

## NEWS from the Assuring Better Child Health and Development (ABCD) II Program

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### **The ABCD II Program**

The ABCD II Program, sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund, is designed to strengthen primary health care services and systems that support the healthy mental development of young children, ages 0-3. The program focuses particularly on preventive care of children whose health care is covered by state health care programs, especially Medicaid. Research has shown that services that support young children's healthy mental development can reduce the prevalence of developmental and behavioral disorders which have high costs and long-term consequences for health, education, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems.

The National Academy for State Health Policy administers the ABCD II Program, helping states create models of service delivery and financing that promote healthy mental development for Medicaid eligible children. Five states, California, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Utah were awarded grants for this program in 2004. Although the projects are led by the states' Medicaid agencies, they all entail working in partnership with other key stakeholders to achieve their objectives. Together, these states form the ABCD II Consortium, a laboratory for program development and innovation that shares its findings with all 50 states.

This news brief is one in a series designed to address issues of interest and concern to states seeking to improve services and systems that support young children's healthy mental development. Additional information about the ABCD II initiative is available at [www.nashp.org](http://www.nashp.org).

### **Using External Quality Review Organizations to Promote Young Children's Healthy Mental Development**

#### **EQROs and Managed Care**

In March of 2003, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) began requiring states to monitor and assess the quality of care in [Medicaid?](#) managed care programs. In doing so, states must:

- use standardized methods for quality review activities;
- specify which quality review activities are mandatory and which are optional; and
- conduct quality reviews that conform to specific protocols.

Many state Medicaid agencies contract with External Quality Review Organizations (EQROs) to conduct quality of care studies. While CMS regulations do not require the use of an EQRO to perform many of these roles, they strongly encourage states to do so by, among other things, providing states an enhanced federal match to engage in quality review activities.

In addition to the mandatory quality review role, the regulations further permit states to draw down an enhanced federal match for optional activities that include focused studies.

A recent survey revealed that, although a number of states commission reports on some aspect of healthcare related to early childhood development, the vast majority are not methodologically sophisticated and fail to capture actionable information. Meanwhile, a small number of states—Michigan, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, and Washington—have successfully used the optional authority to delve deeper into preventive and developmental services in their managed care programs by assessing, in many cases, the actual content of care that is delivered to children. They did so by engaging their EQROs to investigate, among other things,

- statewide use of standard screening tools,
- immunization rates,
- medical records, and
- performance data relative to national standards.

States can also use EQROs as partners in collaborating with managed care organizations (MCOs). A recent effort by Illinois to improve the quality of care in EPSDT well-child visits—a significant component of which includes a developmental screen—provides a case in point.

Illinois wanted to improve the quality of EPSDT visits within its MCO population. The state worked with the EQRO, Health Services Advisory Group, to engage the MCOs in a performance improvement project (PIP) that seeks to benchmark the quality of care and establish improvement criteria. The EQRO, because of its position between the state and the MCOs, was able to help the state achieve its means by working collaboratively with the MCOs. The Illinois PIP has now been running for ?? years and they are expecting their benchmark data to be available starting in ??.

Illinois' Goals (Slide 5)

Barriers and challenges (Slide 3)

Concerns expressed by MCOs (slide 4)

The Critical Role of the EQRO (Slide 9)

Study Question (Slide 8)

Early Results (Slide 11)

Conclusion:

EQROs have a strong role to play in state efforts to improve the developmental care of young children. States can direct EQROs to capture data on MCO performance concerning the healthy mental development of young kids. Illinois has shown that

EQROs can even help states work more smoothly with MCOs in overcoming barriers to measuring and improving care.

This brief summarizes presentations made as part of a conference call for states participating in the ABCD II consortium. The call was held in October of 2005 and included presentations from Henry Ireys of Mathematica Policy Research, Deborah Saunders, MCH Bureau Chief for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, and Margaret deHesse, Executive Director of State and Corporate Services for Health Services Advisory Group, Inc. (HSAG). HSAG is the EQRO for the state of Illinois.