A Public Health Approach to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities: Summary of *Within Our Reach: A National Strategy to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities*

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The Protect Our Kids Act of 2012 called for the development of the Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities (CECANF). Charged with developing a national strategy to reduce child deaths attributed to abuse or neglect, the CECANF released the national strategy report titled *Within Our Reach: A National Strategy to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities* (Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, 2016). The CECANF proposed a public health approach to child safety including effective leadership at all levels, data-informed decision making, and multisystem participation in all levels of prevention.

To eliminate child abuse and neglect fatalities, primary and secondary prevention of child abuse are essential. A collective approach is critical between community agencies, including child protective services (CPS), law enforcement, the courts, medical and mental health professionals, family service providers, and clergy, to provide primary prevention and support the work of the child welfare system. While much of this report is focused on realigning federal and state child welfare policies, there are specific...
recommendations for community partners to share
the responsibility and accountability in preventing
child maltreatment deaths.

CECANF Immediate Recommendations to Prevent
Child Fatalities:

| Identify children and families most at risk
  of a maltreatment fatality
| Share data electronically and in real time
  across systems
| Review near-fatality cases
| Provide accountability of providers, CPS,
  and mandated reporters to meet quality
  and training standards
| Augment the structure of the federal gov-
  ernment and expand its authority and
  oversight of state policy and practice
| Invest money and resources for the 21st-
  century welfare system.


Through the process of holding public hearings, the
CECANF noted the importance of identifying
patterns associated with increased risk of child
fatalities and the importance of early intervention by
connecting families with quality, evidence-based
supportive services. Action to address these factors
includes an ecological approach to address poverty,
implicit bias, and disparities. This requires
operational partnerships between public and private
sectors in the community to build trusting
relationships with families and to leverage resources
that proactively address risk factors and promote
resilience.

The CECANF maintains that coordinated efforts are
critical to prevention of child fatalities. Examples of
coordinated, multisystem engaged efforts include the
following:

- Multidisciplinary professionals informing the
development of state fatality prevention plans
  (Recommendation 5.2, 6.2)
- Shared data on children and families between law
  enforcement and CPS (Recommendation 6.1)
- Pediatric health information exchanges with
  shared information on prior child injury visits
  across systems to enhance surveillance within
  emergency departments, acute care, and pediatric
  offices (Recommendation 7.2)
- Access to high-quality prevention and earlier
  intervention services and supports for children
  and families at risk (Recommendation 7.1)
- Standardized protocol and guidelines for medical
  examiners regarding child death investigation
  across states (Recommendation 6.2)
- Partnerships between CPS, courts, law
  enforcement, medical professionals, and family
  service providers to preserve families through
  enhancing protective factors in the home and
  community (Recommendation 4.1).

The CECANF discussed the issue of racial
disproportionality in the child welfare system and
the ways in which implicit biases negatively affect
minority children and families. Implicit biases are
found across systems and levels of services within the
CPS workforce, law enforcement, courts, medical
professionals, and family service providers.
Recommendations state that child welfare system
providers receive racial equity training, including
“(1) family engagement, development, and
strengthening; (2) understanding racial and ethnic
cultures and cultural norms; (3) understanding the
historical context of racism; (4) understanding and
recognizing biases; and (5) how biases can impact
assessment of risk, access to services, and delivery of
services” (Recommendation 4.2)(2016, p. 64).

The public health model recommended by the
CECANF stresses the importance of building and
sustaining community capacity for prevention of
child abuse, neglect, and fatalities. In 2016, the
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
released Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A
Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and
Programmatic Activities (Fortson, Klevens, Merrick,
Gilbert, & Alexander, 2016). This technical package
offers three components—strategy, approach, and
evidence for providers, communities, states, and
other entities to prioritize evidence-based efforts and
News from APSAC

APSAC Guidelines for Practice Now Available at No Cost

APSAC is pleased to share that our Board of Directors voted to make all Guidelines for Practice available for free! Guidelines are developed by National Interdisciplinary Guidelines Task Forces and include concise, data-based information on key areas of practice in child maltreatment. APSAC Guidelines for Practice are vetted through a rigorous, multi-layered peer review process, involving subject matter experts not on the task force, APSAC members, legal counsel, and APSAC’s Board of Directors. Be sure to read the two Guidelines just published in 2017—The Investigation and Determination of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment in Children and Adolescents and Munchausen by Proxy (MBP): Clinical and Case Management Guidance. Click here to access the guidelines.

APSAC Holds Inaugural Psychological Maltreatment Symposium in Montclair, New Jersey

On December 11th, APSAC held a one-day symposium on Psychological Maltreatment, put on in partnership with Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey, Montclair State University, and the New Jersey Children’s Alliance. The faculty, pictured here, included the authors of the APSAC Guidelines The Investigation and Determination of Suspected Psychological Maltreatment in Children and Adolescents—Marla Brassard, Stuart Hart, and Amy Baker; and Gina Hernandez, Senior Vice President of Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey. The event was certified for CEU’s and received rave reviews from the audience of CPS workers, early childhood center staff, home visitors, child advocacy center staff and faculty from Montclair.

Want to bring this one-of-a-kind program to your state? Contact Jim Campbell.

References


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kimberly Kay Lopez, DrPH, MPH, Assistant Professor, Baylor College of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics at Texas Children’s Hospital, serves as Senior Director of Public Health for the Section of Public Health Pediatrics. Her research is focused on mitigating adversities and promoting resiliency in children, families, and communities.

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