



THE EARLY CHILDHOOD MEDICAL HOME:

A gateway to the health, development and success of young children

Why The Early Childhood Medical Home?

A child's earliest experiences have great power over their brain development and later life outcomes. There is a critical window of opportunity in the first several years of life to impact health, development and life success. The data is clear; supportive, nurturing early environments are critical to healthy growth and development and school success.

Unfortunately, many factors negatively influence healthy development. Poor parental attachment, developmental delays, maternal mental health concerns, poverty, social isolation and psychosocial stressors are common causes of poor outcomes. Half of all children entering Kindergarten are already at risk for academic problems (NCLD). Screening and referral at Kindergarten entry is late for many children and can lead to more costly and less effective interventions. The correlation between physical health and disease prevention and school readiness are clear and the medical home assures health promotion and prevention opportunities that lay the groundwork for wellness.

Effective services early in life can avoid the costly consequences of problems left unaddressed.

Issues impacting early childhood development can be addressed effectively through comprehensive, family centered and community based health care in an early childhood medical home. The early childhood medical home offers increased prevention, early identification, and treatment of health, developmental problems and promotion of positive parenting techniques. Supporting families in their communities, routinely screening for common issues, providing proactive health and success promoting education, connecting families with community agencies and intervening early are effective ways to promote health and success.

Portal to Young Children and Families:

In 2006, 97% of those infants and toddlers had regular access to healthcare. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health Interview Survey (2006) found that of those children who have regular access to care, 97.9% received their healthcare from a standard provider (either a pediatric clinic or doctor's office). Current guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend fifteen well-child visits from birth through a child's fifth birthday. No other venue or early-childhood system offers the large-scale, comprehensive access that a pediatric medical home can provide. The next opportunity (albeit less effective) to reach children and families on such a large scale does not occur until a child is enrolled in an educational institution, in which case a child may already be on a trajectory towards inequality and poor health outcomes.

The Medical Home

A Concept rather than a Building

A Medical home is:

- Accessible
- Continuous
- Comprehensive
- Family-centered
- Compassionate
- Culturally Effective.

It is community based and supports families where **they are**. In some form or another it provides 24 hour a day links to services 7 days a week and well child services as well as sick and emergent care. The medical home is in touch with community services and able to refer families when needed. The medical home is based on productive, longitudinal relationships.

The medical home is a *proactive*, not a reactive, attitude towards health care delivery and service provision. It is a holistic model built to ensure the realization of healthy development and success in all people.

The medical home embraces a holistic definition of health and understands the critical role of supportive environments in health promotion:

"Health promotion is the science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health. Optimal health is defined as a balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health. Lifestyle change can be facilitated through a combination of efforts to enhance awareness, change behavior and create environments that support good health practices. Of the three, supportive environments will probably have the greatest impact in producing lasting change". (*American Journal of Health Promotion*, 989,3,3,5)

The Early Childhood Medical Home serves as a component of and a portal for the comprehensive early childhood services that support:

- physical health- including oral health, vision and hearing screening, immunizations and preventive services and adherence to the American Academy of Pediatrics/Bright Futures guidelines for preventive care
- child development
- mental health and social emotional well being
- early care and education
- parent education
- family supports
- early literacy

Examples of supports that can be accessed in a true early childhood medical home are tremendous and include:

- Maternal mental health promotion through pre-natal and early childhood mental health awareness, screening, education, supports and referrals
- Pro-active behavior management education

- Routine developmental screenings and surveillance
- Collaboration with community agencies including potential co-location of mental health and service enrollment services
- Financial literacy, tax credit, education and legal supports to alleviate poverty and promote stable financial environments
- Linkages to vital community services including quality childcare, Pre-K, nutrition supports early literacy supports
- Interactive and multimedia education and screening in the waiting room
- Promotion of early literacy through programs such as Reach Out and Read
- Parent supports
- Facilitating referral to early intervention services and helping families navigate their way

An Early Childhood Medical Home provides a major opportunity to enhance the school readiness, health, growth and development and life success of our youngest citizens.

An early childhood Medical Home promotes optimal physical health school readiness and success, mental health and addresses poverty itself. It plays a major role on preventing morbidities including child abuse, disease and injuries. All of these factors have direct contributions to the health, well being and future success of children. The recognition of the medical home as a gateway to health and success and the expansion of dedicated supports to fully realize this vision for is a critical step for children.

The opportunities are limitless. The Early Childhood Medical Home realizes the great opportunities to support and intervene early.

A MEDICAL HOME FROM THE START IS A KEY TO HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

- i. "Summary Health Statistics for U.S. Children: National Health Interview Survey, 2006." *Vital and Health Statistics* 10.234 (2007). 10 July 2008 <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_234.pdf>.
- ii. Ibid