

Improving Statewide Access to Mental Health Services for Children of Low-income Families

Introduction:

- Optimal mental health is the foundation of a child's well-being. The connection between a child's mental health and his or her long-term health and life outcomes is powerful.
- Supporting children's mental health early improves the chances of them developing into healthy teens and young adults. Addressing and preventing mental health concerns in childhood can decrease the chances of individuals developing debilitating conditions that can push them into unfortunate situations, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and homelessness.
- Additionally, there is an identifiable gap of a qualified, well-trained workforce to meet the mental health needs of children and parents. The California Center for Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health (California Center) has established competencies for mental health providers.

<http://cacenter-ecmh.org/wp/professional-development/california-compendium-of-training-guidelines-personnel-competencies-and-professional-endorsement-criteria-for-infant-family-and-early-childhood-mental-health/>

Background:

- The Department of Health Care Services is leading an effort to improve California's health care system for families with limited incomes, known as Medi-Cal. Medi-Cal is the state's health insurance program for low-income Californians, including 40% of *all* children.
- Currently, access to the Medi-Cal mental health services varies between counties, making a disparity in access to care.
- The Stepped Care approach in Los Angeles County, is an exemplary program that could be replicated across counties.
- The Stepped Care approach was introduced by the LA County Department of Mental Health in April 2018 in order to improve access to services for clients and families who are experiencing early signs and symptoms of mental illness, need engagement into the mental health system, and are not ready to participate in evidence-based early intervention services.
- Services may include psychiatry, case management, and other mental health services.
- This approach makes it easier to claim federal funding for mental health services and allow people seeking mental health services and children at high risk who do not have a clinical diagnosis to gain access to care.

Summary:

- The state of California, as a whole, that operates the single state agency for Medicaid, should deliver mental health services succinctly and consistently across all counties statewide.
- Other counties throughout the state of California can look to LA County's Stepped Care approach as a model system of providing mental health services. This would allow for more children and their families with low-incomes to gain access to mental health services regardless of a diagnosis.
- The California Center assists policymakers, funders, and organizations to apply high quality practices that support healthy social and emotional development of infants and young children. They provide professional development opportunities for providers who are building their own skills or training others within the pediatric mental health specialty. This is a valuable resource that can be utilized to ensure that Californians have access to a skilled workforce of mental health providers.

Sources:

<https://first5center.org>

<http://cacenter-ecmh.org/>

http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/dmh/1059747_FAQPEIENHANCEMENTS6-28-19.pdf

<https://www.chcf.org/publication/2019-medi-cal-facts-figures-crucial-coverage/>

http://www.calhealthreport.org/2019/10/10/to-help-children-get-mental-health-care-researchers-call-for-overhaul-of-medi-cal/?utm_campaign=CHL%3A%20Daily%20Edition&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=77962198&hsenc=p2ANqtz--Rm4v8xNmK_Rr8-eFB3rItOn7e7sJbwVpOVs9dtMH98aYZXWSuM2i016FOksfdYDbXwtmWH-gM9TBYqojPOHfygA-rnA&hsmi=77962198