

SUMMARY: EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH BEST PRACTICES

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY MEETING WITH EL PASO COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY

On February 24, 2022, Joint Initiatives for Youth + Families (JI) convened a community meeting to assess the state of Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) in El Paso County using Mental Health Colorado's Early Childhood Mental Health Toolkit¹ as a framework. The meeting was designed to build new and strengthen ongoing relationships in the early childhood community while assessing current practices and identifying opportunities for growth for how the El Paso County community can comprehensively support early childhood mental health county-wide. Twenty-seven (27) early childhood community members representing sixteen (16) different agencies/roles attended the virtual meeting, facilitated by an external consultant. The following summary accompanies a full report of the meeting. Read Full Report **HERE**.

EL PASO COUNTY'S IDENTIFIED AREAS OF STRENGTH

- Solid "home base" for early childhood community work in JI.
- Strong collaborative relationships and diverse local partners who recognize their role in supporting ECMH.
- Strong regional and statewide collaborative relationships.
- Current alignment of ECMH Toolkit best practices in collective impact activities, specifically within JI's Health & Well-being Committee.
- ECMH consultation is available within a variety of settings.
- Multidisciplinary providers trained in the DC:0-5™.

EL PASO COUNTY'S IDENTIFIED AREAS OF NEED

- Continued intentional integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations (and if/how they pertain to creating a trauma-sensitive environment) when identifying and engaging potential community partners, recruiting and training the workforce, and partnering with providers and families.
- Building connection between screening practices and community services and referral processes.
- Ongoing development (creation of diverse pathways, and support and professional development) of an adequate and well supported early childhood mental health workforce.
- Strategic respite care supports for providers, recognizing that the pandemic only exacerbated the current struggles of early learning providers.
- Additional ECMH consultation and DC:0-5™ trained professionals, leveraging the existing foundation in El Paso County.
- Consider a revision of the ECMH Toolkit to honor environmental and cultural shifts since the pandemic within the El Paso County community.

POTENTIAL LOCAL COLLABORATIONS

- Investigate intentional partnerships with local hospitals, particularly around screening and appropriate referrals.
- Explore intentional alignment with El Paso County Public Health's communication activities.
- Identify additional community members who represent the parent/guardian/family/lived experience voice with the intention of including non-English native language speakers.
- Deepen targeted support to Family Child Care Homes.

FUNDING NEEDS

- To support continue targeted outreach to increase diverse voices and to support additional community convenings/ongoing activities.
- To support external facilitation from consultants with expertise in identified efforts (e.g., capacity building for community wide collaborations in the implementation of screening and assessment, cultivating an environment for authentic engagement from partners with lived experience, etc.).

¹ The Early Childhood Mental Health Toolkit was developed to help increase and improve prevention, early identification, and intervention for mental health issues impacting young children and their families in Colorado. It is a framework for how communities can support early childhood mental health through a comprehensive approach. This toolkit offers an overarching plan for addressing early childhood mental health and promoting community strategies. It contains resources and steps you can use to ensure every child has a path to success through 10 best practices with strategies for how to implement, fund, and sustain these practices in communities. (The community recognizes that the Toolkit was finalized in 2018 and that MHC no longer has the capacity to revise content and provide technical assistance to communities.)