



MEETING THE Health Care Needs of Children in the Foster Care System



Project Description

The Georgetown University Child Development Center recently completed a three-year study funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and supported in part by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, to identify and describe promising approaches for meeting the health care needs of children in the foster care system. In this study, the term health care was utilized to encompass services and strategies for meeting the physical, mental, emotional, developmental and dental health needs of children. Identification of these promising approaches was part of a larger effort of the *Public-Private Partnership for the Health of Children in Out-of-Home Care* (supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau and the Administration for Children and Families) to improve and promote the health of children in foster care and their families.

Background

Children in state protective custody are likely to have a range of acute and chronic health problems. When compared with other children from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, they have higher rates of chronic medical, mental health, and developmental problems (AAP 1994). For many children, the trauma of family separation and placement within the foster care system itself compound these conditions. Despite the availability of health care through Medicaid and other funding sources, as well as laws and policies that mandate appropriate care, numerous systemic and direct service barriers prevent many children in state protective custody from receiving adequate health care (GAO 1995).

However, many states and communities are developing or implementing creative strategies (promising approaches) for overcoming these barriers. This study aimed to identify such approaches, to analyze the critical elements of each, and to publicize the findings from these states and

American Academy of Pediatrics. (1994). Health care of children in foster care (RE9404), *Pediatrics*, 93(2), 335-338.

United States General Accounting Office. (May 1995). *Foster care: Health needs of many young children are unknown and unmet*. Washington, DC: (GAO/HEHS-95-114).



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communities to assist others in developing comprehensive, systematic strategies for assuring that the health care needs of children in the foster care system are adequately met.

Methodology for the Study

A national search was conducted to solicit nominations for promising approaches being implemented in states and communities around the country to address the health care needs of children in the foster care system. Following this search, telephone interviews were conducted with individuals from 73 nominated sites. Based on analysis of the interview data and feedback from the project advisory panel, criteria were developed for selecting a small number of sites to be visited. Site visits were conducted during 2000 to obtain in-depth information on the following programs:

- **Project for Adolescent and Child Evaluations, State of Arkansas**
- **HealthWorks of Cook County, Cook County, IL**
- **HealthWorks of Illinois, State of Illinois**
- **Foster Care Pediatrics, Monroe County, NY**
- **Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) Foster Care Program, San Diego County, CA**
- **Assessment and Consultation Team, Riverside County, CA**
- **In-Care Network, Billings, MT**
- **The Children's Aid Society, New York, NY**
- **Westchester Institute for Human Development Family Program, Westchester County, NY**

Key stakeholders—including child welfare administrators and caseworkers, health and mental health agency administrators and workers, birth parents and foster parents, and health care providers from other organizations such as hospitals and clinics—were interviewed at each site. Data collected from the nine site visits was analyzed to identify critical elements of these approaches that impact health care for children in the foster care system.

Based on analysis of the findings from the 9 site visits and the telephone interviews with 73 sites, as well as review of existing and proposed health care standards for children in foster care, a framework of **critical components** that make up a comprehensive system for meeting the health care needs of children in the foster care system was developed. These components include:

- Initial screening and comprehensive health assessment
- Access to health care services and treatment
- Management of health care data and information
- Coordination of care
- Collaboration among systems
- Family involvement
- Attention to cultural issues
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Training and education
- Funding strategies
- Designing managed care to fit the needs of children in the child welfare system

Findings from the study indicated that while many sites are implementing one or more of these components in their efforts to provide comprehensive health care for children in foster care, rarely has a single state or community addressed all of these components.

Products

As a result of this study, a number of different products have been created to assist states and communities in their efforts to improve health care services for children served by their foster care systems. These products, each titled “Meeting the Health Care Needs of Children in the Foster Care System,” include the following:

- **Framework for a Comprehensive Approach: Critical Components**—Definitions of 11 critical components to address in developing a comprehensive system of health care for children in the foster care system.
- **Summary of State and Community Efforts**—Discussion of key findings from both the site visits and phone interviews that were part of the study.
- **Strategies for Implementation**—Technical assistance tool that describes considerations for states and communities interested in developing strategies for addressing the health care needs of children in foster care.
- **Individual Site Visit Reports**—Comprehensive reports that describe each site visit and provide details about the health care strategies utilized in each site.
- **Fact Sheets**—Brief (1-3 page) summaries of individual state or community approaches based on information collected through the telephone interviews and site visits. Contact information is included on each fact sheet.
- **Compendium of Approaches**—State-by-state listing with contact information for the various approaches identified in the study.
- **Topical Issue Briefs**—Discussions of some of the most interesting findings and themes of the study, designed to provide more detailed information about topics highlighted in the *Strategies for Implementation* document.
- **Literature Review**—Summary of the literature on the health and mental health issues affecting children and families in the foster care system.

All of the above products will be made available as they are completed on the Georgetown University Child Development Center’s website at <http://gucdc.georgetown.edu/foster.html>.

Published versions of the documents can be obtained by contacting Mary Moreland at (202) 687-8803 or deaconm@georgetown.edu.

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The document reflects the findings of a research project, as well as the thinking of the project advisory panel, respondents in states and communities, and the authors. It does not necessarily represent official policy or positions of the funding sources.

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