

Provide Family-Focused Preventive Interventions to Children and Families Through Primary Health Care

A policy action to Ensure Healthy Development for all Youth

Issue

Family-focused preventive interventions can improve the well-being of children and promote cognitive, affective, and behavioral health in young people. However, due to stigma associated with participation, concerns about the expertise of the organizations providing parenting advice, and the absence of sustainable funding, parenting programs that incorporate such preventive efforts do not reach enough families.¹ Implementing tested family-focused programs through primary health care settings may be an effective way to expand the reach of preventive interventions aimed at reducing behavioral health problems in young people.

Action

The following action steps can be used to build congressional support for the implementation and testing of family-focused preventive interventions:

1. Encourage the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to explore payment mechanisms for effective family-focused preventive interventions.
2. Direct the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration to study parenting programs and include them in future pediatric preventive-care recommendations.
3. Fund a pilot initiative for tests of parenting programs in primary care and ensure that findings from such evaluations are published and communicated to officials with the Health Resources and Services Administration and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

Evidence

Evidence from randomized trials indicates that family-focused preventive interventions are effective in improving cognitive, affective, and behavioral health in children and adolescents.² A summary of recent meta-analyses of family-focused prevention programs reveals beneficial effects across a number of child health and behavior outcomes.³ Annie E. Casey's Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development initiative at the University of Colorado lists 16 effective family-focused prevention programs; these programs have positively affected children's behavioral health problems of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, aggression, violence, and delinquency.⁴ Despite this strong evidence, healthy parenting programs are underutilized in the nation's schools, communities, and health care systems.⁵

Primary care settings provide a venue in which effective family-focused prevention programs can reach a large number of families with diverse ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. The parent–medical provider relationship begins early in childhood and continues through key phases of youth development. This patient–doctor relationship provides a strong foundation to recruit and engage parents in family-focused prevention programs. Studies of family-focused preventive interventions through primary care settings are promising. Initial evaluations of preventive interventions for families and children through primary care settings have shown positive effects on parenting and child outcomes.⁶ If the programs are widely used, the potential for population-level benefits of tested and effective family-focused prevention programs is great.⁷

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End Notes

1. Collaborative on Healthy Parenting in Primary Care (2016); Leslie et al. (2016).
2. Collaborative on Healthy Parenting in Primary Care (2016); Hawkins et al. (2015); Leslie et al. (2016).
3. Jenson and Bender (2014).
4. Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (n.d.); Mihalic and Elliott (2015).
5. Hawkins et al. (2015); Leslie et al. (2016).
6. Berge, Law, Johnson, and Wells (2010); Kjøbli and Ogden (2012); McMenemy, Sheldrick, and Perrin (2011); Perrin, Sheldrick, McMenemy, Henson, and Carter (2014); Piotrowski, Talavera, and Mayer (2009).
7. Patlak (2014).

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About this policy action

This policy action statement was developed by members of the network engaged in the Grand Challenge to Ensure Healthy Development for all Youth. The Grand Challenges initiative’s policy action statements present proposals emerging from Social Innovation for America’s Renewal, a policy conference organized by the Center for Social Development at Washington University in collaboration with the [American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare](http://www.aasw.org/), which is leading the Grand Challenges for Social Work initiative to champion social progress through a national agenda powered by science.

Grand Challenges for Social Work is an initiative of



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