



Texas Council on Children and Families
**Incorporating System of Care Concepts into
Services for Children, Youth and Families**
October 27, 2010

Texans Care for Children is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated exclusively to the children of Texas. We look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners and 220 members throughout the state who together represent thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda. We also co-convene various stakeholder groups, including the **Texas Children's Mental Health Forum**, which we convene with the Texas Health Institute, bringing together a broad range of organizations, public agencies, families, advocates and other stakeholders to learn more about the programs, policies, and issues impacting children's mental health in Texas, and to share information, identify concerns, and offer policy recommendations to advance children's mental well-being.

Last week, the Texans Children's Mental Health Forum co-hosted an event at the Capitol which brought together experts from national, state, local and family perspectives to talk about the benefits of utilizing a **system of care approach to serve children and youth with complex behavioral health needs**. This promising approach, which is being implemented in five communities in Texas, but is unavailable to most children and families in the state, has been shown to produce positive outcomes while keeping children and youth at home and in their communities, close to their family and natural supports.

While the system of care approach was originally developed to serve children and youth with serious mental health challenges, its concepts and philosophy are applicable to any population being served by multiple systems. **Several themes and recommendations from the event highlight ways to improve the outcomes of children and youth and directly align with the Council's draft recommendations, or can be easily woven into them.**

Broadly speaking, to improve outcomes of children and youth with complex needs, Texas should work to ensure services provided to children, youth and families are ***coordinated, effective, community based, family driven, youth guided, culturally responsive, and linguistically competent.***

Recommendations to Promote System of Care Concepts within Various Systems and Services

- Promote prevention and early intervention of mental health concerns, through strategies such as promoting health homes, integrated health, and social marketing strategies to combat stigma and prevent suicide
- Seek federal grants for capital improvements to help schools establish or improve school based health clinics
- Identify mechanisms that help ensure services provided to children and families are *effective* and are *culturally responsive*, such as requiring providers via contracts to:
 - Use research-informed or promising practices
 - Report indicators measuring cultural and linguistic competencies
 - Report functional child and family outcomes
 - Implement family-driven, youth-guided services
 - Implement strategies shown to reduce disparities
- Strengthen family and youth partnerships at all levels, including service provision, program management, and policy development. For example:
 - At the service level, family members can participate on planning teams for their own children and can help other youth and families by serving as paid care managers, family partners or liaisons, or peer mentors.
 - At the management level, families can serve as trainers or program evaluators
 - At the policy level, youth and family members can serve on governing bodies and provide invaluable input into the development and implementation of programs, services and systems
- Utilize data-driven decision making for quality management and continuous quality improvement
- Identify and support strategies to develop a skilled workforce through education, training, technical assistance, coaching, peer certification, and information dissemination
- Conduct interagency trainings at state and local levels
- Strengthen partnerships with higher education, incorporating system of care concepts into curriculums and teaching best practices

Recommendations Specific to the TX Council on Children and Families Draft Report

Regarding the Council's draft recommendations related to screenings:

- Ensure screening tools are evidence based and culturally/linguistically appropriate and that they address social and emotional concerns
- Ensure the strategies related to trainings on working/communicating with parents and caregivers, social marketing or public awareness campaigns, or websites are culturally responsive

Regarding the Council's draft recommendations related to school-based and early care and education programs:

- In addition to identifying existing programs within early care and education and public school programs and determining if they are evaluated, also look at how they fit together. To what extent are they coordinated? Do their purposes align? What programs overlap, what gaps exist?

Regarding the Council's draft recommendations related to Center for Social-Emotional Development:

- Utilize the Center to:
 - Disseminate system of care concepts and principles into child-serving workforce, something that is not current being widely taught in higher education training programs – how to coordinate services, how to collaborate, how to work with family and youth.
 - Facilitate cross-systems training
 - Serve as a hub to disseminate promising practices and innovations being developed in communities across the state, such as the system of care communities and Mental Health Transformation project community collaborations.

Regarding the Council's draft recommendations related to Transition to Adult Services:

- Consider including the use of peer mentors/care managers/system navigators as part of the service delivery systems supporting transitioning youth
- Ensure services are coordinated, culturally/linguistically appropriate

Regarding the Council's draft recommendations related to Regional Leadership Councils:

- Strongly support the inclusion of family/youth representation
- Strongly support the recommendations to identify & communicate collaborative evidence-based and informed programs/practices to communities to promote effective practices

Thank you for your time and commitment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care for Children at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

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