

Prior experiences are linked to how long families starting Reach Up in 2002-2007 remained in program

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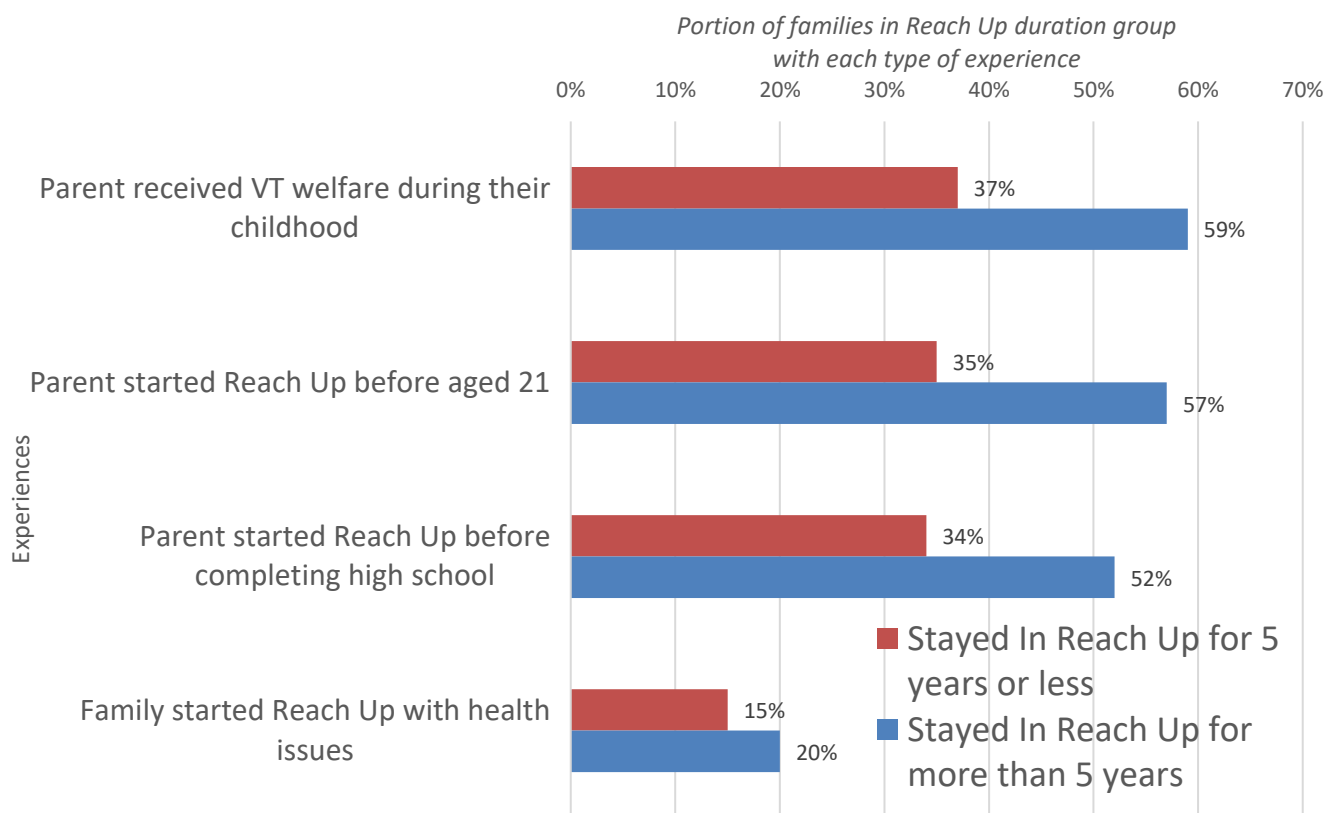
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Summary

Families who use the Reach Up program for more than five years are likely to share several early experiences that are relatively rare among families who use the program for a shorter time. Parents in the families with long-term needs for Reach Up assistance are more likely to have received Vermont welfare benefits as children, dropped out of high school before graduation and become parents before their 21st birthday. Families who continued using Reach Up for more than 5 years were also more likely to have entered the program facing parental or child health challenges.

Of all families who started Reach Up in 2002-2007, 25 percent continued using the program for 60 months or more.¹ The remaining families had participated for 60 months or fewer as of December 2017 when data collection for this study concluded. The study focused exclusively on the most common type of Reach Up family—families headed by single parents who were aged 30 or younger when they started the program.

Earlier experiences are linked to how long families remained in the Reach Up program



**Based on all families headed by single parents who were aged 30 or younger starting Reach Up for the first time as parents in 2002-2007. All months between 2002 and 2017 in which the family participated in the Reach Up program were included.*

¹ Total months of Reach Up participation in 2002-2017 were tabulated for each family regardless of whether families stayed in the program continuously or had multiple periods participating in the program separated by breaks of non-participation.

Background

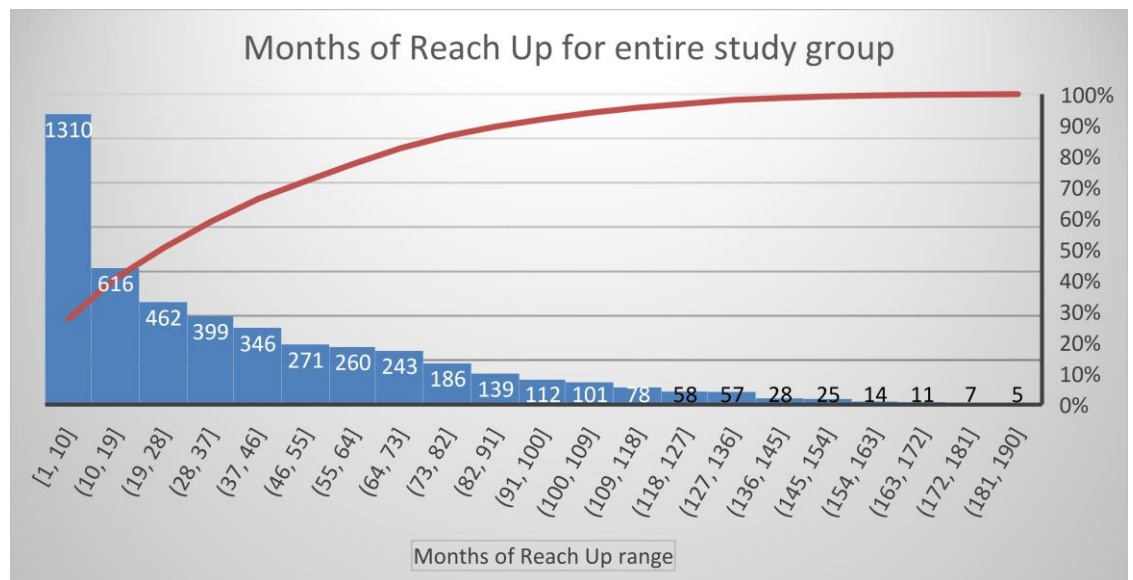
Methodology framework

- Studied all 4,728 single-parent families who started Reach Up for the first time in 2002-2007 when the parent was 30 years old or younger.
- Counted the total number of months that the family participated in the Reach Up program in 2002-2017, regardless of whether the months participating were continuous.
- Analyzed the relationship of family characteristics and experiences to the total number of months in 2002-2017 that the family participated in the Reach Up program.
- Potential factors correlated with long-term Reach Up participation were limited to those reported in monthly DCF Reach Up program extracts and monthly files of family members participating in Vermont’s welfare program in 1991-2001, prior to the Reach Up program’s implementation.

We conducted this analysis at the request of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF), Economic Services Division, in January 2018 through August 2018.

The median number of months of Reach Up assistance received by the families between 2002 and 2017 was 28. At the lower end of the duration range were the 28 percent of the families who participated in Reach Up for 10 or fewer months. At the upper end of the range were the eight percent who participated for more than 100 months.

A prior study of families in the Reach Up program in 2012 showed that many families receive assistance for a period, leave the program, and then return months or years later, generating multiple Reach Up “episodes.” This prior study showed that the more total months of Reach Up a family had accumulated, the greater the number of Reach Up episodes they were likely to have.²



² Black-Plumeau Consulting, LLC. *From short-term safety net to multi-generational income source: An analysis of varied welfare use patterns over two decades by Vermont families*, June 2013.

Early experiences linked to months of Reach Up participation

Parent received Vermont welfare as a child

According to an earlier study, more than half of the families in Reach Up in 2012 had indications of long-term, generational poverty in which welfare had been part of their lives, first as children and later as parents. Prior to the Reach Up program, Vermont provided financial support for very low-income families with children through a predecessor program.³

Many of the parents in our current study, who started Reach Up as parents in 2002-2007, also showed indications of generational poverty and used Vermont welfare assistance when they were children. A parent was considered to have received welfare benefits as a child if his or her social security number was associated with a child member of any case participating in Vermont's welfare programs in 1991 (the earliest year for which aggregated electronic records were available) through 2007.⁴

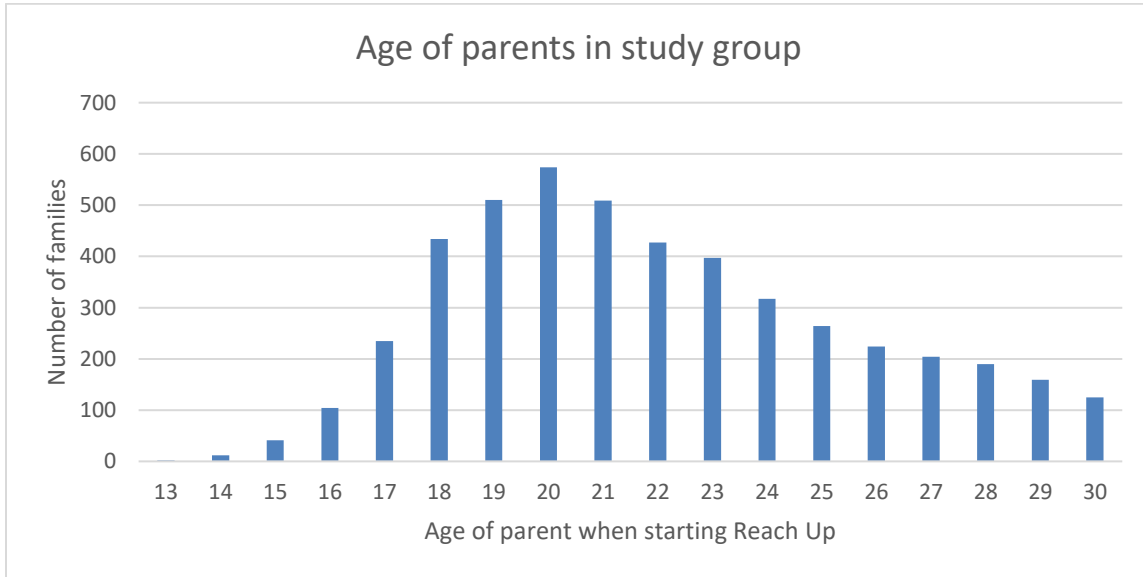
Families in which the parent had received benefits as a child through Reach Up or its predecessor program were likely to use Reach Up longer than other similar families. Among the families who used Reach Up for more than 5 years between 2002 and 2017, 59% were headed by parents who had received Vermont welfare benefits as children, according to the 1991-2007 records available. This is significantly higher than among families who used the Reach Up program for less than 5 years. 37% of these shorter-term participants were headed by parents who had received Vermont welfare benefits as children, according to the available data.

³ Vermont's welfare program assumed the name "Reach Up" in 2000 when the state implemented changes made to the federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families program as well as other changes.

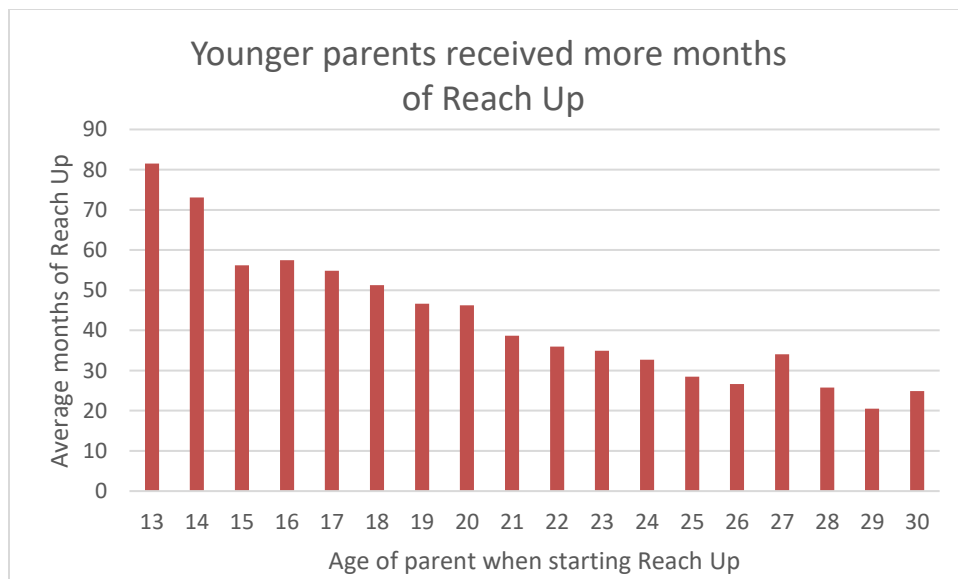
⁴ At least 42% of the Reach Up families in the current study had a parent who had used Vermont welfare as a child, according to records for 1991-2007. However, since many of these parents had childhood months spanning earlier than 1991, it is likely that the percentage of Reach Up families in which parents had received Vermont welfare is significantly higher. A prior study by Black-Plumeau Consulting found that at least 56% of all families participating in the Reach Up program in 2012 had received Vermont welfare benefits as children.

Age of parent when starting Reach Up

Although the families we studied were limited to those headed by parents who started Reach Up at age 30 or younger, parent ages ranged down to 13. The median age when starting Reach Up among the families we studied was 21. To enter the Reach Up program, a parent must be either pregnant or already caring for at least one child.



The younger a parent was when they started Reach Up, the more total months they were likely to participate in the program.

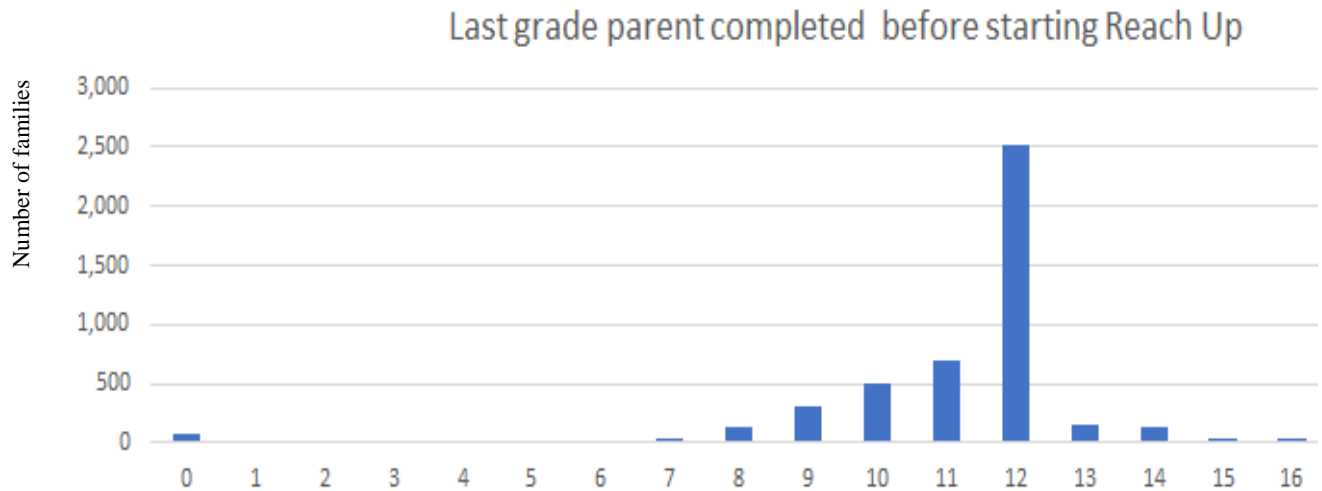


Among the families who stayed in the Reach Up program for more than 5 years, 57 percent were headed by a parent who entered the program before reaching the age of 21, compared to 35 percent among the families in Reach Up for shorter durations. This difference is likely due to the demands of parenting at a young age coupled with the expanded years of potential child rearing when the first pregnancy is early in life.

Parent education before starting Reach Up

Although many parents participating in Reach Up go on to complete additional education while they are in the program, we found a correlation between the parent’s education level before starting Reach Up and the number of months that they continued to participate in the program. The fewer years of education a parent had completed when they started Reach Up, the longer their likely use of the Reach Up program.

Although most parents we studied had completed high school before starting Reach Up, 39 percent had not yet completed 12th grade.

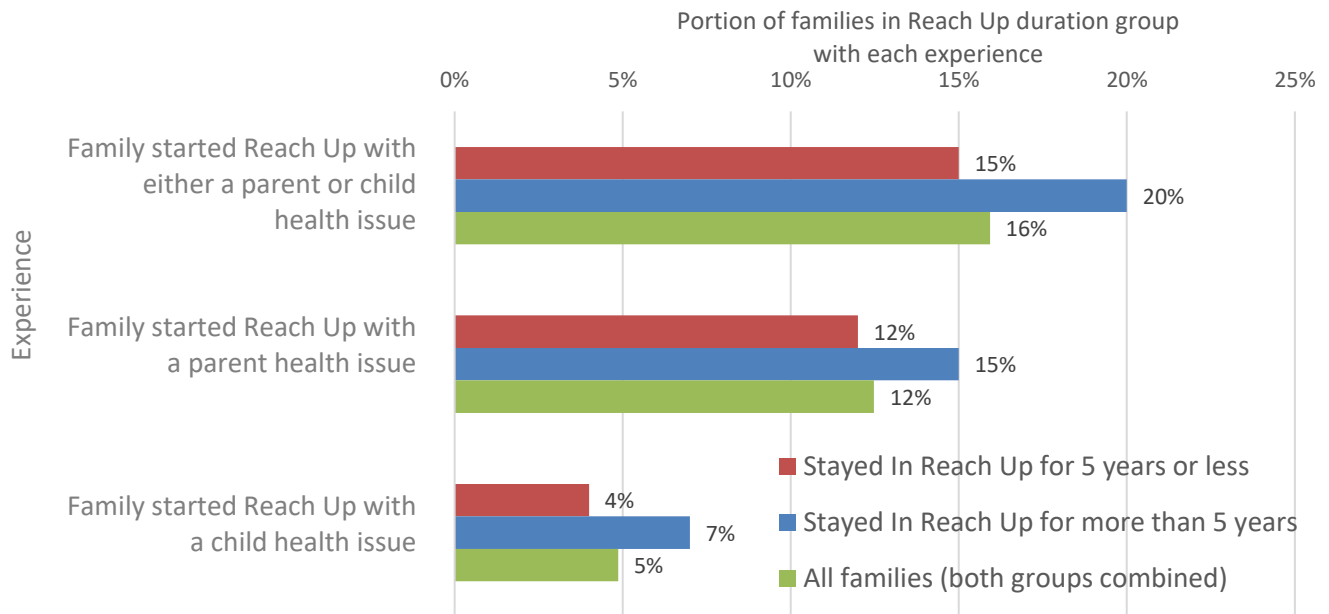


Among the families who continued to use Reach Up for more than 5 years, 52% were headed by parents who had not completed high school before starting Reach Up, compared to 34% among the families with shorter Reach Up duration.

Health issues

Families who started Reach Up already challenged by a parent or child health issue were more likely than other families to stay in the program for more than 5 years. Among the families who continued using the program for more than 5 years, 20 percent entered Reach Up with a health issue, compared to 15 percent among the shorter use families.

Health issues faced by families when they started Reach Up are linked to whether they stay in the program for 5 years or more*



*Includes any health issue identified in the family's Reach Up case record in the first 12 months after their Reach Up start date.

In addition to examining health challenges facing families when they started Reach Up, we looked at the prevalence of these challenges throughout the family's time in the program. Families who experienced parent or child health challenges at any point after their initial entry to the Reach Up program were also likely to have greater total months of program use.

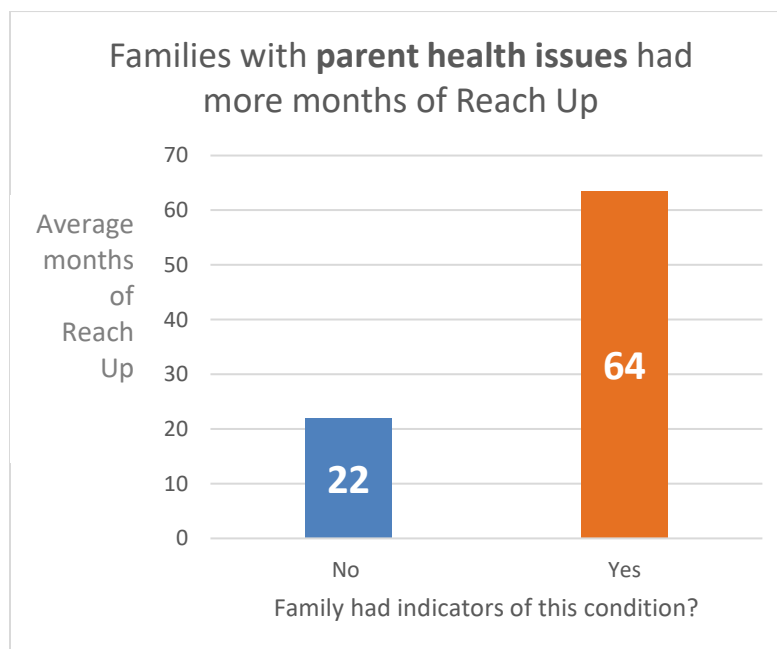
Parent health issues

For 12 percent of the families, parent health challenges had been identified at the start of their time in the Reach Up program. By 2017, as their lives continued, 42% had experienced a parent health challenge at some point according to their Reach Up case records.

Looking at all of their months participating in the Reach Up program between 2002 and 2017, 82 percent of the families with more than five years of participation had parents who experienced health issues at some point, compared to 28% of the parents who used the Reach Up program for a shorter time.

On average, families with any parent health issues indicated in its Reach Up records at any point used the program for 64 months, nearly 3 times as long as the 22-month average experienced by families with no indication of parent health issues.

A family was considered to have parent health issues if its record in the monthly Reach Up DCF extracts in any month in 2002-2017 indicated either a parent disability or a parent medical condition.⁵



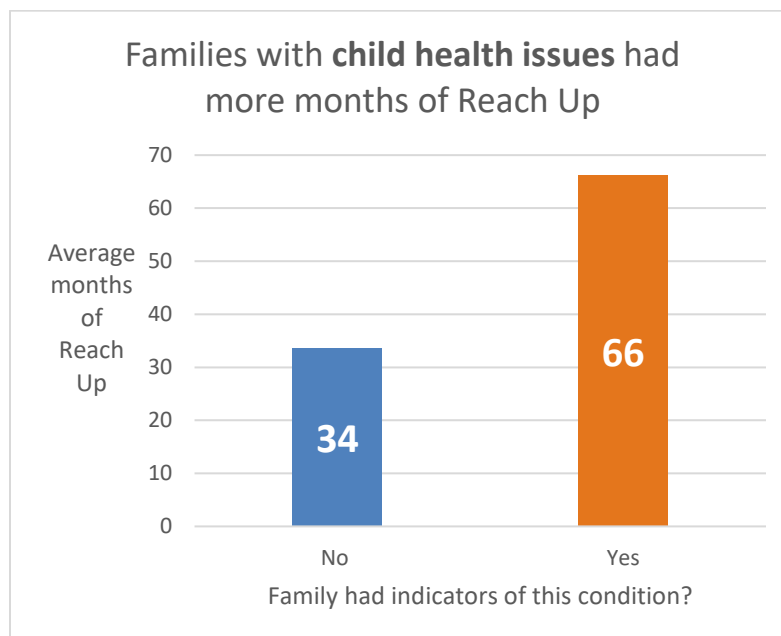
⁵ A family was considered to have a parent disability or medical condition if any of its monthly records in 2002-2017 included any of the following indicators: DISA1 of “Disabled or Win Temporary Medical” or WINREG of medical deferment of 1-3 months, medical deferment of more than 3 months, medical deferment (SSI/AABD or terminated by VR) or “able to work part time – medical condition.”

Child health issues

Although less pervasive than parent health issues among the Reach Up families, 5 percent of the families had identified child health challenges when they started Reach Up in 2002-2007. By 2017, 17 percent had experienced a child health challenge at some point according to their Reach up case record. The average months of Reach Up participation among the families with child health issues at some point in 2002-2017 was almost double that of families with no child health issues (66% compared to 34%).

Of the families who used the Reach Up program for five years or more, 35% had child health issues at some point in 2002-2017 compared to 12% among the families who used the program for shorter time.

A family was considered to have a child health issue if its record in the monthly Reach Up extracts in any month in 2002-2017 indicated a child disability or that the parent was needed in the home.⁶



⁶A family was considered to have a child health issue if any of its monthly records in 2002-2017 included any of the following indicators: DISA2 of “Disabled or Win Temporary Medical” or WINREG of “Caretaker parent”, “Required in home” or “Caring for family member”.

Other factors linked to months of Reach Up use

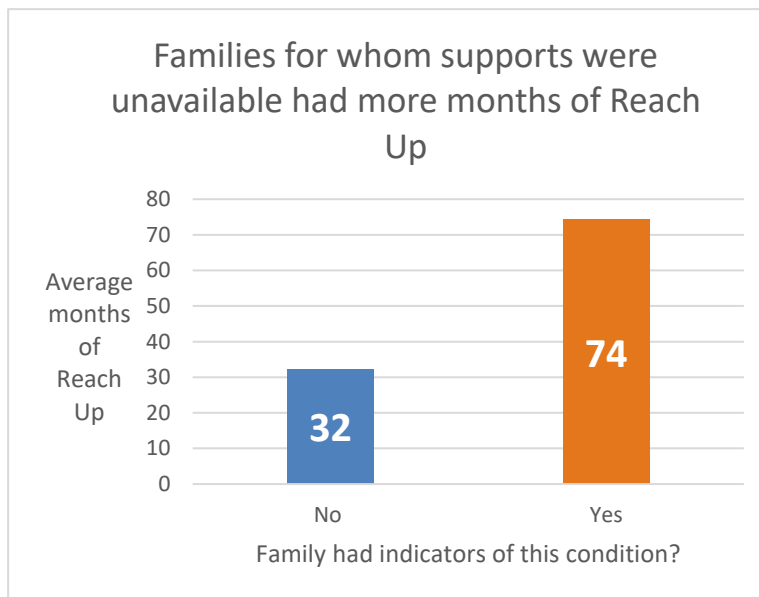
Supports not available

A family who experienced a lack of supports, such as child care or transportation, was likely to participate in the program for more months than other Reach Up families. Even though the Reach Up program connects families to needed supports, families for whom a support such as child care was not available at some point stayed in the Reach Up program for 74 months on average--more than twice as long as the 32 months for other families with no such lack of support.

Seventeen percent of the Reach Up families experienced support unavailability at some point during their Reach Up participation. A family was considered to lack a support if its record in the monthly Reach Up extracts in any month in 2002-2017 indicated that child care was not available, transportation was not available, or some other support was not available.⁷

Among families who used the Reach Up program for more than five years, 41% lacked supports when starting Reach Up or later in their participation, compared to 9% of the families who used the program for a shorter time.

Due to data limitations, this study did not control for the fact that the Reach Up program helped many families resolve their lack of supports by connecting them to child care assistance, transportation resources of other needed supports.



⁷ Families were considered to have lacked supports if any of its monthly records in 2002-2017 based on the WINREG1 code.

Reach Up program sanctions

We also examined the prevalence of program sanctions among families with differing program durations. Among all the Reach Up families, 37 percent had experienced sanctions at some point during their time in the program between 2002 and 2017.

On average, families who experienced sanctions had participated in the Reach Up program longer than those who did not (58 months for the average family experiencing a sanction, compared to 28 among the average family with no sanctions). Among the families in Reach Up for more than 5 years, 65 percent experienced program sanctions at some point compared to 28 percent among shorter use families.

