



# The Intersection of Illicit Substance Use Disorder and Child Support

A Preliminary Examination

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Presentation to National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics 2019 Workshop

July 2019

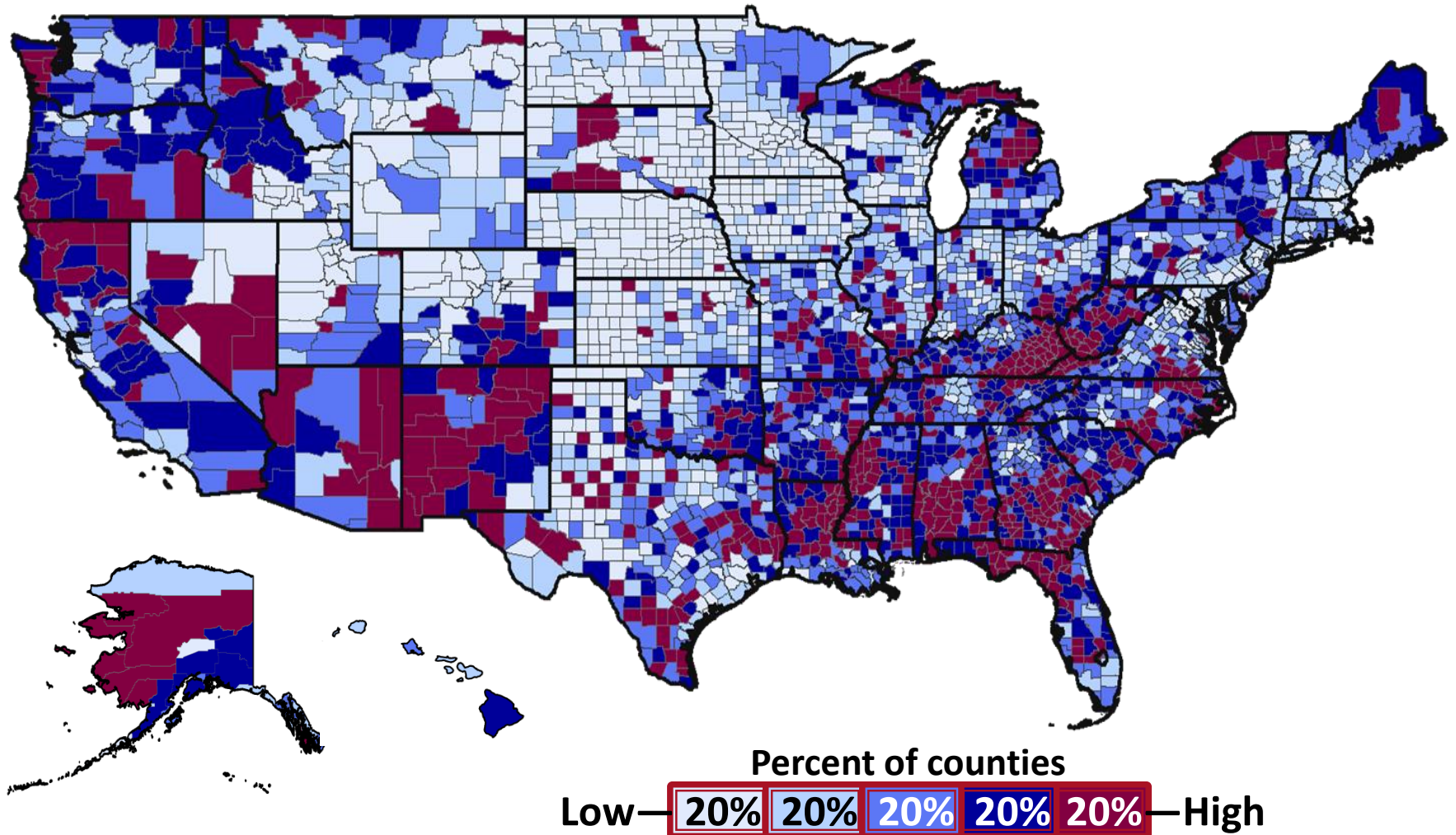
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Lauren Antelo • Annette Waters

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# Percent Males 20-64 Not Employed by County: 2012–2016

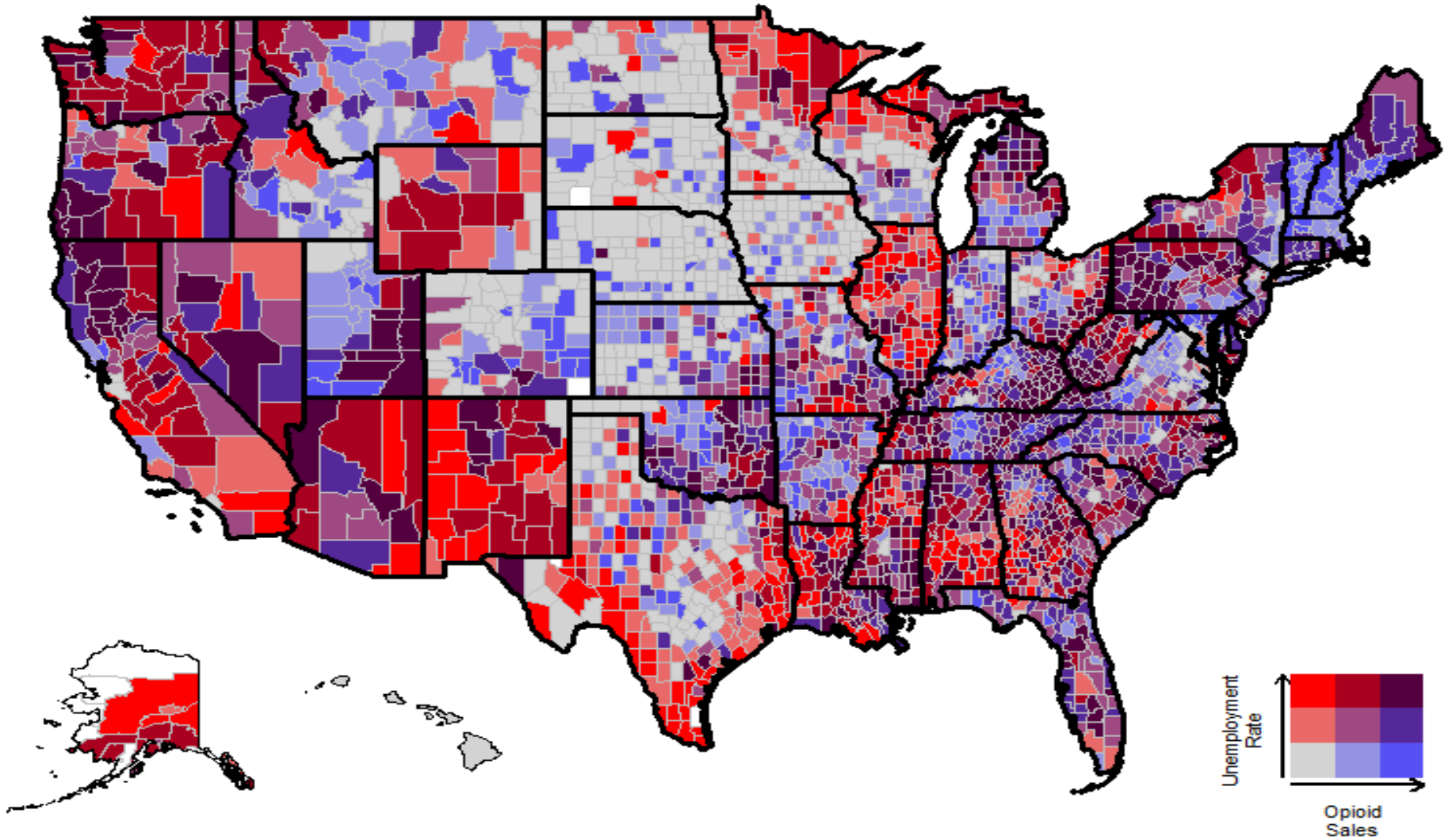
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**Note:** Men not employed is the sum of those who are not in the labor force and those who are unemployed.  
**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2012-2016.

# Unemployment Rates and Retail Opioids Sales: 2016

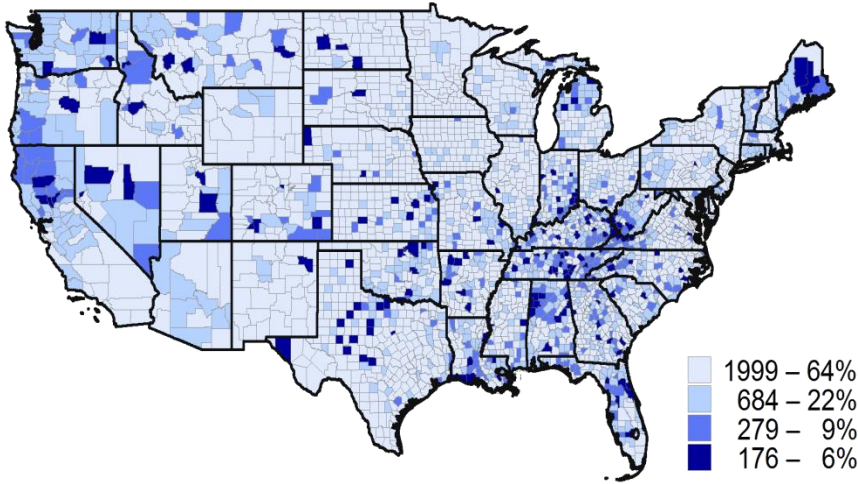
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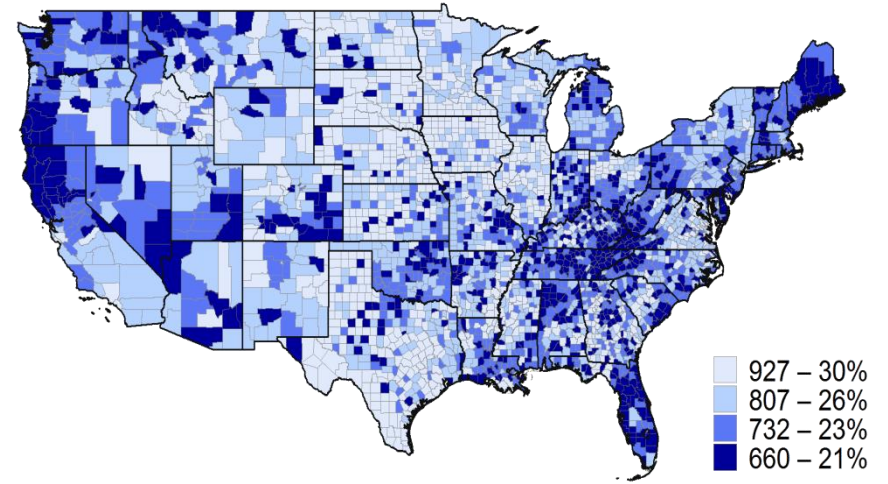
# Change in Retail Opioid Sales: 2006 - 2016

(volume MMEs)

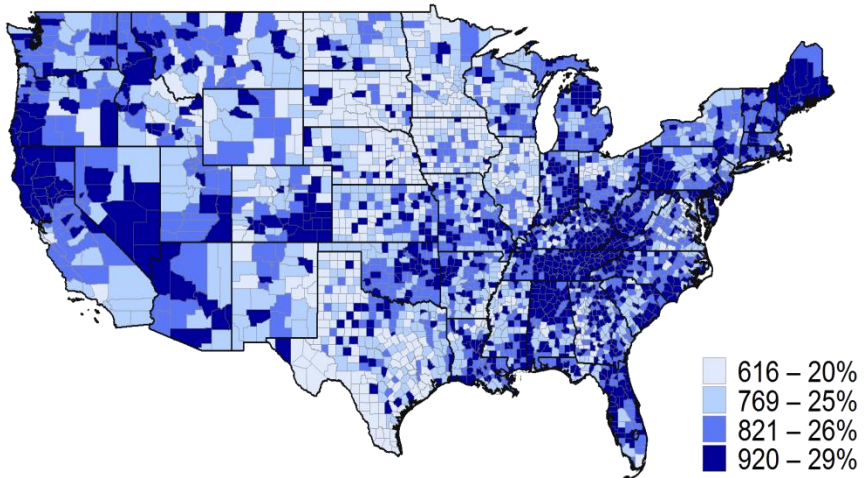
**2006**



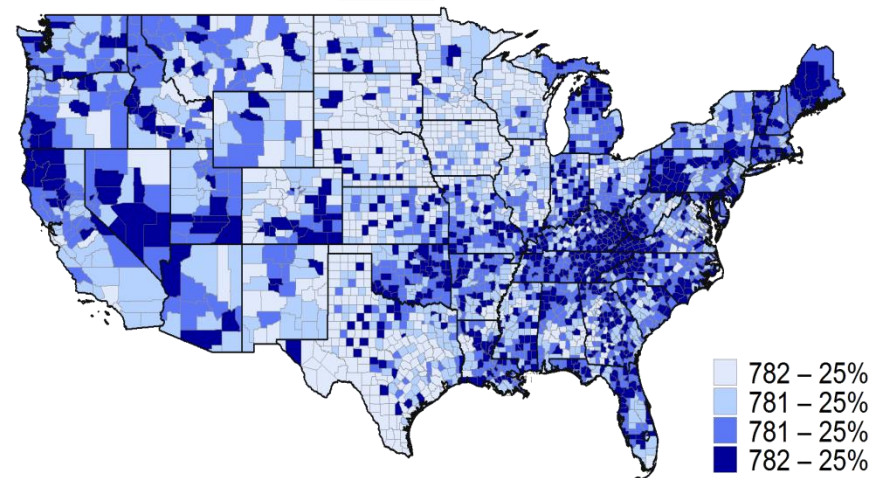
**2009**



**2012**

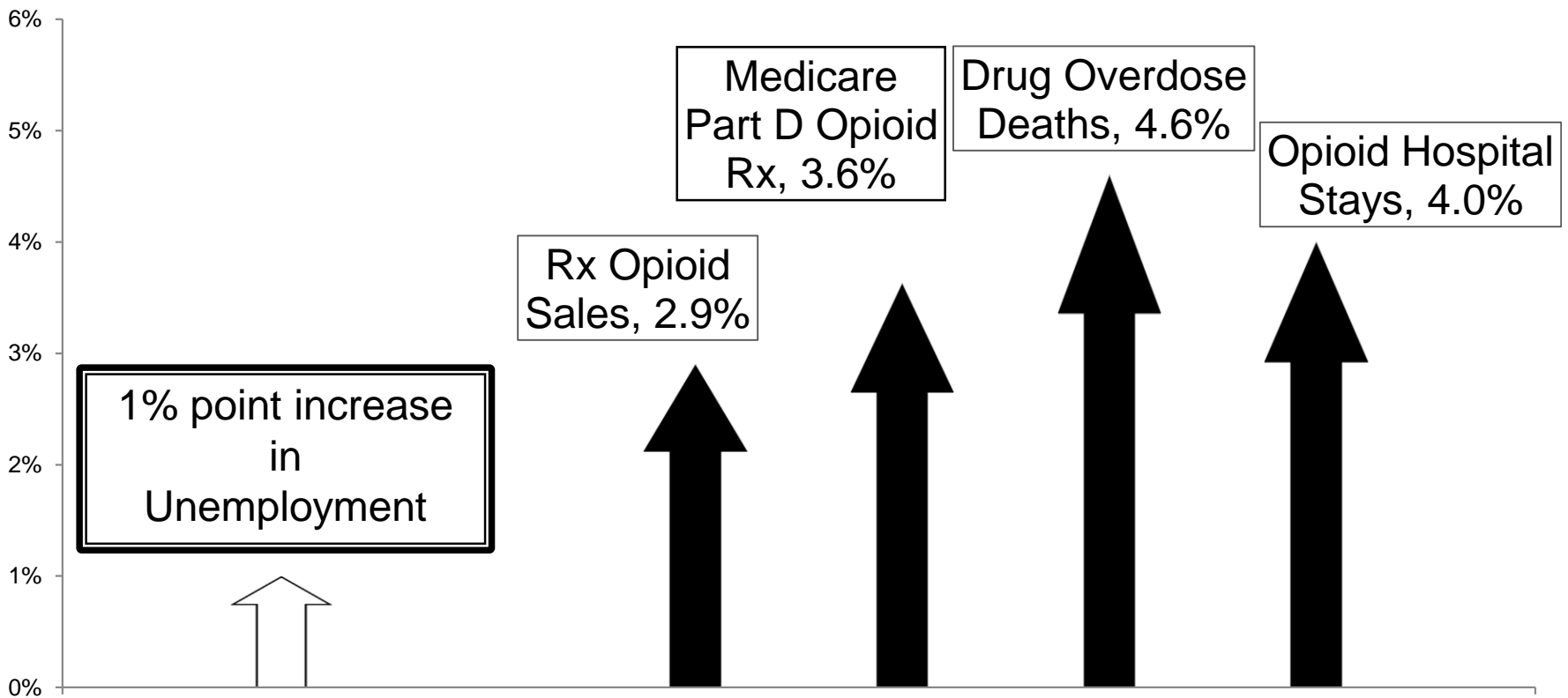


**2016**



Note: Each maps drawn using 2015 quartile boundaries: [0 to 50] (50 to 76] (76 to 111] (111 and up]

# Substance Use Prevalence and Unemployment Rates



N=31,373, 31,286, 31,343, and 8,479 for opioid sales, Medicare Part D claims, deaths, and hospitalization data sets, respectively. This graph shows that unemployment is associated with these outcomes, unemployment does not cause these outcomes. Data are for 2006-2015 for all opioid sales and drug deaths, and for 2011 through 2014 for hospital stays. Relationships statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Results from statistical model adjusting for county population, other demographic variables including race/ethnicity, age, and urbanicity, and other economic factors affecting a state in a given year.

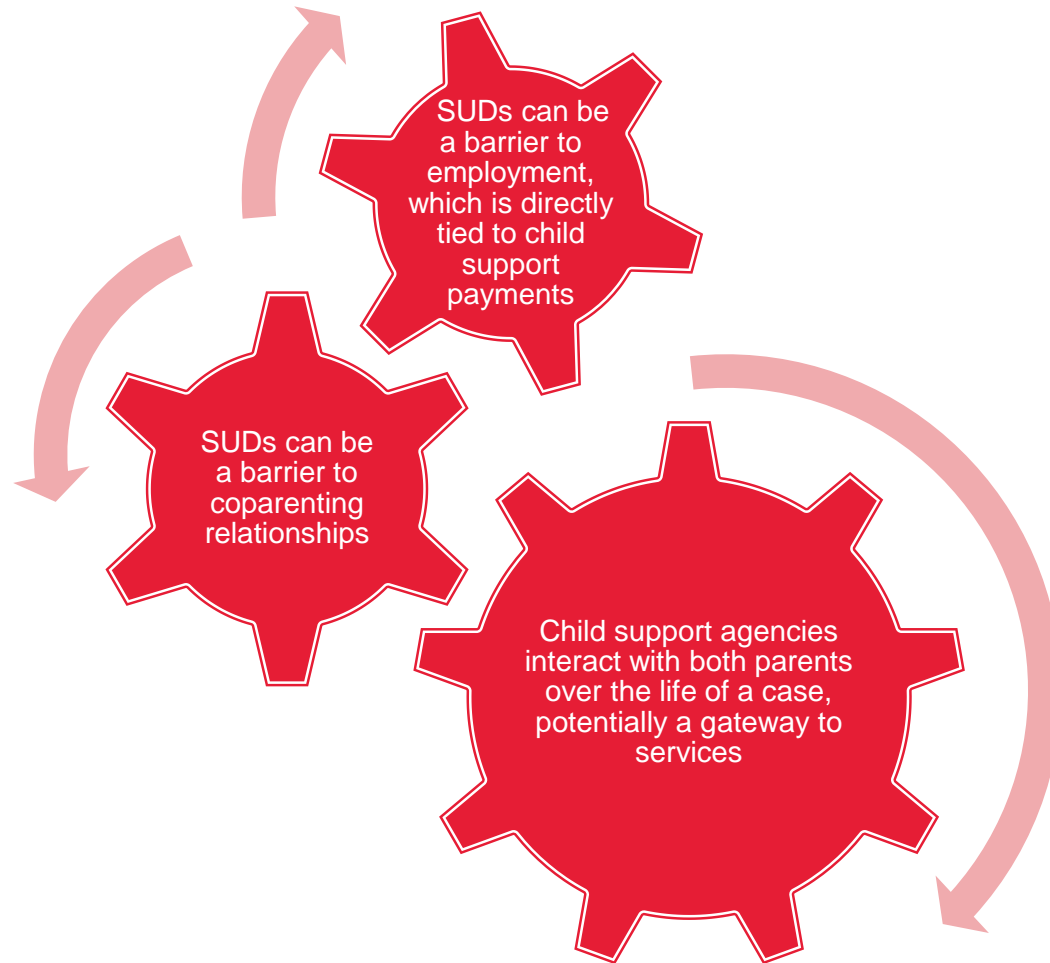
# Treating SUDs is Possible!

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- There are a number of evidence-based treatment approaches for SUDs:
  - SAMHSA’s Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center maintains a list of programs: <https://www.samhsa.gov/ebp-resource-center>
  - For OUD in particular, Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) is the standard of care:
    - 1 of 3 FDA-approved medications (Buprenorphine, Methadone and Naltrexone) paired with psychosocial supports
    - Reduce risk of overdose, increase treatment adherence, improved treatment/recovery outcomes

# Why does this matter for child support?

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# Background

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There has been little study of noncustodial parents (NCPs) with substance use disorders (SUDs)

How does SUD influence child support outcomes?



How does SUD affect a parent's ability to maintain employment?



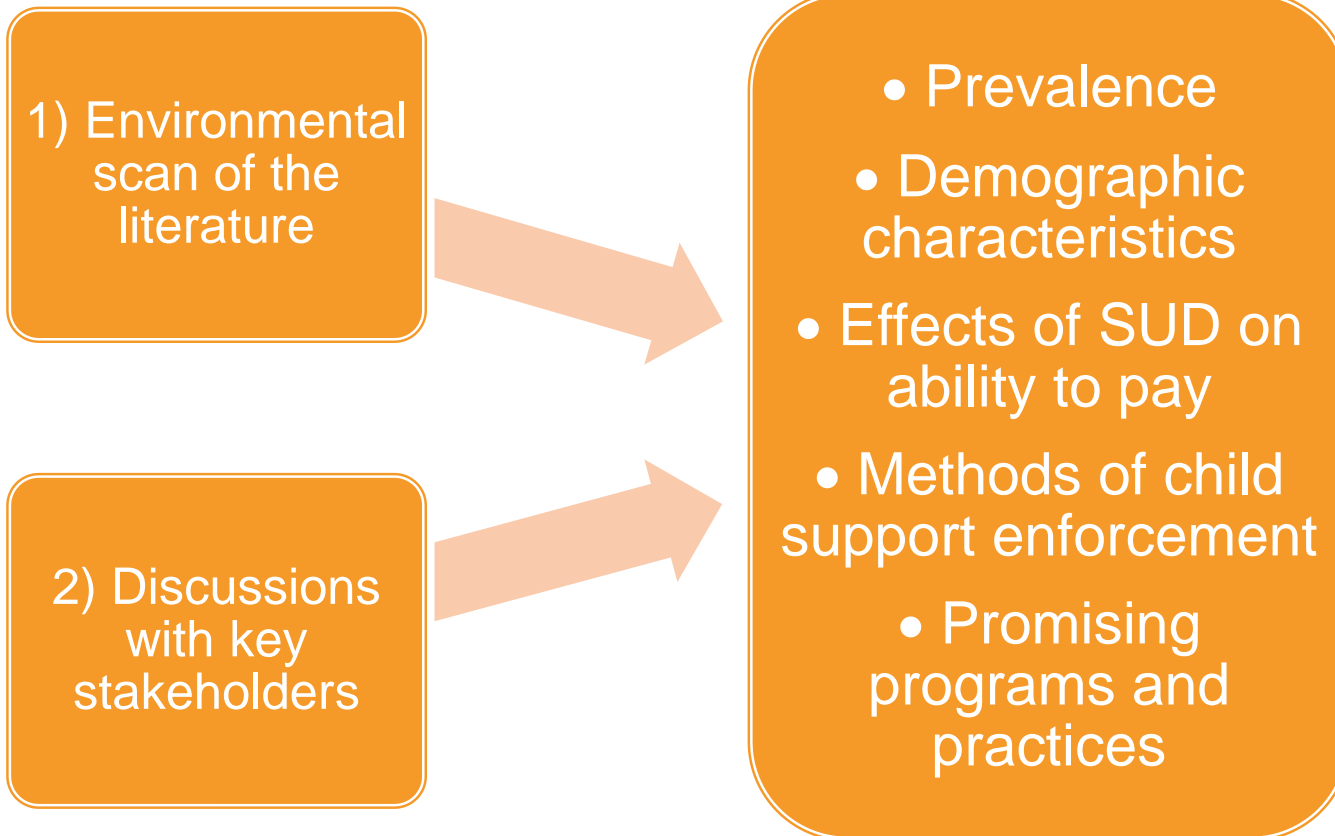
How do child support offices **identify and respond to** a client's SUD?





# Scope of Project

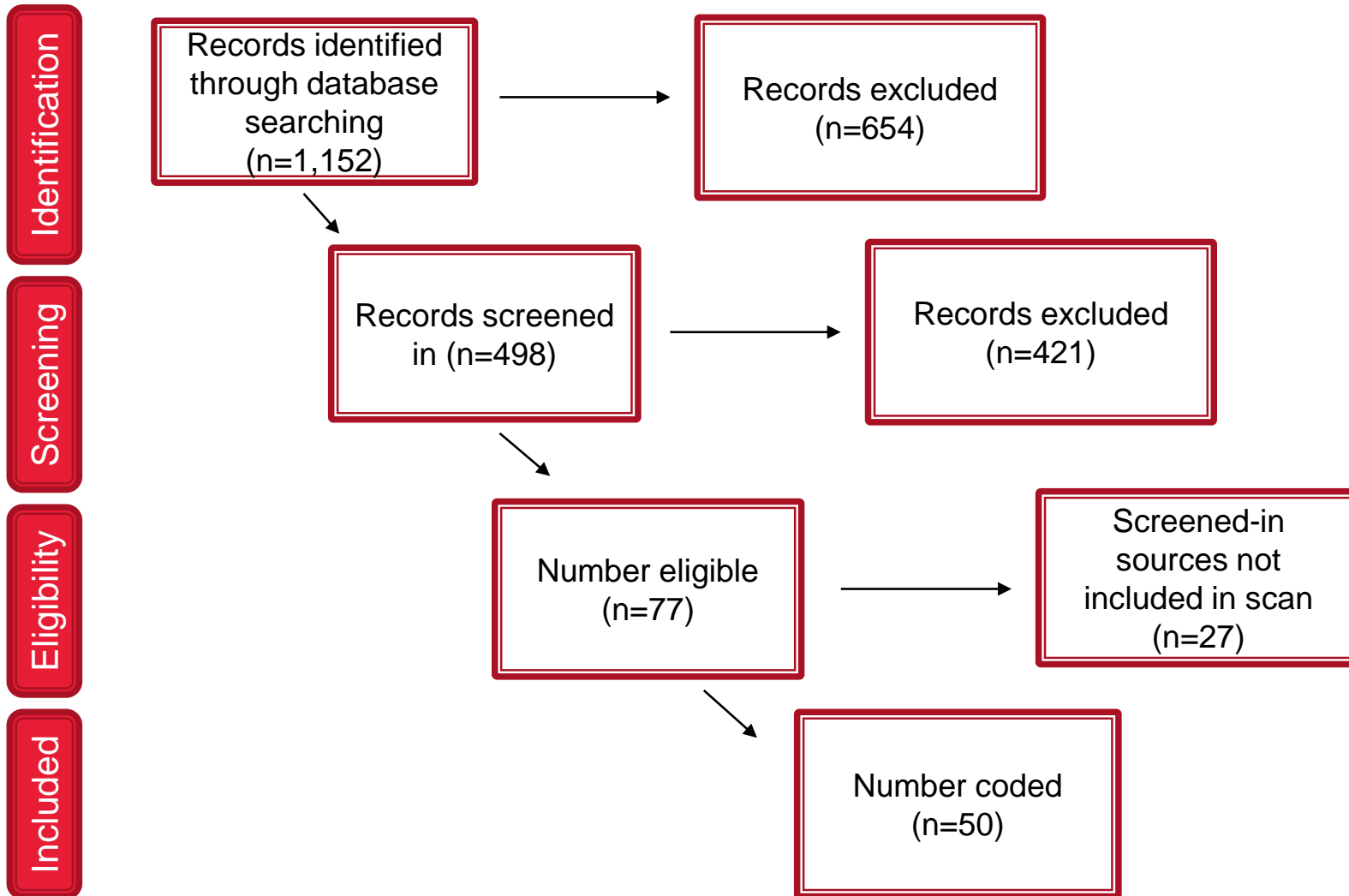
- This study had two components



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# Environmental Scan of the Literature

# Environmental Scan: Method



# Environmental Scan: Key Findings

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**The intersection of substance use and child support was not a common theme in the literature.**

- The literature contained little information on the prevalence of NCPs with SUDs.
- SUD and the ability to pay child support were often addressed in parallel but were rarely linked.
- The link between SUD, employment and child support payments was never fully examined.

# Environmental Scan: Key Findings

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- A general link between child support and SUD was observed in the legal context



- Literature on problem-solving courts included some mention of the intersection between SUD and child support
- Several sources mentioned the need for agency collaborations

- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) identified the impact of SUD on child support as an issue



- ACF's monthly child support newsletter mentioned SUD frequently
- We identified some promising programs and practices through these newsletters

# Environmental Scan: Key Findings

- There are programs that may serve NCPs with SUD, but these programs were aimed at a broader population
- We found little information about the prevalence of NCPs with SUDs in these programs



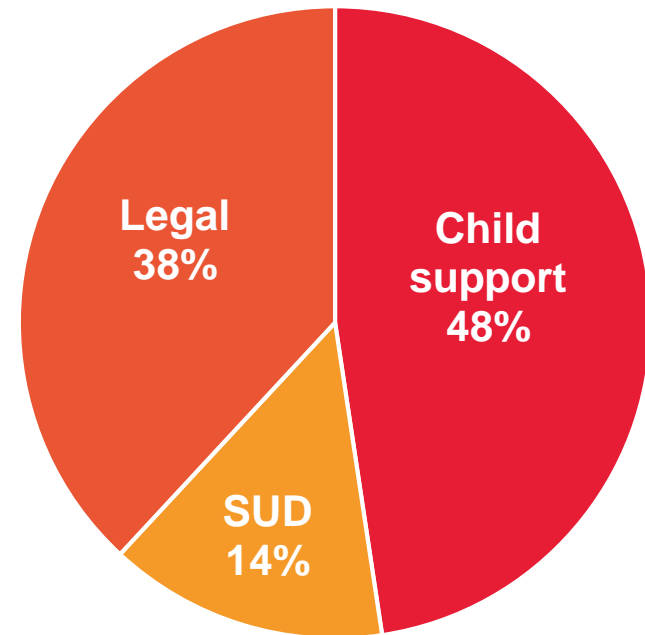
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# Discussions with Key Stakeholders

# Methods for Stakeholder Discussions

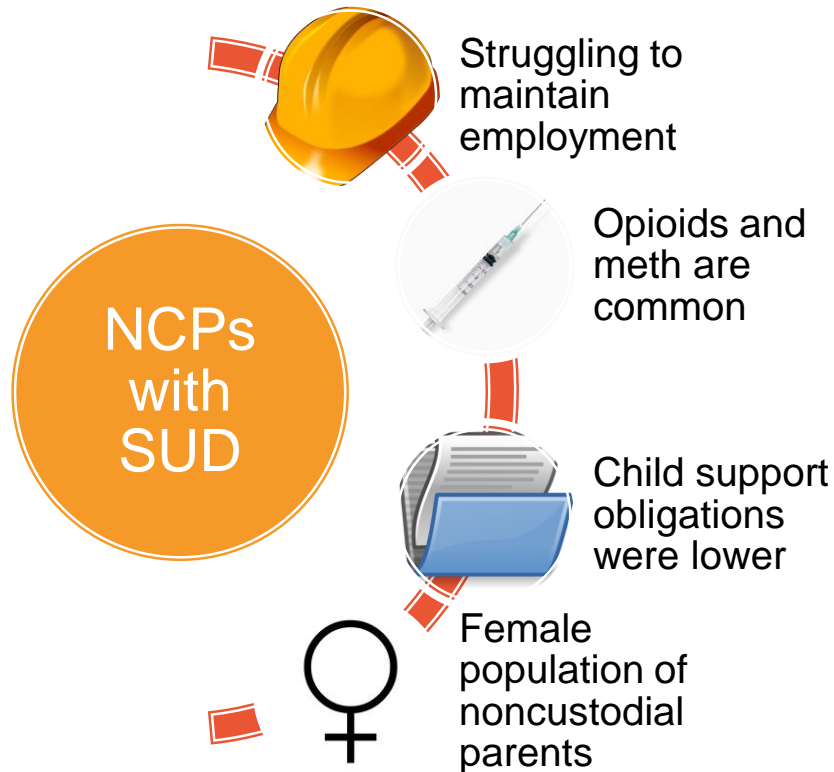
- Recruited stakeholders with expertise in child support, substance use, and legal fields
- Reached out to 46 potential respondents and conducted interviews with 21 of them
- Discussions took place over six weeks; each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes

Stakeholders' primary area of expertise





# Stakeholder Discussions: Key Findings



- **Demographic trends**
  - Lack of data on NCPs with SUD
- **Discovery of SUD**
  - Clients voluntarily disclose use or caseworkers notice signs
  - Formal drug screenings are not mandated and are rarely performed systematically
  - Typically discovered during enforcement stage

# Stakeholder Discussions: Key Findings

## • Impacts of SUD

- More difficult to maintain employment, meet child support obligations
- NCPs often do not have consistent or stable employment which makes income withholding difficult
- Difficulty accessing treatment

“Folks would say, ‘**Why don’t they just get a job?**’ and I would say, ‘Wow, there’s so much more to it than that.’”  
—*Substance use stakeholder*

“Case workers try their best to **establish trust** with NCPs when they are in treatment, but many relapse and either end up in jail or stop checking in and the Office of Child Support **loses track of them.**”

—*Child support stakeholder*

## • Procedures in NCP cases with SUD

- Same protocols for NCPs with/without SUD
- Modifications are primarily based on changes in financial status, indirectly related to SUD
- No laws to guarantee accommodations for those in treatment

# Stakeholder Discussions: Key Findings

**“Fathers are more than a paycheck.... The father is a parent and a pretty important piece of the puzzle for children to grow up happy, healthy, and productive.... **The emotional is just as important as the financial.**”**

*—Child support stakeholder*

**“I think we’re **quicker to blame** than we are to try to heal.”**

*—Substance use stakeholder*

- **Practices to help NCPs with SUD increase compliance**
  - **Helping NCPs sign up for Medicaid**
    - In many states (particularly in non-expansion states) NCPs are not eligible for Medicaid which is a major barrier to treatment.
  - **Employment programs**
  - **Programs specifically for this population (problem-solving court)**
- **Collaborative efforts with treatment**
  - **Most child support stakeholders reported a lack of collaboration**
  - **Good model: “one-stop shops”**
  - **Need for more collaboration**

# Stakeholder Discussions: Key Findings

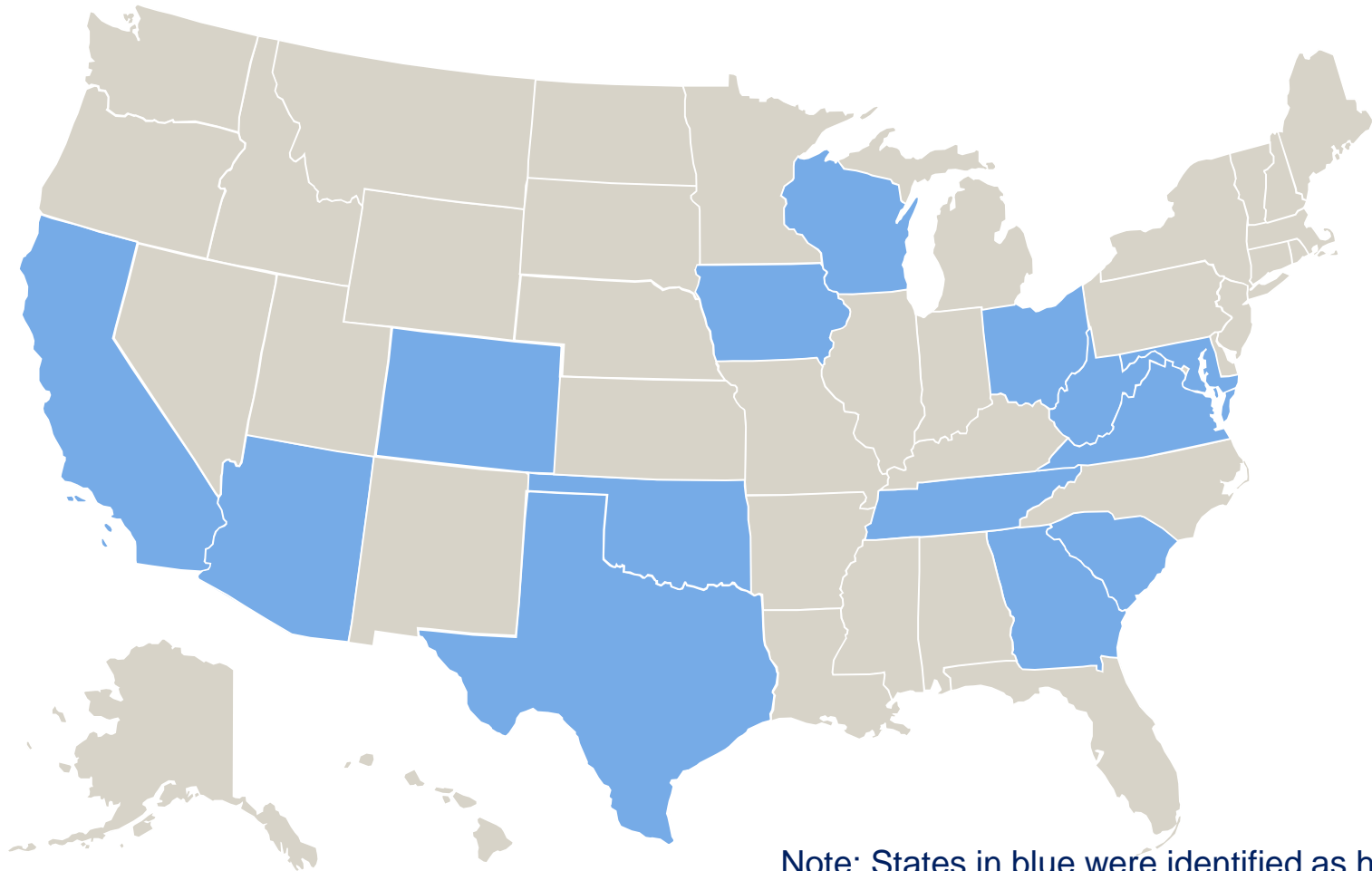
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- **Policy, judicial, and legal changes**
  - Some provisions to OCSE’s Modernization Rule have potential implications for this population
  - Gradual change in perspective regarding NCPs with SUD
  - Decreasing punitive actions, such as suspending driver’s licenses (but only in some states)
- **Final thoughts from stakeholders**
  - Understanding the intersection of SUD and child support is a salient issue
  - Further research is needed

**“It’s a serious enough problem that it warrants having a special focus.** The goal is to try and get NCPs to financially and emotionally support their child, and substance abuse is a huge barrier to be[ing] able to do that.”  
—*Child support stakeholder*

# Promising Programs and Practices

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Note: States in blue were identified as having programs or practices that will be discussed in this presentation.

# Promising Programs and Practices

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Problem-solving  
courts

Fatherhood/parenting  
programs

Programs for  
incarcerated or  
reentry populations

Change in driver's  
license revocation

Enhanced case  
management

Integrated programs  
or strategic  
partnerships with child  
support

# Promising Programs and Practices: Examples

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**PJAC:** an alternate to child support contempt grant program with enhanced case management. Some partner with employment and SUD treatment programs.

AZ, CA, MD,  
OH, VA

**Parent Accountability Court:** a jail-diversion program for parents who have issues other than unemployment (such as SUD).

GA

**Medical legal/partnerships:** nationwide program established in 47 states that forms integrated, cross-discipline care teams.

Nationwide

# Promising Programs and Practices: Examples

**CSPED:** offered services in enhanced child support services, employment assistance, parenting education, and case management. Some states continue following demonstration end.

CA, CO, IA,  
OH, SC, TN,  
TX, WI

**Ohio Fatherhood Program:** addresses underlying issues that affect parents' ability to meet their obligations.

OH

**Change in driver's license revocation:** select counties have changed their policies to be more lenient on driver's license revocation for NCPs.

OH/IN



# Strategies for child support agencies to consider:

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- Review child support orders for a potential modification when a noncustodial parent is in treatment;
- Suspend arrears accumulation while a noncustodial parent is in treatment;
- Partner with an employment program that has a tiered approach;
- Help noncustodial parents sign up for Medicaid to access treatment;
- Partner with a community-based organization with expertise in working with individuals with SUDs;
- Work with a medical-legal partnership;
- Consider how license suspension and reinstatement is used in the context of treatment;
- Train staff on how to interact with parents with SUDs.

# Directions for Future Work

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**This study is exploratory and limited to a few states and a select group of experts. However, it sheds light on gaps needing further analysis, such as:**

- Descriptive research on the population of noncustodial parents with SUDs and the prevalence of SUD among noncustodial parents.**
- Understanding how issues associated with SUD may compound a noncustodial parent's difficulty in meeting their financial obligations, such as polysubstance use, co-occurring mental health conditions, and inability to access treatment.**
- How child support compliance efforts interact with SUD treatment.**

# For More Information

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- [Illicit Substance Use and Child Support: An Exploratory Study](#)
- For any follow-up, please contact:
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