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**GEORGIA CHILDREN'S CABINET**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

**FISCAL YEAR 2025**

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This Annual Report summarizes the work of the Georgia Children's Cabinet (Cabinet) for fiscal year (FY) 2025 (July 2024 to June 2025). During FY25, the Children's Cabinet updated their strategic plan to include four new goal areas: family engagement, preventive and proactive interventions, best practices and innovative ideas, and Two-Generation (2Gen) capacity building.

In FY 2025, the Cabinet held five meetings: three executive Cabinet meetings and two meetings of the full Cabinet. Members of the executive Cabinet also attended the full Cabinet meetings. All meetings were held in-person; full Cabinet meetings were held at the Governor's Mansion and executive Cabinet meetings were held the Department of Early Care and Learning's (DECAL) office in Atlanta. Faculty from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (Institute of Government) facilitated and provided technical support for all meetings. In addition to executive and full Cabinet meetings, faculty from the Institute of Government coordinated strategic planning meetings with members of the executive Children's Cabinet to refine and develop updated goal areas for a new strategic plan.

## CABINET STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2025 the Georgia Children's Cabinet finalized its strategic priorities for the next 4 years. The following goal areas were established to guide the work of the Children's Cabinet over the next five years.

### **Family Engagement**

The Cabinet is committed to prioritizing the voices of families by recognizing parents and adult caregivers as the foremost experts on the needs of their households and their well-being. To accomplish this goal, the Cabinet will actively promote the involvement of families throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and systems. Key focus areas will include aligning terminology to be more accessible for families, as well as integrating family-centered design principles into family-facing products, systems, and forms.

### **Preventative and Proactive Interventions**

The Cabinet will prioritize and coordinate efforts focused on preventive measures that address root causes, proactively mitigate risks, and enhance family resilience. Adopting a holistic approach, the Cabinet aims to improve family outcomes through the development and implementation of comprehensive programs and policies. Key focus areas will include developing integrated home visiting programs, supporting innovative literacy environments for both early learners and adults.

## Best Practices and Innovative Ideas

The Cabinet will serve as a central hub for exploring innovative ideas, national trends, and best practices. Key focus areas will include examining effective outcomes for children and families (e.g., housing, transportation, child care, and food insecurity), conducting research on emerging issues, and collaborating with national experts to stay informed on national trends and strategies.

## 2Gen Capacity Building

The Cabinet will continue to strengthen capacity for 2Gen approaches (whole family) that improve the economic and social well-being of families through interagency collaborations, professional development, projects, and outreach. Key focus areas will include sustaining the 2Gen Academy and continuing to align participants with Cabinet agency programs and sponsors, implementing a 2Gen workshop for supervisors, and hosting a biennial 2Gen Summit.



## 2GEN ACADEMY

In FY 2025, the Georgia Children's Cabinet continued the Georgia 2Gen Academy with a third cohort of participants. The Cabinet partnered with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government to create and implement the Academy, whose goal is to develop leaders who can execute a collaborative strategy using a 2Gen approach to improve outcomes for Georgia's children and families. The third cohort of attendees was composed of 25 participants from 13 state agencies.

Instruction and group activities were delivered in 11 sessions over ten months. As part of the Academy, participants learned the key tenets of the 2Gen approach, including centering family voice in decision making, designing programs around the needs of families, understanding human-centered design, using systems thinking, applying an antipoverty mindset when supporting families on their way to self-sufficiency, and understanding the importance of data when developing 2Gen program goals and communicating program outcomes.

Capstone projects were an integral part of the 2Gen Academy, giving participants an opportunity to apply the concepts learned in each session and to develop interagency relationships. Five interagency capstone project teams were formed and paired with a family project advisor, allowing participants to put families at the center of analysis. The project teams enabled cross-agency learning about state programs and collaborative problem solving while fostering new connections with colleagues in sister agencies serving the same family.

The cohort-based structure of the 2Gen Academy allows members to develop relationships with peers in other organizations that can facilitate improved services for the populations they serve.

I probably would have never formed relationships with the other agencies, if it was not for 2Gen ... there are many instances that we could benefit from working together or using each other as a resource for different projects.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF THE 2GEN ACADEMY

Build knowledge of the 2Gen Model and its application.

Learn and apply the principles of systems thinking and human-centered design to effect organizational change.

Learn strategies to engage local partners and work across organizational boundaries.

Identify 2Gen approaches to improve collaboration among organization staff and local partners.

Understand how to create and sustain 2Gen programs.

## CAPSTONE PROJECTS

The following are the five capstone projects completed by the third cohort of the 2Gen Academy. The Department of Human Services and Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities provided support and direction to the project teams.

### **Georgia Gateway Projects**

Georgia Gateway is the online portal that families use to apply for a variety of benefits, including CAPS, SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, and TANF. The state is planning a process to update the system. The 2Gen Academy capstone projects supported the Department of Human Services' efforts to improve the experience for both families and staff as they interact with the system.

#### *Georgia Gateway: Family Experience*

This project focused on the experience of a family through the application and eligibility process of the Georgia Gateway system. This group examined the functionality of the system and explored opportunities for improvement to increase participant ease and accessibility across the state. In partnership with their family project advisor, this group utilized a human-centered design approach to center the experience of families using this system throughout their project. The project team presented research on the Georgia Gateway system, including the number of

families that use it, what benefits are offered through it, and ways families can access it currently. The group made recommendations to improve the user experience including a simplified application process, accessible and user-friendly communication, mobile and digital experience enhancements, and flexibility for families.

Project Members: Amanda Tarpley (DECAL), Bradly Green (DHS), Greg Barrett (GEEARS), Sarah Richards (GOSA), Sheila Carter (DPH), Tracie Paggett (TCSG)

#### *Georgia Gateway: Support Experience*

This project focused on enhancing Gateway Community Partners program. The project team sought to identify service gaps, improve user experiences, and foster stronger local connections within the Gateway system. Gateway Community Partners are trusted organizations like foodbanks, domestic violence shelters, and community organizations that work in collaboration with the State of Georgia to help individuals and families access public assistance programs. They assist citizens in navigating the Georgia Gateway system and connect them with essential services such as food assistance, healthcare, childcare, and other critical support services.

Project team members presented data on Georgia Gateway Community Partners and explained how an expanded program could be a force multiplier for DFCS to assist more families in a cost effective way. This group provided recommendations implementing a phased staffing expansion based on district and regional needs, and shifting program focus from recruitment to development, support, and retention.

Project Members: Jill Taylor (DECAL), John Barnes (DHS), Juan Wilson (TCSG), Laura Miller (United Way)



2024–2025 Georgia Children's Cabinet 2Gen Academy Cohort 3 Graduates

## Opioid Crisis Projects

As the opioid authority for the state of Georgia, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) is responsible for overseeing opioid treatment, recovery, prevention, and harm reduction related programs, providing clinical guidance, and maintaining a plan for continuity of care. The 2Gen Academy capstone projects supported DBHDD's opioid prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts for Georgia.

### *Opioid Crisis: Prevention*

This project focused on identifying culturally responsive prevention frameworks for adolescents ages ten to 19. Early prevention efforts can help stop substance misuse before it begins. Current prevention programming is broad and may not directly address opioid use or be impactful for all populations. To address this, the project group compiled research on existing prevention initiatives for youth across Georgia to examine the state of primary prevention programs in Georgia and to identify gaps in services, specifically in rural areas. They examined prevention models and highlighted four exemplary prevention programs - Prevention Clubhouse Model, Black Boys Better, Georgia PAST Project, and Sources of Strength. They identified the following components of successful programs: positive behavioral health, peer support, mentorship, and family engagement. They provided recommendations to DBHDD covering four areas: (1) funding, (2) partnerships, (3) 2Gen approach, and (4) awareness building and training.

Project Members: LaTonya Williams (DBHDD), Quandra Obi (DECAL), Samantha Fields (Dougherty County Schools), Tamara Barber (DJJ), Uzma Azhar (Voices)

### *Opioid Crisis: Treatment*

This project focused on maternal substance use and supporting pregnant women with Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) and their families. Maternal substance use is a priority area in Georgia's Opioid Response Strategic Plan, and a 2Gen approach lends itself well to supporting both mother and child during treatment. This project explored the best treatment modalities for pregnant women, identifying strategies that are effective for mothers while being safe and sustainable for infants. This project group's initiative aimed to remove barriers to care for pregnant women with OUD who are seeking treatment prior to giving birth, thus, reducing the number of babies born with Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome and the number of infants entering Division of Family and Children Services custody due to maternal opioid use.

The project group conducted research on existing Women's Treatment and Recovery Services across Georgia, including types of treatment facilities. In conjunction with their research, they worked with their family project advisor, someone with lived experience in this topic area, to identify barriers that women experience when seeking treatment (e.g., fear of loss of custody of children and access to transitional resources following treatment). This project group

suggested the expansion of Women's Treatment and Recovery Services to reduce barriers for women and families in Georgia.

Project Members: Anthony Daniels (DBHDD), Bridget Ratajczak (DECAL), Chelsea Benson (CJCC), Jayson Davis (DHS), Yeni Garcia-Villegas (Head Start)

#### *Opioid Crisis: Recovery*

This project focused on supporting youth in opioid recovery by addressing the whole family. Substance Use Disorder is a family disease, where one member's substance misuse can impact multiple generations. Typically, recovery plans focus on the individual and may not consider the broader impacts of the family, such as children's school performance, mental health services for all family members, and parenting supports to address reunification or relationship repair. This project explored frameworks and best practices that consider the needs of the larger family to support the individual in recovery.

This project group conducted research to identify best practices for program criteria for youth recovery programs. They identified the following components: peer support, comprehensive support services, family involvement, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity, outcome measurement, continuum of care, cross-sector collaboration, and strong privacy policies.

Project Members: Elina Acosta (CJCC), Emily Kelly (DJJ), Grace Morrow (DPH), Gwen Craddieith (DBHDD), Maria Ramos (Voices)

## 2GENACADEMY RESULTS

After each course and at the end of the program participants provide feedback on their experience. One of the objectives is to foster more interagency relationships and collaboration.

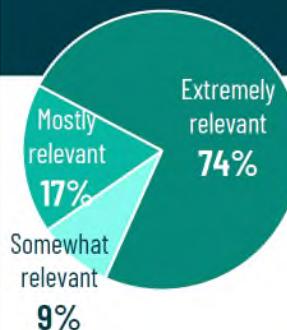
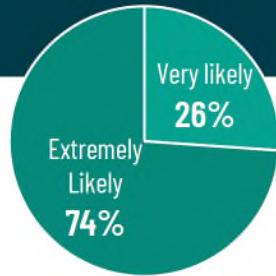


Participants indicate increased levels of engagement and collaboration both during the program and the see themselves collaboration more going forward.

All participants indicated they would recommend the program to a colleague. Participants also expressed that the content of the program was relevant to their work with 74% saying it was extremely relevant.

#### HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO RECOMMEND THIS COURSE TO A COLLEAGUE?

**“** This was a great experience and highly encouraged for all leaders, regardless of their placement within their organization, to take part in. **”**

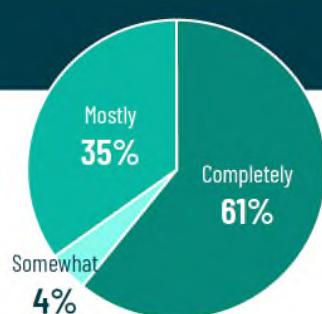


#### HOW RELEVANT WAS THE 2GEN ACADEMY MATERIAL TO THE WORK YOU DO?

**“** I found [the 2Gen Academy] to be one of the most challenging experiences in my professional career...I've grown on many levels learning how to navigate in unfamiliar territory and people from an array of backgrounds and distinctions. **”**

#### WITHIN 12 MONTHS, I PLAN ON PUTTING INTO PRACTICE SOMETHING I LEARNED FROM THIS COURSE.

**“** 2Gen has introduced me to family-centered education. I have always included the families, but my entire thought process around how I will include my students' families has changed. **”**



#### HOW PREPARED ARE YOU TO IMPLEMENT THE 2GEN CONCEPTS?

**“** I just want to thank you all for this amazing experience. It's not only taught me how to look at problems differently, it has allowed me how to connect with agencies more effectively to collaborate and share our resources to benefit the most people. **”**

Putting the content into practice contributes to the sustainability of the 2Gen approach among Children Cabinet organizations. Ninety two percent of the participants agree or strongly agree that within 12 months they will put into practice something they learned from the program. When asked if they are prepared to implement the 2Gen concepts, 96% said they are completely or mostly prepared to implement the concepts.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY HIGHLIGHT: MATCH PROGRAM

Two priorities in the Cabinet's strategic plan are to (1) develop protocols for families in crisis and (2) develop innovative approaches to improve outcomes for children and families. One way Cabinet agencies are advancing these priorities is through the MATCH (Multi-Agency Treatment for Children) Program. To date, the MATCH program's most significant impact has been the increased communication and collaboration between state agency partners and providers to better serve children and youth with complex behavioral health needs.

### **MATCH Mission and Purpose**

The MATCH Program is designed to lead a coordinated and accountable continuum of care to support children, youth, and young adults with complex behavioral health and other treatment needs. MATCH accepts referrals from local interagency children's committees throughout Georgia for cases where a child's behavioral health needs exceed the resources available in their local community or through their legal custodian.

### **MATCH Structure**

Authorized in the 2021 as part of House Bill 1013, *The Mental Health Parity Act*, the MATCH program is lead by DBHDD and is comprised of two subcommittees: the State MATCH Committee and the MATCH Clinical Team. These bodies work collaboratively across state agencies to identify and implement solutions for children and families with complex behavioral health needs.

State MATCH Committee includes representatives from mandated agencies well as state and local stakeholders, such as the SafetyNet Provider Network, Centers of Excellence, Local Interagency Planning Team (LIPT) Chairs, the Governor's Office, and advocacy organizations. Members are appointed by the DBHDD Commissioner. The State MATCH Committee is responsible for overseeing compliance with HB1013 and guiding the overall MATCH strategy. It also advises the Behavioral Health and Coordinating Council on services gaps, policy needs, and opportunities to improve supports for children and youth with complex needs.

This MATCH Clinical Committee is composed of clinicians, certified peer specialists, and administrators from key child-serving agencies such as DBHDD, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Department of Community Health (DCH), and the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE). The MATCH Clinical Team reviews and recommends appropriate services for children and youth whose complex behavioral treatment needs could not be met locally. They also identify and document systemic gaps, barriers, and policy issues that hinder access to care for these youth.

## **MATCH Program Highlights**

The MATCH Program has strengthened collaboration across state agencies and providers through pilot programs, improved coordination, and policy collaboration.

### *Pilot Initiatives*

MATCH has launched targeted pilot initiatives to expand access and improve outcomes, including:

- Devereux Short-Term Transition Program – Provides extended support and community integration for males with a diagnosis of an intellectual disability and co-occurring serious behavioral or psychiatric concerns and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
- Wellroot Functional Family Therapy – Extends intensive community-based therapeutic services using functional family therapy with strong success outcomes.
- Murphy Harpts Respite – Increases geographic access to respite care and opens eligibility to non-DFCS-custodial youth.
- Emergency Department (ED) – Embeds connection coordinators (via View Point Health) at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta to reduce ED boarding and expedite access to behavioral health services.

### *System Growth and Collaboration*

MATCH has facilitated increased transparency and coordination across agencies and providers. For the first time in many cases, agencies are proactively collaborating to discuss child-specific needs, offer insights, and align care plans before referrals are made. Providers have shared that they wouldn't be where they are today without MATCH. The MATCH Program is focused on cultivating an environment that encourages authentic, open communication.

### *Policy Clarification*

With DBHDD legal support, MATCH successfully advocated for clarification of licensing rules, allowing broader access to respite care. The State Committee is also reviewing recommendations from House Resolution 611 (i.e., House Study Committee on Abandoned Child Placement Following Hospital Discharge) to ensure earlier community transition planning for youth in psychiatric residential treatment facilities.

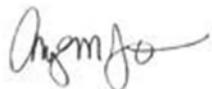
MATCH is changing the culture to build a more coordinated, responsive, and family-centered system of care.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIR

The Georgia Children's Cabinet is an important forum for interagency collaboration, coordination and shared learning. In FY2025 we have updated our strategic plan to focus on ways the Children's Cabinet members can work together and champion best practices that benefit children and families across Georgia. This year we celebrated the graduation of the third cohort of our 2Gen Academy. The 2Gen Academy is strengthening the fabric of cabinet member relations as our staff work together on cabinet priority projects and learn how to develop family centric programs and policies. The relationship building that is part of the 2Gen Academy is resulting in more collaboration during the program and after graduation. We are proud to have 78 alumni advancing 2Gen principles across 18 organizations.

I also want to thank Joy Hawkins who served as Co-Chair of the Children's Cabinet since 2019. Joy has been so valuable in helping guide the work of the cabinet and been a great champion of literacy programs in our state. We look forward to welcoming new leaders to the Children's Cabinet and together we will continue to make a difference for children and families in our state.

Gratefully,



Amy M. Jacobs  
Commissioner  
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

## APPENDIX A: GOVERNANCE AND LIST OF MEMBERS

On June 12, 2019, Georgia Governor Brian P. Kemp issued an executive order appointing the Georgia Children's Cabinet and charged the Cabinet with supporting a “sustainable and comprehensive system of education and care to best serve children and families in each region of our state.” He named the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) as the lead fiscal agency for the Cabinet and transferred responsibility for the Cabinet to the department. First Lady Marty Kemp serves as honorary chair of the Cabinet. DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement Executive Director Joy Hawkins serve as co-chairs.

The appointed executive and full Cabinet members for FY 2025 are shown below:

Table 1. Children Cabinet Members

EXECUTIVE CABINET MEMBERS	AGENCY
CANDICE BROCE	Georgia Department of Human Services and the Division of Family & Children Services
JERRY BRUCE	Georgia Office of the Child Advocate
RUSSELL CARLSON	Georgia Department of Community Health
GREG DOZIER	Technical College System of Georgia
AMY JACOBS	Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
ERIC JOHN	Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia
JAY NEAL	Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
SHAWANDA REYNOLDS-COBB	Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice
KEVIN TANNER	Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
KATHLEEN TOOMEY	Georgia Department of Public Health
RICHARD WOODS	Georgia Department of Education

FULL CABINET MEMBERS	AGENCY
MINDY BINDERMAN	Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students
AMANDA BURT	United Way of Northwest Georgia
MELISSA CARTER	Barton Child Law and Policy Center
KATIE DEMPSEY	Georgia House of Representatives
JUDY FITZGERALD	Voices for Georgia's Children
JOANNA HILL	Bright Promises Children's Center
MICHELLE SMITH LANK	Kids World Learning Center
SCOTT LINGRELL	University System of Georgia
MILTON J. LITTLE, JR.	United Way of Greater Atlanta
NORIS PRICE	Baldwin County Schools
ALLISON SETTERLIND	Georgia Head Start State Collaboration Office
FREDDIE POWELL SIMS	Georgia Senate
GAYE SMITH	Georgia Family Connection Partnership
PATTY STINSON	Georgia House of Representatives
BLAKE TILLERY	Georgia Senate
RICHARD WARD	Georgia Chapter – American Academy of Pediatrics
VONDA WOODALL	North Oconee High School
JUANITA YANCEY	Executive Officer for the Georgia Head Start Association