

## Insights

# Early Childhood Development Requires Stronger Systems



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Early childhood is a crucial period for child development. From birth through age 3, kids can reach significant milestones in language, cognition, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor skills, and social and emotional development that can set them up to reach their full potential, specifically optimal developmental health.

That's why there are so many resources to support children and families during these crucial years. Healthcare providers; community supports; and government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels can all aid with early development. But these groups don't always work together, so care and support are often episodic, lacking continuity as well as a systems approach.

That's what the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (ECCS CoIIN) seeks to improve. Better coordination and integration of

services, sectors, and data related to early childhood can help ensure that children reach their developmental potential and are ready to thrive in kindergarten.

## **Working Together for Solutions**

The ECCS CoIIN convenes teams from 12 states, allowing them to share strategies, solutions and challenges for connecting existing resources as well as creating new ones for children. This is collaborative learning and collective impact at its best. Each state-based team is also working with place-based community teams who will work at the community level testing changes and potential improvements.

Such collaboration draws attention to insights in systems improvement across the early childhood system, from the national stage to individual towns or neighborhoods. In such joint work, ECCS stakeholders encounter common themes and challenges in their work, sharing successes and strategizing together for solutions. Substantive changes and hopefully improvements can be made across sites, not just for specific areas.

To that end, the ECCS CoIIN will capitalize on many of the best practices used for distance learning and national collaboration. In January, the first in-person learning session helped introduce teams to each other and connect with NICHQ staff, and the ECCS CoIIN Coordinating Center, to build working relationships. Webinars, virtual learning sessions and NICHQ's Collaboratory will facilitate data sharing and collaboration to maintain progress as work is done in individual places.

To ensure that the ECCS CoIIN results are particularly meaningful for families, parents are full members of the ECCS teams. They authentically participate to help guide improvement strategies and innovation. Moms, dads and other caregivers understand what it is like to navigate across systems to seek opportunities that optimize their children's developmental health. They best know what can be improved and how proposed systems changes might realistically work out.

## **Measured Goals for Change**

Changes and progress will be monitored throughout the ECCS CoIIN to ensure that strategies have a positive impact on the early childhood systems that families rely on for developmental support. The overarching goal for the initiative is to increase, by 25%, the age appropriate skills of three-year-olds in participating communities.

To achieve that, the ECCS CoIIN will focus teams in a series of cohorts with distinct objectives that foster team identification of areas for improvement and specific challenges that can benefit from collaboration. The first cohort is focused on developmental health promotion. Through continuous collaboration and cooperation, the ECCS CoIIN can strengthen systems for optimal early childhood development while at the same time serving as a guide for future systems-building work across the country.

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