigator position to connect families to existing services, worked with childcare providers to increase childcare availability, and built additional partnerships to offer parental support and recreational opportunities. For example, to address families' need for peer support and services, SMC's early childhood navigator created a virtual book club for parents and caregivers to connect with one another and learn about available services and resources to support healthy development of children and families. The book club has attracted many families because it offers practical information and free books (in audio, digital or print format), thanks to a partnership with the Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment (WISE). The SMC hub team also participated in SRC's training and technical assistance to identify ways to use families' stories and data to increase the impact and sustainability of the hub. Over the 2 years, the SMC hub created tailored strategies to assist local families in navigating early childhood and care systems and uplifted families' stories to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development.

What's Still Needed?

Many hubs want to expand their reach to serve more families, especially those who live in rural areas or whose primary language is not English; yet these hubs lack sufficient staff capacity and resources to do so effectively.

Some hubs and navigators reported struggling to connect with and adequately serve certain populations (e.g., those who live in highly rural areas). These challenges stem from a range of factors. Services are not evenly distributed across the state, and some families face transportation barriers or financial constraints when trying to reach services in their region. Also, hubs and their partners may lack sufficient funds, staff, and infrastructure to cover the full cost of managing larger caseloads involving lengthy interviews, the completion of referral loops, or relationship-building time with families. Hubs and their partners also reported lacking reliable access to language interpreters and not having enough multilingual staff who could communicate with local families in their preferred language(s). As a result, hubs struggled to reach out and effectively serve multilingual families.

Coordination needs to start at the state and federal levels.

Families with young children interact with a range of programs, services, and systems. To facilitate community-informed family navigation models, federal and state agencies could take the lead on cross-sector coordination and continue supporting local communities in developing customized strategies for outreach, referral, and consultation. For example, families benefit when navigators are familiar with MN Benefits, an online tool that allows for a single application for multiple economic assistance programs. However, the online application does not currently include all the services and programs that families with young children use or are eligible for and could be expanded to reflect a whole-child, whole-family approach to service delivery. Increased cross-sector coordination at every level, starting with guidance at the state level, would allow communities to better respond and generate partnerships and customized solutions to barriers faced by families, enhancing their experiences across the early childhood system.

“The majority of our population is probably Caucasian... and we have small pockets of people from other cultures. I do know that we have several families that are from Thailand; [they] don't speak much English. I don't have enough resources in our county to have a Thai interpreter and be able to tell us about their culture.”

– Grantee leader



As the state’s infrastructure for community-driven family navigation models expands, the state, community partners, and families will need to co-create shared indicators of quality and impact.

Before the grant, the organizations that have served as hubs primarily focused on their organization’s indicators and metrics and did not share collective goals or metrics. The grant has allowed hubs and their partners to start creating a common vision of family navigation quality and impact. To strengthen the family navigation infrastructure, it would be important to officially adopt shared quality standards, metrics, and desired outcomes for successful implementation. The standards and metrics would be more effective if developed in consultation with local families, who have key insights into what works in their communities. As demand for navigation support increases, partners may need to shift priorities, metrics, and resources in order to provide comprehensive supports to families. Hence, sufficient time and resources should be allocated for working with local families and community leaders in the co-creation of indicators and assessments of family navigation initiatives.

Sharing data across agencies is essential to assess family navigation efforts, yet agency leaders need to streamline data systems and address families’ distrust and concerns around surveillance.

The state has contributed to developing a comprehensive data infrastructure, but hubs and their partners are still struggling to share data—mainly due to privacy concerns, regulations, and security challenges. Improving data sharing and system alignment across agencies could benefit families. For example, as part of the 2022 early childhood strategic refresh report, local stakeholders shared that data-sharing efforts not only reduced the number of times families needed to tell their story (and potentially trigger traumatic memories) in order to receive services but also facilitated service coordination and referrals.¹⁸ At the state level, data can be used across agencies to inform policy decisions, including where resources are going to be most impactful, and to share outcomes and success stories with policy-makers and other external audiences. However, the state and local agencies must acknowledge and proactively address families’ concerns about system data sharing. Many Minnesota families, particularly those who have been systematically discriminated against by racist U.S. policies for several generations, may be concerned that state efforts to collect data and track their participation in government-supported programs will not help them or have the potential to cause them harm. This lack of trust may also stem from fears of losing their children to the child welfare system, being surveilled without consent, or being reported to immigration authorities by participating in data collection efforts. Therefore, any efforts to engage in data-driven decision-making must hinge on transparency, clarity, and respect. All partners (including hub grantees and families) need to have clear, shared understandings about how, when, and why the data will be collected and used. Above all, families’ confidentiality, privacy, and well-being should be protected.



18 In 2021–2022, Minnesota identified the need for a fresh look at what has been accomplished since the initial PDG B-5 needs assessment and strategic plan, and how recent events have reshaped the state’s early childhood system priorities. For more information, see Minnesota Early Childhood Strategic Refresh: An Updated Cross-System Plan for 2023 and Beyond (forthcoming).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY NAVIGATION MODELS AND INFRASTRUCTURES



The use of the targeted universalism approach¹⁹ is evident in Minnesota’s support for community-driven family service navigation models such as the community resource hubs. While these efforts share common policy goals and strong local-state partnerships, the local partners in each of these programs have developed unique and holistic strategies to impact child and family outcomes in their communities. For example, HMC serves as a universal tool available to all families with a focus on providing relationship-based, culturally responsive service navigation and concrete supports for families and communities that are furthest from opportunity. To improve the state infrastructure so that community resource hubs can continue to provide this type of targeted support to families experiencing systemic inequities, the state and local partners should consider the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Direct funding to create a network of community-informed and culturally responsive family navigation models within underserved communities.

The community resource hubs pilot allowed several communities to plan and implement their own customized models, while providing evidence and lessons that informed state leaders about what conditions are necessary for community-driven family service navigation models to be implemented well and to be responsive to the needs of local families. For example, funding can be used to ensure culturally responsive practices are embedded throughout the service navigation models to reduce harm, build trust, and create safe spaces for families, especially rural and multilingual families. With those lessons in hand, it is critical to secure sustainable funding to effectively build the capacity of local organizations to plan and implement their own models. Existing models can benefit from additional resources to produce outreach materials in the languages primarily spoken in their local communities, and increased staff and technology capacity to serve families with the greatest level of need. Funding can also be used by communities to directly improve family outcomes and reduce crises by providing local families with concrete supports that provide emergency funds to cover expenses such as rent, down payments, energy bills, or transportation.



RECOMMENDATION 2: Maintain the focus on coordination at the state level.

Ongoing collaboration at the state level can lead to common definitions for success, priority areas for intervention, dedicated and sustainable funding, and collective data tracking and evaluation efforts across program areas. For example, state agency partners can strengthen ongoing efforts to incorporate cross-agency collaboration into the governance, monitoring, and funding design of hubs to help alleviate barriers to coordination due to limited capacity and resources. The state already has in place a coordinated cross-agency governance structure, has recently updated its early childhood strategic plan, is working to braid funding sources across programs, and is using an integrated data system (i.e., the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System [ECLDS]) to inform future program design and resource allocation decisions. Each of these components can continue to be strengthened as part of the state’s plan to improve cross-agency coordination and alignment.

19 powell, j. a., Menendian, S., & Ake, W. (2019). *Targeted universalism: Policy and practice*. Haas Institute. https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/targeted_universalism_primer.pdf?file=1&force=1

RECOMMENDATION 3: Expand the common application (MNBenefits) to help more families to identify and apply for comprehensive services.

The MNBenefits online application interface allows users to apply for benefits in nine different programs in under 20 minutes. It is currently available in English and Spanish, with plans to expand to additional languages, and should be expanded to include even more programs based on what families currently need, including Early Learning Scholarships; Head Start; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and more.



RECOMMENDATION 4: Extend the reach of the Help Me Connect (HMC) tool alongside the expansion of family service navigation models into more communities.

The successful application of HMC across the family and community resource hubs model has shown how the online tool can be used as part of the state’s targeted universalism approach. HMC serves as a universal option to accompany the expansion of locally driven, relationship-based, culturally responsive service navigation efforts. The state can work to elevate the success of using HMC in its messaging and ensure that staff across agencies are trained and equipped to apply the HMC tool in their work serving children and families. Future enhancements, such as an electronic referral mechanism, are specifically designed to support navigators in their work to connect families to services and, most important, to facilitate follow-up communication that ensures families are receiving services.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Continue offering flexible training, coaching and technical assistance to hub staff, partners, and navigators.

The training and support received so far by the hub staff has been crucial to their success and should be continued. These opportunities have helped hub partners to connect with one another and share lessons learned on various aspects of implementation, including family entry points, outreach and engagement efforts, culturally relevant and trauma-informed programs and services, sustainability models and funding, and evaluation. As the hubs and family navigation network expand, it is important that the state-offered training and supports are flexible and customizable to the unique needs of the hubs and the communities they serve. For example, the state could provide hub staff and their partners with additional opportunities for on-demand training—that is, pre-recorded training sessions to be accessed at a time, pace, and place of their choosing—or with online discussion forums so that participants can discuss problems of practice asynchronously. The flexible trainings would be particularly important over time, given the potential for staff turnover.

“As we talk about trauma-informed approaches to families, how are we supporting our staff? We’ve lost a lot of staff for a variety of reasons, new jobs, having to come out of the workforce to care for aging parents, or having to shift. I just think it’s really critical that we spend part of our time and part of our sharing really realizing how we can support staff or the front line for this work who are also going through so many of these stressors and crises.”

– Hub partner staff member



“Families come to us with heavy needs—a lot of trauma, a lot of abuse. And it can also weigh heavy on us [hub staff].”

– Hub grantee

RECOMMENDATION 6: Support the capacity of local communities to co-create a shared understanding of when and how to best use data to ease family navigation, while respecting families’ rights and preferences.

Better information generally leads to better decision-making and more efficient systems. As discussed in the findings, the state and local partners have made important efforts to develop data management systems and share data in order to make better decisions on behalf of families and reveal the outcomes of the pilot. However, families’ preferences around evaluation and data sharing have not been fully incorporated. An important next step for the state is to bring together families, providers, local agency leaders, evaluators, continuous quality improvement staff, and other key partners to co-construct a shared framework for assessing the progress and impact of Minnesota’s family navigation network. This framework would help clarify what data need to be collected, how, and why. This clarity could strengthen partnerships and increase families’ trust and buy-in concerning the data collection and sharing processes. The shared framework and measurement systems would serve as guideposts for family navigation network members and help them communicate the success of community-driven efforts to a wide range of partners. State leaders can support these efforts by drawing on the lessons learned through other state-funded, partnership-centered grants, such as the Education Partnerships Coalition fund, which uses a collective impact framework to build and assess a comprehensive multi-sector network of support services for children and youth.²⁰

20 Minnesota Department of Education. (2021). *Education Partnerships Coalition Fund: Report to the Legislature*.

https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=PROD047110&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary

RECOMMENDATION 7: Ensure that navigation partners are available across the state and that they are effectively partnering with service providers to meet identified demand for services.

The development of hub approaches should be accompanied by a corresponding expansion of local program capacity to ensure an adequate supply of programs and services are available to meet the demand from families in the community. A common frustration elevated by Minnesota hub navigators was the need to refer families to local services that simply do not exist. For example, many communities face a severe lack of affordable housing, childcare, transportation, food access, and mental health supports, leaving families with limited options. For many families, the hub may also be their first time interacting with state and local systems, and families' trust in the systems is reduced when the hubs cannot connect families to the services they need. Therefore, it is very important to ensure that families leave with a concrete solution and are not simply referred to yet another entry point in the system, whether it is the county, the school district, or another organization. To identify and address service gaps, state and local leaders should be in continuous communication and maintain strong partnerships.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Invest in local capacity and leadership to encourage collaboration and partnerships between programs and systems serving families.

The pilot hubs have shown that local organizations and community members know their families' needs and preferences best. And, as local navigators demonstrated, community members can effectively serve as system navigators and liaisons when offered sufficient training, funding, and leadership opportunities. Local staff are best positioned to build strongly rooted partnerships and to make culturally relevant decisions about how to invest and coordinate funding from multiple sources to meet specific needs in the community.²¹ The state can strengthen institutional knowledge base by learning from the hub navigators and leveraging their built partnerships. State leaders can benefit from observing trends at the local and regional levels that will ultimately inform decision-making and resource allocation at the state level. The state can further contribute to building local capacity and partnerships by encouraging navigation hubs and/or partners to blend, braid, and layer funding streams. The state could also increase resources for dedicated leadership positions for people who come from the community being served and focus on creating connections and providing strategic technical assistance/support for partnerships. This state-local infrastructure would allow communities to build greater capacity to quickly respond and generate customized solutions to policy and program barriers seen by families.



21 Connors-Tadros, L. (2022). *Coordinating funds to support the sustainability of comprehensive early childhood systems*. SRI International. https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdgb5_policyanalysis_coordinatingfunds_acc.pdf



RECOMMENDATION 9: Build off existing hub implementation efforts in Minnesota and other states.

It will be important to ensure the findings and lessons learned from the Minnesota PDG B-5 hubs pilot, Family Resource Centers, Full-Service Community Schools, Community Action Programs, Family Service Collaboratives, Education Partnerships, and other efforts are well documented and used to inform the planning and design of Minnesota’s statewide community resource hub structure. The reports and stories captured from partners working to implement these models, including the hub partners’ community of practice, are instrumental in identifying what is working well and how similar approaches might be designed for additional communities. For example, one lesson learned from other state efforts is the importance of creating a common infrastructure that ensures that funding for hubs is not from a single program area (e.g., child welfare, education) but instead draws from a variety of resources to allow space for true cross-agency collaboration and promote greater sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Continue facilitating families’ access to social safety net programs and concrete supports.

Community-informed family navigation models can be incorporated into the state’s overall strategy to improve child and family outcomes. As a key upstream solution, community navigators can help families’ access to social safety net programs and concrete supports (e.g., cash assistance, childcare, employment opportunities, housing support, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], WIC, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]).²² In the last months of the hub grant, grantees will be able to offer concrete supports to families. Connections to these critical programs can serve as protective factors to prevent familial stress and reduce chances of future engagement with the child welfare and justice systems and associated costs.

²² *Concrete support in times of need* refers to “the basic necessities everyone deserves in order to grow and thrive (e.g., healthy, food, a safe and protective environment), as well as specialized health, mental health, social, legal, educational, or employment” (Harper Browne, 2014, p. 48). Harper Browne, C. (2014, September). *The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching out and reaching deeper*. Center for the Study of Social Policy.



State Spotlight

The effectiveness of regional hubs in expanding services for children, leveraging funding, and improving child outcomes has been proven in other states.

In Oregon, regional hubs have been successful in promoting a sense of collaboration across entities, supporting the development of cross-sector partnerships, and leveraging funding to provide services. The **Oregon** system was developed through the work of the Affordable Care Act / Accountable Care Organizations model and offers a great example of attaching early childhood / family needs to a shifting policy. Since 1993, **North Carolina's** Smart Start initiative has successfully established cross-sector partnerships and blended public and private funding to increase both families' access to affordable services and childcare quality.²³ Research consistently shows that Smart Start children have better health and learning outcomes than nonparticipating children.²⁴ And the positive effects of Smart Start on children's learning hold steady or even grow across years.²⁵ The benefits of Smart Start hubs have been experienced among families of all incomes and across diverse geographic areas.²⁶ **Michigan's** network of Great Start Collaboratives and Great Start Parent Coalitions has helped strong community voice impact the state's birth-to-age-8 systems work by connecting local philanthropic organizations, educators, leaders of public agencies, and parents to address the needs of children in Michigan. The state of **New York** is developing a network of "family opportunity centers" by funding and connecting numerous community-based or school-based programs that support the coordination of services and resources in order to improve the safety and well-being of children and families. New York's network builds on the positive impact that its family resource centers have had on parenting practices and family protective factors for more than two decades.²⁷

23 Bryant, D., & Ponder, K. (2004). North Carolina's Smart Start initiative: A decade of evaluation lessons. *The Evaluation Exchange: A Periodical on Emerging Strategies in Evaluation*, 10(2), 7–8.

24 Ponder, K. W. (2010). *Early childhood education and North Carolina's Smart Start initiative*. Institute for Emerging Issues, North Carolina State University.

25 Dodge, K. A., Bai, Y., Ladd, H. F., & Muschkin, C. G. (2017). Impact of North Carolina's early childhood programs and policies on educational outcomes in elementary school. *Child Development*, 88(3), 996–1014.

26 Ibid.

27 New York State Family Resource Center Network. (2017). *Member snapshot: New York*. https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ec0538_b3595ab668bd413aae4000a507b9c273.pdf

LOOKING AHEAD

The idea of family resource navigation and community hubs is not new. Across the country and in Minnesota, there are multiple family navigation models and funding streams. Currently, Community Action Agencies have dedicated state and federal funding for implementation in Minnesota. A sustainable statewide funding model for community resource hubs should build on the community resource hub pilot and existing models that provide the state with a proof of concept for larger-scale implementation, while ensuring communities can develop the family resource navigation system that best meets the needs of their families. In addition to funding for other models, the concept of regional hubs was also supported at the state level through a bill introduced in February 2021 ([HF 1024](#) / [SF 2170](#)), which sought to establish a cabinet-level state Department of Early Childhood in Minnesota. Additional funding for family and community resource hubs was also proposed in the [2022 Revised Governor's Supplemental Budget Recommendations](#). Although neither one passed, the two proposals underscored the importance of creating a state plan and infrastructure to support community hubs models.

The state can continue to scale successful models centered on a whole-family approach while examining emerging issue areas where additional capacity is needed. Minnesota decision-makers at all levels—funders, policy-makers, government agency staff, service providers, families, and community partners—are encouraged to elevate the stories and lessons learned from the community resource hubs pilot, as well as learnings from other state family and community resource models, to inform the expansion of community-driven and culturally responsive solutions in more parts of the state. Building on these existing efforts while creating a supportive state-local infrastructure will help reduce barriers and fragmentation and improve service navigation and delivery for more families with young children.



