

Parenting, child care services have most potential to help low-income families

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Credit: Washington University in St. Louis

Child care, parenting and child health/health care are important factors in improving the lives of children in low-income families, according to a new study from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

Researchers conducted a national survey of staff at helplines where consumers dial 211 for community information and referral services. Staff at 211 helplines interact with both [low-income families](#) and local social-service agencies, which gives them unique insights into community resources.

The survey asked 211 staff to rank the needs of callers with children based on which needs, if addressed, would help families most. Researchers compiled responses from a total of 471 information and referral specialists, resource managers and call-center directors from 44 states, Puerto Rico and Canada.

Child care, parenting and child [health care](#) were rated most important. Respondents said the adequacy of resources to address those issues varied, with most saying their communities had adequate resources for health care but not for help with serious [child](#) problems or quality, affordable [child care](#). Authors of the study say the results suggest that regular screenings for those issues by professionals such as health care providers would be valuable.

"Brief screenings for social needs by 211 staff or [health care providers](#), followed by provision of referrals to community resources, have the potential to substantially alter the life course of children living in poverty," said Tess Thompson, research assistant professor at the Brown School and lead author of the study, "What Would Help Low-income Families?: Results from a North American Survey of 211 Helpline Professionals," published May 23 in the Journal of Child Health Care.

"At the same time, advocacy efforts are needed both nationally and at the local level to establish, expand or redirect resources and ensure that all families get the help they need," Thompson said.

More information: Tess Thompson et al. What would help low-income families?: Results from a North American survey of 2-1-1 helpline professionals, *Journal of Child Health Care* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/1367493518777152](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367493518777152)

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