Poverty Reduction Project (PRP)

Overall Aims

The National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives (NPSC) promotes the adoption, implementation and scale-up of programs and policies founded on a strong research base that have established their effectiveness in reducing or preventing problems among children, youth and families. Given that behavioral, mental and physical health problems are highly concentrated in high poverty neighborhoods, the NPSC has prioritized an initiative focusing on the reduction of poverty and its ill effects. Our strategy going forward is to continue to work with Congressional offices across the aisle to draw attention to science-based approaches to reducing poverty and offer expertise and education on these approaches. This past year, we hosted a well-received Congressional Briefing on poverty, produced a policy paper for distribution that summarizes our findings, and recruited Congressional staffers across the aisle to agree to work together to promote an evidence-based prevention science approach to dealing with poverty.

We believe that our Poverty Reduction Project (PRP) meets a growing need to develop and disseminate knowledge to improve child well-being in our country. Our promotion of rigorous implementation science focuses on the need to expand the capacity of existing systems. As outlined below, we propose an infrastructure project that includes 4 components (a) advocacy and education on the use of prevention science to reduce poverty and its impacts; (b) dissemination of this knowledge; (c) identification of opportunities to expand the work of prevention science research and implementation; and (d) building collaborative relationships between investigators, practitioners and policy-makers (both federal and state) working on poverty reduction. These activities are designed to positively impact the systems that touch the lives of families and children living in poverty, improving outcomes. We have included in the attachments our accomplishments this year, which we believe speaks to our capacity to successfully advance this poverty reduction strategy.

Background

Children raised in poverty have—on average—higher rates of multiple problems, including school failure and cognitive deficits, mental health problems (e.g., depression, trauma stress), and risky behaviors (e.g., delinquency, violence, early pregnancy, substance abuse, suicide attempts). Experiences of many forms of adversity, from child maltreatment and abuse to witnessing violence and trauma, are prevalent in high poverty communities and neighborhoods, substantially compounding these problems, delaying their physical and social development, and interfering with their ability to achieve academically. Children in poverty are also at risk for the development of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes. In effect, impoverished children tend to develop along a slower trajectory in several functional domains, thereby reducing their chance for successful lives. And the cost to society of the most common behavioral problems for all youth totals nearly $500 billion annually (estimated in 2014).
Prevention science offers a strong foundation for the nation to create communities that ensure young people reach adulthood with the skills, interests, values, and health habits needed to lead productive lives in caring relationships with others. There are well-tested and effective programs, policies, and practices that can prevent the most common and costly problems of youth. Some interventions can directly affect the economic well-being of those in poverty or who are vulnerable to falling into poverty. Others do not directly or immediately affect economic standing, but ameliorate the negative effects of poverty, such as the behavioral and mental health problems mentioned above. Indeed, alleviating these negative consequences of poverty has potential to improve later economic well-being; e.g., improving academic performance, decreasing school drop-out and teenage pregnancy rates, increasing employment, and enhancing self-efficacy. Many of these interventions can also help to prevent inter-generational poverty.

Such evidence-based solutions are bipartisan, as they avoid more controversial, strictly economic remedies to poverty. They stress the importance of accountability while benefitting children and family, saving money by preventing problems before they develop, and not wasting precious resources on programs that do not work by phasing out unproven practices and implementing those shown to be effective.

Project Goals and Activities

1. **Education**

We see the need to educate the public, media, Congress, and federal agencies regarding the scientific alternatives to reducing poverty and its adverse effects on children and families. We will utilize such means as op-eds, press conferences, congressional briefings, written materials, and relationships with legislators/administrators.

Going forward, the NPSC plans to work with its 40+ affiliate organizations to facilitate additional partnerships between researchers, practitioners, community and national organizations, federal agency administrators, and policy-makers to explore ways in which prevention science can more effectively address poverty than current approaches. This task will be accomplished through meetings, calls, emails exchanges and conferences, as well as newsletters, our basecamp platform, and online exchanges of ideas and information.

2. **Dissemination**

Our “Translational Prevention Science Committee” is composed of several experts, including basic scientists, implementation specialists, and intervention researchers. With additional funding, we will retain our Research Associate to work with our scientists who will distill and disseminate the science pertaining to childhood exposure to adversity (including poverty, parental neglect, maltreatment and abuse) to community organizations, policy-makers and government agencies.
We will also create a new website for non-scientists, conveying straight messages about poverty and the potential for prevention science to exert a positive impact (i.e., improve economic security and reduce ill effects on children and families). It will include videos and modules addressing various relevant aspects of the problem and suggested solutions.

An additional dissemination strategy involves writing a scholarly article for a prominent journal on ways in which preventive interventions improve the economic security of individuals and families. There is potential to edit a special journal issue that would ask scientists to reanalyze their existing data to focus on the effects of intervention on economic security indicators (rather than only including them as covariates). The article and the special issue (if we do the latter) will include a focus on the prevention of childhood exposure to adversity. These publications can serve as a consolidated resource for research findings and their implications for poverty reduction efforts based on prevention science; none currently exists.

3. **Pursuit of Funding for Research and Implementation**

We will identify foundation and federal grant solicitations that call for additional research on poverty and childhood adversity that fills existing gaps; this information will be disseminated to our membership. We will also identify opportunities to fund projects related to the implementation, scale-up, and evaluation evidence-based programs in high poverty communities or in human service systems that have substantial interaction with disadvantaged populations (e.g., schools, child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, mental health). Applications from relevant experts in our membership will be encouraged. For example, we are presently exploring an opportunity to support statewide capacity building within the California child welfare system for implementing and scaling up effective approaches to the prevention of child maltreatment and related outcomes.

The NPSC formulated a “call” for a demonstration grant mechanism (at the request of congressional staffers) to implement and evaluate evidence-based preventive interventions to decrease poverty and its effects (see attachment). Our hope is to encourage federal appropriations for evidence-based programs, similar to that provided for Head Start.

4. **Relationship Building**

We will further develop relationships with federal and state policymakers, national organizations, and foundations that focus on poverty and childhood adversity to jointly scale up these efforts, ensuring a broad impact. On April 18, 2016, we have organized a “Research to Policy Collaboration” (RPC) Project on Capitol Hill. Our strategy is to build trusting and productive working relationships with federal policy makers and staff that allows NPSC to engage in knowledge translation that informs and guide public policy.

It is important in poverty reduction work that collaborations are established with community partners, including both local service agencies and the community members being served, to ensure the fit and feasibility of locally adopted programs. It is also critical to help address and
manage local implementation challenges and increase buy-in and readiness in the community. Investigators, implementation scientists, economists, and practitioners who are members of the NPSC (and many who are on the Board of Directors) have a track record of conducting studies and implementing programs in high poverty communities or with disadvantaged populations. Thus, we have significant investment and experience in this track.

Our goal is to evolve communities and the policies and systems that affect them toward the creation of nurturing and healthy families. Ultimately, providing opportunities and fostering skills that increase chances for income mobility as well as positive youth development will serve to overcome the conditions associated with poverty.