First 5 LA

SUBJECT:
County-wide Universal Assessment of Newborns

RECOMMENDATION:
Adopt a systematic and universal strategy County-wide that will enable all new parents at the birth of their child to receive a comprehensive assessment of their needs to care for and nurture their newborns, and referrals to supportive services to ensure all newborns will be raised in healthy and supportive environments. This strategy, universal assessment, will identify families at greatest risk/need and link high risk families to supportive services. In addition it will provide data valuable for evaluation and planning on pregnancy outcomes, newborn and family needs, and the capacity of specific communities to meet these needs. Recommended First 5 LA funding will not exceed $54.1M for the remaining duration of the current strategic plan.

BACKGROUND:
This program is intended to support the development of a countywide universal assessment program for all new parents at the birth of their child. The target population is the estimated 112,000 LA County annual births outside of First 5 LA’s 14 Best Start communities. The proposed program is modeled after similar programs successfully implemented by three Southern California First 5 Commissions (Orange, Santa Barbara, and San Diego) and other jurisdictions. The proposed program is designed to produce the following family and system level outcomes:

Family Outcomes
- Connect families with resources to improve outcomes post birth
- Increase parent knowledge and application of healthy nutrition and breastfeeding so children maintain healthy weight
- Early identification of high-risk issues within newborn families

System Outcome
- Encourage family friendly-practices at high-birth hospitals.
- Provide capacity for First 5 LA to “impact” all newborns in LA County
- Increase timely referral for services
- Improve birth-level data collection for measuring outcomes of First 5 LA programs and advocacy, health planning and policy development.

Implementing a county-wide universal assessment program for parents at birth of their child poses benefits for numerous stakeholders: families, medical and service providers, community at-large and First 5 LA. Benefits to families include increased knowledge and awareness, and access to supportive services to address child health, developmental and parenting concerns prior to or no later than at time of hospital discharge. Medical and service providers including hospitals may benefit by having access to a repository of parenting/family support services to refer at-/high-risk families to, and decreasing the likelihood of costly hospital re-admissions incurred from undetected infant safety risk and health problems. Finally, benefits to the community at-large and First 5 LA include enhanced measurement of pregnancy outcomes, improved coordination amongst service providers, and better documentation and understanding of service needs and availability of services for parents/families of young children 0-5 years old.
**DISCUSSION:**
On November 15, 2010 the Board of Commissioners discussed this proposal and in the process, a number of questions were raised:

- The potential of hospitals receiving funding for or implementing this project
- The proposed program strategy being more reflective of a direct service model than Countywide system change approach
- The sustainability and scalability of the project

I. Hospital-Based Approach
The hospital setting offers, truly, the only venue at which a universal screening program can be conducted if the objective is to screen all parents upon the birth of their newborns. However, hospitals do not have to be First 5 LA’s contracted entity to implement this project. Health-care professionals and hospital partners from other non-profits (i.e., federally qualified community health centers, community clinics, universities, professional trade associations, etc.) can be contracted to conduct the assessments, provide referrals, and follow-ups in hospitals. The ultimate selection of the hospital roll-out approach and proposed contractor(s) will be made on a case-by-case basis and will employ an implementation strategy that will be most effective and efficient, and one that will be directed to provide assessments to the highest need families.

II. Direct Service Provision
While conducting assessments and making service referrals may be viewed as a direct service, the intent of the proposed Universal Assessment program is to transform current institutional policies and practice among Los Angeles birthing hospitals so screening newborn risk and referring at-/high risk families to essential supportive services prior to or at hospital discharge will become a standardized routine practice. Additionally, this Universal Assessment program will allow vital public health data to be collected and tracked; hence, providing First 5 LA, public agency administrators, practitioners, policy makers, and funders insights into population health status and service needs as well as improvements in maternal and child health outcomes over time for them to ultimately design and evaluate effective programs County-wide, shape/reform public policies, and make funding allocation decisions.

III. Scalability and Sustainability
The proposed project duration is for the remaining years of the current strategic plan. A general implementation approach—that suggested incremental increases in the number of assessments conducted annually (pending additional non-First 5 LA funding) until at least 75% of all births are captured—was included in the proposal.

Details of project implementation—including selecting/modifying or developing a valid and reliable universal assessment tool, determining staffing levels/model to conduct the assessments, coordinate service referral and follow-ups, delineating risk levels and service eligibility criteria and service referral strategies, and defining eligible hospitals, contractors and subcontractors—will be provided to the Commissioners once this project is approved for funding. Scaling the project County-wide will depend on adoption and diffusion rates and available non-First 5 LA funds. Potential early adopters—opinion leaders and role-models of respected peer groups—will be sought and rallied as change agents to diffuse and encourage adoption of universal assessments County-wide. Appropriate early adopter hospitals and assessment and referral providers will also be selected to maximize the likelihood of county-wide spread.

With respect to sustainability—while the original proposal estimated a number of years before significant dollars are obtained from non-First 5LA sources—this activity will begin immediately with commission approval. Also, the commission will retain the ultimate
responsibility for approving the methods for obtaining supplemental funds and the pace at which the program is rolled out based on the availability of these non-First 5 LA funds. Staff will research viable funding options and structures such as Medi-Cal, Federal home visitation funding, private health insurance, and federal and state dollars through partnerships with a variety of local entities (e.g. county departments such as DCFS), and also consider various funding conditions for contractors to receive First 5 LA funding. For example, First 5 LA may require proposers via First 5 LA’s RFP/RFQ to include a sound sustainability plan and/or discussion of strategies to secure other sources of support, and use these plans/discussions as part of First 5 LA’s contractor selection criterion and process. Including these specifications at the outset can provide First 5 LA a schedule and plan by which its funding will be leveraged and project sustained.