THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS | Center for Public Partnerships and Research

Children's Trust Fund
Missouri's Foundation For Child Abuse Prevention
Strong Families, Safe Kids

The Power of Prevention

Building Community Capacity to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

Prevent Child Abuse America National Conference

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Presenters

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Background

Approaching Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Problem Statement

- Child sexual abuse has been established as a significant problem in the United States with over 44,000 cases reported annually (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).
- We lack agreement on how to address the problem.
  - Approaches vary with scarce evidence
  - Individual level focus dominates
  - Not well coordinated or integrated.
- Overall, we lack a unified solution that focuses on root causes and prevention to adequately address this pressing issue.

Current Landscape

- Several key federal laws provide a prevention framework including the Child Abuse Protection and Enforcement Act of 2000 and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.
- The federal version of Erin's Law, called the Child Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Act, provides federal funding for educational programs about sexual abuse.
  - Thirty-eight states have currently passed their version of Erin's Law. www.erinslaw.org
- There has been a recent increase in state legislative-level prevention activity (Enough Abuse & PCAA, 2025, p. 7).
- Prevention approaches have focused narrowly on educating children and have not fully leveraged opportunities to create societal prevention infrastructure and enlist the larger community in preventing abuse.

Presentation Aims

- Highlight the Children's Trust Fund of Missouri's efforts to address the underfunded, under-researched challenge of preventing child sexual abuse.
- Share five years of innovations, lessons, and evidence.
- Spark new directions for practice, policy, and research that can shape a stronger future for CSA prevention.

Shifting Directions

Moving Toward Community Solutions

New approaches

Multi-tiered, **holistic approach** enables adults, organizations, & systems to be the foci of change with an eye to building capacity & addressing root causes of abuse.

New approaches, *continued*

Organizational Focus

- *There is a need to create conditions of safety within institutions and equip service providers with the knowledge and skills they need.*

Adult & Community Responsibility

- *While educating children can be a part of the strategy, it should not be up to children to protect themselves.*
- *Instead, work should help adults create conditions of safety for children within homes and communities.*

Perpetration Prevention

- *Paradigm shift that impacts strategies used (i.e., PSB treatment)*

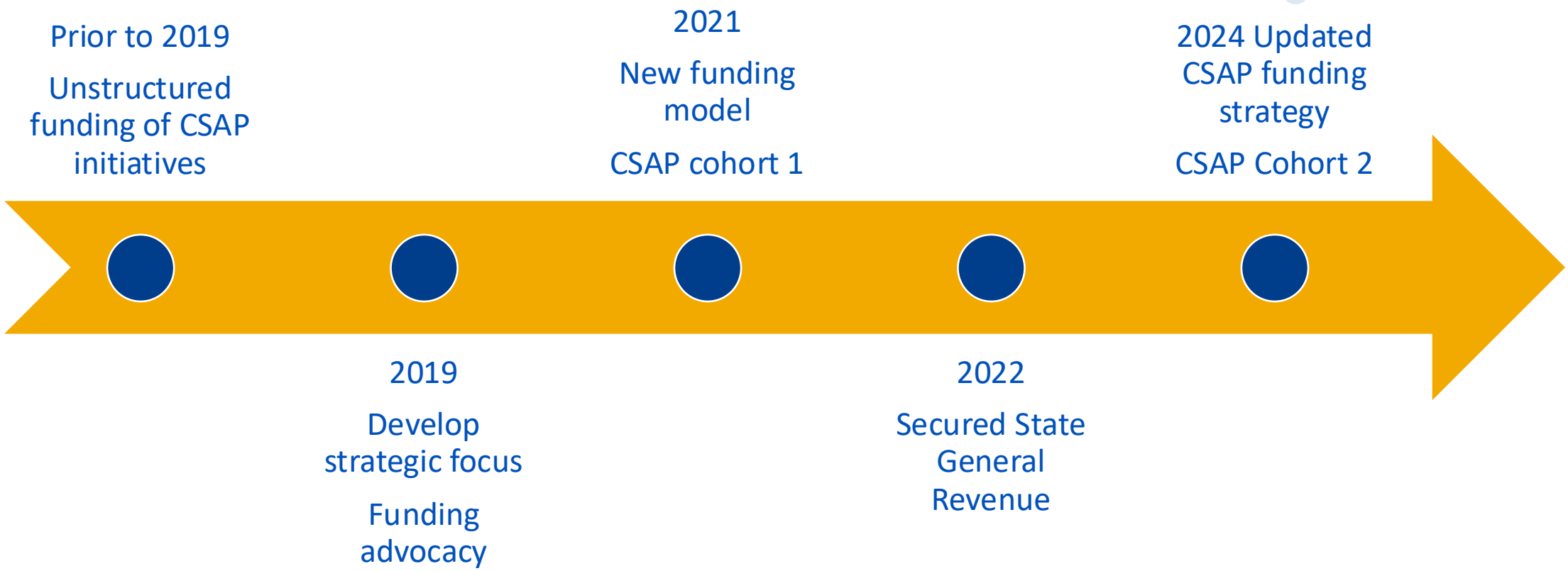
A Coordinated Approach is Showing Positive Evidence

- *With a desire to close the gap, in part by funding promising, multi-tiered strategies (Johns Hopkins, n.d.), The Missouri Children's Trust Fund has made CSA prevention a top priority.*
- *Similar work in Pennsylvania has shown decreases in substantiated and unsubstantiated child sexual abuse. (Noll et al, 2025.)*

Missouri CTF Approach – Philosophy & Values for Addressing CSA

- Adoption of single priority approach to address complexity of an issue that warrants unique strategies
- Focus on building adult capacity to protect youth who are inherently vulnerable
- Upstream primary prevention and root cause approaches – decreasing risk for perpetration
- Iterative learning approach to discovery
- Focus on system capacity-building and building evidence through rigorous developmental evaluation

Missouri CTF Approach – History & Evolution



Missouri CTF Initial Approach and Strategies

- Initial approach
  - Descriptive domains of impact to guide program selection – not prescriptive to grantees
  - Targeted communities experiencing highest risk by zip code
  - Included evaluation with heavy emphasis on capacity building and process

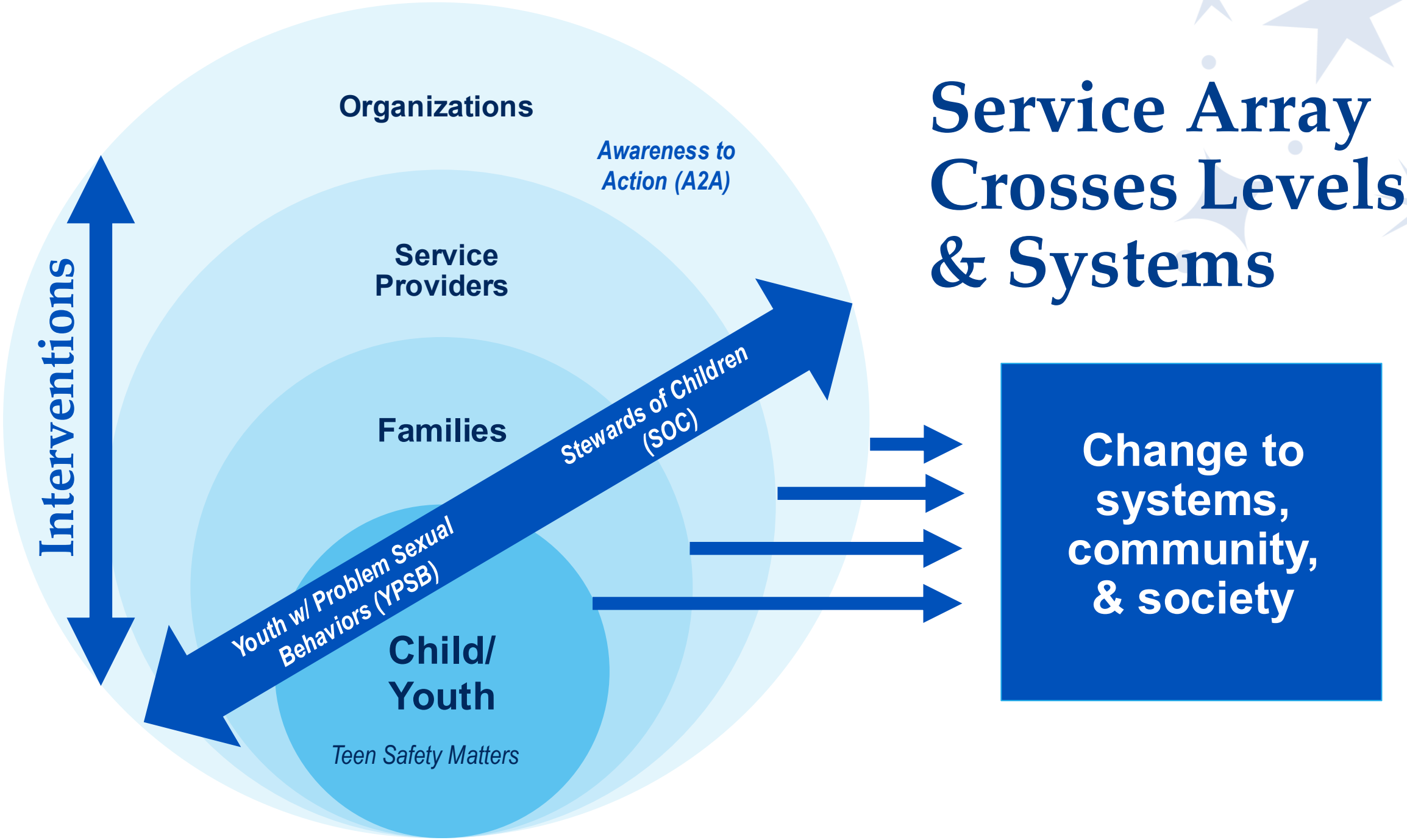
Stewards of Children	Child/Teen Safety Matters	Awareness to Action	Youth Problematic Sexual Behaviors CBT	Public Education and Awareness

Missouri CTF Approach - Strategies

- Evolution of approach
  - Becoming more prescriptive as evidence emerges; pivot in school-based approach to target adults, organizational focus, and youth healthy development
  - Target communities experiencing highest risk by county
  - Evaluation focus shifted toward evidence and impact

Stewards of Children	Child/Teen Safety Matters	Awareness to Action	Youth Problematic Sexual Behaviors CBT
Public Education and Awareness	Netsmartz	Safe Dates	Green Bear – High School Program

Service Array Crosses Levels & Systems



Building Evidence for Community Solutions

Program Impact

Evaluation Aim

- Nimbly explore experimental solutions and innovative approaches used in Missouri to understand impact on CSA rates with systematic rigor
- Build evidence for new combined and collective approaches
- Research Questions:
    1. To what extent are CSAP grantees implementing the approach as planned? (PROCESS)
    2. How does CSAP's funded approach and strategies impact child sexual abuse outcomes? (IMPACT)

Evaluation Design

- Developmental/emergent design of practice-based evidence (Chorzempa, Smith, & Sileo, 2019)
- Responsive real-time data analysis and feedback loops
- Multiple methods to capture depth and breadth (e.g., triangulated data sources, process and impact)
- Outcomes anchored in partner priorities
- Scalability and policy relevance

Process Evaluation Insights

- There is need for additional organizational capacity.
- Access to program training impacts program feasibility.
- Balancing federal compliance with evolving and exploratory practices requires attention.
- Funder flexibility creates innovation:
  - Catchment area needs (e.g., zip code focus, crossing county boundaries)
  - Non-prescriptive approach to program selection (Challenge: dependent on proposals).
  - Adapt approaches based on learnings.
- Included planning period, technical assistance, and evaluation support
- Grantee insights informed adaptations and innovations.

Impact Study: Short, Intermediate, & Long-Term Outcomes

Short Term

- **Improved knowledge** (TSM, SoC)
- **Improved attitudes toward CSAP** (TSM, SoC)

Intermediate

- **Increased organizational behaviors** (SoC)
- **Increased individual behaviors** (SoC)
- **Increased organizational best practices** (A2A)

Long Term

- **Reduced involvement in child welfare, especially victimization and perpetration of CSA** *based on state child welfare data*

Teen Safety Matters

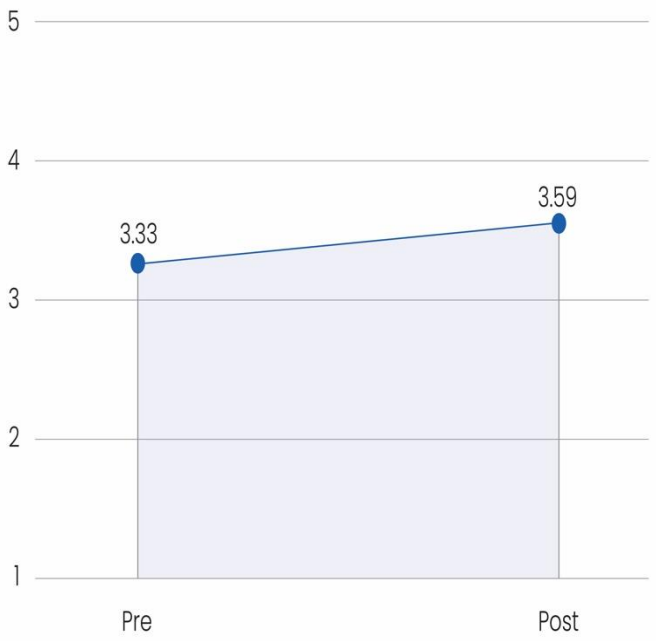
Emerging Evaluation Findings

Knowledge and Attitude Findings

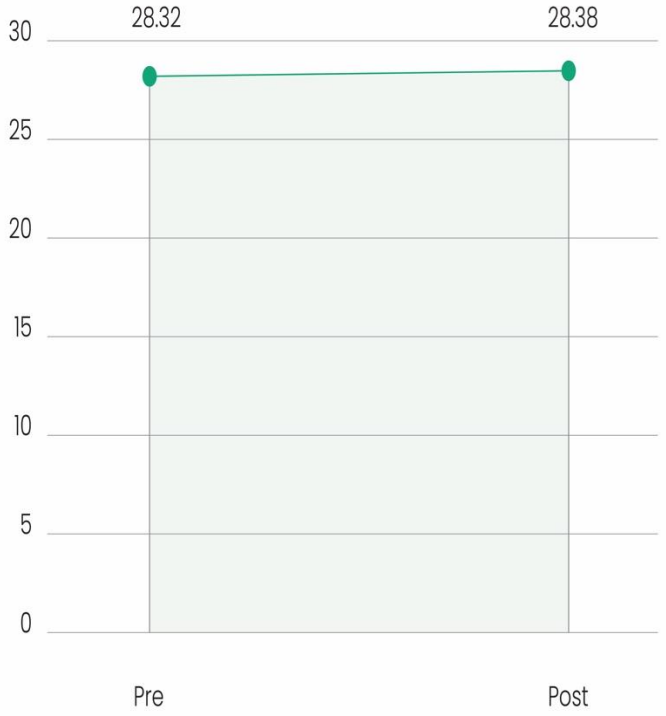
- Knowledge improvements among TSM participants were statistically significant but so small, they are not practically meaningful.

- Attitudes improvements among TSM participants were not statistically significant.

Knowledge (significant)



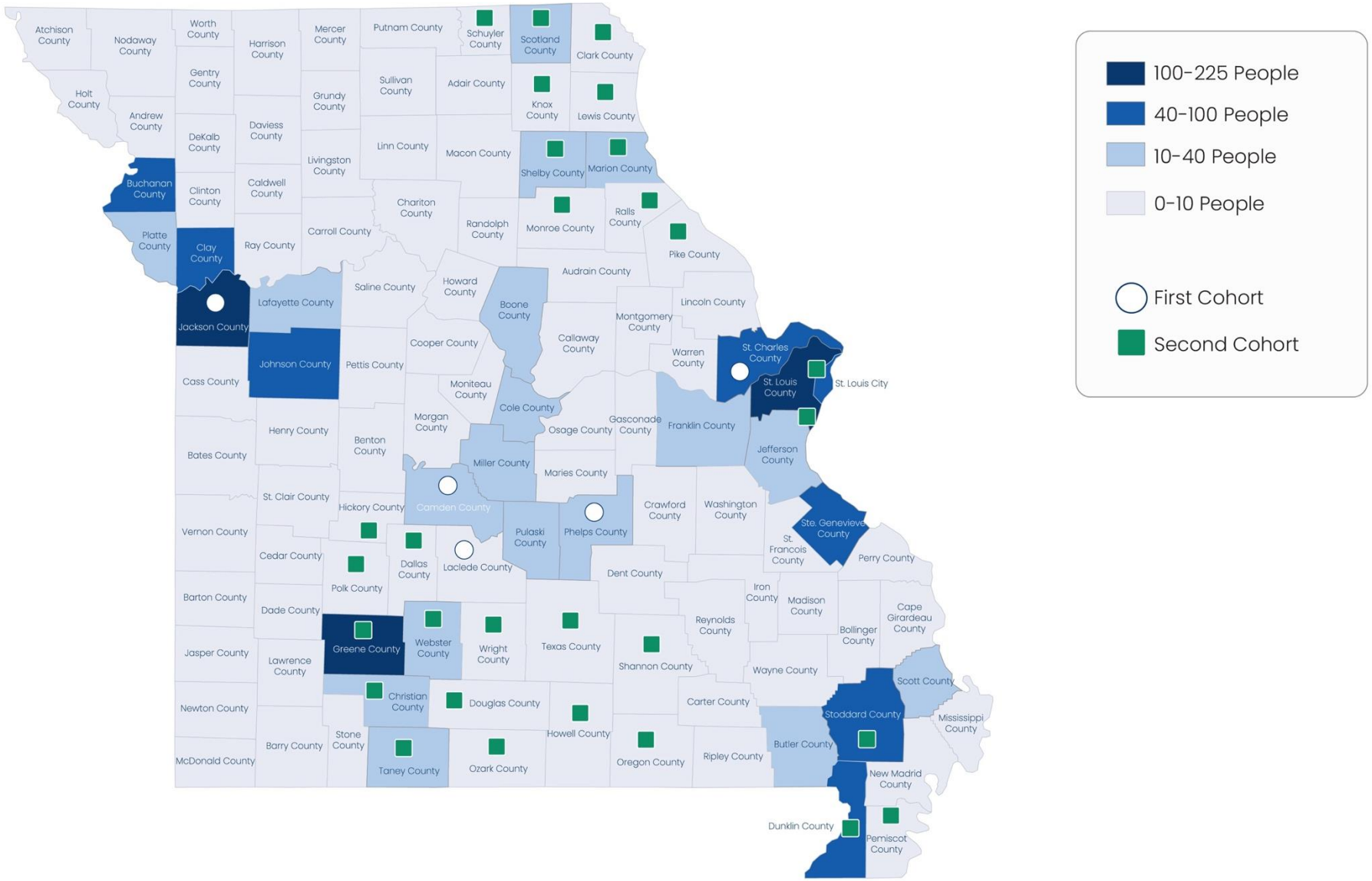
Attitudes (non-significant)



Stewards of Children

Emerging Evaluation Findings

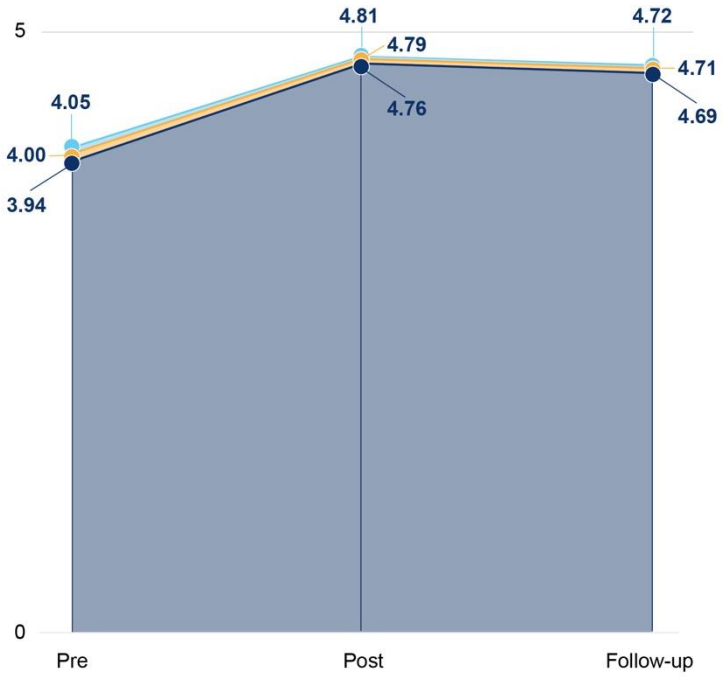
SoC Reach Across CSAP Cohorts



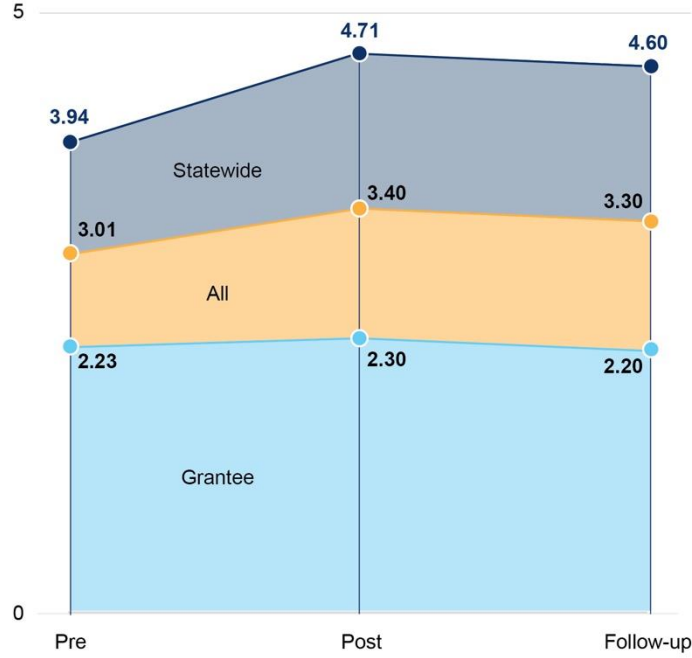
Knowledge and Attitude Findings

- Knowledge quickly improved among SoC participants
- Attitudes toward CSAP quickly improved among SoC participants
- Improvements sustained six months post
- Improvements are statistically and practically significant

Knowledge



Attitudes



Behavior Change Findings

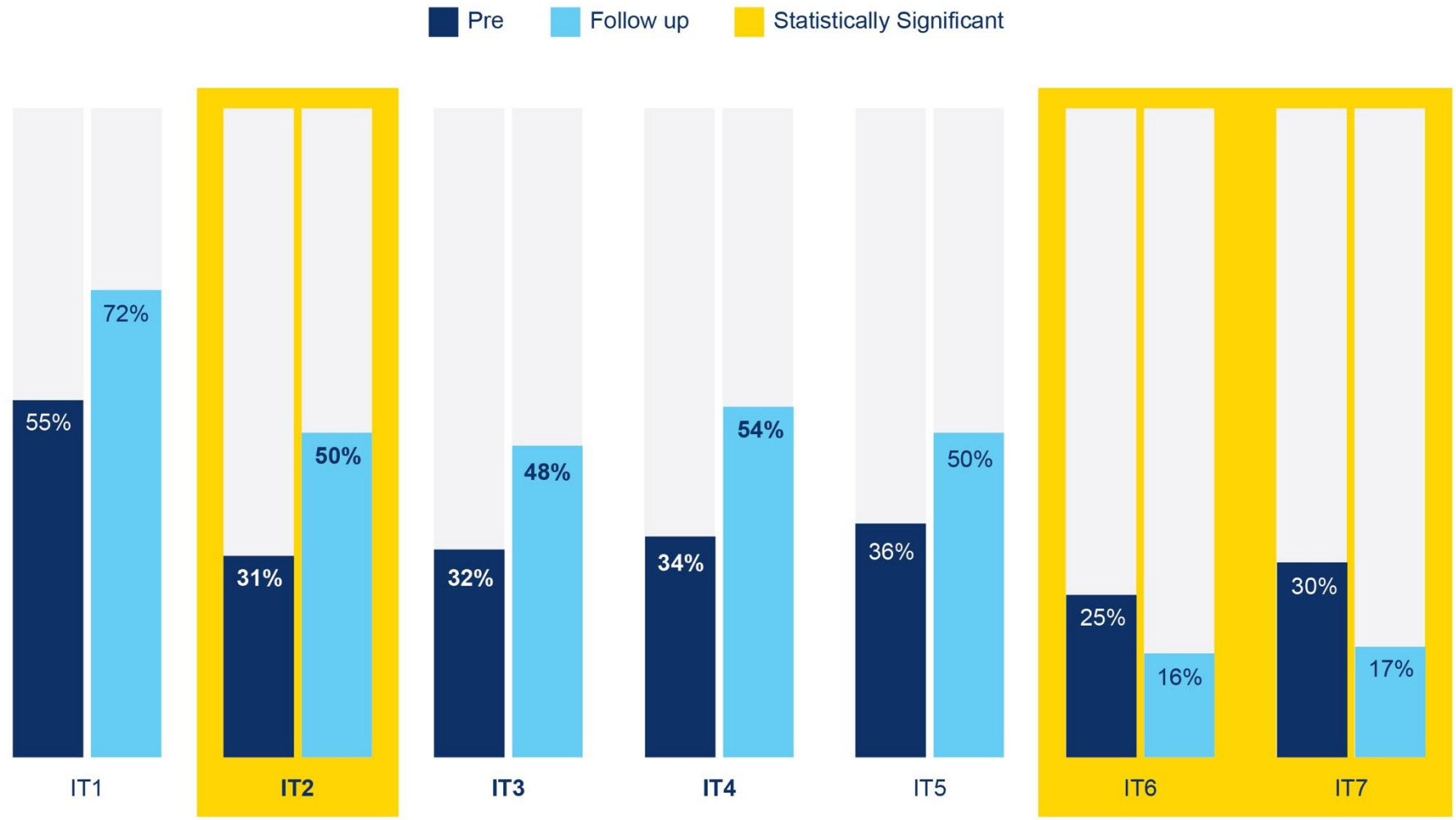
- Individual and organizational prevention behaviors generally increased over time with some statistically significant changes
- 9 of 16 individual behaviors
- 1 of 7 organizational behaviors increased overall
- 2 of 7 organizational behaviors decreased overall

SoC Participants Reported Increased Individual Behaviors for Over Six Months

SoC Participants Reported Individual Behaviors Over Six Months

Item #	Description of Behavior	Percent Reported Behavior	
		Pretest	6-Month Post Follow up
IT1	Talked with a child or teen about healthy sexual development	25%	40%
IT2	Discussed the issue of sexual abuse with a child or teen	23%	38%
IT3	**Looked for signs of sexual abuse in children in my life**	**34%**	**63%**
IT4	**Acted on suspicions that a child/teen could be a victim of sexual abuse**	**13%**	**28%**
IT5	**Spoken with a child about internet safety/digital citizenship**	**34%**	**58%**
IT6	Monitored a child's internet use	30%	46%
IT7	Asked a staff member at a school, church, after-school, or other community-based program about the organization's child sexual abuse prevention policies	7%	16%
IT8	**Evaluated the potential for sexual abuse to occur when deciding whether my child or another child should participate in an activity**	**16%**	**30%**
IT9	Checked a sex offender registry	23%	39%
IT10	Made an official report to either Children's Division or law enforcement regarding a suspicion or a discovery/disclosure of child sexual abuse	3%	9%
IT11	Called a helpline number regarding an issue of child sexual abuse	1%	4%
IT12	**Made sure that a situation in which an adult is supervising a child or group of children is observable and interruptible**	**19%**	**44%**
IT13	**Made sure that multiple adults are present in an activity that involves children**	**28%**	**55%**
IT14	**Shared with another adult an article, book, brochure, website or other information about reducing or preventing child sexual abuse**	**11%**	**31%**
IT15	**Offered advice or support to someone about child sexual abuse**	**18%**	**37%**
IT16	**Inquired about or worked to enhance/improve an organization's or any group's policy to keep children safe**	**11%**	**28%**

SoC Participants Reported Organizational Behaviors Over Six Months

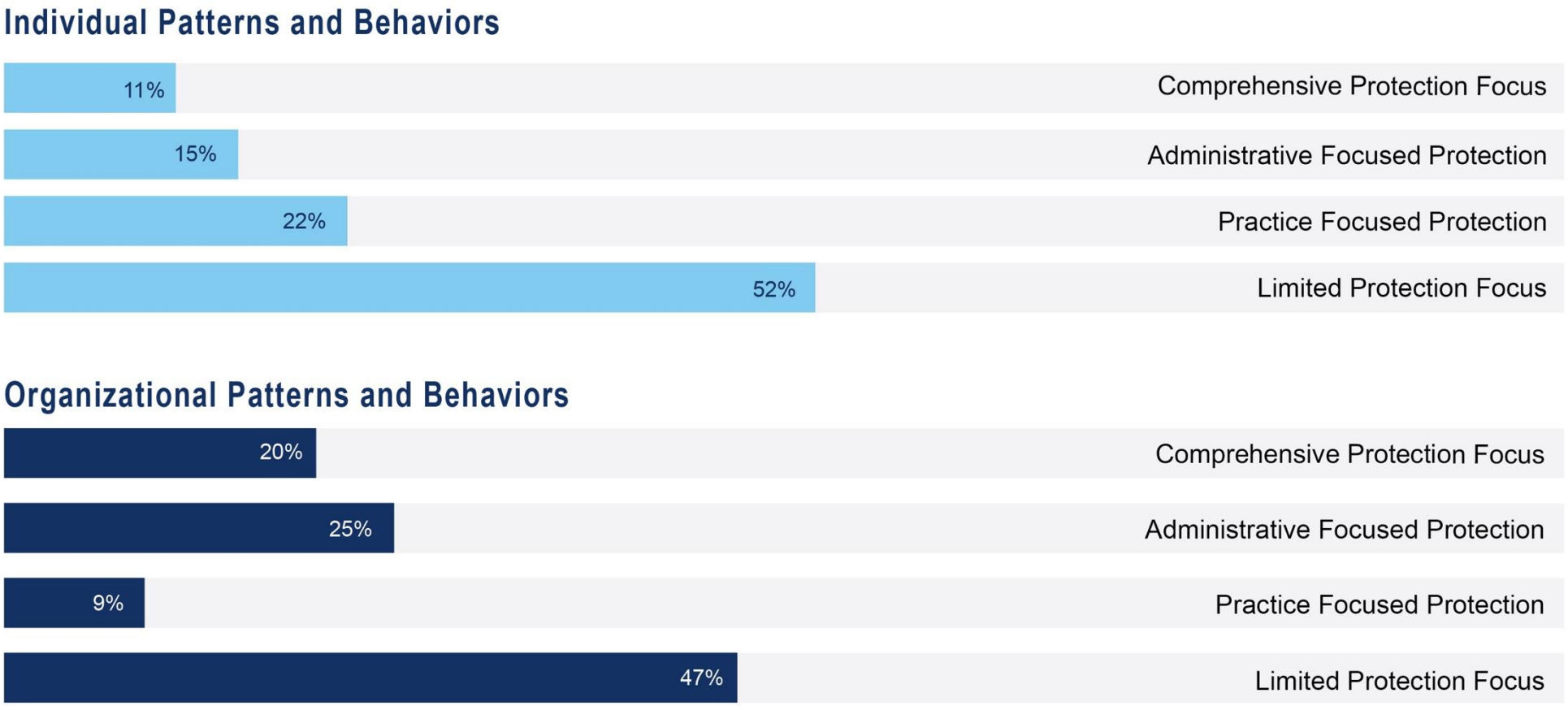


SoC Participants Reported Organizational Behaviors Over Six Months

Item #	Description of Behavior	Percent Reported Behavior	
		Pretest	6-Month Post Follow up
IT1	Criminal record checks (e.g., state, national)	55%	72%
IT2	**Child welfare background checks (e.g., Children's Division)**	**31% (CSAP grantees 26%)**	**50% (CSAP grantees 44%)**
IT3	Screening interview	32%	48%
IT4	Reference checks	34%	54%
IT5	Provided written policy/procedures outlining appropriate conduct with child	36%	50%
IT6	**Monitored one-on-one time between adults and children**	**25% (CSAP grantees 20%)**	**16% (CSAP grantees 39%)**
IT7	**Provided written policy for handling suspected or disclosed sexual abuse OR Provided written policy for handling suspicions of abuse OR Provided written policy for handling disclosures of abuse**	**30% (CSAP grantees 24%)**	**17% (CSAP grantees 43%)**

Patterns of Behaviors

Patterns suggest SoC participants fall into four groups when they start training



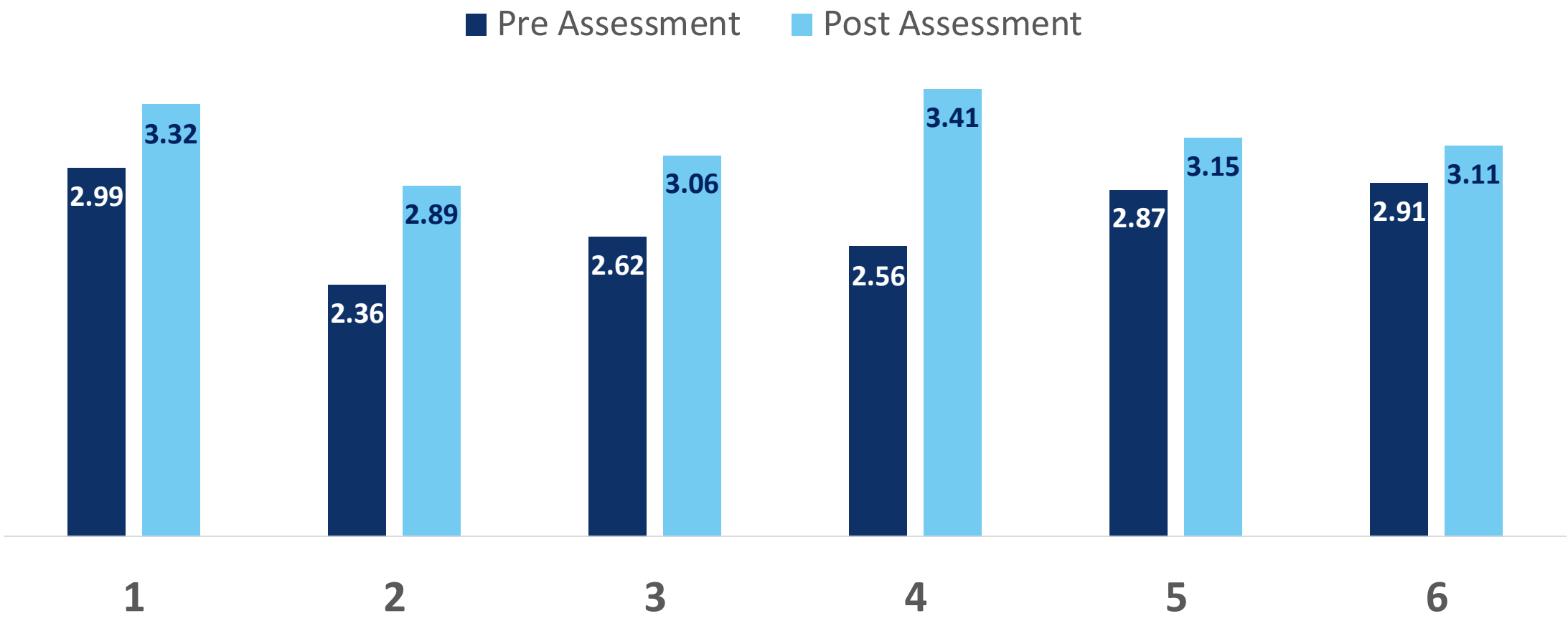
Participation in SoC should result in more protective patterns of behaviors over time

Awareness to Action

Emerging Evaluation Findings

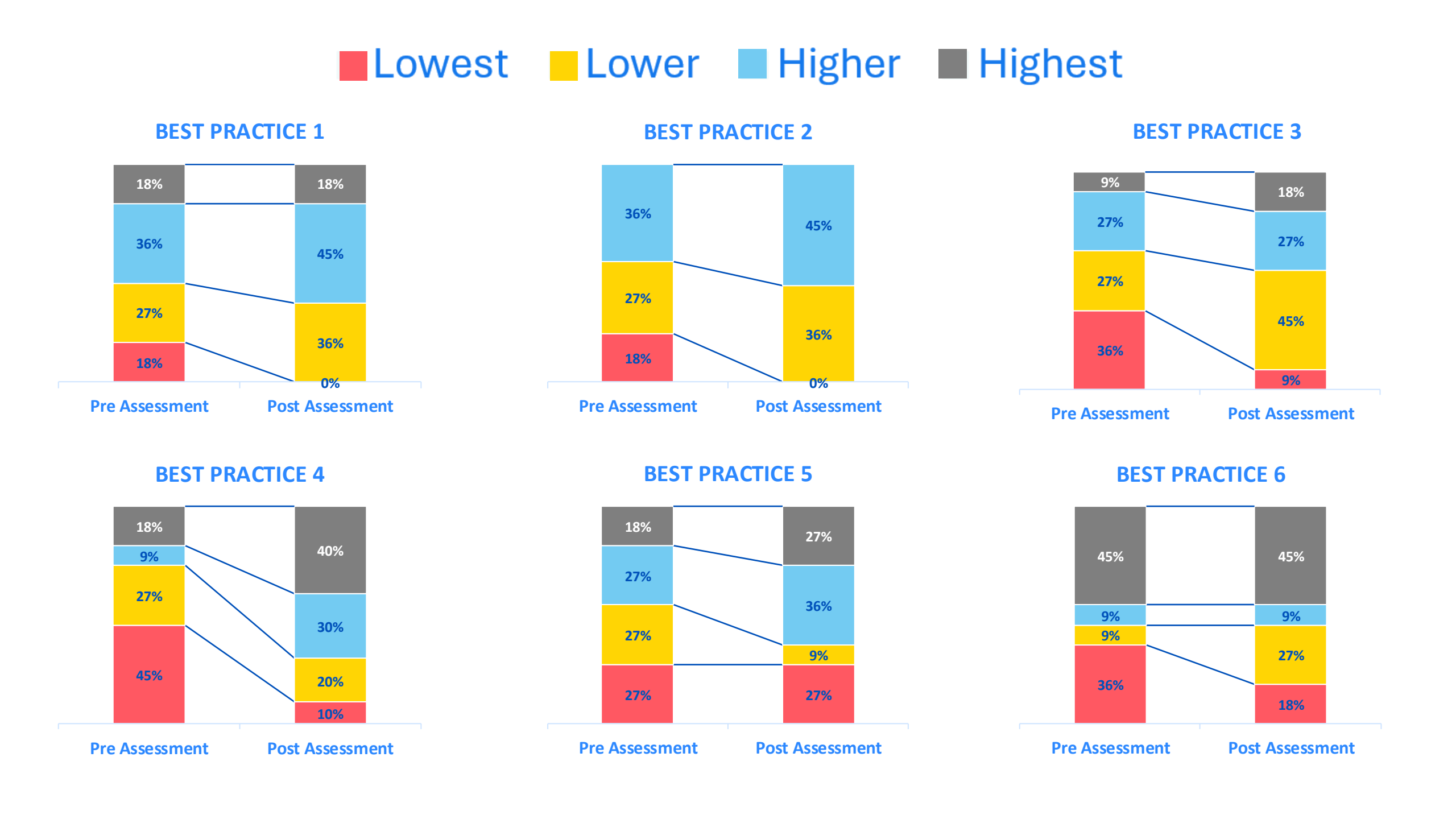
A2A Best Practice Findings

- Means improved across all 6 best practices
- Organizations are increasing their use of best practices as demonstrated by increased proportions of organizations moving from lower quartiles to higher quartiles.



BP #1: Screening/Selecting Employees & Volunteers
BP #2: Guidelines to Interactions
BP #3: Monitoring Behaviors

BP #4: Ensuring Safe Environments
BP #5: Responding to Abuse
BP #6: CSA Prevention Training


Lowest
Lower
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BEST PRACTICE 1
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9%
27%
18%
Pre Assessment
Post Assessment

Long-Term Child Maltreatment Trends

Child Maltreatment Trend Analysis

State administrative data

- Children's Division of Missouri Department of Social Services
- State Fiscal Years 2019–2024

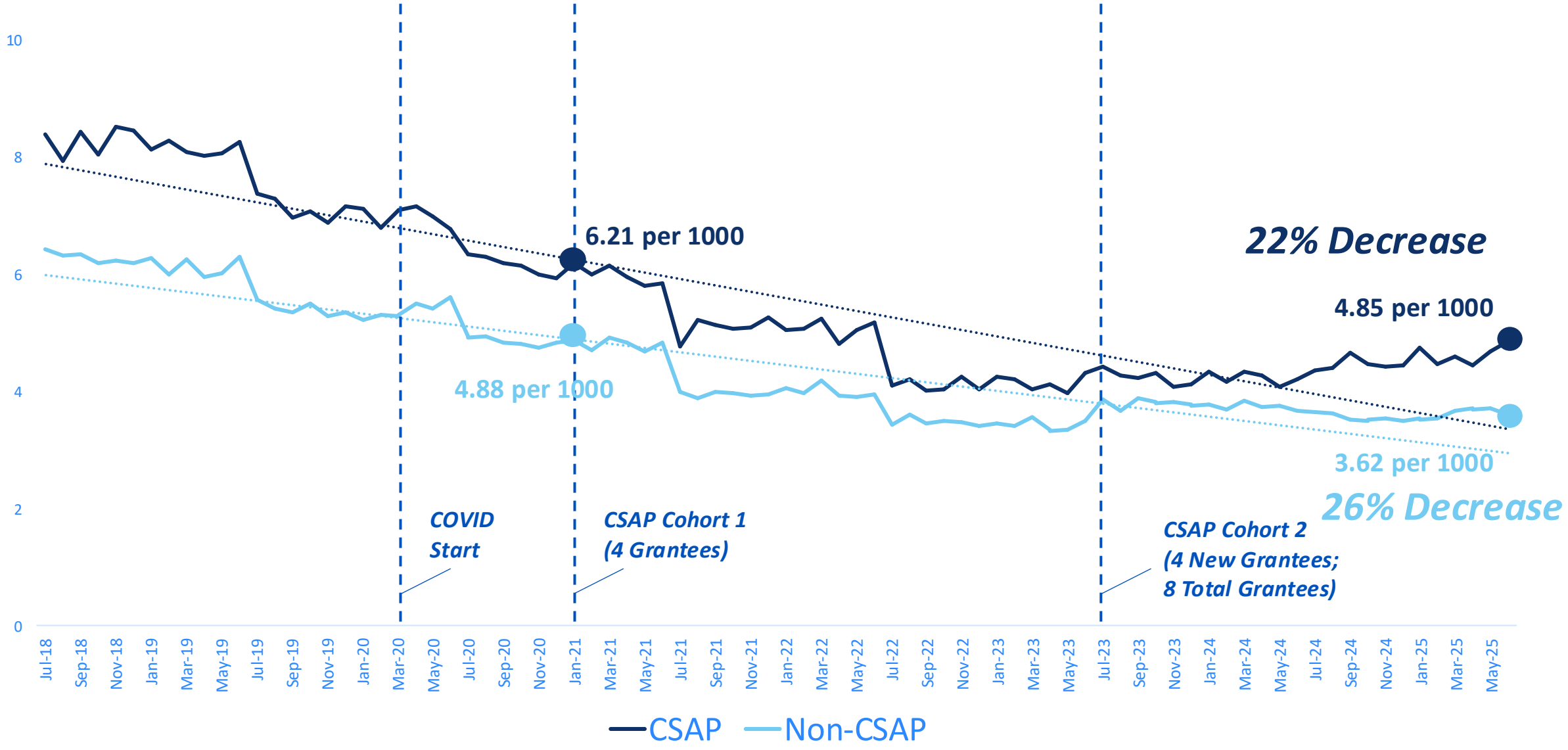
Monitoring three outcomes comparing CSAP funding areas and Non-CSAP funded areas

- Family Assessments in Need of Services
- Victims of Child Abuse or Neglect Overall
- Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

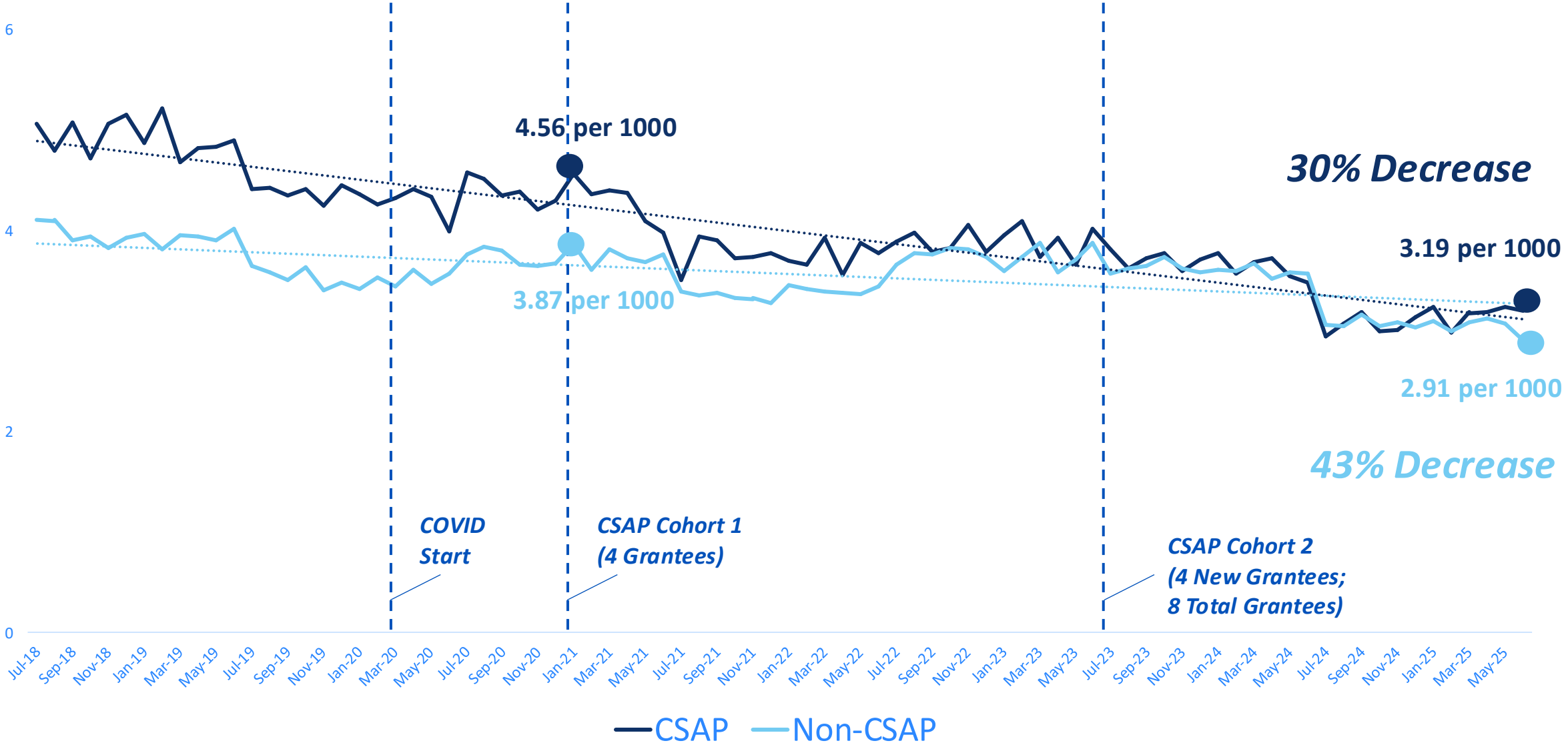
Key events and milestones

- COVID Start in March 2020
- CSAP Cohort 1 in January 2021 when four community grantees began services
- CSAP Cohort 2 in July 2023 when four additional community grantees began services

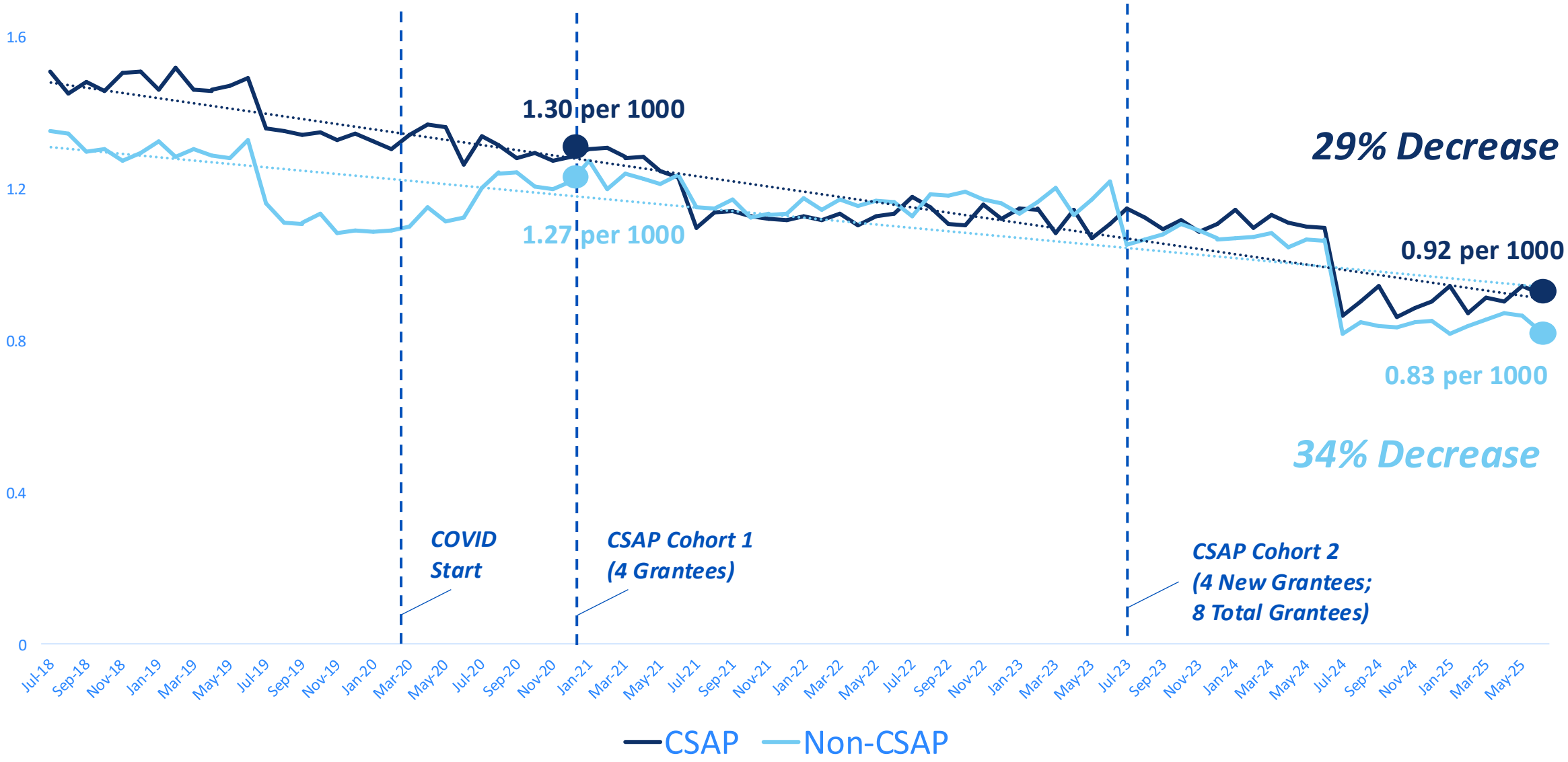
Family Assessments in Need of Services per 1000 Children



Substantiated Victims of Abuse and Neglect per 1000 Children



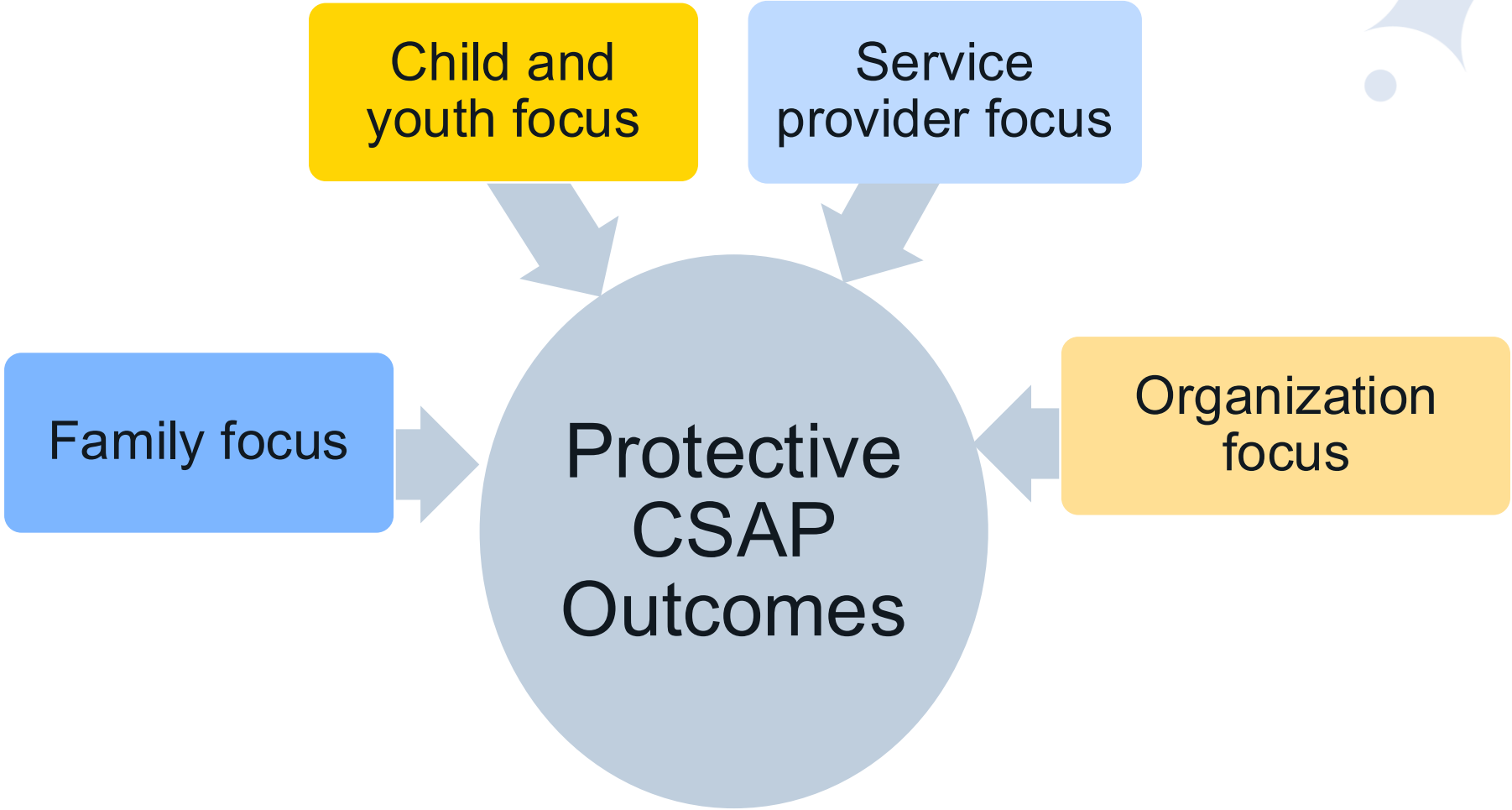
Child Sexual Abuse per 1000 Children



Putting It All Together

Implications for Practice, Policy, & Research

Key Takeaway



What does it mean for practice?

- New strategies may pivot from long-standing practice
  - Adult focus, specifically in schools, organizations, and communities
  - Move away from school-based youth approaches promoting youth responsibility for protection
  - Perpetration prevention approaches
  - Home/community approaches building family capacity for prevention

- Build bridges across organizations and communities for collaboration
  - Work outside usual silos, across sectors, and outside the social service sphere

What does it mean for policy?

- Consider expanding on national legislation (i.e., Erin's law) to align with holistic multilevel approach
- Develop dedicated funding streams – state legislatures
- Align practice and funding to evidence as it emerges - how does CTF funding *nationally* re-align itself to support development and adoption of new approaches
- Invest in perpetration prevention strategies
- Current strategy for funding may need to get more prescriptive over time as evidence is established

What does it mean for research?

- Emergent and exploratory data will inform development of a nuanced theory of change for preventing CSA
  - Some evidence established through this initiative
  - Continue developmental and exploratory approaches and triangulated data from multiple methods to build knowledge – not enough is truly known to make good decisions
- Next direction: dose response at the community level, understanding if combinations of services perform differently

Discussion

What more do you want to know?

How does this apply to your context?

What future directions do you see?

Contact

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