Indicator Summary Report

September 2000

Data, Research, and Evaluation Committee
Los Angeles County Children and Families First - Proposition 10 Commission
Recommendations

Numerous expert sources, including those who participated in the August 2000 expert panel, recommended a broad approach to improving child outcomes with the following characteristics.

Community-based and Community-driven

Children develop within a set of systems — the family, the neighborhood, and the broader community. By building upon the existing capacities within these systems, the Commission can address a variety of needs. There was resounding support from the expert panelists for a family-centered, culturally sensitive, community based framework. While data is important to measure need and impact, the Commission should be sensitive to community needs, even where data is not available.

- Promote asset-mapping and community needs assessments;
- Support population-based surveys and data collection on diseases and disabilities and utilize Los Angeles County Burden of Disease data to identify problems and to guide potential intervention targets;
- Be active in the larger political process that impacts children and families.
- Engage the research community, providers, policymakers, parents, communities and the public by exposing them to effective approaches to family strengthening and community building around the country.

Collaborative and Comprehensive

The programs that work best for children and families are those that address a variety of needs and link families to their community capacities rather than attempting to ameliorate complex and intertwined social problems with categorical and isolated strategies.

- Encourage the leveraging of funds from a variety of sources, in doing so the Commission can be an example of collaboration and innovation;
- Provide guiding principles, but allow communities and service providers to be creative in their proposals;
- Promote new, broad partnerships and collaborations;
- Support programs that offer a broad range of services from social and emotional support for parents to concrete assistance with housing, jobs, childcare, prenatal care and education;
- Assist in the building of capacity, particularly staff development (e.g., child care providers).
Developmentally-driven

Utilize a developmental framework to expand and link key indicators of child well-being to strategies and initiatives.

- Reconsider the relationship between the 4 chosen indicators (low birth weight, incidence of disease and disability, family violence, and 3rd grade reading scores). Rather than looking at them as distinct and unrelated, they should be viewed as linked indicators on a child’s developmental pathway. For example, low birth weight, child health and family violence could be seen as indicators of child well-being at different developmental points on the path to school readiness.

- School readiness should be assessed at several different developmental points, for example, at 3 years-old and upon kindergarten entry (5 years-old).

- Indicators of school readiness should include not only cognitive development but also socio-emotional development.

- There might be a core set of indicators and then additional process indicators that are important in the developmental pathway. By utilizing a “critical pathways” approach that graphically lays out all of the potential determinants of the selected outcomes using an analytic framework, the Commission can strategically identify the best leverage points for the allocation of funds. This approach could assist the Commission in identifying the most evidence-based strategies as well as “meta-determinants” that affect multiple outcomes.

- The current indicators are deficit-based and set a negative tone. The group suggested reworking the indicators so that they are more positively stated with the overall goal of seeking positive outcomes rather than simply avoiding negative outcomes.

Active in research about children

A research agenda as part of the strategic plan will provide another venue for collaboration, help support the programmatic decisions of the Commission, and provide information for agencies that serve children and families.

- Support existing data collection efforts
- Collaborate with other agencies
- Build research and evaluation capacity within funded agencies
- Test and promote innovative strategies that work for children and families
- Continue expert panel support
Low Birth Weight

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DATA

- In 1997, 6.5% of live births in Los Angeles County were low birth weight.
- African-American infants are at particularly high risk of being born with a low birth weight — the rate of low birth weight among African-American children is 12.3%, nearly double the county average.
- The rate of low birth weight births in the County has remained relatively stable since 1987, remaining between 6% and 7%.

Low Birthweight Rates
Los Angeles County 1987-1997

![Graph showing low birthweight rates from 1987 to 1997](image)

Note: VLBW = Very Low Birth Weight (under 1500 g); LBW = Low Birth Weight (under 2500 g)

COMMON RISK FACTORS

- Maternal substance use
- Maternal age (under 20 or over 35)
- Maternal stress or anxiety
- Inadequate prenatal care
- Low maternal education
- Low income
- Poor maternal nutrition
EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Prenatal Care

Women who receive a full course of prenatal care are more likely to deliver healthy, full-term, normal-weight babies than women who do not receive such care. The earlier in pregnancy that prenatal care is begun, the more likely it is that risks can be identified and appropriate care given. Prenatal care programs that provide and coordinate nutrition, health education, psychosocial assessments and social services have been shown to produce better results among high-risk women.

Home Visiting

Comprehensive home visiting programs have shown some success in improving low birth weight rates among program participants, especially among women who are high risk. However, the effectiveness of home visiting programs has yet to be fully proven. Programs that are most successful in improving birth outcomes are ones that not only provide social support, but focus their curriculum on teaching mothers how to be healthy and care for themselves while they are pregnant.

Nutritional Support

Evaluations of the WIC program have provided mixed results. However, the majority of findings demonstrate that through the provision of nutritional support, WIC has positive impacts on low birth weight.

Services for High Risk Mothers

Comprehensive programs for drug addicted pregnant women that offer substance abuse treatment combined with prenatal care, child care, parenting classes, transportation, WIC services, and recreation have shown effectiveness in improving birth outcomes for high-risk mothers.

Programs that combine home visiting, support services, and mentoring for pregnant teens have also been shown to be successful in improving low birth weight rates among program participants.

Service Linkage and Referrals

Linking pregnant women to services such as health education, home visiting, and other social services has been demonstrated to contribute to lower rates of low birth weight among high-risk women.
LOS ANGELES COUNTY DATA

- According to the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, the leading health problems for children in Los Angeles County are unintentional injuries, vaccine preventable diseases, chronic asthma, lead poisoning, and poor oral health.

![Prevalence of Health Problems for Children in Los Angeles County by Year](chart)

- Sixty-five children under the age of 5 died from unintentional injuries in 1997 and 3,683 children required hospitalization due to such injuries.

- In 1997, there were 80 cases of vaccine preventable illnesses (measles, mumps, rubella, and pertussis). While this number is fairly low, there is a growing number of children who are not immunized and therefore vulnerable to such diseases.

- In 1997, 7% of all children in Los Angeles County were afflicted with asthma and the rate was over twice that for African-American children (19.1%). Asthma is a marker disease for adequate access to primary care.

- Current data on children's oral health is not available, though school health providers report dental pain is a major cause of school absences among children ages 7 to 14 years. Since tooth decay is preventable, oral health efforts need to begin with children under 5 years.

- Los Angeles County cases of lead poisoning make up half of the total cases in the state. Children of Hispanic origin made up 70% of the cases in Los Angeles County between 1991 and 1998.
EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Home Visiting

There is some evidence from nurse home visiting programs that children’s long-term health outcomes are improved when trained nurses provide high-risk parents with support and guidance. Programs that began when mothers were pregnant are associated with improved postnatal indicators such as well-child visits and up-to-date immunizations.

Safety and Health Education

Public education campaigns, education by health care professionals to parents and other caregivers, as well as community-based education efforts have increased safety behaviors such as seat belt usage, smoke detector ownership, safe tap water temperatures, use of bicycle helmets. Use of car seats have lead to reductions in unintentional injuries. Although little is known about the effectiveness of lead abatement programs, one recommended strategy is education for parents and other caregivers, especially by pediatricians, about the risks of lead exposure and the potential prevention strategies.

Health Care

In 1997, only 56% of all two year-olds and 43.5% of African-American two year-olds in Los Angeles County were fully immunized. Given that immunization rates are often used as a proxy measure for access to care, there is still a great need for health care in the County. Early immunizations, on-time well-child visits and oral health care are all effective health care strategies for improving the incidence of disease and disability among children 0 to 5.

Community Safety Improvements

Community safety improvements such as traffic calming measures and fences around swimming pools can have dramatic influences on the rates of unintentional injuries. Traffic calming strategies in neighborhoods can reduce the risk of pedestrian injuries by roughly 60%. Similarly, fences around swimming pools prevent roughly 40% to 70% of child drowning and near-drowning accidents. In areas that are high risk for lead exposure, routine use of assessment questionnaires, universal screening for lead poisoning and removal of the sources of lead poisoning are all recommended strategies.
Family Violence

The term “family violence” includes both child abuse and neglect as well as domestic violence between partners. Research indicates that both child-directed abuse and child exposure to domestic violence can have profound effects on children’s physical, emotional, social, and cognitive well-being.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DATA

Child Abuse & Neglect Cases Opened

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>180,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>200,000</td>
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Note: Includes all children under age 18.

Child Abuse and Neglect

- Children 0 to 5 years-old are disproportionately at risk of child abuse and neglect. In August 1999, 12,740 children under age 5 were under the care of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for child abuse and neglect-related services.

- As of April 2000, 12,912 children under the age of 5 were in foster care in Los Angeles County.

- Between 1993 and 1997, there was a 4% increase in Emergency Response cases opened, a 34% increase in cases in which the child temporarily removed from the home, and a 42% increase in children in long-term placement.

Domestic Violence

- In 1997, there were a total of 68,000 domestic violence calls in the County, a 4% increase since 1995.

- An estimated 25% to 30% of American women are beaten at least once in the course of intimate relationships and 70% of women who seek shelter from their batterers are joined by their children.

- Between 3.3 and 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence in the United States each year. Between 4% and 17% of battered women are battered for the first time when they are pregnant.

Domestic Violence Calls to Police, Los Angeles County, 1987-1997

The number of calls is not necessarily an accurate indicator of the prevalence of domestic violence, more accurate data are not available.
EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Home Visiting

Home visiting programs, especially those which include frequent contact, intense and comprehensive services, and high quality relationships between parents and staff, have demonstrated reduced rates of abuse and neglect as well as improvements in risk factors such as harsh discipline practices and parenting skills. These results are not consistent across programs and appear to occur primarily for high-risk participants such as teen mothers.

Family Support

Family support programs attempt to promote social competence and positive parenting and often include peer support, parental education, as well as social and learning experiences for families. Evaluations of family support programs are mixed and direct effects on official reports of child maltreatment have not been found. However, improvements in parental knowledge of child development, care giving behaviors, and discipline practices have been reported.

Family Preservation

Family preservation programs target families who are at risk of having a child placed out of the home or families whose children have already been placed. These programs seek to build family skills, family social support, and are usually home-based. Evaluations of family preservation programs report mixed results, but improvements have been reported in the number of children in out of home placements, characteristics of the placement arrangement when placements were necessary, and improved parent-child functioning.

Services for High-Risk Parents

Substance abuse treatment programs for pregnant women that provide substance abuse treatment in conjunction with prenatal care, child care, parenting classes, transportation, WIC services, and recreational activities have been successful in improving maternal parenting skills and discipline practices -- both risk factors for child abuse and neglect.

Programs that teach couples how to communicate effectively and manage conflict better have shown success in reducing relationship conflict and physical abuse as well improving the success and of and communication within the relationship.
Third Grade Reading Scores

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DATA

- Thirty four percent (34%) of 3rd grade children in Los Angeles County were reading at or above the 50th National Percentile Ranking (NPR) in the Spring of 2000.

- There has been a steady increase in 3rd grade reading scores in Los Angeles County over the past 3 years.

- Despite improvements in 3rd grade reading scores, approximately 10% fewer children in Los Angeles County are reading at or above 50% NPR compared to the 3rd graders across the state.

![Stanford 9 Test Results](image)

**3rd Grade Reading Scores, 1998-2000**

FACTORS THAT AFFECT EARLY READING SKILLS

- **Exposure to Reading Materials** - Children who grow up in homes with more types of reading materials score higher in reading proficiency than children from homes with fewer reading materials, and as the number of reading materials in the home increases, so does the average reading proficiency.

- **Family Literacy and Reading Practices** - Children who are read to or told stories are more likely to be successful readers. According to a study conducted by the US Department of Education, 69% of children who are living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold were read to three or more times a week compared to 85% of children living above the poverty threshold. Children whose mothers have at least a high school education are more likely to read to their children (90%) than children whose mothers have less than a high school education (61%).
EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

High Quality Child Care

According to the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study, a longitudinal study that started in 1993, the benefits of high quality early child care continued to positively affect children’s basic cognitive skills (language and math) and behavioral skills in the classroom (thinking/attention skills, social skills, behavior problems, and peer relations), at least through kindergarten and in some cases through second grade. Because of the importance of high quality care, strategies need to focus on improving quality through caregiver training, improvements in compensation for caregivers, and technical support and training for early childhood programs.

Early Childhood Education Programs that Involve Parents

Evidence from comprehensive early childhood education programs demonstrates that children who participate in early childhood education programs often experience immediate positive effects in terms of school achievement and cognitive development. These effects sometimes diminish over time (especially for low income children), but some long-term effects have been found.

Programs that have been particularly successful in improving children’s short and long-term achievement focus on both the child and the parent. These “two generation” approaches combine high quality center based child care with frequent home visits and parent education and support services. Evaluations of early childhood education programs show that adding family support on top of existing child-focused programs strengthens the programs’ benefits.

Family Literacy Programs

Family Literacy programs not only improve parents’ and children’s literacy skills, but attempt to change family reading practices and values so that learning gains can be maintained. Parental involvement in children’s learning is thought to account for the majority of the success of family literacy programs. Evidence from the National Center for Family Literacy programs in several sites in the United States show improvements in: (1) parents’ provision of reading and writing materials for their children at home, (2) parental engagement in a wider range of reading and writing activities for their children, (3) explanatory and interactive parent-child talk, (4) parent-child play, and (5) parental attitudes and knowledge regarding children’s learning.

Parent Training Programs

Parent training programs that focus on improving parent-child interactions and parental discipline practices have been found to improve children’s behavior and attention. Although direct effects on children’s reading achievement have not been reported, improved attention and behavior clearly contribute to children’s ability to succeed in school.

We recognize that the data and information contained in this report may not be the most recent and is limited in its scope. We will continue to collect information and data to inform our efforts.