

Illinois's Approach to Building and Sustaining Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

What is infant and early childhood mental health consultation?

Infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based service that pairs a mental health consultant with families and adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as childcare, preschool, and at home. These consultants build adults' capacity to strengthen and support the healthy social and emotional development of children.

What is the Illinois Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Initiative?

The Illinois Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Initiative (ECMHCI) is a cross-system public/private partnership program that advances the goal of a universal, effective, and sustainable IECMHC model throughout Illinois. The initiative aims to develop an expanded, qualified work force. The program's leadership team includes representatives from each child- and family-serving system in the state, advocates, philanthropists, consultants, nonprofit partners, Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency partners, and representatives from Erikson Institute. ECMHCI is led by the [Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership](#), the only statewide, public/private partnership of policymakers and advocates committed to improving the scope, quality, and access to mental health programs, services, and supports for children starting at birth.

Illinois's efforts to build a statewide IECMHC program began in 1996. Advocates, Erikson Institute, and other stakeholders identified the overwhelming need and demand from providers across Illinois for training and support around young children's social and emotional development and mental health. Working with the public sector and legislators, the ECMHCI team identified Part C Early Intervention and general revenue funds to support the placement of mental health consultants at every Child Family Connection early intervention site across the state. In 2003, the director of child-care services for Illinois, in partnership with the Illinois Child Care Advisory Board, agreed to use Child Care Development Block Grant quality set-aside funding to pilot test a regional mental health consultation model, placing a consultant in each child-care region. In 2006, the Illinois State Board of Education agreed to support mental health consultation in Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative sites, and the Irving Harris Foundation provided funding to build the mental health consultant training infrastructure at Erikson Institute. In 2008, Child Care Services expanded the model statewide.

The vision for the future is to have one highly trained MHC [mental health consultation] workforce that is large enough to provide a robust, intensive and evidence based model of MHC to children and families across child and family serving systems, funded with public funds that are integrated. This will allow for efficiencies and effectiveness as well as scale.

-Phyllis Glink, Executive Director, Irving Harris Foundation

Today, a variety of funding sources support IECMHC in Illinois, including a Preschool Expansion Grant; Department of Human Services; Department of Public Health; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds; Illinois State Board of Education; and support from foundations and nonprofits that advance innovation.

What can I learn from Illinois's experience with funding IECMHC?

Lesson 1: Prepare a vision, data, and talking points before funding is available

Illinois began with a clear vision for an effective and sustainable model of IECMHC and a long-term vision to make consultation available at scale. To make the case for how IECMHC would enhance early childhood systems, the program's leaders did the following:

- Demonstrated a need for IECMHC by collecting statewide data on children's outcome and well-being, preschool expulsion rates, and the need for quality settings for young children. When summarizing the data, they made it relevant for different audiences.
- Demonstrated demand for IECMHC through surveys, field participation at state advisory tables, and parent organizations.
- Identified key levers that would allow systems to use funds to support IECMHC.
- Remained opportunistic by expanding IECMHC into various child- and family-serving systems whenever possible.
- Embedded IECMHC into a combination of administrative and legislative policy changes.
- Used philanthropically led, public/private partnerships to push the agenda forward when needed. The Irving Harris Foundation developed the [Illinois Action Plan to Integrate Early Childhood Mental Health into Child and Family Serving Systems](#) that led to the launch of the ECMHCI and the formation of a robust public/private leadership team.

Lesson 2: Connect IECMHC to identified needs

Use data from surveys and other needs assessments to support the need for IECMHC. Here are some examples of how Illinois's ECMHCI leadership team used survey results to secure policy changes and secure funding for IECMHC:

- When a statewide survey of early childhood providers revealed high levels of expulsion from childcare and a need for training around children's mental health, the leadership team worked with others to secure a publicly funded mental health consultation component within the early intervention system.
- When subsequent surveys of providers showed demand for more training in children's social and emotional development, and research demonstrated a need for this support, advocates and stakeholders worked with

their government partners; and the legislature pushed for the following administrative and legislative changes:

- Including children’s social, emotional, and mental health as part of the definition of quality in Illinois’s Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative, opening up the opportunity to provide consultation to meet this goal
 - Securing money intended to support child care quality improvement efforts to fund regional mental health consultation
 - Including language about mental health consultation and social and emotional development in the State Child Care Plan, including securing a commitment to create an advisory board to develop a preschool expulsion and suspension policy
 - Advancing and securing passage of HB 2663, eliminating preschool expulsion and suspension and calling for prevention and intervention strategies to support providers and families
 - Embedding training for child-care providers on social emotional development into the CCR&R system
- When MIECHV data showed that the home visiting work force was not trained to address complex problems facing families being served, the subsequent funding application included providing mental health consultation to MIECHV sites to support and train home visitors.
 - When the state applied for Preschool Expansion Grant funding, it included mental health consultation as part of its comprehensive approach to delivering high-quality preschool.

Lesson 3: Find champions to advocate for IECMHC

Champions can promote IECMHC across a variety of state systems. Illinois used champions to embed IECMHC in key policy and legislative actions, including the following:

- Illinois Child Care Advisory Board members promoted the importance of children’s social and emotional development and mental health as a core element of quality.
- Early childhood advocates promoted the need for preschool for all 3- to 4-year-old children. The governor was a champion for this effort, and in 2006, the state legislature passed a bill authorizing preschool for all kids in the state, which provided leverage for implementing IECMHC in all regions.
- Early Learning Council convened to define quality, and identified children’s mental health as a key to quality, which created an opportunity to promote the work of consultants.



Lesson 4: Take advantage of changes in the state's political priorities

Look for opportunities to capitalize on the priorities of state or tribal leadership to highlight the importance of IECMHC.

For example, in Illinois, the state applied for a waiver to Section 1115 of the Social Security Act, which gives the secretary of Health and Human Services authority to approve experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects that promote the objectives of the Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) programs. When the Illinois state administration focused on behavioral health in its 1115 Waiver application, the ECMHCI leadership team felt it would be critical to include language that supports the use of Medicaid funding for IECMHC. The Medicaid funding would supplement the IECMHC funding already invested by agencies across the state.

The Illinois 1115 Waiver language read, in part:

*To nurture healthy child-parent relationships, it is imperative to increase the capacity of the adults in children's lives. Two tested ways to do this are through evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) programs and **Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (I/ECMHC)**.*

While IL has not yet been awarded a Waiver, if it happens, the broader language in the Waiver allowing for the use of funds for mental health consultation will allow advocates and other stakeholders the opportunity to seek additional investments over time.

-Phyllis Glink, Executive Director, Irving Harris Foundation

Lesson 5: Leverage philanthropic funding opportunities

Public/private partnerships are an effective way to fund pilot or demonstration projects that inform development efforts and that provide data for making a case for IECMHC. Foundation dollars can also support the following:

- Meetings
- Training or seed infrastructure funding
- Strategic planning
- Advocacy, policy, and systems support
- Public/private partnerships
 - Philanthropy partnered with the Illinois State Board of Education to provide mental health consultation to programs and to train the work force.

- Philanthropy is supporting the ECMHCI, which is testing a high-quality, universal model of consultation that will be used across multiple child- and family-serving systems with the intention to scale it over time.
- Philanthropy funded the development of a public/private Mental Health Action Plan to guide Illinois as it develops its early childhood system.

Further information

For additional resources on funding IECMHC in your state or tribal community, please visit the Center of Excellence's [IECMHC Toolbox](#) sections on [Financing](#) and [Communications](#).

