



Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative

MONTHLY PROGRESS

September/October 2022

OVERVIEW

Announced by Governor JB Pritzker in March 2022, the Initiative aims to improve the delivery of behavioral health services to children and adolescents with significant and complex challenges, as well as to streamline and simplify the ways in which families can access resources, services, and supports for the youth in their care. This work will culminate in a Blueprint for Transformation that will guide the state in improving the children's behavioral health service system in Illinois. The Initiative is led by Dr. Dana Weiner, a clinical psychologist and child welfare expert with decades of experience in improving the functioning of public systems and increasing access to services for children and families.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As the weather cools, children return to school, and we collectively continue to recover from the shared trauma of a global pandemic, we are reflecting on all we have learned about how our State agencies, community providers, and system partners can [support young people](#) with behavioral health challenges. Research suggests that trauma can have [lingering effects on our brains, bodies, and behaviors](#) long after stressors have subsided. In this update on our progress, we examine the role of trauma in creating or exacerbating existing mental health problems, which complicates our ability to heal and creates inequities in outcomes among people with chronic exposure. Understanding the impact of trauma will allow us to respond more effectively to behavioral health challenges. In this month's Bulletin, we also describe our efforts to address the consequences of trauma and [promote the behavioral health](#) of Illinois children & adolescents.

Did You Know...

1. According to Mental Health America, from January 2020 to July 2021, **Cook County, Illinois** had the third-highest number of individuals scoring positive for PTSD on the PC-PTSD (after Los Angeles County, California and Maricopa County, Arizona). These 3 counties also had the highest number of trauma survivors (MHA, 2021)
2. Exposure to violence can create or worsen youth behavioral problems. For example, for every 14 violent crimes, one additional youth experiences behavioral problems over the long and medium term (DaViera, 2019; Journal of Community Psychology).
3. Youth exposed to community violence may re-experience events through nightmares or flashbacks, avoid engagement or discussion of upsetting events, experience bodily reactions or changes in sleep, attention, and appetite, and have difficulty trusting others (REACT Program, <https://voices.uchicago.edu/react/community-violence-resources/>).
4. Adverse Childhood Experience (ACES) are complex early stressors that can disrupt normal development and are associated with increased risk for mental health disorders (Sheffler et al, 2020, Adverse Childhood Experiences: Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Prevention).

5. The Illinois ACES Response Collaborative provides education to assist those who have experienced ACEs, while developing strategies to reduce their frequency, impact, and intergenerational transmission [Illinois ACES Response Collaborative | Health & Medicine Policy Research Group \(hmprg.org\)](#).



Coordination

The Interagency Crisis Staffing Workgroup, comprised of representatives from the six partner agencies, meets several times a week to address urgent service and placement needs of young people in crisis. Use of the Interagency Intake Portal, introduced in June, 2022, has allowed the group to reflect on data from over 80 collaboratively staffed cases to observe trends in case resolution, time until placement, and child characteristics. This information can continue to inform our efforts to adjust capacity and processes to achieve better outcomes for children and families. Interagency coordination also occurs at the leadership level, in collaborative discussions about strategies for sharing capacity, space, and programs across state agencies to better serve youth.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative analytic team has generated a series of maps that improve our ability to understand existing gaps in resources. These maps focus both on the availability of residential programs and the availability of community-based mental health services. Understanding that the need for services is influenced by other stressors, including economic hardship and exposure to violence, we have developed a set of estimates that more accurately reflect the statewide need for behavioral health care. We have also partnered with residential service providers on a survey that allows them to report on workforce shortages and available service capacity. The findings from the survey will be displayed on a new interactive map that will illustrate residential resources across the State.

Process Improvements

As we work to develop a Blueprint for Transformation, we are focused on improving processes for youth who currently need care. To this end, we have engaged in regular cross-agency meetings on focused topics including supports for youth transitioning to adulthood, coordination of care across multiple state agencies, and partnership with community provider agencies who can access state funds to stand up new programs and expand existing initiatives in new, existing, or repurposed facilities. In this way, we'll continue to build upon existing strengths and leverage assets to address our challenges.

Coming soon

- We will share analytic findings and maps with stakeholder groups to build consensus for recommendations.
- Blueprint development will include implementation plans to ensure that recommendations can be implemented effectively.
- Family engagement will ensure that system changes are informed by lived experience and understood by people who need access to behavioral health care.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the **Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative** please contact Dana.A.Weiner@Illinois.gov