

Infant-Early Childhood  
Mental Health  
Statewide Tour Report  
– Taking Action brief

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# Taking Action brief

## Background

Early life is critically important in shaping lifelong health and well-being. In alignment with its mission, HCA has increased its efforts to provide evidence-based, effective, and integrated care to infants, young children, and their caregivers, through the development of new policies and resources to support infant-early childhood mental health (IECMH) across Washington state.

In 2023, HCA's IECMH team conducted a Statewide Tour of listening sessions with behavioral health providers, to understand barriers and potential solutions around improving access to quality IECMH services. Almost 100 providers from across the state shared their wisdom and perspectives through these listening sessions, and the key findings from these sessions are reflected in the [Statewide Tour Report](#) and the [Executive Summary](#).

Everyone has a role to play in building a stronger IECMH system for Washington state. In alignment with HCA's IECMH Priorities, this Taking Action Brief highlights strategies for action that mental health providers, allied providers, agency administrators, and state policy and system partners can take. Each strategy is based on the best practices and challenges identified by providers, as well as approaches identified in literature.

Theme	HCA IECMH Priority
<b>IECMH Workforce</b>	Priority 1
<b>Mental Health Assessment for Young Children</b>	Priority 2
<b>Mental Health Assessment for Young Children</b>	Priority 2
<b>Services in Home and Community Settings</b>	Priority 2 & Priority 4
<b>Caregiver Engagement</b>	Priority 3
<b>Allied Professional Collaboration</b>	Priority 1 & Priority 5
<b>IECMH Financing</b>	Priority 4



## Mental Health Providers

Individuals who are or are interested in providing mental health services to young children and their families, such as: marriage and family therapist, mental health counselor, psychologist, or clinical social worker. Strategies in this section highlight actionable steps an individual can take to build their skills and practice as well as support strengthening the workforce and system.

### IECMH Workforce

- Increase awareness by sharing about IECMH with students and colleagues.
- If you are an IECMH professional, offer to supervise or mentor mental health professionals.
- Build your IECMH competencies and practice through self-study and attending IECMH trainings.

### Mental Health Assessment for Young Children

- Attend a DC:0-5 Clinical Training and incorporate into your mental health assessments with young children.
- Review and share with agency leadership HCA's MHAYC and IECMH resources to support incorporating IECMH best practices.
- Participate in [IECMH-WC](#) professional development opportunities focused on building skills in assessment and observation.

## Mental Health Treatment for Young Children

- Provide dyadic services when working with young children and involve all caregivers when possible.
- Document your use of IECMH evidence-based practices using the EBP reporting guide.<sup>20</sup>
- Build partnerships with Tribes and BIPOC by-and-for organizations in your region to identify opportunities to strengthen your culturally based practices and opportunities to expand access to young children in these communities.<sup>32</sup>

## Services in Homes and Community Settings

- If you work in an agency, share your interest and/or openness to providing IECMH services in home and community settings.
- Incorporate safety assessment into your initial information gathering with families.
- Share about the MHAYC travel reimbursement policy with your administrative and billing staff.

## Caregiver Engagement

- Ask families about social determinants of health and life stressors to support connecting them to resources.<sup>1,27</sup>
- Ensure your services and treatment goals use family-centered language and center the strengths and priorities of families.<sup>17</sup>
- Foster trusted and respectful relationships with all caregivers recognizing the range of relationships and importance of collaboration to support young children's healthy development.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Allied Professional Collaboration

- Strengthen coordination across mental health and allied providers working with families of young children throughout treatment.
- Use the [Mental Health Referral Service Line](#), [MHAYC Multidisciplinary Referral Guide](#) and [Help Me Grow](#) to identify and connect to mental health and allied services that meet young children's needs.
- Share and use the [Emotional Health of Babies and Toddlers flyers](#) detailing how we all can play a role in supporting families of young children.

## IECMH Financing

- Utilize HCA's billing resources and participate in [HCA's IECMH Office Hours](#) for questions and provider-to-provider support.
- Engage in groups like the [Children and Youth Behavioral Health Workgroup's](#) Workforce and Rates Subgroup to share your perspective and inform policy recommendations.
- Sign up for [HCA's GovDelivery listservs](#) to stay current on policy and billing updates.
- Strengthen partnerships with billing staff/ teams to increase awareness and understanding of your services.



## Allied Providers

Individuals who are allied providers supporting IECMH in physical health care, social services, early learning, and adult behavioral health, such as pediatrician, family doctor, public health nurse, child welfare social worker, family/care navigator, child care/early learning provider, early intervention provider, or mental health professional. Given the report is based on mental health provider feedback, strategies are primarily identified in the [Caregiver Engagement](#) and [Allied Professional Collaboration](#) sections, though individuals may be interested in strategies identified for other audiences throughout the report.

### Caregiver Engagement

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### Allied Professional Collaboration

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## Agency Administrators

Agency administrators at organizations who are or are interested in providing mental health services to young children and their families, such as: supervisor, manager, director, or C-suite executive. Strategies in this section highlight actionable steps organizations can implement to incorporate IECMH services and best practices into their agency policies, practices, and service delivery.

### IECMH Workforce

- Build IECMH workforce capacity through creating birth-5 specialty teams and providing IECMH internship opportunities.<sup>28</sup>
- Ensure staff have the necessary resources to meaningfully engage in IECMH professional development, including agency investment in training, provider release time, and supervision support.<sup>16</sup>
- Strengthen IECMH-specific supervisor capacity through supporting access to reflective supervision training and ongoing professional development, including supervisor-to-supervisor learning opportunities.
- Prioritize diverse workforce in hiring and offer career development opportunities support.<sup>28,32</sup>
- Provide IECMH staff with job-embedded professional development on cultural competence and working with diverse families.<sup>17</sup>

### Mental Health Assessment for Young Children

- Choose a best practice to support implementing multi-session assessment and use of the DC:0-5, such as dedicated efforts to shifting agency culture about the assessment process, aligning intake staffing and workflows, or updating electronic health record systems.
- Encourage staff, especially assessment staff, to attend HCA webinars and DC:0-5 Clinical and Overview Trainings.
- Develop IECMH-specific intake processes or adapt current templates to align with IECMH best practices ([Appendix H](#)) and use of IECMH-specific tools.

- Explore funding mechanisms to support collateral information gathering.
- Provide the [DC:0-5 Casebook](#) as a resource to support staff in building competencies in assessment and diagnosis for young children. Update agency workflow/s to support information gathering best practices and use of IECMH-specific tools.

## Mental Health Treatment for Young Children

- Update your policies to support and promote developmentally appropriate dyadic care.
- Explore local partnerships and alternative financing to provide onsite childcare for caregiver only sessions.
- Ensure your teams are documenting use of IECMH evidence-based practices using the EBP reporting guide.<sup>10,20</sup>
- Commit to making resources available to providers in adopting evidence-based models, such as release time for training, reduced caseload, and dedicated supervision.<sup>16</sup>

## Services in Homes and Community Settings

- Develop safety policies and protocols for offering services in home and community settings.
- Invest in resources to support staff comfort and safety, such as agency cell phones.
- Ensure billing staff are aware of the MHAYC travel reimbursement policy and resources.

## Caregiver Engagement

- Update policies and leverage flexible funding to support families access to concrete needs and allied services, including those to support caregiver mental and behavioral health.<sup>1,5</sup>
- Build local partnerships and collaborate with community partners and regional [Accountable Community for Health \(ACH\)](#) to support referrals for families.<sup>6</sup>
- Adopt family-centered practices and two-generation approaches that support the wellbeing of children and their caregivers.<sup>1,5,21</sup>
- Expand your service offerings to include IECMH-focused parenting groups.<sup>8</sup>

## Allied Professional Collaboration

- Establish ongoing collaborative relationships and strengthen your regions IECMH network by attending or creating collaborative meetings spaces.<sup>9</sup>
- Partner with other agencies supporting young children and families to offer co-located services.<sup>21,22</sup>
- Invest in offering reflective supervision to staff and invite allied providers to participate when possible.<sup>22</sup>
- Update agency policies and workflows to support coordination with allied providers throughout services.

## IECMH Financing

- Share HCA's billing resources and encourage staff to attend [HCA's IECMH Office Hours](#) and share [HCA's IECMH resources and billing guidance](#).
- Build relationships with provider relations representatives at MCOs to strengthen communication and partnership around administrative challenges.
- Encourage and support clinical and billing staff relationships to ensure alignment between services and billing practices.



## State Policy & System Partners

State cross-system partners invested in fostering the mental health and well-being of young children in Washington state, including Tribes, local and state government agencies, community-based organizations and IECMH providers, policymakers and advocates, payors, researchers, higher education institutions, or community members.

### IECMH Workforce

- Conduct an environmental scan and/or workforce analysis to understand the current IECMH workforce landscape, identify facilitators to expanding IECMH capacity, and support the creation of an IECMH workforce development plan.<sup>2, 4, 7, 4, 10, 15, 26</sup>
- Support investment and identify policies to increase accessible, ongoing, and tailored IECMH-specific training and ongoing professional development supports, including cohort models for provider-to-provider support.<sup>2, 4, 7, 17, 26, 29, 30</sup>
- Partner with higher education institutions to incorporate IECMH curriculum and assure foundational IECMH knowledge is included in mental health graduate programs.<sup>28</sup>
- Identify and implement strategies to recruit and support providers from underserved communities and increase capacity for cultural match to populations being served.<sup>1, 7, 17, 32</sup>

### Mental Health Assessment for Young Children

- Identify and address barriers to increase use of culturally and linguistically relevant screening and assessment tools, including new policies, investments, or adopting a list of standard IECMH-specific tools.<sup>1, 17, 26</sup>
- Establish cross-system leadership from providers, professional associations, and state agencies to collaborate on developing a standard IECMH intake form that addresses IECMH best practices, clinical and ethical standards, and state regulations.
- Provide investment to support providers and agencies in updating EHR systems to align with MHAYC the policy.<sup>13</sup>

### Mental Health Treatment for Young Children

- Identify and implement strategies to build infrastructure and sustain access to evidence-based, dyadic IECMH services, including updating or creating new policies.<sup>10, 20, 27</sup>
- Provide investment to support the operating costs for developmentally appropriate care, including onsite childcare, child-friendly spaces, and age-appropriate toys.
- Invest in research, pilot programs, and implementation evaluation of evidence-based models and culturally driven interventions to strengthen the evidence base, identify gaps, and inform scalable solutions in community-based mental health.<sup>1, 10, 16, 17, 32</sup>

### Services in Homes and Community Settings

- Provide investment to support the access to IECMH services in home and community settings, including opportunities to leverage co-located and integrated IECMH services where families and children already receive care.<sup>9, 29, 30</sup>
- Gather best practices across allied services and specialty programs to inform standard tools and guidance for services in natural settings.
- Support initiatives aimed at ensuring IECMH providers have access to resources and supports for best practices in home- and community-based care.

### Caregiver Engagement

- Align policies and initiatives with the [Washington State Early Learning Coordination Plan](#) that prioritize approaches and programs that promote family wellbeing and address sources of stress, including caregiver mental and behavioral health supports.<sup>1, 5, 6</sup>

- Develop parent leadership networks and opportunities to inform policymaking and hold systems accountable.<sup>1,27</sup>
- Create cross-system IECMH communications and caregiver education for families with young children that fosters trust, normalizes mental health and well-being, and builds awareness for how to access services when needed.<sup>17</sup>
- Explore cross-sector policy solutions to make the IECMH system easier to navigate for families.<sup>23</sup>
- Invest in research and analysis of parent/family-peer models and IECMH parenting groups to evaluate and strengthen the evidence base, identify gaps, inform scalable solutions, and identify funding strategies to increase access to these services.<sup>1</sup>

### Allied Professional Collaboration

- Leverage higher education and professional development initiatives to ensure IECMH providers across sectors have a foundational awareness and understanding of IECMH as it relates to their work.<sup>4,18,27</sup>
- Explore policy strategies and technological solutions to align referral systems, promote ease of coordination, and streamline information sharing across IECMH professionals and settings.<sup>1,17</sup>
- Support initiatives that prioritize co-located services where families already access care and concrete needs.<sup>2</sup>
- Optimize existing cross-sector groups, such as the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Workgroup, to strengthen efforts for shared policy development and investments for the IECMH system.<sup>17,22</sup>
- Identify key cross-system IECMH champions to define elements of the continuum of care and establish roles to identify IECMH policy priorities, support integration across sectors, and address services gaps.<sup>1,4,7,17,22,27</sup>

### IECMH Financing

- Leverage existing funding streams to support developmentally appropriate care through aligned regulations, braided/blended funding strategies, and identification of overlaps in services.<sup>1,11,17,21,22</sup>
- Utilize policy and investments to expand funding options increasing access to and the delivery of high-quality IECMH services.<sup>1,17,22</sup>
- Assess rate adequacy and sustainability to inform implementation of policies that ensure reimbursement covers the full cost of care for developmentally appropriate, evidence-based dyadic services.<sup>1,17,18</sup>
- Build capacity for a comprehensive IECMH network of providers by providing tailored resources, training and technical assistance to increase clarity and confidence navigating the complex health system.<sup>17</sup>
- Identify and implement systems-level strategies to reduce duplication of administrative functions and streamline reimbursement processes.<sup>17</sup>

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