



PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) releases the latest national data on child abuse and neglect every April. For 2006, the latest data available, the numbers tell a familiar story: More than 900,000 children were substantiated as abused and/or neglected, out of the more than 3.3 million child abuse reports made. Children younger than 1 year had the highest rate of victimization at 24.4 per 1,000 children. Of the estimated 1,530 child fatalities in 2006, 41.1% were attributed to neglect, with physical abuse a major contributor to child fatalities.

Of the child victims, nearly 9% were sexually abused, and 16% were physically abused. A consistent annual statistic that surprises some is that nearly 65% of the 900,000 children are victims of neglect. These are children whose mistreatment can be just as serious as those victims of sexual or physical abuse. It also tells us we are not doing enough to prevent these children from coming into care or being brought to the attention of child protective services (CPS).

Another consistent statistic is that of the 900,000 abused and neglected children identified, nearly 40% did not receive follow follow-up services. With such a high and consistent percentage going without follow-up help, clearly services are not being adequately provided at the front end of the child welfare system. For some children, this may mean that they will return to the system.

Late in 2008, HHS was working on the release of the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS). The last one was published in 1996, and, like its predecessor, the forthcoming congressionally mandated study is likely to tell us that more children suffer from abuse and neglect than the official statistics indicate. The NIS includes children who were investigated by CPS agencies, but it also obtains data on children seen by community professionals who were not reported to CPS or who were screened out by CPS without investigation. This means the NIS estimates provide a more comprehensive measure of the scope of child abuse and neglect known to community professionals, including both abused and neglected children who are in the official statistics and as well as those who are not.

Prevention of child abuse and neglect is perhaps the greatest challenge in the continuum of the child welfare system. All too frequently, prevention of abuse and neglect is

an add-on service instead of a core component of the range of needed services. The issue of providing or addressing prevention too often is conditioned on whether a child welfare agency or department can free up appropriations or funds by reducing the cost of services, including foster care, which some describe as “back-end services.” In fact, what is required is an investment in the range of services.

Both child care and Head Start funding and services have been inadequately addressed in the past decade. In the coming session of Congress, CWLA will partner with leaders of the Child Care NOW Coalition, including the Woman’s National Law Center and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, as they craft a comprehensive proposal to improve both the quality and accessibility of child care. CWLA will also work with the National Head Start Association and other Head Start advocates to expand and strengthen that program and fully implement the most recently enacted reforms. Both of these programs represent a key component of community-based strategies that are necessary to reduce the level of child abuse and child neglect.

We will withhold comment on the reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for a future paper. When TANF is reauthorized, however, careful examination will be necessary, and attention must be paid to how that block grant can be crafted to ensure the most vulnerable families are assisted; one of TANF’s central target populations is the very same collection of families that come to the attention of the child welfare system when all else fails.

The federal government provides some limited funding for services that can prevent or remedy potential neglect and abuse situations. Title IV-B part 1, Child Welfare Services (CWS), and Title IV-B part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), are flexible funding streams that can fund a range of services, some to support families in an effort to prevent abuse, but the data and results are not clearly understood. These funding sources are available on a limited basis for innovative programs and services that wrap around vulnerable families. Other federal funds, such as the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), may also help the development of community-based initiatives that have shown promise. More dedicated sources of funding are needed, but with a link to outcomes and evidence of what works.

A number of promising approaches nationwide may use specific interventions, such as home visitation, whereas others, such as Baltimore's Family Connections program, have a strategy of using a range of funding sources from public, private, faith-based, foundation, and other community partners to show some significant results. The Family Connections program has shown positive results in reducing the instances of abuse and neglect by using limited federal funds to better coordinate communities and services.

Another promising approach is more specific in its structure: the home visiting model. Home visitation programs refer to different model programs that provide in-home visits to targeted, vulnerable, and new families. Home visitation programs—either stand-alone or center-based—annually serve at least 400,000 children from birth to age 5.

The eligible families in these home visitation programs may receive services as early as the prenatal stage. Because a child's early years are the most critical for optimal development and provide the foundation necessary for success in school and life, home visiting can make a lifetime of difference. Nurses and other trained members of the community conduct home visits weekly, bimonthly, or monthly. Program goals include an increase in positive parenting practices, improvement in the health of the entire family, increase in the family's ability to be self-sufficient, and enhanced school readiness for the children. Home visitation programs rely on a range of sometimes unstable federal, state, and local funds.

Other programs that hold promise for prevention include the use of differential response. This is a form of practice in child protective services that allows for more than one method of response to reports of child abuse and neglect. Also called dual track, multiple track, or alternative response, these programs recognize the variation in the nature of reports and the value of responding in ways appropriate to each, avoiding a "one size fits all" approach.

Great variation exists in state and county implementation of differential response, which generally involves low- and moderate-risk cases that receive a noninvestigation assessment response without a formal determination or substantiation of child abuse and neglect. Although states are attempting several approaches in this area, the basic policy difference is in how complaints of abuse and neglect are dealt with and screened into or out of the CPS system. In some instances, responses to reports of child abuse and neglect may result in greater family support and services to address the underlying causes.

The Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant also offers great possibility. In September 2008, Title V received the highest possible rating on the White House Office of Management and Budget's Performance Assessment Rating Tool, yet the program is consistently underfunded. Title V is a federal-state partnership that funds a diverse array of programs and services specifically aimed at improving the health of mothers and children, many of whom are vulnerable and in need of prevention or early intervention.

States must use at least 30% of their federal allotment of Title V on preventive or primary care for children, and 30% of their federal allotment on children with special

health care needs. Above and beyond these requirements, Title V provides wide flexibility to states to determine the most appropriate use of federal funds, as long as these uses are in line with Title V's overall mission of building the maternal and child health infrastructure.

Although the block grant is authorized to receive \$850 million in federal money in 2008, actual appropriations for Title V dropped to \$666 million from \$693 million provided in each of the two previous years.

Initiatives that combine the efforts of the courts and the child welfare community also have shown great promise. These initiatives, which provide funds to train key personnel—including judges and child welfare workers involved with the courts, such as court-appointed state advocates (CASAs) and CPS workers—have yielded positive results in keeping families together and addressing the abuse and neglect of infants and the very young. The Court Teams for Maltreated Infants and Toddlers Project, spearheaded by Zero to Three, has shown great promise and results; what it lacks is a steady source of dedicated funding.

Another innovation being implemented in some areas, both in terms of CPS and in placement decisions, is family group decision making (FGDM) and other similar team meeting models. FGDM and similar initiatives offer an approach of working with families and communities involved with the child welfare system. Families are engaged and empowered by child welfare agencies to make decisions and develop plans that protect and nurture their children from enduring further abuse and neglect. These approaches recognize that families are the experts of in their own situations and are often able to make well-informed decisions about their circumstances with the support of family members and others who have worked with the family.

The Fostering Connections Act offers some limited national grants to advance the use of FGDM, but overall, very limited funding sources exist for these initiatives. In addition to providing designated funds for home visitation, some flexibility needs to be built into the funds provided through Title IV-E foster care and adoption assistance. This flexibility should be tied to measurable outcomes and data.

Child protection can trace its origins to the 19th Century when, in 1875, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established in New York City. After publicity surrounding the treatment of a young girl captured the public's attention, the president of the American Society for the Prevention and Cruelty to Animals was approached and, as a result of his support, existing state legislation to protect children was vigorously enforced for the first time.

The first White House Conference on Children was convened in 1909; one of the results of that conference was the creation of a Children's Bureau at the federal level. Part of the mission of the new bureau, at the urging of the White House Conference, was to "investigate and report on all matters relating to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of people."

In 1974, Congress passed the first Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). That landmark law helped establish national standards for specific reporting and response practices for states to include in their child protection laws. CAPTA is the only federal legislation



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exclusively dedicated to preventing, assessing, identifying, and treating child abuse and neglect—the continuum of child maltreatment services and supports.

CAPTA includes three programs: grants to the states to develop innovative approaches to improve their CPS systems; discretionary funds that support state efforts to improve their practices in preventing and treating child abuse and neglect; and the Community-Based Family Resource and Support Program that provides grants to states to support their efforts to develop, operate, and expand a network of community-based, prevention-focused family resource and support programs that coordinate resources among a range of existing public and private organizations.

The SSBG is a major source of federal funding that addresses the needs of vulnerable children and youth. SSBG represents 11% of federal funding for child welfare services. When SSBG was converted from a matching entitlement fund to a capped federal block grant to states in 1981, states were free to decide whom to serve and what services to provide. As a capped entitlement, SSBG funding was set in the statute at \$2.8 billion. Congress, however, reduced funding to \$2.3 billion when the TANF block grant was created in 1996. Although funding was to be restored to \$2.8 billion by 2003, it was reduced again to \$1.9 billion in FY 1999, and to \$1.7 billion in FY 2000. The \$1.7 billion total is what is currently in law. In the 1980s SSBG was used to assist states in a time of recession. In 2005 and again in 2008 SSBG has been a major funding source for hurricane relief with Congress allocating more than a half billion in both cases.

Although states can use SSBG funds for an array of social services, such as child care or services for the aging, child welfare services receive more of these funds than any other service area. In FY 2006, child protection and foster care services each accounted for 24% of SSBG expenditures. Thirty-eight states used SSBG funds to support child protection services; 37 used SSBG to provide foster care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-Term Actions:

- ★ Based on the newly enacted Fostering Connections Act, the new Administration should assist states in their use of the new Family Connections funds in expanding the use of family group decision making.
- ★ Based on the newly enacted Fostering Connections Act, the new Administration should assist states in the expanded use of Title IV-E training funds as they now apply to the training of court personnel, including

members and staff of abuse and neglect courts, court-appointed special advocates, and others to train key personnel in prevention and successful intervention programs such as Zero to Three Family Drug Treatment Court and other model court-community partnerships.

- ★ Under the Fostering Connections Act, the new Administration should issue regulations that are expansive and broad in defining the coverage of Title IV-E training funds as it applies to court-related personnel.
- ★ The new Administration should discontinue the requirement on states to plan their allotment of Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) based on proposed budget cuts. This directive to states can require some local governments to plan their SSBG spending based on cuts that Congress has never approved.

Long-Term Actions:

- ★ Congress and the new Administration should enact legislation to fund home visitation programs similar to the Education Begins At Home Act introduced in the 110th Congress.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should enact legislation that will provide targeted federal funds that will encourage the development of programs such as Baltimore's Family Connections program, the Harlem Children's Zone, and other similar neighborhood-based projects. These projects should require an extensive community planning process involving public, private, and faith-based agencies, as well as foundations. Any project must be tied to specific community-designed data and outcome measures.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should amend Title IV-B State Court funding to provide \$5 million in mandatory funds to create a National Court Teams Resource Center as proposed under the Safe Babies Act of 2007.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should add flexibility to the use of Title IV-E funds for the purpose of preventing or intervening to prevent child abuse and link the use of funds to state- or community-based measurable outcomes and data.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should fully fund at their authorized levels programs including Promoting Safe and Stable Families and Child Welfare Services and strengthen the programs by gradually developing methodology and data that can show results and how funds are invested.



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- ★ Congress and the new Administration should fully fund at its authorized level the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) at \$280 million. This funding would be for CAPTA state grants, discretionary grants, and the Community-Based grants. While this amount of funding cannot address all prevention or child protective services needs, it will create a greater urgency in implementing the mandates under CAPTA.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should fully fund at its authorized level the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant at \$850 million.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should restore SSBG funding to no less than the \$2.3 billion provided in 1996, with a phased-in increase to \$2.8 billion, restoring the SSBG as enacted in the 1996 TANF Act.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should direct research funding to child fatality research and a meta-analysis of existing information from state child fatality reviews to examine case characteristics, case practice, and systemic issues when children die from abuse and neglect.
- ★ Congress and the new Administration should enact legislation similar to the 2008 Child Welfare Workforce Improvement Act that would fund a study by the National Academy of Sciences on workforce. This study would look at the challenges and strategies as it relates to child welfare, make recommendations regarding case-load standards, the use of data, and expand the research, training, and demonstration projects. Such a study should include workers involved with the child protective services and those considered to be part of the front end of services.