A kinship system of care refers to a comprehensive and cost effective system of services that targets all kinship families, but especially the many private and voluntary kinship families who are without public child welfare supports. These families are often on their own in facing unique challenges including accessing general services, legal assistance, and specialized kinship services. (Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008; Wallace, 2016).

Observations and Discussion Points

- Kinship families, especially private and voluntary, face barriers to eligibility for financial assistance, child care, and school enrollment, as well as to accessing other service systems. Their custodial rights may be less secure. They confront special challenges in maintaining family relationships because, unlike non-relative foster parents, they still are connected to birth parents. The children in their care may have numerous adverse family experiences (Radel & Bramlett, 2014). A kinship system of care includes program actions designed to address these challenges.

- A kinship system of care incorporates the full range of services offered by social services, child welfare, and temporary assistance agencies. Their collaborations with kinship navigators ensure access to agency services and specially targeted kinship navigator services.

- Kinship navigator programs are at the center of a comprehensive kinship system of care and start with core services of information, referral, and education (preferably via a statewide program) and add programmatic services focused on the special challenges and needs of kinship families.

- Kinship navigator programs offer: (1) information, referral, and education; (2) prevention and supportive services to assure stability; (3) support for achievement of permanence; (4) specialized services to meet special needs of children, youth, and families; (5) collaborative outreach and partnerships; and (6) ancillary services.

- Kinship navigator programs are at the center of introducing greater formality into the processes of strengthening partnerships and building bridges between kinship caregivers and public service systems. We recommend that kinship navigators should be central components of any kinship system of care and should be developed in every state with public support.
• Kinship navigator services start with core services of information, referral, and education (preferably via a statewide program) and add programmatic services focused on the special challenges and needs of kinship families. Depending upon the availability of funding, kinship navigators should include core services plus one or more additional elements:

1) **Information, Referral, Education:** Essential services provided by any kinship navigator program, either via virtual connections (web site and/or help line) or as part of local direct services, includes information on kinship laws, benefits, referrals to agencies, and education of caregivers and professionals on kinship issues;

2) **Stabilization Services:** Aimed at stabilizing families via prevention and supportive services, includes access to financial assistance (TANF and Social Security), to legal supports (family court, assistance with administrative agency appeals), emergency assistance, and advocacy with other service agencies;

3) **Permanency Services:** Aimed at kinship families in need of ongoing interventions and case management services, includes advocacy, case management, education, support groups, and family group decision making;

4) **Specialized Services:** Aimed at kinship families with special challenges, includes mental health treatment services, parent engagement services, and trauma informed care for children.

5) **Ancillary Services:** Aimed at caregivers and professionals, includes outreach to kinship families as well as to service agencies/organizations (school districts, mental health agencies, etc.), educational services for kinship families and service professionals, education of state and local policy stakeholders, and development of referral systems.

6) **Collaborations:** Aimed at social services and other service systems, includes kinship navigator education and advocacy to improve access and response of other systems: child welfare, temporary assistance, SNAP, child care, social security, aging, education, health and mental health, corrections, judiciary, housing, and immigration. A kinship system of care posits all of these systems working with kinship navigators to identify how their services impact kinship families and how better to meet kinship family needs.

**Recommendations**
1. Serve kinship families with a comprehensive and cost effective system of services that targets all kinship families.
2. Incorporate within the system of kinship care appropriate responses to family needs by the child welfare system and other human service systems, such as health, mental health, and corrections.

3. Provide funding for kinship navigators that consists of a combination of federal and state dollars, with priority given to establishing statewide core services augmented by local services.

4. Consider housing or locating kinship navigators in facilities with social service agencies and programs.

5. Consider Kinship Navigator programs as core components of a system of kinship care, and development in every state.

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