

(<https://www.actforchildren.org/champion/join-movement/e-advocate>)

This Issue: Mental Health Awareness Month



Happy May, early learning advocates; it is Mental Health Awareness Month! We will dive into a topic that is critical to the work we do as early learning professionals: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH). In this month's eAdvocate, we outline IECMH basics, providers' roles in supporting children's social-emotional needs, and professional development resources to learn more and get involved in IECMH efforts in Illinois.

Importance of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health



Children's mental health and social-emotional development play a critical role in their ability to learn and thrive — in classrooms, workplaces, and interpersonal relationships — now and into the future. The foundation is laid in the earliest years: trauma or toxic stress can have lasting impacts on a child's brain development and mental health, which can impair his or her ability to succeed in school and life. Therefore, prevention and early intervention are crucial to supporting children's healthy development.

Children develop within the context of their relationships. Strong, stable relationships with family members, early childhood providers, and other adults in their lives promote their social-emotional learning and mental health. It is also important that mental health needs are addressed within children's natural environments and that caregivers are involved.

For example, early childhood providers who have concerns about a child's social-emotional development can engage an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (<https://www.actforchildren.org/providers/nutrition-wellness-programs/early-childhood-mental-health-program/>), who supports the provider and the child's family in understanding and addressing the child's behavior, as well as identifying strategies to support the child in their early childhood program.

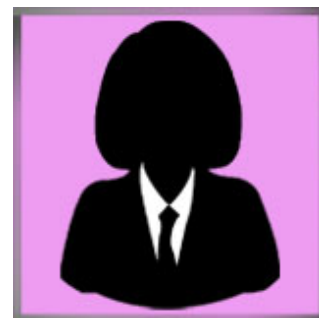
Resources like mental health consultation and the professional development opportunities below aim to build providers' capacity to promote the healthy social-emotional development of all children in their care.

For more information on the importance of early childhood mental health, please refer to these additional resources:

- Center on the Developing Child: Early Childhood Mental Health brief and video (<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-early-childhood-mental-health-video/>)
- Zero to Three: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Policy Series (<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health-iecmh-policy-series>)

Professional Development Opportunities

In Illinois, there are a host of professional development opportunities available to early childhood practitioners, whether you're looking to grow your understanding of IECMH issues, strengthen your skills to support children's social-emotional learning, or join other leaders in efforts to improve the IECMH system. Below are a few current and upcoming opportunities to definitely take advantage of.



Webinar and Blog Series: Immigration and Trauma

Recent changes in immigration policy are presenting new and intense challenges to infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families, and the teachers and programs that work with them. Families and programs are experiencing increased trauma due to the immigration climate. With funding from the Irving Harris Foundation, the BUILD Initiative has organized a series of webinars and blogs (<https://buildinitiative.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=8e3c8b6d5a7cc7b507f959be1&id=90fe1ed939&e=9d3df2eb0c>) in partnership with the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) for providers, state policy leaders, and advocates.

Join the BUILD Initiative during a series of four webinars, from April through July 2019, which will provide important areas for consideration in the provision of trauma-informed care as it relates to immigration and U.S. immigration policies. Topics will include: immigration policy and trauma; the impacts of immigration trauma on the health and development of young children; using a trauma-informed approach in working with providers and families; and promising practices and strategies for policy and legislation. We invite you to attend these webinars and encourage you to share the invitation with others.

The next webinar, which will be held on May 23, will discuss the impacts of immigration trauma on the health and development of young children. You can register here. (<https://cc.readytalk.com/registration/#/?meeting=w7sukn4822u&campaign=xxv6xe5uyakb>)

Strength and Resilience: Supporting Social-Emotional Development

September 29, 2019 at the UIC Forum – 725 W Roosevelt Road, Chicago, IL

Illinois Action for Children's annual Children's Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health Symposium, led by IAFCs Consultation Services team, brings IECMH experts and early childhood providers together to share timely information and resources to support children's positive social-emotional development. Look out for more information about this year's symposium as it gets closer!

Policy Updates



Meanwhile, in Washington, Congress is currently in the middle of appropriations season, where legislators decide on funding levels for the upcoming fiscal year. These decisions will impact a wide range of discretionary programs, from early childhood programs and housing assistance to scientific research and Defense Department programs. Federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 begins on October 1, 2019, and among a range of other appropriations requests, IAFC is urging Congress to provide robust funding to Head Start and Early Head Start. Specifically, **Illinois Action for Children is urging congress to increase funding for Head Start by at least \$1 billion**, bringing the program's total appropriation to over \$11.1 billion in FY 2020.

This funding increase crucial to improve access to high-quality care for children and families and to attract and retain a qualified workforce — and the additional funds would help ensure that Head Start programs around the country can provide the type of trauma-informed care and other supports that many vulnerable children so desperately need.

In order to accomplish these goals, it is imperative that Congress support a robust investment in Head Start for FY 2020. Thanks to the work of amazing advocates like you, over 200 members of Congress have already signed on to letters to the Appropriations Committees, requesting additional funding for Head Start. Copies of a couple letters can be found here (<https://www.ffyf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/House-Dear-Colleague-Letter-Supporting-Head-Start-in-FY2020.pdf>) and here. (https://www.nhsa.org/files/fy20_head_start_stivers.pdf) Both these letters explicitly highlight the need to direct more funds to ensure Head Start programs can support the behavioral health needs of young children and families that they care for.

In fact, earlier this month the House Appropriations Committee approved a draft FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies funding bill. Among other important investments, this funding bill calls for a \$2.4 billion increase to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to a total of \$7.7 billion, a 45 percent increase over FY19 levels. Head Start funding would also grow from \$10.1 billion to \$11.6 billion. Funding for Preschool Development Grants would also rise from \$250 million to \$350 million. These funding levels still need to be approved by the full House, then reconciled with the Senate, and signed by the President.

Our work is not done yet! Whether your representative (<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>) has signed on in support of one of these letters (thank them!) or not, you can call to urge them to keep up the pressure to ensure Head Start, CCDBG, and early childhood programs as a whole are a priority throughout the appropriations process.

Immigration

In our current immigration policy climate, many parents are concerned it's unsafe to bring their children to early childhood programs. Families are worried about sharing their private information, how participating in publicly funded programs could affect their ability to obtain long-term status, and the possibility of encountering immigration agents at or near the child care center.

In response to these concerns CLASP has recently released a guide to creating “safe space” policies for early childhood programs. Safe-space policies safeguard programs against immigration enforcement actions and protect families' safety and privacy. In this guide, advocates, providers, and policymakers will find information about developing and implementing safe-space policies, sample policy text that can be adapted by individual early childhood programs and a list of key resources for providers and parents. Check out the guide here. (https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019_safespacesguide.pdf)

Partner Plan Act Conference: Equity from the Start



This annual conference brings early childhood system stakeholders together to learn, network, and deepen their community systems knowledge and skills. This year, the theme is Equity from the Start: Community Systems Development through a Racial Equity Lens. Dr. Aisha Ray, Professor Emerita of Child Development at Erikson Institute and Distinguished Fellow at BUILD Initiative, is presenting the afternoon plenary and will focus on how participants can embed a racial equity lens in their everyday practice.

In addition, the conference will feature breakout sessions presented by organizations like Erikson Institute, Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University, the Ounce of Prevention, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and more.

Partner Plan Act Conference: Equity from the Start (<https://www.partnerplanact.org/events/event-description?CalendarEventKey=5eb3ae38-5af7-4b10-acd1-1e2d85229583&Home=%2fpapa%2fevents>)

Bloomington, IL

June 11, 2019

9:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.