



DEPARTAMENTO DE LA
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ADMINISTRACIÓN DE
FAMILIAS Y NIÑOS



Families First: Puerto Rico Title IV-E Prevention Plan 2022-2026 Executive Summary



Families First
Puerto Rico

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Introduction

The U.S. Families First Prevention Services Act (Family First), part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, shifted child welfare funding towards prevention services, supporting minors and families to prevent entry into foster care. Family First emphasizes trauma-informed, evidence-based services, including mental health, substance abuse treatment, in-home parenting skills, and kinship navigator programs. Under the federal legislation, States and Territories would only be able to receive federal funding for these services if they meet specific standards.

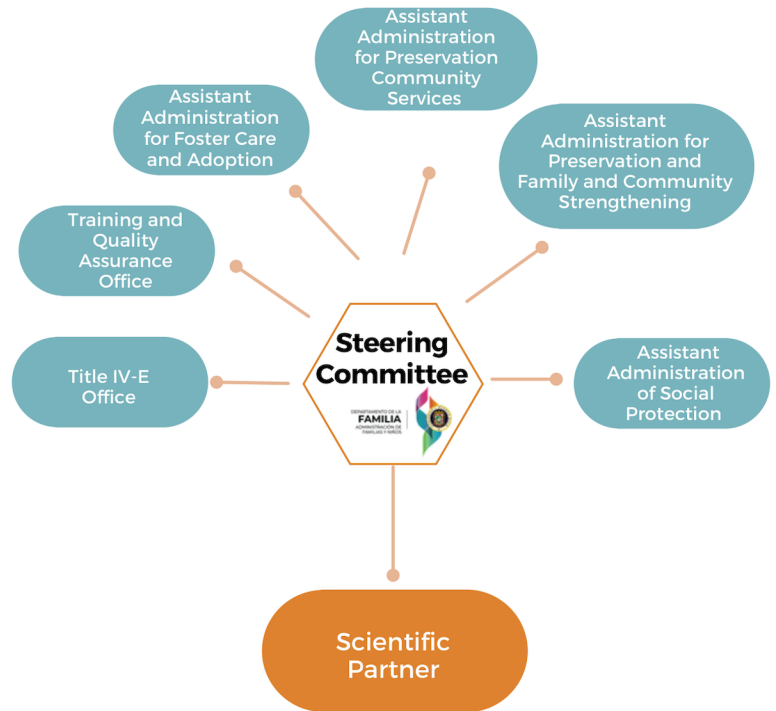
The application and implementation of this policy in Puerto Rico represents both opportunities and challenges, impacting the structure of child welfare and providing an opportunity to transform the system.

In accordance with federal legislation, the new public policy has been enacted through Law 57-2023, titled “Law for the Prevention of Abuse, Preservation of Family Unity, and for the Safety, Welfare, and Protection of Minors.” The law proposes the transformation of the social welfare system, including: prioritizing the safety and best interest of the child, efforts directed toward family preservation, structural changes, support and training for the workforce, and trauma-informed services based on best practices, among other improvements.



Puerto Rico Decision-Making Model: PR-DF and ADFAN

The Puerto Rico Department of Family (PR-DF) is the local government umbrella agency that oversees social welfare services through four autonomous administrations. The ADFAN (Administration for Families and Children) is responsible for child welfare services and Title IV-E Program administration, aiming to reduce foster care entries and enhance family preservation through integrated, family-centered services.



Considering ADFAN's and Family First's mission and vision, ADFAN's readiness to implement the required changes was evaluated through a multilevel policy analysis approach. These analyses were made during the Pre-Implementation phase of Family First in Puerto Rico and revealed that implementing Family First changes represented a challenge if the infrastructure for execution (i.e., human, fiscal, structural, and technological) was not considered and addressed first.

In 2019, PR-DF and ADFAN began the efforts to design a strategic planning process for Family First implementation with the support of a scientific partner (Grupo Nexos, a non-profit organization that provides consulting, capacity-building, and evaluation services using evidence-based practices). Since then, a Steering Committee has overseen the Family First implementation in Puerto Rico, supported by six subcommittees focusing on policy, trauma-informed services, evidence-based interventions, workforce development, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability. This structure has ensured coordinated efforts and effective communication across the child welfare ecosystem.

Strategic Planning and Pre-Implementation Activities

Led by the Steering Committee, Puerto Rico's strategic planning for implementing Family First began in 2019 and included three main phases:

1. Pre-implementation
2. Implementation
3. Development of the Title IV-E Prevention Plan

Pre-implementation activities involved a multilevel policy analysis, organizational evaluation, identification of evidence-based practices, and organizational development. These efforts aimed to prepare the infrastructure, workforce, and policies for effective Family First integration. Emphasis was given to the interactions between policy networks and key stakeholders such as organizations, agencies, and public and private programs. The pre-implementation activities included:

1. Development of a database with legal frameworks from 41 states to aid the implementation of Family First in Puerto Rico.
2. Comparative policy analysis of local and federal legal frameworks to align Puerto Rican laws with Family First requirements.
3. Continuous monitoring of legislative measures to ensure alignment with Family First provisions.
4. Juvenile Justice System analysis with recommendations for amendments to Puerto Rico's Juvenile Law 88-1986 to prevent an increase in juvenile justice cases.
5. Review of licensing standards for foster care settings with policy change recommendations to meet Family First requirements.
6. Organizational assessment to monitor readiness for change and identify organizational needs.
7. Surveys and interviews with ADFAN's workforce to identify areas for improvement and readiness for Family First implementation.

Strategic Planning and Pre-Implementation Activities

8. Collaboration with the Puerto Rico Evidence-Based Workgroup, identifying and evaluating interventions that meet Family First criteria and ensuring that the selected interventions are culturally appropriate for Puerto Rico's population.
9. Creation of a communication plan involving regional champions and local promoters within the ADFAN staff.
10. Development of brochures, web pages, and videos to inform and train ADFAN staff.

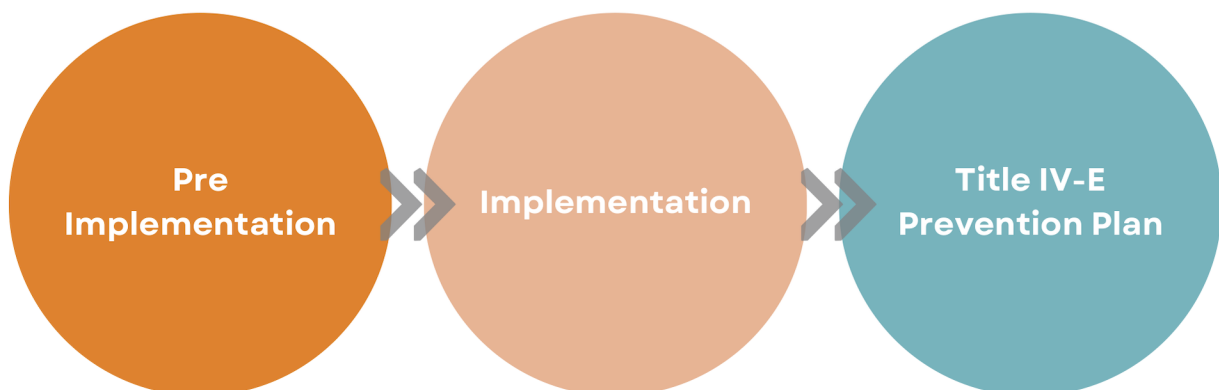
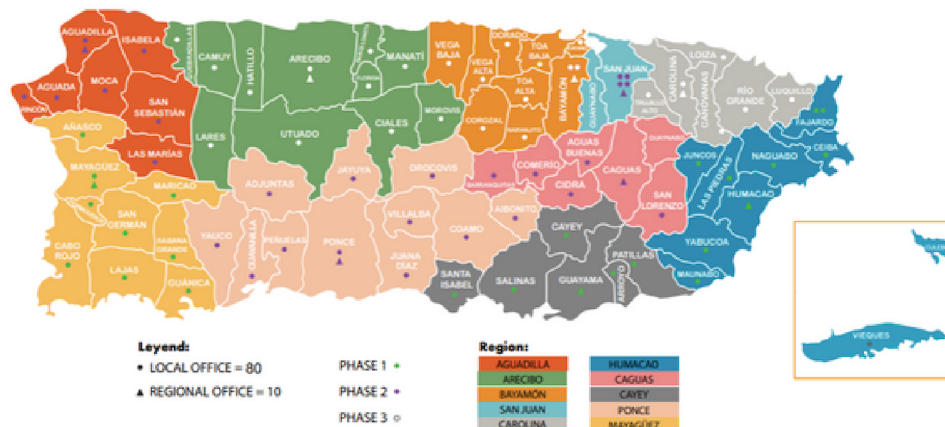


Strategic Planning and Implementation Plan

Following the pre-implementation findings, Puerto Rico decided to employ a scale-up phased implementation approach:

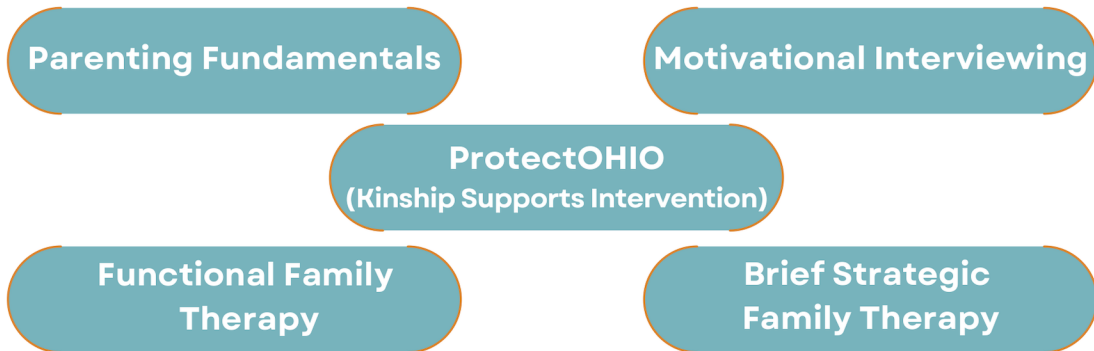
1. Phase 1: A pilot focused on awareness, trauma-informed capacity building, evidence-based practices certification, and multidisciplinary case management integration in the Bayamon, Guayama, Humacao, and Mayagüez regions.
2. Phase 2 and 3: Focused on organizational development and review of active cases in other regions (Aguadilla, Caguas, San Juan, Ponce, Arecibo, and Carolina) followed by similar focus areas as Phase 1.

This phased approach has allowed for gradual scaling, addressing organizational challenges, and incorporating data-driven decisions. As of July 2024, the implementation plan is currently advancing in all three phases.

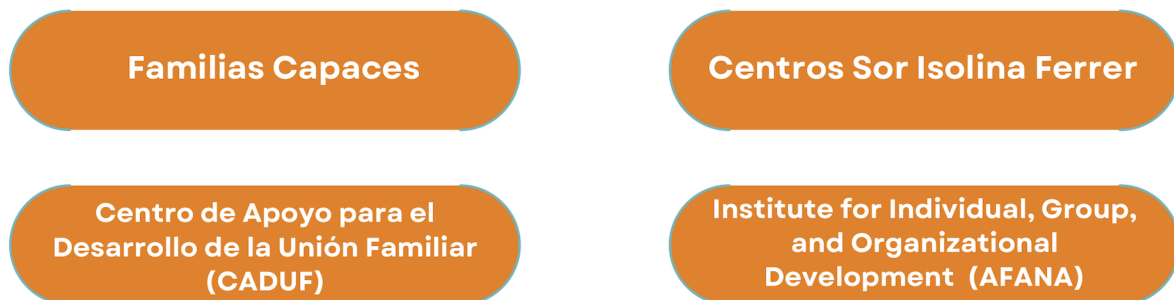


Strategic Planning and Implementation Plan

Also, five Evidence-Based Interventions were selected and ratified for implementation at the local level, in alignment with Family First requirements:



In March 2021, a Request for Application (RFA) was released for the Family First Puerto Rico Implementation Pilot Program, which generated letters of intent from 65 organizations and 15 formal proposals. After evaluation, four external providers that participated in the RFA were approved for funding:



A new selection process for additional external providers was released in October 2022, after which funding was approved for an additional external provider to work on the implementation of the intervention known as Parenting Fundamentals:



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Implementing prevention services in accordance with the Family First guidance required multiple actions, some of which are still underway:

1. Adopting a clear scope regarding the candidacy and eligibility of children, youth, and families who need Family First prevention services. The ADFAN developed an updated definition of “candidacy,” considering the characteristics of families referred to its units and service programs:

- (a) Minors referred to Preservation Services between 0 and 17 years of age, to prevent their entry into foster care services under the following typologies of neglect, emotional neglect, medical negligence, educational neglect and/or physical abuse; (b) Youth in foster care who are pregnant; (c) Youth in foster care who are raising their children to avoid entering the system; (d) Minor at imminent risk of re-entering the Foster Care System after the adoption and/or guardianship plan has been achieved. To conduct the assessment, this plan adopts the use of the Safety Family Assessment (SAFE) Model for risk and safety assessment.

2. Addressing ADFAN’s high caseloads and limited resources. As part of the Family First implementation, the long-term goal is to reduce caseloads to 20 preservation cases per worker through hiring, training, and continuous quality improvement.

3. Promoting structural changes that impact the provision of services in Puerto Rico, particularly regarding case management, interventions, and external referrals. The analysis showed that ADFAN’s current safety and risk assessment and case management models comply with the Family First requirements, and Puerto Rico will continue its application for Title IV-E prevention services. However, under Family First, the efforts will be focused on:

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- a. ongoing capacity building for Puerto Rico social workers,
- b. reviewing and updating processes to identify Title IV-E eligible families and support documentation,
- c. continuous evaluation.

4. Adopting services that are evidence-based, trauma-informed, and respond to at least one of the following service areas: mental health services, substance abuse services, in-home parenting skills, and kinship navigator services. While ADFAN has provided preservation services directed at strengthening families and preventing the recurrence of abuse and neglect, by implementing Family First, ADFAN will expand these services. Programs were assessed for scientific evidence, cultural fit, and practical application. As a result, Puerto Rico will implement five programs that were been selected for the rollout:

- a. Motivational Interviewing for substance abuse: is a method of counseling clients designed to promote behavior change and improve physiological, psychological, and lifestyle outcomes.
- b. Brief-Strategic Family Therapy for substance abuse, in-home parenting skills, and mental health: uses a structured family systems approach to treat families with children or adolescents who display or are at risk for developing problem behaviors, including substance abuse, conduct problems, and delinquency.
- c. Ohio's Kinship Supports Intervention/ProtectOhio for kinship navigation: is designed to promote and support kinship placements and to meet children's physical, emotional, financial, and basic needs by connecting kinship caregivers with federal, state, and local resources.

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d. Parenting Fundamentals for in-home parenting skills: an intervention that aims to improve parents' knowledge of child development, non-violent discipline and positive parenting, communication skills, conflict resolution strategies, social support, and reduce the risk of child abuse.

e. Functional Family Therapy for mental health: a short-term prevention program for at-risk youth and their families that addresses risk and protective factors that impact the adaptive development of the youth who have been referred for behavioral or emotional problems.

5. Advancing an organizational structure and care framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of traumas. These efforts to transform ADFAN into a trauma-informed care system are guided by four phases and will impact trauma-informed training, service provision, and policy development. This work is done in collaboration with the Evidence-Based Board of Puerto Rico to transform ADFAN into a trauma-informed care system. Conceptual and operational definitions of the trauma-informed approach were developed for Families First Puerto Rico. Also, the following internal policies have been developed and adopted: (a) Trauma-Informed Approach Policy, (b) Recruitment Protocol: Interview, Selection, and Pre-Service of the Social Worker and Supervisor, and (c) Evaluation of Practice Standards for Trauma-Informed Approach.

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6. Supporting ADFAN workers' development with training and continuing education that integrates the Family First requirements, building upon the existing training and delivery methods to enhance the onboarding process, ongoing training, and continuing education. Workforce recruitment and retention strategies will also be incorporated, and new training modules will be developed for external providers. A training curriculum has been developed, covering 11 topics: Families First introductory training, trauma, trauma-informed approach, evidence-based practices, teleservices, core curriculum on childhood trauma, integrative approach to trauma, motivational interviewing, foundation for outreach through experiential child advocacy studies training, leadership academy, and wellness and mindfulness program.

7. Consultation and coordination among stakeholders. The plan outlines a stakeholder engagement workgroup, collaborative efforts, and feedback mechanisms to continuously improve the plan.

8. Ensuring accurate and timely reporting on prevention programs with robust systems for tracking service delivery and outcomes, in compliance with federal reporting requirements, and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure data accuracy and program fidelity.

9. Implementing a comprehensive evaluation strategy to monitor implementation and ensure continuous improvement. This will require tracking key indicators, performing an ongoing assessment and adjustment of strategies to improve service quality and effectiveness, and partnering with external evaluators to provide an objective assessment of program effectiveness.

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10. Adoption of specific protocols for reporting missing or abducted children and youth, which include immediate reporting and coordination between child welfare services and law enforcement, and strategies to prevent abductions and ensure the safety of children in the system.



Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement Strategy

Table 1. Outcome of Preservation Service for Families in Puerto Rico

Goal of Families First:

Reduce entry, re-entry and census into Foster Care

Expected results are achieved in each intervention and program and family functioning improve including:

- Family adherence to the services agreed during the case management process.
- Adults' well-being:
 - Increase positive parenting practices
 - Decrease parents' and caregivers' substance use
 - Decrease the parents' and caregivers' mental or emotional health
 - Increase family functioning
- Minors' well-being:
 - Increase behavioral and emotional functioning
 - Decrease substance use
 - Decrease delinquent behavior
- Minors' permanency:
 - Out-of-home placement
 - Placement stability

Table 2. Outcome in training for the ADFAN workforce

Goal of Families First:

Promote ADFAN as trauma-informed care and welfare system for children adolescents, and families

Expected results for the ADFAN workforce:

- Knowledge and skills in Trauma and Trauma-Informed Approaches
- Develop mindfulness skills
- Increase in overall well-being
- Development of leadership competencies and skills