

## Illinois Action Plan to Integrate Early Child Mental Health into Child and Family Serving Systems

Early childhood mental health is as critical to school readiness, health and overall well-being as cognitive, physical and literacy development. When we fail to sufficiently support early childhood mental health, we not only risk continuous or worsening challenges for children as they enter school, but we also reduce the effectiveness and impact of investments made in other child and family serving systems, including early care and education, health, mental health, family support, child welfare, and K-12 education.

While Illinois has made great strides over the years in addressing the mental health needs of young children and families, very significant gaps in services and strategies unfortunately persist across the continuum of social-emotional health promotion, prevention/intervention and treatment systems and services. ***Our state must now go further and do more to assure the success of all our children by building capacities within and across the full range of systems and services.***

In early 2014, the Irving Harris Foundation initiated a process to examine early childhood mental health in Illinois and convened a group of public and private sector leaders who shared the Foundation’s view that Illinois was in the midst of a critical moment to address key gaps for integrating early childhood mental health into systems serving young children, pregnant women and families. The group aimed to identify ways the state and its partners can better support children of diverse race, language and culture to succeed in school and life by integrating early learning systems with child and family mental health and health systems more effectively.

**Vision for Young Children and  
their Families in Illinois**

Every child enters kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn because, beginning prenatally, families have access to resources, services, and supports in their communities that include promotion, prevention/intervention, and treatment services.

To achieve the Vision, the group conducted a system scan (interviews, focus groups, a survey, and a research review) and held stakeholder meetings, gathering feedback from over 600 stakeholders. Through the distillation and analysis of this data, the group defined five key goal areas and developed corresponding priority action recommendations for each (Goal Areas and example priorities below) culminating in the *Illinois Action Plan to Integrate Early Childhood Mental Health into Child- and Family-Serving Systems, Prenatal through Age Five* (Action Plan). Illinois can significantly improve outcomes for the state’s most vulnerable children and families through the prioritization and implementation of the Action Plan.

Program Access and Availability	Workforce Development	Funding and Finance	Public Awareness and Education	System Governance and Implementation
Increase access and availability to high quality mental health services along the promotion to treatment continuum by developing and implementing a sustainable, scalable and consistent model for mental health consultation and access to other services through building capacity and increasing and integrating funding across systems.	Establish a cross-system approach to organizing all early childhood mental health workforce development efforts, including infusing early childhood mental health knowledge and best practices into coursework and training and establishing an entity to build a robust consultation network, supported by training and reflective supervision.	Increase coordination and effectiveness of public and private funding, including through innovative public-private partnerships, and by leveraging current and planned investments in promotion, prevention/intervention, and treatment services.	Increase awareness and understanding of early childhood mental health including through the creation of a public awareness workgroup of stakeholders, including parents, to inform the development of a social marketing and information campaign for promotion, prevention/intervention, and treatment services.	Establish a formal governance structure as a focal point for integrating early childhood mental health into systems and services, including an Early Childhood Mental Health Director or a similar priority position in state government, and a cross-systems state leadership committee on early childhood mental health.