



Frequently Asked Questions about ICMHP and the Children's Mental Health Plan

Why is Illinois focusing on the mental health and well-being of children and youth?

Research indicates that children's healthy social and emotional development is as important to their health, well-being and academic success as physical health. Yet, little attention is placed on children's mental health until problems become severe. Nationally, over 20 percent of children have a diagnosable mental health problem, and only one in five of these children are receiving services. Mental health programs and services for children in Illinois – like that of most states – are highly fragmented, under-resourced and limited in scope. In addition, the current Illinois system places little emphasis on promoting children's social and emotional well-being, and preventing mental health problems.

What is the Children's Mental Health Act?

The Children's Mental Health (CMH) Act of 2003 was created to develop a comprehensive system of community and state programs, services and resources that promote the mental health and well-being of children ages birth to eighteen, intervene early to address potential mental health needs, and provide comprehensive mental health services for children who need them. This groundbreaking Act represented the work of over 100 multi-disciplinary agencies, organizations and families committed to the well-being of Illinois children. The CMH Act created the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP) to develop and monitor implementation of a statewide Children's Mental Health Plan.

What is the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership?

The ICMHP is comprised of twenty-five members appointed by the Governor who represent families, child advocates, education, early childhood, health, mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, substance abuse, violence prevention, and others. State legislators – two members of each caucus of the House of Representatives and Senate – and representatives from key state agencies and departments (e.g., child welfare, public health, mental health, education, and corrections) are also on the ICMHP.

Is the CMH Act, the ICMHP or the CMH Plan advocating mandatory screening or testing of all children for mental health problems?

No. There is no intent nor has there ever been any intent to require that all children be screened for mental health problems. Voluntary mental health screening is a core component of an effective and comprehensive children's mental health system, and of an overall approach to promoting health and wellness in children. It identifies social and emotional development needs in children and adolescents as early as possible, prevents potential mental health problems from developing or worsening, and can help identify unique strengths in children. Voluntary mental health screening is conducted with parental consent and in accordance with existing Illinois and federal confidentiality, consent, reporting, and privacy laws and policies.

The ICMHP would like to see that children have access to voluntary mental health screening. The ICMHP recommends that in child-serving systems where screening takes place: parents should provide consent to screening, trained professionals conduct the screening, standardized and evidence-based screening tools are used, and children who are identified as having a mental health need receive referrals for more in-depth assessment and/or appropriate services.

Does the ICMHP believe that parents should provide consent to mental health screening?

Yes. The ICMHP recommends that voluntary mental health screening be conducted with parental consent and parental involvement in accordance with existing Illinois and federal confidentiality, consent, reporting, and privacy laws and policies.

Does mental health screening mean that children will be inappropriately labeled or given prescription medications?

No. Screening does not result in a definitive statement about a child's needs nor does it draw a conclusion about a mental disorder or diagnosis. It only indicates whether further assessment by a trained professional might be needed. The ICMHP recommends that parents be informed if a screening indicates the child would benefit from further assessment.

Will schools be required to conduct mental health screenings for all students?

No. Neither the ICMHP nor the CMH Plan require or recommend that mental health screening be conducted for all students.

What is the Children's Mental Health Plan?

The Children's Mental Health Act mandated that a Children's Mental Health Plan be developed, submitted to the Governor as a Preliminary Plan on September 30, 2004 and Final Plan by June 30, 2005 with progress reports submitted annually. Members of the ICMHP and its six standing committees – over 200 individuals and groups – worked and deliberated for over one year to develop the recommendations and strategies included in the CMH Plan. Five public forums were held across the state to provide an opportunity for public comment to a draft of the Preliminary Plan. The Preliminary Plan received overwhelming support from families, educators including special education teachers, health and mental health professionals, child care providers, and others concerned about the well-being of children.

Are parents and families involved in the work of the ICMHP and the CMH Plan?

Yes. Parents/families are full members of the ICMHP. In addition, the ICMHP created a Family Involvement Committee to ensure substantial input by families to the development and implementation of the CMH Plan. Families serve a number of important roles on the ICMHP including providing guidance and input to the Plan, ensuring that the Plan is grounded in the interests and needs of families, and educating the ICMHP about ways to help ensure that the children's mental health system truly meets the needs of families.

What is covered in the CMH Plan?

The CMH Plan is a statewide strategic blueprint or "roadmap" to promote children's social and emotional development and improve the children's mental health system. The Plan covers a range of recommendations and strategies necessary to reforming the children's mental health system in Illinois that include the following.

- Promoting children's optimal social and emotional development.
- Identifying mental health needs and intervening early.
- Ensuring that mental health programs and services meet the needs of diverse communities.
- Working with and engaging families in all aspects of the system.
- Promoting multi-agency collaboration at the state and local level to maximize scarce resources, minimize duplication of services, and make it easy for families to access services.
- Increasing mental health programs and services, especially in underserved areas of the state.
- Building a culturally-competent, qualified and adequately trained workforce with a sufficient number of professionals to serve children and their families.

Will the Children's Mental Health Plan, once submitted, automatically become policy or law?

No. The Children's Mental Health Plan is a set of recommendations that are subject to approval by the Governor and implementation by state and community-based agencies and other groups.

What are the next steps of the ICMHP?

Once the Plan is approved by the Governor, it will be implemented over time and with a phased-in approach that continues to emphasize family involvement and community support. The ICMHP and its six standing committees will continue to meet to advance the recommendations contained in the Plan. In particular, the ICMHP has identified a list of strategic priorities for focus in the coming year that include the following.

- Promoting ongoing family/consumer and youth involvement in the Plan.
- Advocating for increased children's mental health services and programs.
- Creating a comprehensive, culturally competent and multi-faceted public awareness campaign plan.
- Promoting mental health screening and assessment and appropriate follow-up services for children and youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.