



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Administration for Children
and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Responsible Fatherhood State Profile: Iowa

www.fatherhood.gov

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Iowa

Strategies Intended to Promote Healthy Marriage

State-Funded Marriage Preparation Activities

Iowa does not use state funds to support marriage preparation activities directly. However, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently has provided funding for marriage preparation programs offered by community organizations in the state. For example, the Iowa Healthy Marriage Initiative Demonstration Project will work with engaged and married couples to offer enrichment activities that promote healthy, strong relationships.ⁱ

Other Marriage Initiatives

Recently awarded federal grants provide funding to organizations in Iowa that are working with married couples to build healthy marriages, as noted. One community organization, the Sioux City Indian Education Committee, will offer Native American married couples training in marriage and communication skills, as well as support services.ⁱⁱ

Strategies Intended to Promote Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood

State-Funded Direct Service Parenting/Responsible Fatherhood Programs

In 2001, Iowa's governor established the Governor's Task Force on Responsible Fatherhood to identify barriers to father involvement, identify promising practices that promote fathers' support of their children, raise public awareness of the consequences of father absence, and recommend changes that support father involvement. The Department of Human Services also established the Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group in 2003 in order to gain an understanding of Iowans' opinions about fatherhood and marriage and to recommend additional social supports for parents and families.ⁱⁱⁱ Recent federal grants also have allocated funding for responsible fatherhood programs in Iowa. For example, the Dad's TIME program works with fathers and father figures to offer support services and to help fathers become financially self-sufficient.^{iv}

State-Funded Programs to Prevent Unwanted or Early Fatherhood

Through the Department of Human Services' Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention program, Iowa provides funding to community organizations that promote abstinence among teens, as well as organizations that teach teens about birth control and sexually transmitted infections, provide

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parenting classes, offer counseling, provide life skills, and encourage parental involvement with teens. Some organizations include specific curricula, such as Wise Guys, to help at-risk males avoid early fatherhood and reduce risky sexual behavior.^v

The Family and Medical Leave Act

Iowa has a Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows both fathers and mothers time off after the birth or adoption of a child, or during an illness, without fear of losing their jobs. Parents are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave over a one-year period to care for a new child, an ill family member, or to recover from their own illness. The FMLA protects fathers and mothers who have worked with the same organization for at least one year and have worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year. Moreover, public employees are allowed to use paid sick leave to care for family members.^{vi}

Domestic Violence Services

Iowa operates a Domestic Violence Prevention Program that works with health care providers to help them better respond to victims of domestic violence. The program develops training materials and protocols for health care providers, arranges training and technical assistance for providers, and helps plan an annual Health Cares About Domestic Violence Day. Every hospital in Iowa is required by law to have a protocol for identifying and responding to patients who have been victims of domestic violence.^{vii} Moreover, a number of community-based programs in Iowa offer services to victims of domestic violence.^{viii} These programs provide crisis hotlines, support and counseling services, legal and medical advice, emergency shelter, and specialized children's services. In addition, the Department of Corrections offers batterers education programs to individuals found guilty of committing domestic abuse.^{ix}

Child Custody Policy

When couples with children separate, both parents have the right to participate in a hearing before an Iowa district court to determine child custody. The Iowa court system has a preference for joint custody. If parties do not agree on a custody arrangement, the court may still consider granting joint custody based upon the best interests of the child. Parents may be required by the court to participate in mediation prior to establishing custody orders. Iowa also requires that parties in any case involving child custody participate in a court-approved educational course about how divorce affects children and how parents can best meet their children's needs.^x

Paternity Establishment

Paternity establishment ensures a child's right to a range of public benefits, including survivor's insurance, education, health care, and workers' compensation. Establishing paternity gives a child born outside of marriage the same legal rights as a child born to married parents. In Iowa, the paternity establishment process may begin at any time up until the child turns 19. When paternity is uncontested, parents can establish a child's paternity either in the hospital or through submitting an affidavit of paternity. In cases in which paternity is contested, parents must go through a judicial process in which all parties must submit to genetic testing.^{xi}

Child Support Assistance

The Child Support Enforcement System has as its primary objectives: 1) to ensure that children have the financial support of both their parents; 2) to foster fathers' responsible behavior towards their children; and 3) to reduce welfare costs associated with child support delinquency. Iowa



operates its Child Support Recovery Unit (CSRU) through the state Department of Human Services. This program aims to help families become self-sufficient by establishing and enforcing child support orders. The CSRU locates noncustodial parents; assists in establishing paternity; establishes, modifies, and enforces financial and medical support orders; and distributes child support payments. Recipients of public assistance benefits and those who have left public assistance automatically receive services from the CRSU, and parents who apply for services may also receive assistance.

The CSRU also provides grants to community organizations that have established pilot programs to increase noncustodial parents' ability to pay support and to increase these parents' involvement with their children. These organizations offer parent-child activities, legal support, financial counseling, mediation, and support groups. The CSRU also uses federal funds to provide grants to agencies that facilitate visitation between noncustodial parents and children. These grants have been used to offer mediation, visitation counseling, and neutral sites where parents can drop off children for visitation.^{xii}

Child Support Enforcement

Iowa uses various methods to collect child support payments from noncustodial parents. The state may withhold money from a parent's paycheck, seize money from bank accounts, intercept federal and state tax refunds, report the parent to credit bureaus, or place liens on property. When a parent is three months delinquent in payment of child support, the state may sanction the parent's professional, recreational, or driver's license or his or her motor vehicle registration. When arrears reach \$5,000, the parent's passport may be denied or revoked.^{xiii}

Strategies Intended to Enhance Fathers' Economic Stability

Welfare Benefits

Iowa offers welfare benefits to two-parent families on the same basis as to single-parent families. In Iowa, single-parent families receive cash assistance through the Family Investment Program (FIP), and two-parent families receive assistance through the Two-Parents Receiving FIP program. Parents receiving financial assistance must immediately participate in work activities through the Promoting Independence and Self Sufficiency through Employment Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (PROMISE JOBS) program; however, education and training can fulfill this work requirement. There is a lifetime limit of 60 months on receipt of FIP benefits.^{xiv}

Services Geared Toward Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers

Fathers with child support orders may be eligible to participate in activities offered by community organizations that have received grants from the Child Support Recovery Unit. These projects offer activities such as financial counseling, parental skills training, legal assistance, support groups, and parent-child activities.^{xv}

Job Training and Employment Services

Fathers who receive Family Investment Program (FIP) benefits are eligible to participate in the PROMISE JOBS program. Participants may be eligible for employment assessments, life-skills training, job-search assistance, work experience programs, educational assistance, parenting and family development programs, and family planning services.^{xvi}

Incarceration and Reentry

Services and Programs for Incarcerated Fathers

Iowa offers incarcerated fathers the opportunity to participate in a variety of parenting, educational, treatment, and job preparation programs. Reentry programs include life-skills classes and a family component to prepare fathers for their reintegration into society.^{xvii}

Resources

- Iowa Fatherhood. This Web site provides an overview of programs and events for fathers in the state; available at <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/fatherhood/>



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