



AN OVERVIEW ON EXTENDED FOSTER CARE: POLICIES, PROGRESS & THE PATH FORWARD

2026

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Introduction

Extended Foster Care offers young people what most families provide naturally: time, stability, and support to become independent adults.

As of September 2025, there were 331,747 children and youth in foster care in the United States.¹ These young people range from infancy through age 18 and enter care for many reasons, live in a variety of settings, and pursue different permanency goals.

Each year, approximately 15,000 young people reach age 18 without being reunified with family or adopted and formally exit foster care through emancipation, a process known as aging out.² At that point, they lose access to housing, case management, and other supports, regardless of whether they are still in school, employed, or have stable housing. Research shows that aging out without a permanent family connection significantly increases the risk of homelessness, disrupted education, unemployment, and poor physical and mental health outcomes.³

Extended Foster Care is a policy solution designed to address the risks young people face when they age out of foster care.

Extended Foster Care allows eligible young adults to remain in foster care beyond age 18, typically up to age 21, and in some states up to age 23, so they can continue receiving housing, case management, and support as they transition to adulthood. Participation is voluntary and governed by state policy.⁴

Federal policy supporting extended foster care has evolved over time and reflects growing recognition that young people leaving foster care need continued support into early adulthood. Since the late 2010s, Extended Foster Care has become widely recognized as a best practice, even though it is not available in every state. Legislative and policy efforts now focus on expanding access, increasing participation, improving re-entry options, and in some states extending eligibility beyond age 21 while addressing ongoing challenges such as housing availability, workforce capacity, and sustainable funding.⁵

More than 15 years of research consistently links participation in extended foster care to better outcomes in housing stability, education, employment, health, and reduced involvement with the justice system. Today, 37 states participate in the federal Title IV-E reimbursement option for extended foster care.⁶

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Data and Statistics: AFCARS."
2. Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Children Exiting Foster Care by Exit Reason."
3. Chapin Hall, "Impacts of Extended Foster Care on Outcomes at Age 23."
4. Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Extended Foster Care Explained."
5. Chapin Hall, "The Evidence for Extended Foster Care and a New Standard of Care for Older Youth."
6. Rachel Rosenberg, "Increased use of extended foster care allows more young people to benefit."



extended foster care

noun

Extended foster care (EFC) is a voluntary program allowing eligible youth to remain in or re-enter foster care beyond age 18, typically up to age 21, to help them transition to independence by meeting specific criteria like attending school, working, or participating in job training, while receiving continued support, housing, and health services.

Extended foster care (EFC) provides young adults who would otherwise age out of the foster care system remain connected to the child welfare system after age 18. Laws and requirements vary by state and change frequently, but almost every state provides a version of it. All extended foster care programs aim to help former foster youth establish a stable, independent life.

Extended foster care offers continued stability and support as they pursue education, employment, or vocational goals. Participants typically receive ongoing case management, access to approved housing, and supports such as health care, education assistance, job training, and life-skills services. Program rules, eligibility, and services vary by state under federal Title IV-E requirements.

Some states allow young people who leave foster care at 18 to later re-enter extended foster care if they are still eligible. Extended foster care exists to mirror the family support most young adults rely on into their twenties, recognizing that this stage of life is critical for long-term stability and success.

Chafee

The Chafee program is the first major federal investment focused specifically on transition-age and older youth in foster care. While Chafee does not extend foster care beyond age 18, it establishes the principle that the need for support does not always automatically end on a person's 18th birthday. The Chafee program provides states, territories, and tribal entities with flexible funding to support youth who were in foster care at age 14 or older, as well as some young adults ages 18–21 for states that extend foster care to age 21.⁷

Chafee is funded at approximately \$143 million annually in mandatory funding, with an additional \$60 million authorized for Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs). The authorized uses of funds includes but is not limited to postsecondary education, employment, housing assistance, life skills training, and preventive health supports. States can use up to 30% of Chafee funds for room and board for youth ages 18–21 pursuing higher education.

To this day, the Chafee program is still administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) under Title IV-E. To receive Chafee funds, states must submit a five-year plan to HHS outlining their program design and implementation, as well as annual updates. Today, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and several tribal entities receive Chafee or ETV funding.⁸

1999

Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (FCIA), also known as the Chafee Act (Pub. L. No. 106-169), amended Title IV-E to create the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. FCIA doubled federal funding to \$140 million a year, allowed states to use up to 30 percent of those funds for room and board, enabled states to assist young adults ages 18 to 21 who have left foster care, and permitted states to extend Medicaid eligibility to former foster youth up to age 21.

2008

Fostering Connections to Success Act and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Pub. L. No. 110-351) created the statutory authority for extended foster care. For the first time, states were given the discretion to extend eligibility for Title IV-E payments beyond age 18, up to age 21. Fostering Connections also authorized states to create re-entry policies for young adults who had previously exited foster care after their 18th birthday. While Fostering Connections did not mandate state participation in extended foster care, it provided the legal framework necessary for extended foster care to exist nationwide.⁹

Fostering Connections

Fostering Connections established extended foster care as an option for states to allow young adults to remain in care if they meet the following criteria: 1) the young person is engaged in education or employment with at least 80 hours per month, 2) a qualifying activity to remove barriers to employment, or 3) they were unable to participate due to a documented medical condition.

States are given broad discretion to define education and employment criteria and to design supervised independent living settings. This can include host homes, college dormitories, shared housing, semi-supervised or supervised apartments, and other arrangements paired with appropriate oversight. This guidance also emphasizes continuing core foster care requirements, such as case planning, permanency planning, monthly visits, and ongoing court oversight, while allowing innovation and youth-voice in service delivery to remain a priority.¹⁰

Implementation of Fostering Connections began in 2010, when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued formal guidance clarifying how states can operationalize Fostering Connections and access Title IV-E reimbursements for eligible extended foster care placements. This guidance allows states to claim federal cost-sharing for foster care maintenance payments for eligible youth ages 18–21, provided that states amend their Title IV-E plans accordingly. In its guidance, HHS emphasizes flexibility, and explicitly encourages states to adopt extended foster care even if they can initially do so on a limited basis.¹¹

After the guidance went into effect on October 1, 2010, states adopted extended foster care at varying times, influenced by fiscal and administrative capacity, housing availability, and child welfare workforce readiness. Some states rely initially on state-only funding, while others pursued Title IV-E approval to access federal reimbursement.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

7. Patrick Landers, "CRS In Focus: John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood"

8. *Ibid.*

9. Emilie Stoltzfus, "CRS: Child Welfare: The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351)"

10. *Ibid.*

11. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ACYF-CB-PI-10-11.

Eligibility and Population of Extended Foster Care



Extended foster care supports young people who were in foster care at age 18 and elect to remain or re-enter care to receive continued support through early adulthood, usually until age 21.

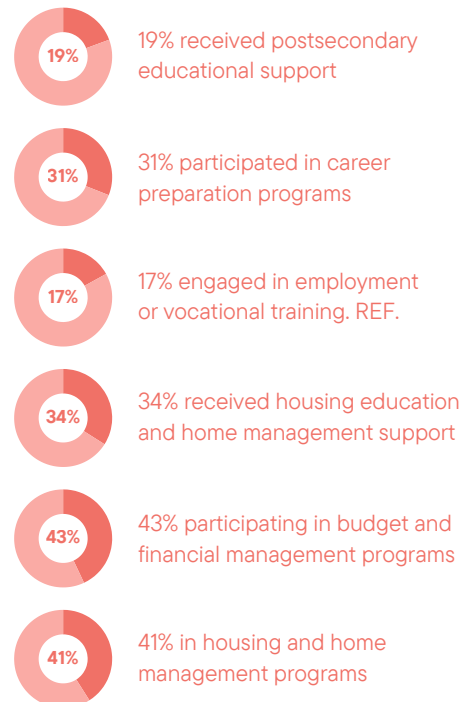
Extended foster care programs exist to provide young adults with the guidance, housing, education, and employment support they need to successfully transition to independence.

Requirements vary between states. A young adult must apply to the program and appear before a judge to determine their eligibility. In the majority of states, those who wish to join the program must meet at least one of the following:

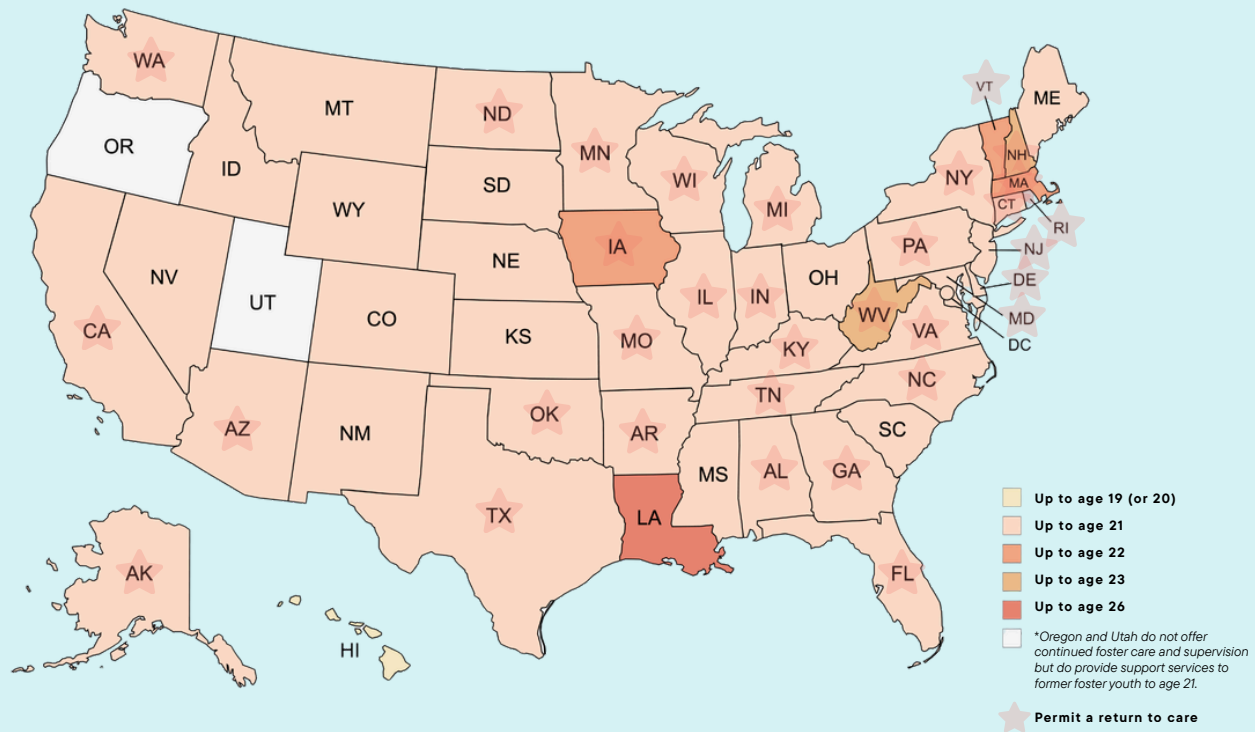
- Enrolled in secondary school
- Enrolled in postsecondary school or vocational training
- Working over a certain number of hours per week
- Unable to attend school or work due to a medical condition

A judge periodically reviews a young adult's eligibility to ensure the requirements continue to be met.

National data from 2023 indicates that out of the 93,445 youth served in extended foster care:¹²



¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Dashboard: Services Received."



This map was developed using state-by-state data compiled by the Juvenile Law Center on extended foster care programs and reflects the organization's analysis of extended foster care policies and implementation across the United States.

Extended Foster Care Availability Across the U.S.

EXTENDED SERVICES

In 48 states, the District of Columbia, and American Samoa, youth in foster care at age 18 may extend their placement and continue receiving child welfare services. In most cases, youth may remain under agency supervision until age 21 through foster care, supervised independent living, or transitional services while pursuing education or employment and building independent living skills. Most states limit eligibility to age 21, though some extend support to age 22 or 23, and in rare cases, up to age 26, as in Louisiana. At the lower end, Hawaii limits eligibility to ages 19 or 20.

RE-ENTRY INTO CARE

In 33 states, youth who exit foster care at age 18 may request to return to care before age 21, as permitted under state law. Returning to care allows youth to receive continued support such as supervised independent living or transitional services to pursue education or employment, ensure safety, and build skills for self-sufficiency.

Variation Across States



For how these programs are funded, **36 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and nine tribes** have federally approved Extended Foster Care (EFC) plans. Additionally, **21 states** operate state-funded programs.¹³

The variation in federal and state funding, along with differences in program design, means that the availability and scope of EFC services can look very different from one state to another.

01

Geographic Variability

Extended Foster Care programs look very different depending on where a youth lives. Urban areas often offer robust housing, education, and employment supports, while rural areas may have limited or no services. Because many case managers split time between traditional foster care and EFC youth, specialized support for older youth can be inconsistent.

02

Funding Variability

Funding structures also vary by state. Some rely on county-allocated state funds, and legislative approvals or state match requirements can create barriers. Even without federal funding, states like Washington and Utah have developed their own extended care initiatives.

CALIFORNIA IS A NATIONAL LEADER IN EFC.



California is a national leader in extending foster care beyond age 18. Following the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act and passage of California Assembly Bill 12, the state moved early to implement Extended Foster Care (EFC).¹⁴

Since 2014, approximately 76,248 youth have participated. As of October 2023, 7,085 youth were in extended foster care in California, compared to 13,380 youth nationally in October 2021 (CCWIP).

Research tracking outcomes for youth at ages 19, 21, and 23 further underscores the importance of extended support. Investments in EFC also demonstrate a strong return: helping youth achieve outcomes similar to their peers could yield an estimated \$4.1 billion per year per cohort of youth aging out of foster care (AECF).¹⁵

¹³ Rachel Rosenberg, "Increased Use of Extended Foster Care allows more young people to benefit."
¹⁴ California Child Welfare Indicators Project
¹⁵ AECF, The Evidence for Extended Foster Care and a New Standard of Care for Older Youth

How Extended Foster Care Supports Youth

Extended Foster Care (EFC) provides young adults with guidance, stability, and access to resources as they transition to independence. Participation is voluntary, so youth can choose to continue through age 21.



Services and Supports

Extended foster care offers a range of supports designed to promote stability, skill-building, and independence, including:

- **Education:** High school completion, college enrollment, job readiness training, internships, and employment connections.
- **Mental and Behavioral Health:** Counseling, therapy, and other behavioral health programs.
- **Case Management:** Dedicated caseworkers help youth navigate services, set personal goals, and connect with community resources.



Housing and Supervision

- Housing options include family foster homes, kinship care, group homes, transitional living programs, and Supervised Independent Living (SIL) arrangements.
- SIL placements give youth more independence while maintaining mentorship and life skills development. Settings can include shared or semi-supervised apartments, host homes, or college housing.
- SIL arrangements do not require the same licensing as traditional foster homes but must meet safety standards and align with transition goals.
- All EFC placements provide some level of supervision and support, helping youth gradually take on independence while remaining connected to caring adults.



Voluntary Participation

- Youth can opt out of EFC at any time between ages 18 and 21, typically by notifying their caseworker or IV-E agency. Some states require a written request.
- Youth may reenter the program if still eligible.
- Opting out ends access to supports such as case management, Medicaid, and other foster care benefits.
- Ideally, youth leaving care are connected to permanent supports or community resources to continue their transition to independence.



“I aged out of foster care before extended foster care was available, and I often wonder how different my transition to adulthood might have been if I had received that support. Having more time to build stability, trusted relationships, and practical life skills could have changed the trajectory of my early adult years. Extended foster care is an investment in young people’s futures—not because they need to be rescued, but because they deserve the same gradual transition into adulthood that so many of their peers receive.”

— California, Expert with Lived Experience in Foster Care



POSITIVE OUTCOMES



Research shows measurable benefits for youth who remain in extended foster care past age 18. Each additional year in extended care is linked to:



Education: 8% higher probability of completing a high school credential; 5–12% higher likelihood of enrolling in college



Employment & Finances: Increased employment and earnings between ages 21–23; approximately \$650 more in personal savings



Basic Needs & Stability: 21% lower odds of food insecurity; 19% reduction in homelessness and couch-surfing



Justice System: 28% fewer arrests

These outcomes highlight how extended care not only supports youth during a vulnerable period but also produces long-term benefits for individuals and communities.

States are more likely to support extended foster care when evidence shows it:

- ✓ Prevents homelessness
- ✓ Reduces involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems
- ✓ Lowers substance use
- ✓ Mitigates other risk factors for youth aging out of care

Extended care provides youth with extra time to:

- ✓ Develop essential life skills
- ✓ Establish stability across housing, education, and employment
- ✓ Benefit from a supportive “landing pad” during the transition to independence

POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH



Extended Foster Care Leads to Stronger Outcomes for Youth

Data shows that foster youth who choose to remain in care beyond age 18 experience significantly better outcomes than their peers who leave care earlier or who achieve permanency at ages 17 or 18. Extended foster care supports higher educational attainment, increased enrollment in school, and greater access to financial aid, while reducing the likelihood of homelessness, disconnection from work and school, early parenthood, and involvement with the justice system.

19-YEAR-OLDS IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE WERE...

69%

more likely to have a high school diploma or GED.

63%

more likely to be enrolled in secondary or postsecondary school.

61%

more likely to have received educational financial aid

42%

less likely to be disconnected from school and work.

63%

less likely to have experienced homelessness in the past two years.

61%

less likely to be young parents.

31%

less likely to have been incarcerated in the past two years

THAN 19-YEAR-OLDS WHO AGED OUT AND WERE NOT IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE.

19-YEAR-OLDS IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE WERE...

76%

more likely to have a high school diploma or GED.

90%

more likely to be enrolled in secondary or postsecondary school.

84%

more likely to have received educational financial aid

64%

less likely to be disconnected from school and work.

65%

less likely to have experienced homelessness in the past two years.

65%

less likely to be young parents.

64%

less likely to have been incarcerated in the past two years

THAN 19-YEAR-OLDS WHO EXITED TO PERMANENCY AT AGE 17 OR 18.

This chart is based on data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), with analysis by Child Trends, U.S. Administration for Children and Families. The design of this chart was inspired by a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

The data comes from surveys of young people at ages 17, 19, and 21. This analysis looks at 19-year-olds who were in extended foster care (but left by age 21) compared with peers who were not in extended care at 19. It also compares 19-year-olds in extended foster care with those who left care for permanency at ages 17 or 18 (1,395 youth) using information from AFCARS and NYTD. AFCARS tracks why youth leave foster care, and NYTD provides information about how they are doing as young adults.

The Impact and Implementation of Extended Foster Care

Extended foster care (EFC) is critically important because youth who age out of foster care without support face significant challenges that can affect their long-term stability and success.

These high risks include homelessness, low educational completion, unemployment, early parenthood, and increased mental and physical health challenges.¹⁶ When young people remain connected to supportive adults, stable housing, and essential services, EFC programs help them navigate this critical developmental period more successfully and lay the foundation for long-term self-sufficiency.

STATE MODELS OF SUCCESSFUL EXTENDED FOSTER CARE



California

One of the first states to formally adopt EFC, California has collected extensive data on participants, providing opportunities for reflection and program improvement.



Massachusetts

Offers structured, well-resourced programs that combine case management, housing support, and educational services.



Minnesota

Uses a three-prong approach that includes streamlined enrollment, frequent communication about available services, and valuing youth input in program planning.¹⁷



Tennessee & Idaho

As of November 2025, these are the first states to extend foster care until age 23.¹⁸



New York City, Maryland, and Washington, DC

Resource-rich areas providing highly structured programs. New York City's Fair Futures Model ensures youth do not age out into homelessness. Maryland and DC have some of the highest EFC participation rates at 87%.¹⁹

16. Child Trends, "Rates of Permanency for Older Youth"

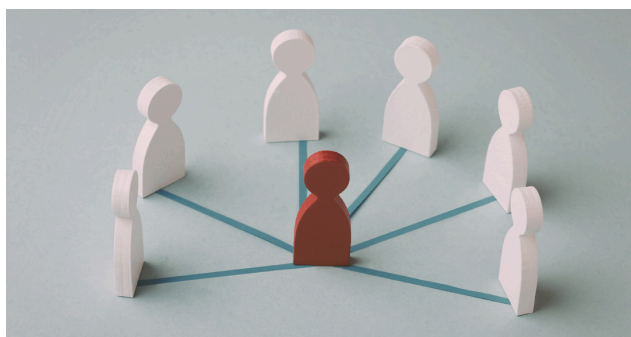
17. Child Trends, "Three Strategies to Enhance Extended Foster Care in Minnesota"

18. Youth Villages, "Want to Improve Outcomes for Young Adults Leaving Foster Care? Here's the Playbook"

19. AECF, The Evidence for Extended Foster Care and a New Standard of Care for Older Youth (2025)

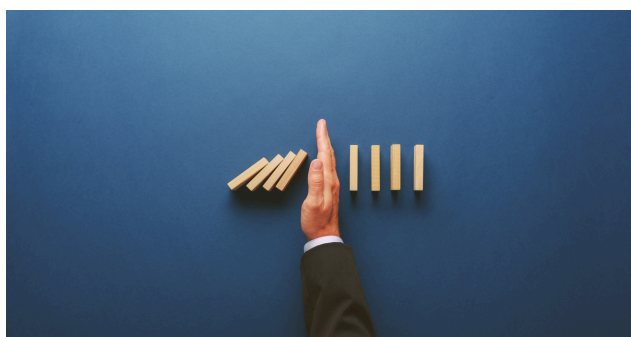
Key Components of Successful Programs

Effective EFC programs integrate multiple, connected elements to create a supportive and sustainable pathway for youth transitioning to adulthood. Core components include:



Comprehensive Service

Housing assistance, mental health care, substance use treatment, workforce preparation, financial literacy, and educational support.



Proactive Case Management

Personalized guidance that helps youth set goals, access resources, and address challenges before they escalate.



Data-Driven Improvement

Tracking outcomes allows states to refine policies and scale effective practices. Leading research from CalYOUTH, Chapin Hall, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Child Trends informs these continuous improvements.

When these elements are combined with sustained state commitment, youth are far more likely to achieve stability, self-sufficiency, and long-term success.

CHALLENGES

in Extended Foster Care

Extended foster care (EFC) has grown over the past 25 years, yet significant challenges persist in its availability, design, and effectiveness. These barriers help explain why not all states participate in EFC and why participation rates among eligible young people remain low.

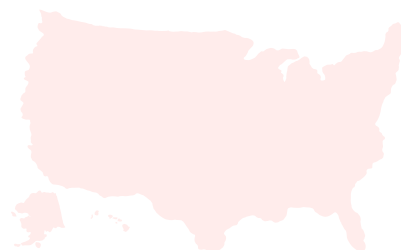


Low Youth Participation Despite Expanded Availability

Despite national efforts to expand access, extended foster care remains underutilized. In 2021, only 22% of young people in foster care at age 18 remained in care at 19.²⁰ This represents a slight decrease from 2016, even after state and national moratoriums on aging out during the COVID-19 pandemic.²¹

State Participation and Systemic Barriers

Not all states have implemented extended foster care, and among those that have, programs vary widely in scope, capacity, and quality.



- X Funding and administrative complexity:** Meeting federal Title IV-E requirements—including stable housing, supportive services, ongoing case management, and court oversight—can be resource-intensive and difficult to implement.
- X Limited access:** Even in states with EFC, access is often uneven. Rural youth may have few or no placements, while urban youth face high housing costs and shortages.
- X Resource shortages:** Sustainable funding, appropriate housing, and a trained workforce remain scarce. High caseloads and limited placement options reduce the system's capacity to support independence.

20. Twitchell, Louisa. "Fostering Success: The Need for Continued Foster Care Beyond Age Twenty-One."
21. AECF. Fostering Youth Transitions: State and National Data to Drive Foster Care Advocacy 2023.

Is Housing the Structural Constraint?

Even the strongest policy design cannot fully insulate extended foster care from housing market instability.

- High-cost urban markets limit supervised independent living placements.
- Rural areas often lack approved housing options entirely.
- Transitional housing development requires long-term investment.

The question may not be whether states can fix the housing market but whether they can find creative solutions such as partner with public housing authorities, expand rental assistance models, integrate extended foster care youth into broader affordable housing strategies, or blend funding streams creatively.



Is Aftercare the Missing Piece?

Some experts argue that success may lie not solely in extending foster care, but in strengthening aftercare supports.




- Should more emphasis be placed on Chafee-funded services prior to age 18?
- Are we investing enough in early preparation for independence?
- Should resources be rebalanced between extended care and aftercare?

A well-functioning continuum might include: 1) a strong transition planning before age 18, 2) optional extended care and 3) robust voluntary aftercare services through age 23 or beyond.

Program Design and Youth Engagement

Many young people find extended foster care too similar to traditional foster care.

Programs that lack autonomy, flexibility, or age-appropriate expectations can feel restrictive or unhelpful. Common challenges include:

-  **Youth-centered approach:** Services often lack clear purpose or structure, and case management may not prioritize youth voices.
-  **Clarity and choice:** Young people may not fully understand extended foster care or the options available to them.
-  **Negative prior experiences:** Traumatic or unstable foster care experiences can discourage continued participation.





High-Needs and Excluded Youth

Extended foster care frequently fails to serve youth with the highest levels of need:

- Young people with significant medical, mental health, or disability-related needs.
- Those requiring specialized housing or education supports.
- Youth involved in juvenile or criminal justice systems.
- Expectant and parenting youth.

Research shows that large-scale targeted programming for these populations has not been developed, leaving many without adequate support even if they wish to participate.²²

KEY TAKEAWAYS ON CHALLENGES

 <p>Access does not equal participation</p> <p>EFC remains underutilized even where available.</p>	 <p>Systemic barriers persist</p> <p>Funding, housing, workforce, and administrative requirements limit statewide implementation.</p>	 <p>Program design matters</p> <p>Youth disengage when programs feel restrictive, unclear, or unhelpful.</p>	 <p>High-needs populations are underserved</p> <p>Tailored support for the most vulnerable youth is largely absent.</p>
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22. Chapin Hall, Impacts of Extended Foster Care on Outcomes at Age 23

Policy Solutions & The Path Forward

Extended Foster Care has expanded nationally, but major policy and design questions remain. **What should high-quality extended Foster Care look like? How should success be measured? What changes would meaningfully improve outcomes for young people?**



Reframing the Policy Conversation

Several core policy questions continue to shape the future of EFC:

- Should states automatically opt youth in, rather than requiring them to affirmatively enroll?
- Should the program's name change to reduce stigma or confusion?
- How do we address the fragility of the housing market that constrains placements?
- What does "success" actually look like?
- Is success defined by fewer youth aging out, or by stronger aftercare outcomes?
- If youth are aware of their option to extend or re-enter care, is it problematic if they choose not to participate?
- Is success about participation rates or about outcomes?

These questions reflect a broader tension: Is EFC a universal solution, or one tool within a broader transition-to-adulthood framework



Currently, only 22% of eligible youth remain in care at age 19.²³ But the field lacks consensus on what participation rate signals success.

Some key considerations include:

- ?? Should success mean higher participation rates?
- ?? Or should success mean improved outcomes, regardless of participation?
- ?? Is success found within extended care or in strong aftercare services?
- ?? If a young person declines EFC but thrives independently, is that a system failure?

Importantly, outcomes data are limited. We cannot fully measure what services youth access in the community if they are not captured in systems like the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). This creates blind spots in understanding how youth fare outside extended foster care.

One proposed reform is automatic enrollment at age 18, allowing youth to opt out rather than opt in.

There are several potential benefits:

- ✓ Reduces administrative barriers.
- ✓ Normalizes continued support.
- ✓ Prevents youth from losing access due to confusion or paperwork delays.

However, autonomy remains central. A youth-centered system must ensure:

- ✓ Clear communication about rights and options.
- ✓ Easy re-entry pathways.
- ✓ Respect for youth choice.

AUTOMATIC OPT-IN & YOUTH AWARENESS



23.Twitchell, Louisa. "Fostering Success: The Need for Continued Foster Care Beyond Age Twenty-One."

What High-Quality Extended Foster Care Should Look Like

The **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008** authorizes extended foster care but does not define what “high-quality extended foster care” entails.

As a result, implementation varies widely across states. A high-quality model should include youth-centered, individualized transition plans; developmentally appropriate case management; specialized community-based transition workers; clear structure, goals, and accountability; and flexibility for states to adapt extended foster care to their population and context.

Core Component	Key Elements
Youth-Centered, Individualized Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans built around each young adult’s goals. • Flexible timelines reflecting real-world transitions.
Developmentally Appropriate Case Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes that ages 18–21 are a distinct developmental stage. • Shifts from surveillance to coaching.
Specialized Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based transition specialists. • Not primarily placement-driven. • Lower caseloads focused on skill-building and connection.
Clear Structure & Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined expectations and goals. • Transparent participation requirements. • Consistent oversight.
Flexibility for States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to adapt EFC models to urban, suburban, and rural contexts. • Tailored housing solutions and service arrays.

What Youth with Lived Experience Are Saying



MA

“One of the greatest celebrations of independence, turning 18, became one of the most **challenging and defining** moments of my adulthood. Shortly after my birthday, I came home to find all of my belongings packed in black trash bags on the porch, forcing me to **navigate housing, education, work, finances, and healing from trauma** almost overnight. **College, extended foster care supports, and mentors became saving graces** that helped me not only survive, but **soar into opportunities** I once could not have imagined.”

MI

“During my experience in care, I wish that I had the **opportunity to receive both a transition plan** and assistance from the professionals that were assigned to work with and for me in regards to the resources that I had been legally required to receive in order to **assist with education, housing, transportation transition out of care, childcare, and affordable healthcare**. Receiving professional assistance through a structured care plan would have **helped to alleviate most of the trauma** that I endured post-transition.”

OR

“Extended foster care gave me the opportunity to become a self-sufficient adult while still having **guardrails in place to prevent failure**. The financial and emotional support I received helped me feel **prepared for independence** when I ultimately aged out of care.

However, I wish there had been more support for maintaining family relationships after age 18. Before adulthood, there was a strong emphasis on preserving parental connections, but **that support largely disappeared** once I entered extended foster care, **creating challenges** that continue.”

PA

“I **chose to opt into extended foster care** because I wanted the additional **support and stability** as I transitioned into adulthood.

It provided access to **resources, guidance, and opportunities** that helped me pursue my **education, build independence, and create a stronger foundation** for my future.”



Legislative Momentum

The House Re-Introduces the Bipartisan *Increasing Access to Foster Care Through Age 21 Act*

U.S. Representatives Judy Chu (D-CA) and Erin Houchin (R-IN) re-introduced the bipartisan H.R.7010, Increasing Access to Foster Care Through Age 21 Act, legislation designed to expand access to Extended Foster Care and remove barriers that prevent eligible young people from receiving continued support. The bill reflects growing bipartisan recognition that young people transitioning from foster care benefit from the same time, stability, and guidance that most families provide naturally as they enter adulthood.

[READ THE BILL TEXT](#)



Trump Administration Prioritizes Older Youth

In recent years, older youth in foster care and their transition to adulthood have emerged as a key focus in national child welfare discussions. Through the Fostering the Future initiative, First Lady Melania Trump has elevated issues affecting youth with foster care experience, including housing stability, educational opportunities, workforce development, and financial independence. These priorities were reflected in the bipartisan Chafee modernization package advanced by Congress, which seeks to strengthen supports available to young people as they transition from foster care to adulthood.



Conclusion

Extended foster care reflects an important shift in how we support young people transitioning from foster care: recognizing that adulthood is not reached overnight and that stability, guidance, and connection remain essential beyond age 18.

While significant progress has been made in expanding access to extended supports, too many young people still encounter barriers to participation, inconsistent services, limited housing options, and gaps in the transition to independence.

The path forward requires continued investment in evidence-based policies and practices that center the voices and experiences of young people with lived expertise. Strengthening extended foster care means expanding access where it remains unavailable, improving re-entry pathways, increasing participation among eligible youth, and ensuring that housing, education, employment, health care, and supportive relationships are integrated into every transition plan.

Every young person deserves the opportunity to enter adulthood with the same foundation most families provide: time to grow, room to make mistakes, and a network of support to rely on. By continuing to strengthen policies that promote stability, connection, and opportunity, we can help ensure that young people leaving foster care do not simply transition out of care, but transition into adulthood with the tools and support needed to thrive.

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Contact

**Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute
853 New Jersey Ave SE, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20003-5022**

www.ccaainstitute.org 

info@ccaainstitute.org 

@theccai 

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