

Our Vision

We are eager to grow our success in using research to build better public policy for families. The Family Impact Institute is the hub that provides training and technical assistance for connecting state policymakers with research knowledge and researchers with policy knowledge. Our mission is two-pronged:

- (1) We are committed to taking the successful Family Impact Seminar model to scale in all 50 states. We are building an ambitious and unprecedented initiative of developing state-by-state capacity for research-based policymaking on family issues. We are capitalizing on the seminars' solid reputation as a trusted knowledge broker on a range of policy issues across a number of diverse states. The Institute connects and supports the leadership of each state's Family Impact Seminars.
- (2) We are committed to disseminating the knowledge we are generating through the seminars about how to create better dialogue between researchers and policymakers. We use this knowledge and experience to train professionals who want to learn what it takes to communicate research findings to policymakers in the timely, accessible, and nonpartisan format they prefer.

To bring our vision to scale, we are seeking partners interested in:

- ▶ Expanding the presence of Family Impact Seminars to reach all 50 states.
- ▶ Ramping up the number of Family Impact Seminars executed in state capitols by becoming more efficient through strategies such as leveraging the use of technology.
- ▶ Strengthening the quality and effectiveness of the Family Impact Seminars by systematically building on best practices.
- ▶ Growing the number of professionals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to successfully build relationships with and communicate research evidence to policymakers.

What do Policymakers Say About the Family Impact Seminars?

You have demonstrated that it is possible to bring together policymakers of disparate political persuasions; provide them with the facts; and assist them in working out principled and meaningful policy choices. Anyone who cares about good government will applaud your efforts.

— Democratic Governor

I'm viewed and well respected by members on the other side of the aisle. . . . One of the reasons why that is the case is because of things such as the Family Impact Seminar where you're really trying to reach across the aisle, reach across the great divide to . . . other legislators that may have a completely different world view of how you solve these difficult problems.

— Republican State Representative

How do you break down the ideological and the partisan barriers? I think that institutional frameworks such as the Family Impact Seminars is extraordinarily beneficial . . . in creating that institutional framework by which we can have a discussion across the partisan and ideological divide.

— Democratic State Senator

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The Institute is a joint effort of the School of Human Ecology, UW-Madison, and Cooperative Extension, UW-Extension.

The Family Impact Institute



Using Research to Build Better Public Policy for Families

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The Family Impact Seminars—Recognized as a “Bright Idea” by the Harvard Innovations in Government Program

Why Focus on Families?

One basic building block of society is families. Families are a cornerstone for raising productive workers in a sound economy and responsible citizens in a strong democracy. Yet even strong families can be harmed by stressful conditions—the inability to find a job, afford health insurance, secure quality child care, or send their kids to good schools. Many families in the United States today are struggling:

- ▶ About half of all marriages end in divorce or separation;
- ▶ Over 4 in 10 children were born to single parents in 2010; and
- ▶ The U.S. has some of the highest rates of child poverty, infant mortality, and uninsured children in the industrialized world, with markedly higher rates among children of color.

How Could Public Policy Decisions Be Better?

Policymaking is less effective, less efficient, and more polarized than it should be. But it doesn't have to be that way. There are better ways of doing public policy. Policy decisions could be more effective if research evidence was used to invest in programs that work and cut those that don't. Policy decisions could be more efficient if they leveraged the contributions that families make to society by viewing issues through the lens of family impacts. Policymaking could be less polarized if opportunities were provided for neutral, off-the-record dialogue that can build the relationships needed to overcome partisan gridlock.

What's at Stake?

If we are unable to use research to build better public policy for families, what will the future look like?

- ▶ Can we envision more partisanship, more polarization, more interest-driven policies?
- ▶ Will families be left to struggle on their own, despite the many valuable private contributions they so effectively and efficiently make to the public good?
- ▶ Will the United States forfeit the extraordinary opportunity that it has in this century to demonstrate that democracy can work in a diverse and changing society?

The Family Impact Seminars—A Proven Model

The Family Impact Seminars are a proven, cost effective, and rapidly expandable model for turning research evidence into better public policies for families. The Family Impact Seminars are a series of presentations, discussion sessions, and briefing reports on timely topics identified by policymakers. This model of communicating high-quality, objective research to state policymakers improves respect for and use of research in policy decisions. Policymakers report that the objective information and opportunities for dialogue provided by the seminars help them rise above politics and develop the relationships needed to build common ground.

Currently, 26 sites, all university/Extension-based, are conducting or planning seminars. Since 1993, over 170 seminars have been conducted on family issues, broadly defined:

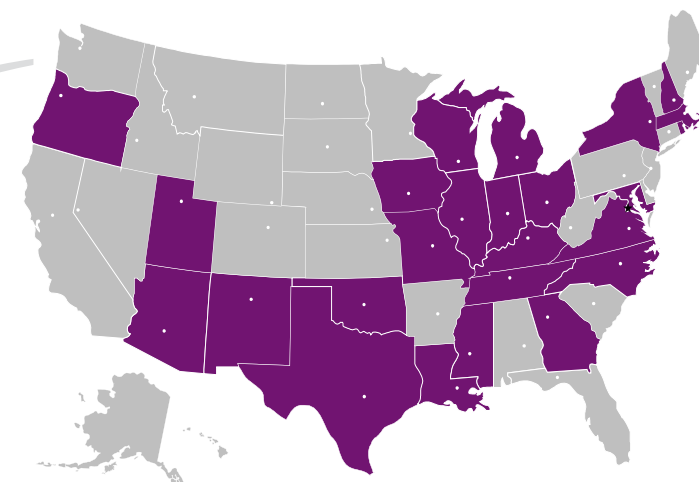
- ▶ 41 on family poverty, jobs, and economic security
- ▶ 38 on family health
- ▶ 25 on families and schools
- ▶ 18 on juvenile and adult crime/corrections
- ▶ 14 on early childhood care and education
- ▶ 14 on strengthening families/parenting

In evaluations, seminar information increases policymakers' understanding of complex issues and helps them see the value of research and the family impact lens. Policymakers report that seminar information is high-quality, objective, and useful in shaping policy decisions. For example:

- ▶ In Oregon, following their first seminar, a refundable child care tax credit was adopted. In 2003, the credit was claimed by almost 26,000 taxpayers.
- ▶ In Wisconsin, four features of other states' prescription drug programs discussed at two seminars were incorporated into a new Senior Care law. In 2012, enrollment was over 87,000 seniors.
- ▶ In Nebraska, after a seminar on rising health care costs, a State Children's Health Insurance law was passed. In 2009, over 48,000 children were served sometime during the year.

The Hub: The Family Impact Institute

Since 1999, the Family Impact Institute has built capacity for research-based policy decisions on family issues. The Institute recruits leaders for the state seminar sites and provides training on how to build relationships with policymakers and effectively communicate research evidence to them. We facilitate the exchange of ideas and peer mentoring across states on how to make the seminars more effective and efficient. To ensure seminar quality, the Institute provides trainings, phone conferences, manuals, and consultation on best practices for building the advisory infrastructure, selecting seminar topics, identifying and coaching speakers, writing policy briefs, fundraising, viewing issues through the lens of family impact and racial equity, and so forth.



[The] hands-on training and manual gave us everything we needed to get started, from big picture strategies, like the importance of an advisory board to nitty-gritty details, like examples of invitations . . . We couldn't do what we do in our state seminars without [the Institute].

— Illinois Family Impact Seminars

The ongoing support provided by the [Institute] is critical . . . they are very responsive, creative, and innovative.

— Louisiana Family Impact Seminars