

# Executive Summary

## The Two-Generation Approach: Recommendations For Bridging Practice and Policy in Maine

Communities and states across the country are adopting a new way to help low-income families thrive — known as “two-generation” approaches. **The fundamental goal of two-generation work is to build family well-being by intentionally working with children and the adults in their lives simultaneously.**

The approach weaves together critical supports and strategies, including quality developmental opportunities for children, educational and employment pathways for parents, economic asset building, health and well-being support, and opportunities to build social capital. But the two-generation approach is more than the delivery of comprehensive services. It represents a fundamentally different way of working with families — by placing them at the center, building on their strengths, and dismantling the structural barriers that create obstacles for them.

Several organizations across Maine are using the two-generation approach to see better results for the families they serve. In Washington County, Family Futures Downeast is helping parents gain post-secondary credentials while their children receive early childhood education. Bangor Housing’s Families Forward offers comprehensive services for both parents and children. Community Action Programs in Cumberland, Aroostook and Kennebec counties are applying two-generation practices in their work with families. And McAuley Residence in Portland is finding ways to integrate services for mothers in recovery and their children.

These practitioners have shared several lessons that are useful to policy makers and administrators who are looking for ways to help Maine families succeed. Drawing from these lessons, national innovations, and best practices, this brief offers four recommendations and accompanying strategies for expanding the core elements of two-generation approaches in policies and systems:

**1. Expand parents’ ability to work by helping them develop new skills and clearing common obstacles on career pathways.**

Two-generation programs in Maine offer good examples for how wraparound supports and coaching can support success in education and job training. At the same time, other states have developed innovative tools to help working families overcome barriers — such as childcare, transportation, and benefit reductions — on their path to increased economic security.

**2. Ensure healthy development of children by bringing a two-generation lens to childcare, early education, and supports for school-age children.**

In addition to helping parents bring in more economic resources for their families, two-generation strategies can further benefit children by directly supporting their

*CONTINUED*

health and development. There are several opportunities to bring these benefits to more children and families in Maine.

**3. Change how government works to help families more efficiently and comprehensively access the resources available to them.**

Government initiatives meant to support families' trajectory towards greater economic stability can create more obstacles than intended if they are made without their end users – parents and children – in mind, if they are accessed in a fractured manner, or if they are administered in silos. Maine's policymakers and administrators can reorient their thinking and programs by putting the aspirations and needs of families at the center.

**4. Increase the value of public investments by leveraging outside resources and incentivizing best practices.**

Two-generation practices require innovative approaches to funding if they are to be effective and successfully scaled. This includes creative use of existing revenue streams, identifying leverage opportunities, building two-generation components into the procurement process, and incentivizing new partnerships and practices.

