IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR SUBSTANCE EXPOSED INFANTS & THEIR FAMILIES

Federal policy should utilize a public health approach

More than 50,000 infants enter foster care each year in the U.S., most due to parental substance use.

The foundational legislation meant to protect infants & children, called the Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act (CAPTA), wasn’t set up to meet the needs of families affected by substance use.

A new bill to strengthen CAPTA was introduced this spring, but additional changes could improve our ability to support families:

Families in need of services must be easily identified, and current eligibility requirements are vague. Clearer guidance should be provided to states and data collection systems should be updated to ensure that infants and families receive needed support.

States should eliminate criminal-justice approaches to substance use in pregnancy.

The federal government should provide clearer guidance on the negative health impacts of these punitive policies, and on the importance of family assessments that are culturally-responsive and oriented to a family’s strengths.

Important new changes to CAPTA support a broad public health response to prenatal substance exposure, but states need technical assistance and monitoring support to implement the changes.

Additional, sustained appropriations funding will be required to realize the goals of CAPTA’s reauthorization bill.