

Request for Applications



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Aligning Policy and Practice: Mental Health Assessment and Treatment of Infants, Young Children and Families

An Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Convening

The ZERO TO THREE Policy Center and partners are pleased to announce an exciting technical assistance opportunity for teams to connect and develop strategies to advance state policy related to infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) assessment and treatment. This opportunity will center around a convening of state teams and national experts.

This opportunity is supported in part by the Irving Harris Foundation and the University of Minnesota, and presented in partnership with BUILD and the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Background

Children's earliest experiences—both positive and negative—impact their brain formation and in turn, their social and emotional, physical, cognitive, communication, and sensory and motor skills development. Promoting an optimal environment for brain growth is paramount to influencing healthy development. Conversely, certain negative early experiences (often referred to as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)) have long-lasting and consequential impacts on health outcomes (chronic illness, substance abuse), educational performance (absenteeism, dropout rates), and even criminal justice involvement (juvenile arrests, felony charges) throughout children's lives.

Recognizing the tremendous opportunities – and risks – associated with this critical time, policymakers are increasingly investing in what experts call “infant and early childhood mental health” (IECMH), defined as the capacity of a child from birth to age five to 1) experience, express and regulate emotions; 2) form close, secure interpersonal relationships; and 3) explore his/her environment and learn, within the context of family and cultural expectations. To strengthen IECMH policies and support the healthy development of young children, states are presented with the challenge of developing and financing IECMH assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. In order to accomplish this policymakers and providers across the country are testing innovative strategies, which presents a great opportunity for facilitated learning, sharing, and problem solving between and within states.

Description of the Opportunity

This opportunity consists of planning calls, a two-day convening, and a subsequent series of virtual sharing and learning opportunities. Following the convening, participating states will also have the opportunity to apply for one of five openings for more intensive technical assistance.

Convening Date: October 13-14, 2016

Convening Location: University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis, MN

Goal: To identify state strategies for aligning health care financing policy, specifically Medicaid policy, with IECMH practice. The meeting will offer both “expert” and peer technical assistance. States will share their expertise and explore possible solutions to their current challenges. IECMH experts and policy leaders will work together to:

1. Develop and share strategies for financing a robust system of IECMH assessment/diagnostic and treatment services;
2. Develop and share strategies for communicating IECMH messages to Medicaid and other policymakers, identifying and using policy levers, and using data to “make the case”;
3. Work towards creating and implementing state action plans; and
4. Identify examples of successful state or community policy/practice change for development of a “Policy Story Bank” following the convening.

Expectations

Selected State Teams will:

- Select one member to participate in planning calls in advance of the convening;
- As a team, complete a survey of current financing structures, service array, and strengths and challenges (guidance provided by ZTT) in advance of the convening;
- Participate in a convening focused on developing strategies to advance IECMH policy. Travel, lodging, and meal costs will be covered for up to five participants from each state.
- Participate in (e.g. choose the topic and lead a discussion; actively contribute to calls led by other states) subsequent virtual learning and sharing sessions between November 2016 and September 2017; and
- Create and implement an action plan based on assessment of current priorities and opportunities, and provide progress updates every other month to assigned ZERO TO THREE contact.

ZERO TO THREE will:

- Lead planning efforts for the convening and related preparatory and follow-up activities;
- Host the convening and a series of subsequent virtual learning and sharing sessions to support teams in developing and realizing financing and other strategic goals;
- Organize resource materials and expert contributions to support team activities;

- Produce a brief report summarizing progress made by participating teams and outcomes of technical assistance to states; and
- Create a “Policy Story Bank” containing analysis of successful IECMH policy efforts in states and communities, with information to support other IECMH leaders in learning from, adapting, and replicating successes.

Application Process

Eligibility:

All states are eligible to apply. States should assemble public-private sector teams of five people (see membership guidelines below). States must submit a single application on behalf of the team for consideration. Applications must identify a lead contact person who represents a public or private sector state-level entity, such as a state agency or advocacy organization, working on the state’s IECMH policy and service delivery system.

Team Composition:

Teams **must** include representation from:

1. the state’s Medicaid director or a high-level designee thereof within Medicaid; and
2. a licensed I-ECMH clinician currently providing mental health services to children and families.

Based on state priorities, structure, and current capacity to advance policy, states may decide to fill the three remaining positions with other state-level decision makers including but not limited to:

- administrator from mental health authority (e.g. children’s mental health director, behavioral health director);
- representative from state Infant Mental Health Association;
- Governor’s Office representative;
- philanthropists/foundation staff; or
- other state agency representatives (e.g. Part C, public health, child welfare).

A broader team may be involved in follow-up activities, if appropriate. States will be expected to commit the time of a core group of public and private leaders who have the authority to influence and make changes. This group will participate in the preparatory activities, convening, and subsequent virtual learning and sharing sessions.

Submitting an Application:

States should identify the lead contact person for this application and provide brief, specific answers to the following questions:

1. Who will serve as your state team? For each member, please describe:
 - their sphere of influence, and
 - what they will contribute to this team effort.
2. Why is this particular combination of partners capable of meaningfully advancing IECMH financing policy in your state?
3. If you could invite additional people to your team, who would they be and why?

4. To what extent has your state included a focus on IECMH within early childhood or other system-building efforts?
5. What does your state team hope to accomplish through participation in this opportunity? Are there financing issues you would be particularly eager to work on in this setting? Please be as specific as possible.
6. In what way(s) is your state uniquely well-positioned to take advantage of this opportunity?

Responses should not exceed five pages and are **due no later than August 1, 2016**. Please email submissions to Lindsay Usry (lusry@zerotothree.org; 202-857-2293).

Selection Criteria

Selection of states will be based on the following criteria:

- The state has recruited a core group of public and private leaders who think comprehensively and systemically, are committed to advancing IECMH policy, and have the authority to influence or make changes specifically related to financing and service delivery.
- Consideration will be given to the geographic diversity and the rural/urban mix among the group of states selected.

If necessary, follow-up discussions regarding applications will be conducted with state representatives by telephone.

Questions may be addressed to Lindsay Usry (lusry@zerotothree.org; 202-857-2293).

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals, policymakers, and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers. The Policy Center is a nonpartisan, research-based resource for federal and state policymakers and advocates on the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers. For decades, ZERO TO THREE has worked to advance the awareness, diagnosis, and treatment of IECMH, to build cross-systems capacity for IECMH, and to provide leadership and guidance to state and federal agencies, national and state organizations, IECMH clinicians, early childhood professionals, and parents. For more information about the work of ZERO TO THREE and the Policy Center, please visit: <https://www.zerotothree.org/policy-and-advocacy>