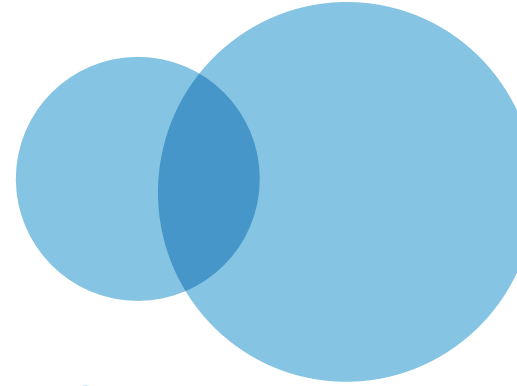


ACTION 4.6

Support professional development to increase primary care providers' knowledge (competency) in prevention, management and treatment of frequently occurring and mild to moderate early childhood mental health conditions.

INCREASE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

in MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT for PEDIATRICIANS and FAMILY PHYSICIANS



Pediatricians and family physicians often have the first and most regular contact with families with young children. It's estimated that one-quarter of pediatric primary care office visits in the U.S. involve a concern for behavioral and mental health problems. Physicians play an important role in preventing, identifying, managing, and treating mental health concerns for young children in partnership with families and other providers. This includes incorporating screening, primary care intervention, engaging families as partners in care, managing medication, knowledge of evidence-based mental health services, and working closely with mental health professionals. Additional training and professional development for physicians in these areas benefits children and families.

WHAT WE KNOW

Although well-child visits to the pediatrician's office are an excellent opportunity for implementing universal behavioral health screening, it doesn't happen often enough because of lack of training and competency. The American Academy of Pediatrics found that 65% of pediatricians reported they lacked the necessary training in the treatment of children with mental health problems, 40% stated they lacked the ability to diagnose mental health problems, and more than 50% indicated they lacked confidence in their ability to treat these patients.

ABOUT 98% OF CHILDREN

ages 0 to 4 have a well-child check-up each year. This makes regular visits with a pediatrician or family care provider a significant opportunity for identifying and addressing infant and early childhood mental health concerns.

For the overwhelming majority of pediatricians, learning how to respond to children’s behavioral health needs comes as on-the-job training. Several North Carolina universities are stepping up to ensure that there are opportunities for pediatricians and family care providers to receive training in infant and young child mental health during medical school to ensure they have the knowledge and experiences needed to provide appropriate behavioral and mental health care. There are also a range of national initiatives that aim to build the capacity of pediatricians and other primary care providers to assess, diagnose and manage a range of mental health issues:

- [The American Academy of Pediatrics’ Screening Technical Assistance & Resource Center](#)
- [Resources for Advancing Children’s Health \(REACH\) Institute](#)
- [American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology’s Post Pediatric Portal Pilot Project](#)

States can maximize their use of funding through supporting a combination of “home grown” initiatives and by tapping into these and other national initiatives.

Dive into the Data

North Carolina, like most states, doesn’t have any strong data on infant and young children’s behavioral and psychological well-being. Without this information, state and local leaders don’t know whether their policies, systems, and allocation of resources are meeting children and families’ needs for support. *Learn more about [the need to fill this data gap](#).* Explore other indicators related to children’s need for care and services on the [Pathways Data Dashboard](#).

WHAT WE NEED

The [Preparing Future Pediatricians to Meet the Behavioral and Mental Health Needs of Children](#) report states that regulatory efforts by councils that accredit medical training, residency, and specialty fellowships can play a key role in promoting needed change. Some examples of these regulatory efforts include: developing competency-based requirements related to behavior and mental health care; mandating incorporating behavior and mental health care into as many resident experiences as possible.

Organizations that set standards for training and certification can play a substantial role in creating the conditions that will increase the likelihood that future pediatricians will begin their careers with the knowledge and capacities that can contribute to reducing the child mental health crisis.

HOW TO SUPPORT

Pediatricians can be encouraged to learn more about and follow the American Academy of Pediatrics' [Bright Futures screening guidelines](#), which recommends conducting a psychosocial and behavioral assessment at each of the 15 well-child visits during the child's first five years. Research shows that [screening should utilize instruments that focus on early development and behavior in the social-emotional domain](#). Screening should also cover other risk factors associated with infant and child mental health challenges, such as maternal depression; financial, housing, and food insecurity; domestic and community violence; and substance abuse in the home.

Increasing the number of pediatricians who screen for behavioral and psychological challenges at well-child visits must be accompanied by increases in the number of infant and young child mental health service providers so that families can be referred to needed supports. Several North Carolina initiatives such as the [Child, Adolescent, and Family Behavioral Health Fellowship](#) are working to improve the availability and accessibility of behavioral health to children and their families.

Getting pediatricians and family physicians more involved in behavioral and mental health delivery is about creating a prevention-focused system.

INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA



[ARCh Project](#) partners with agencies around the state to improve infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) outcomes of North Carolina children ages birth to five by increasing access to services and advancing workforce capacity to effectively meet their needs. From Fall of 2022 until Fall of 2027, they will expand mental health consultation to pediatricians and early interventionists; support the development of a statewide childcare consultation model; increase equitable access to IECMH endorsement; and provide training and supervision to professionals across the state in a wide range of IECMH topics.

[Visit the Pathways Action Map](#) to learn more about these and other initiatives leading efforts in this area.

