



MINNESOTA HEAD START ASSOCIATION, INC.

Mental Health

On May 11-12, 2004, the Minnesota Head Start Association and its partners conducted a statewide event entitled "Strengthening Mental Health Services for Head Start Children and Families". At this forum, a broad group of stakeholders provided input into the development of a Mental Health Action Plan for Minnesota Head Start. The proposed plan, which follows, challenges Head Start agencies across Minnesota to define and enhance their activities around mental health prevention and early intervention for low-income families with children birth to 5. The plan also calls for Head Start to work in partnership with state agencies and existing groups to challenge the health care system to respond to the mental health needs of Minnesota's youngest children.*

Within Head Start, the Minnesota Head Start Association (MHSA) and its partners will:

In the Area of Screening and Referral

- Encourage all Head Start agencies to use a quality mental health screening tool ^{1/} to identify and refer children who may need further evaluation or consultation. MHSA will work with its state partners to create training opportunities for Head Start staff to learn how to properly administer quality screening tools and use screening results to educate parents and make appropriate referrals.
- Work together with appropriate state agencies to develop a referral protocol for services at the state level and a framework for this type of protocol at the local level. All Head Start agencies will be encouraged to create a local protocol that is reflective of the referral networks in their communities and share information back to the state level about the gaps in their referral networks.
- Encourage all Head Start agencies to identify a referral expert(s) within their agencies whose job it is to know the mental health services in their communities. These experts will be asked to be part of a mental health advisory group for Head Start that can advocate for and pass on information about statewide initiatives and training opportunities available in the area of early childhood mental health.

In the Area of Program Design

- Support Head Start agencies through peer-to-peer networking and shared models to develop an early childhood mental health services continuum of care for their local service area. Help agencies set goals and develop strategies to increase the cultural competence, sensitivity and effectiveness of mental health services delivered through Head Start.
- Support Head Start agencies through peer-to-peer networking and training to develop an integrated, holistic approach to mental health that strengthens relationships with at-risk families and empowers them with ongoing support.

In the Area of Training and Support

- Sponsor training opportunities to enhance Head Start programs' use of reflective consultation and supervision (with video taping). Also provide statewide training opportunities on evidence-based practices such as filial therapy and parent/child interaction therapy.
- Work with the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Education to offer regional trainings on functional behavioral assessment to Head Start and its community partners.

Encourage the use of technology-based training approaches to make learning opportunities easy to access for rural Head Start programs and their community partners.

- Develop opportunities for ongoing training and updates that clarify the eligibility criteria, scope of service and restrictions for different state and federally funded programs designed to serve young children with social, emotional and behavioral concerns (including programs through the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health and Human Services).
- Work with State partners including the Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health to develop training and supportive resources for parents that help them advocate for the services their young children need. Explore the feasibility of developing a statewide mental health support group for parents of children birth to 5.

The Association and local Head Start agencies will:

- Advocate and encourage the Minnesota Legislature to fund new strategies that will enhance the capacity of the state's mental health service system to better address the mental health needs of pregnant women and children birth to 5.
 - Toward expansion of this system, we will endorse the Minnesota Department of Human Services' plan to develop a benefit/payment structure for diagnostic services, including screening, delivered to children birth to 3.
 - We would also support funding for pilot programs that use innovative methods and new technologies to increase rural access to mental health services and training.
- Encourage Minnesota's Health Plans to develop educational materials about the importance of early childhood mental health that encourage early identification of mental health issues in an effort to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health services.
- Encourage the University of Minnesota to create educational opportunities for Head Start staff and mental health providers to learn "best practices" in the delivery of the continuum of mental health services to families with young children and culturally sensitive and specific practices for mental health prevention and treatment targeting at-risk populations.

^{1/} A quality mental health screening tool provides standardized, reliable and valid results about children's social, emotional and behavioral development and is age- and culturally-appropriate. A screening tool that meets many of these criteria for use with children under age 3 is the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ:SE).

*The Minnesota Head Start Association and the Minnesota Head Start Collaboration Office, in partnership with the Children's Mental Health Partnership, the Minnesota Department of Education and the Children's Mental Health Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services.