



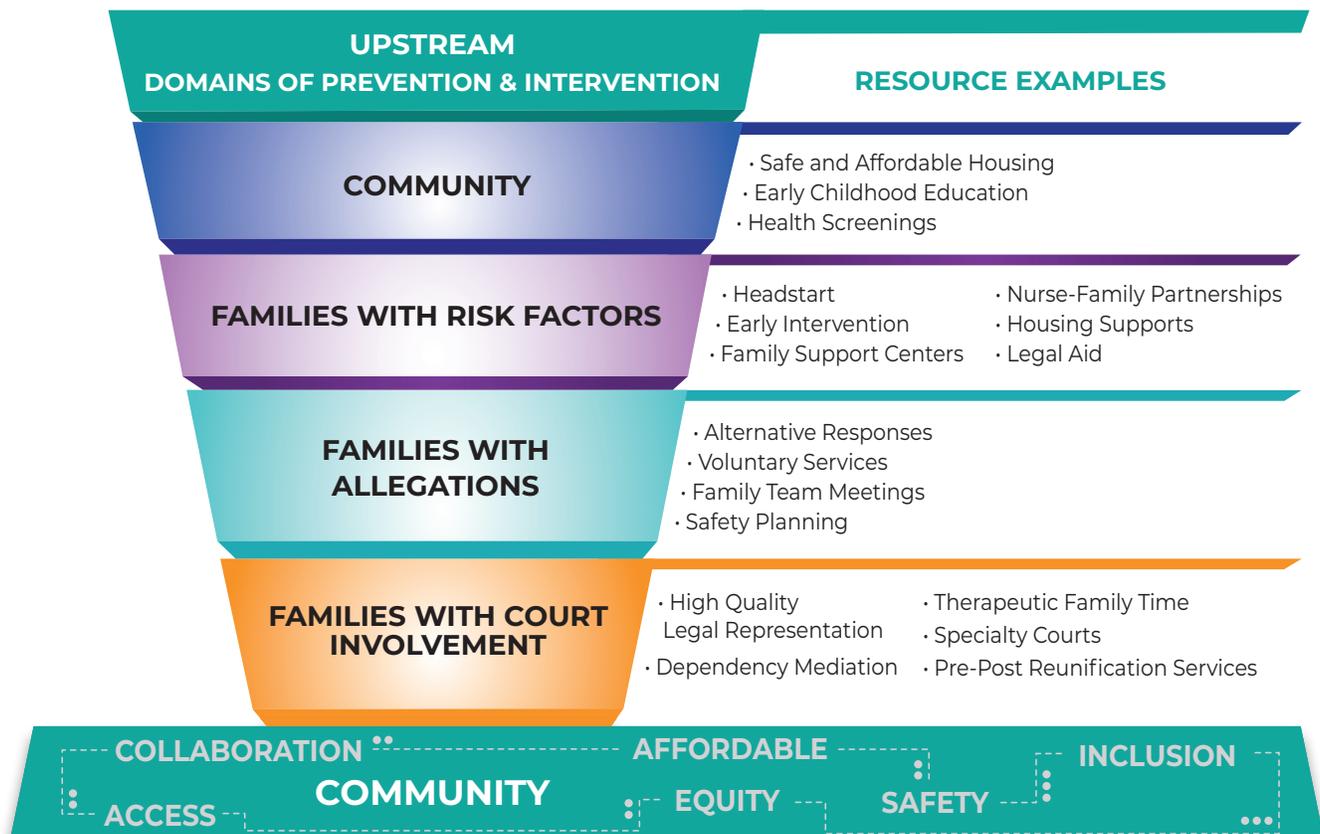
THE BENEFITS OF UPSTREAM FOR CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

Every community has a range of agencies, organizations, and systems tasked with providing the resources and supports families need to thrive. Too often, the effectiveness of these entities is limited by inequitable service availability and accessibility, lack of coordination and collaboration, and inadequate community engagement. This results in missed opportunities to identify and address risk factors before child welfare or court involvement.

Child welfare agencies often are placed with full responsibility for addressing the needs of families, yet they are only one part of the solution. A coordinated effort with court and community stakeholders can result in shared accountability, shared resources, and increased access to supports within the community.

A Framework for Community Collaboration

Upstream is a community-based approach that leverages judicial leadership and collaborations with child welfare agencies, state and local public agencies, community-based organizations, and community members to increase access to community-based services, prevent child maltreatment and out-of-home placement, reduce court involvement, and support strong, safe, and healthy families.



The Benefits of Upstream

Upstream sets a foundation for aligning and coordinating state and local efforts.

States can use Upstream as a catalyst to coordinate and align state and local efforts across the child welfare system and set a clear path toward a shared vision for promoting safe and healthy families and communities. Upstream focuses on community-specific needs and encourages communities to develop their own solutions, yet it also provides the opportunity for ongoing communication and alignment with state-level efforts.

Upstream provides a framework for convening stakeholders that live, work, or have connections to a particular community to determine the community's strengths, assets, resources, and challenges. Communities also incorporate state-level assessments and strategic plans, such as those conducted as part of the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) and Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) implementation, with knowledge about community-specific strengths, service needs, and gaps in resources.

Upstream fosters cross-system collaboration, partnership, and shared accountability.

A cross-systems team is essential for implementation of Upstream. A diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from the child welfare agency, the court, community-based providers, school representatives, members of the medical community, community members, and those with lived experience in the child welfare system, share and analyze information to map community strengths, assets, and resources. This sharing of information enhances cross-system communication, role-clarification, and transparency. An increased understanding of the community allows for targeted solutions.

All members of the cross-system group hold responsibility for the health and safety of the community. Each individual stakeholder contributes

unique and valuable knowledge and expertise. The influence of those with decision-making authority is critical to leverage change, and the experiences of individuals providing direct services and system-impacted individuals are central to informing change.

The Upstream process results in a collaborative action plan where agency, court, and community partners set shared goals and assume shared accountability for achieving their collective vision.

Upstream focuses on the individual, community, and systemic factors that increase the risk of child maltreatment and involvement with the child welfare system.

Grounded in the Social Determinants of Health,¹ Upstream helps communities identify opportunities to implement strategies for reducing risk and supporting safe environments for children. Responsibility for these strategies is intentionally shared across stakeholders with a focus on community-based services that are available to the families that most need them and accessible without needing to be system-involved.

Conclusion

Child welfare agencies have a critical role in supporting safe and healthy communities for families, but they cannot do it alone. The Upstream framework enhances cross-system collaboration and partnerships, breaks down silos and barriers, builds upon existing initiatives, and identifies resources and opportunities for integration. This collaboration leverages shared decision-making and coordination of resources and builds the foundation for improved outcomes for all children and families.



**Strengthening Children and Families through
Prevention and Intervention Strategies:
A COURT AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH**

¹ Centers for Disease Control. About Social Determinants of Health. <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html>