



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

*Making a Difference for Children, Families and
Communities*



Joette Katz
Commissioner

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

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Blueprint For Improving Children's Behavioral Health In Connecticut Submitted To General Assembly

Prevention, Early Intervention And Access To High Quality Services Are Focus Of Plan

HARTFORD – The final Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan will be submitted by Department of Children and Families Commissioner Joette Katz to the State Legislature at a hearing today at 11 a.m. The Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan is a comprehensive, integrated plan to promote well-being and meet the mental, emotional and behavioral health needs of all children in Connecticut. The plan fulfills the requirements of Public Act 13-178, which was passed by the Legislature in the wake of the Newtown tragedy.

Governor Dannel P. Malloy said the plan embodies reforms for which families have asked. "Engaging families in this effort is the most effective way to help ensure that children receive the treatment and services they need," said Governor Malloy. "In its substance and in its development, the plan places families and children at the center of our work to improve the behavioral health system. I applaud DCF, CHDI and community members who participated in order for us to develop a forward-thinking plan that responds to the evolving needs of our children."

Commissioner Katz said the plan's call for providing services in the community and in the places where families already take their children will make services more available, integrated and effective. "One appealing aspect of the plan is that clinical services will be integrated into schools and pediatric offices where parents take their children in the normal flow of their lives," Commissioner Katz said. "This will make services more accessible but also can help reduce the stigma involved with seeking mental health services."

The plan represents major changes for Connecticut's behavioral health system, including fundamentally reforming financing by pooling existing state agency funds. The plan also calls for greater coordination and enhancing the array of services and supports available to children and families across a full continuum of care (health promotion, prevention, intervention, treatment and follow-up). It recommends building a well-coordinated and integrated system with "no wrong door" for families, whether they enter through their day care, school, doctor, a state agency or a hospital.

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The Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan identifies seven areas of focus that will result in significant improvements to the children's behavioral health system, including:

1. system organization, financing and accountability;
2. health promotion, prevention, and early identification;
3. access to a comprehensive array of services and supports;
4. pediatric primary care and behavioral health care integration;
5. addressing disparities in access to culturally appropriate care;
6. family and youth engagement; and
7. workforce development.

A set of goals and strategies to be implemented over the next five years are included for each of these areas. Highlights include:

- Enhance the ability of caregivers, providers and school personnel to promote healthy social and emotional development for children of all ages;
- Implement a statewide system of screening and early intervention and connection of children and youth to appropriate resources and services;
- Expand school-based behavioral health services, including school-based health clinics, behavioral health screening for students and training for school personnel;
- Integrate pediatric primary care and community based behavioral health services as well as provide training and support for pediatricians to address behavioral health concerns;
- Allocate funding to expand evidence-based behavioral health services for children to prevent and treat social/emotional disorders as early as possible;
- Create a "Care Management Entity" to coordinate care and improve outcomes and accountability
- Create a pooled financing system to "de-link" services from insurance status, system involvement and other factors, and provide children access to services based on needs;
- Develop a financing strategy to adequately resource a comprehensive array of behavioral health services and ensure those services are culturally and linguistically competent, and accessible in all communities;
- Convene a Children's Behavioral Health Implementation Team that will agree on a common set of behavioral health outcomes and track and regularly report on implementation progress and results.

DCF selected the [Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut \(CHDI\)](#), an organization with specialized expertise in children's health and behavioral health, to draft the plan. CHDI and DCF established an Advisory Committee and a Steering Team and launched an extensive input-gathering process as the cornerstone for the preparation of the plan. Input was gathered from close to 1,000 families, youth, advocates, health and behavioral health providers, state agency representatives, researchers, educators, and members of the public through six open public forums, 26 family and youth "community conversations," 12 facilitated discussions with topical experts, and input submitted through www.Plan4Children.org. A draft of the plan was posted for public comment on the www.plan4children.org website on September 5, 2014, and 115 people submitted written feedback.

“Children and families in Connecticut currently experience significant barriers to achieving social, emotional, and behavioral wellness and accessing quality behavioral health care,” said Judith Meyers, President and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut and co-chair of the Plan’s 36-member Advisory Committee. "The Children’s Behavioral Health Plan provides a set of strategies for how we can do better. It will take time and resources from many partners over the next five years to achieve the vision laid out in PA.13-178 - *that together we will meet the mental, emotional and behavioral health needs of all children in the state.*"

The Plan was funded through a public private partnership involving the Department of Children and Families, the Connecticut Health Foundation, the Children’s Fund of Connecticut and the Grossman Family Foundation.

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