

Public Benefits and Child Maltreatment: Implications for Prevention

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Punchline

Evidence indicates that investments in social safety net programs that reduce poverty and material hardship help prevent child abuse and neglect, which provides economic returns on those investments.

Background

- Child maltreatment is a prevalent public health problem.
- Oregon in 2018
 - 50,319 children received an investigation for suspected abuse or neglect.
 - 12,581 children were identified as victims.
 - 4,607 children were placed into foster care.
 - 26 children *died* as a result of abuse and/or neglect.

Background

- Child maltreatment is a costly public health problem.
- Child abuse & neglect lead to economic burdens:
 - Short and long-term health care
 - Child welfare
 - Criminal justice
 - Special education
 - Productivity losses
 - Quality-adjusted life years (value of lost lives)
- For Oregon, abuse & neglect in 2018 alone:
 - \$42.2 billion in *lifetime* economic burdens.

Why Public Benefit Programs?
Why Reduce Poverty?

A Prime Target for Primary Prevention...

“The weight of the causal evidence indicates that income *poverty itself causes negative child outcomes*, especially when it begins in early childhood and/or persists throughout a large share of a child’s life. Many *programs that alleviate poverty* either directly, by providing income transfers, or indirectly, by providing food, housing, or medical care have been shown to *improve child well-being*.

-- The National Academies
A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty, 2019
[Available here](#)

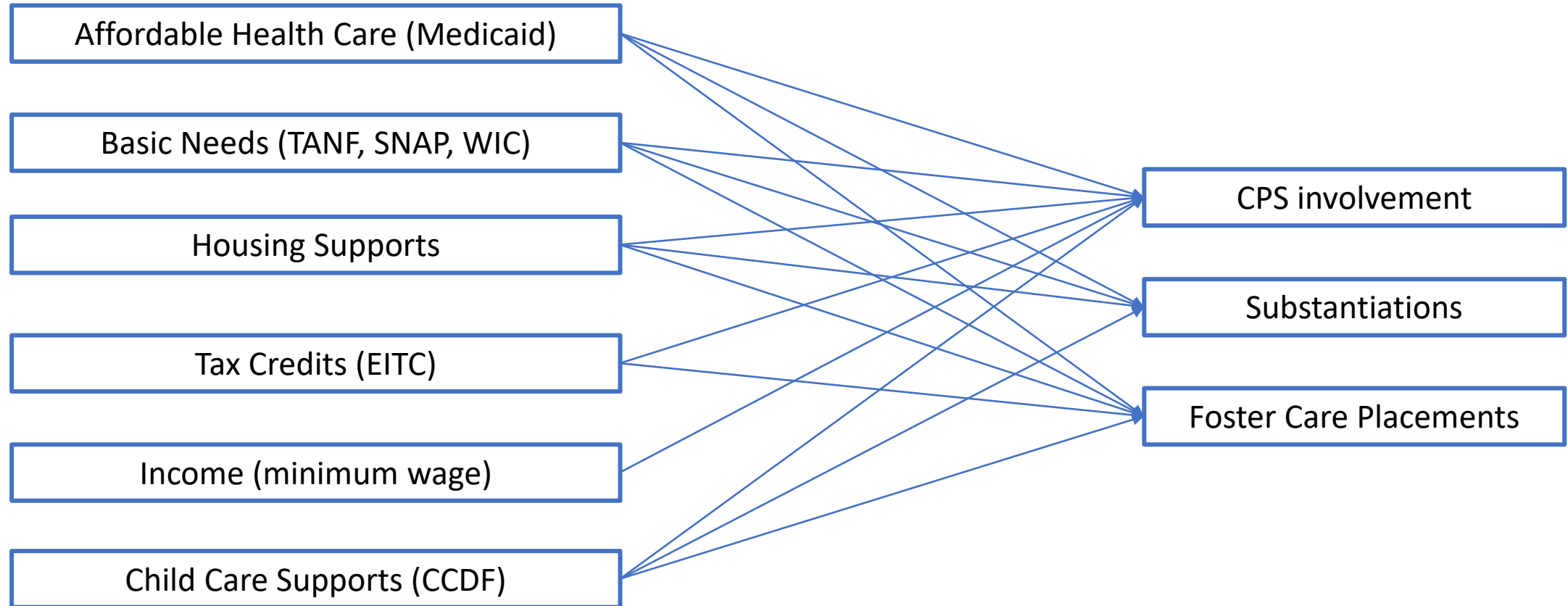
Poverty and Risk

- Children living in poverty are at:
 - 7x risk for neglect
 - 3x risk for physical abuse
 - 2x risk for sexual abuse

Evidence for Specific Programs

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; i.e., food stamps)
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC; particularly when refundable)
- Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
- Medicaid

Evidence for Economic & Concrete Supports



PEDIATRICS®

State Spending on Public Benefit Programs and Child Maltreatment

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Investments

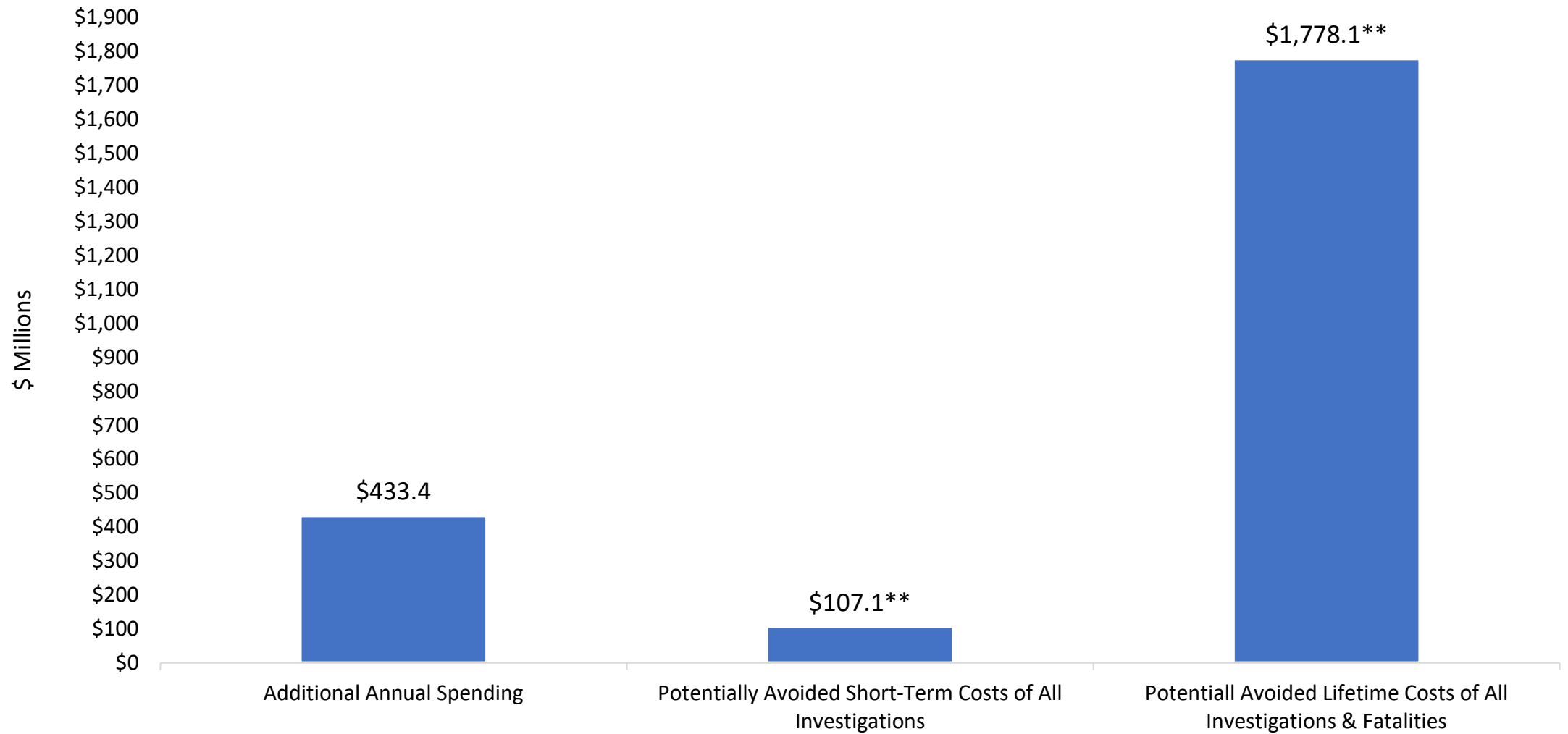
- If Oregon spent about 13% more on public benefit programs, you might realize each year that the money is invested:
 - 2,100 (-4.3%) fewer children being investigated
 - 500 (-4.0%) fewer children being victims of abuse or neglect
 - 97 (-2.1%) fewer children would enter foster care
 - 2 (-7.7%) children might not have died from abuse and neglect

Return on Investments



** Based upon the economic burdens of maltreatment inclusive of short- and long-term health care costs, criminal justice costs, child welfare costs, special education costs, monetized quality-adjusted life years, and value per statistical life. Peterson C, et al. The economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States, 2015. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2018;86:178-183.

Return on Investments



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Conclusion #1:

Public benefit programs have broad positive impacts on child and family well-being, and probably help prevent child maltreatment.

Conclusion #2

Poverty = *Policy Choice*

Poverty = Child Maltreatment

Child Maltreatment = *Policy Choice*

The Public Health Case for a Universalist Child Tax Credit

VIEWPOINT

JAMA Pediatrics

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- “....let’s not means test children’s health.”

Conclusion #3:

We need to legislate in an evidence-based way that promotes health, well-being, and equity.

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Thank you!