

Building Linkages for Early Childhood Mental Health

The Massachusetts Early Childhood Linkage Initiative (MECLI)



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The MECLI project is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau; The A.J. Mallman Family Foundation; The Anne E. Carey Foundation; and The Frank and Theresa Caplan Endowment for Early Childhood and Parenting Education at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University. We thank these organizations for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of these organizations.

MECLI: Brandeis, DPH, DSS, and the EI Programs

MECLI Background

- Guided by the science of early childhood development
- Young children under three years of age with substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect are at high risk for developmental problems including early childhood mental health (ECMH) problems
- MECLI piloted referrals of these children to Part C Early Intervention (EI)

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Early Childhood Mental Health

“Early child development can be seriously compromised by social, regulatory, and emotional impairments. Indeed, young children are capable of deep and lasting sadness, grief, and disorganization in response to trauma, loss, and early personal rejection. Given the substantial short- and long-term risks that accompany early mental health impairments, the incapacity of many early childhood programs to address these concerns and the severe shortage of early childhood professionals with mental health expertise are urgent problems.” (Shonkoff & Phillips, p. 5)

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Early Childhood Mental Health

Infant mental health is the developing capacity of the child from birth to age 3 to:

- experience, regulate, and express emotions;
- form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and
- explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children.

Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.

(Zero To Three, <http://www.zerotothree.org/Search/index2.cfm>)

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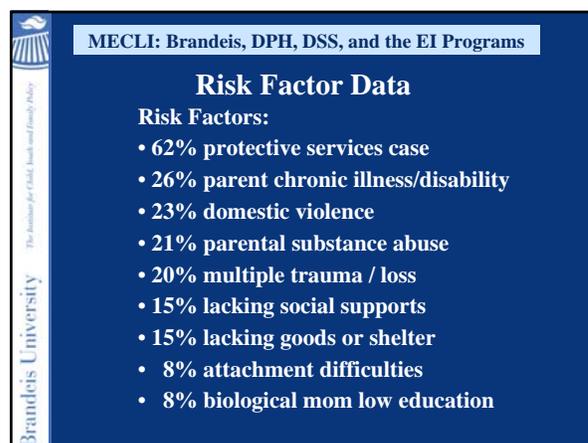
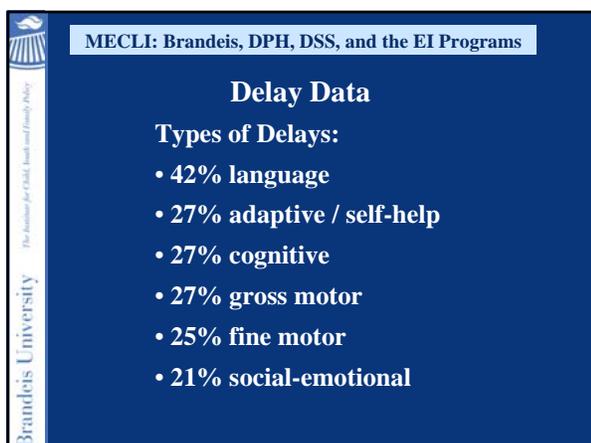
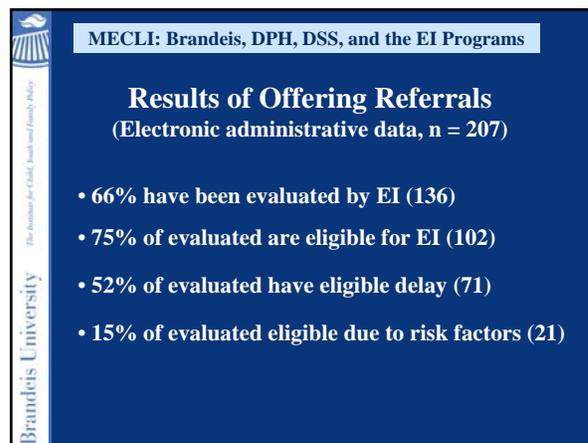
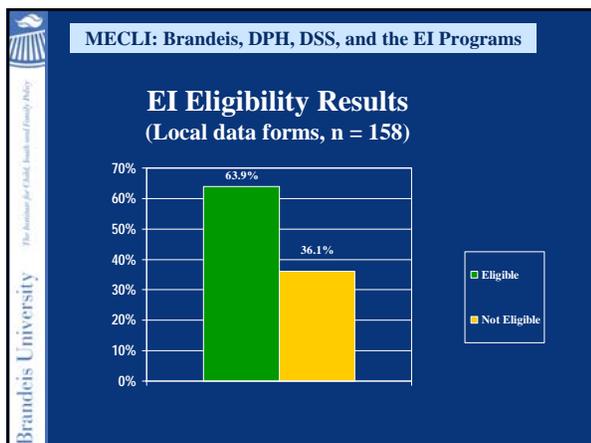
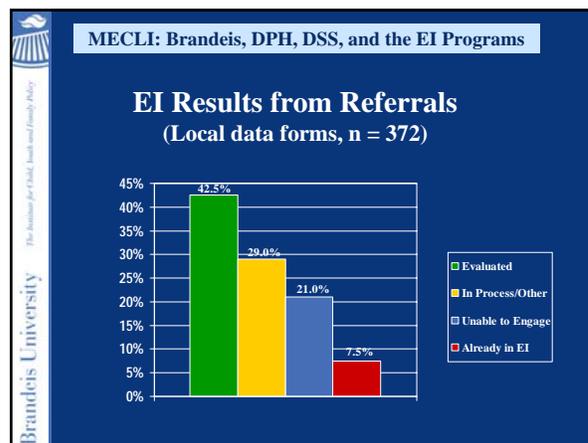
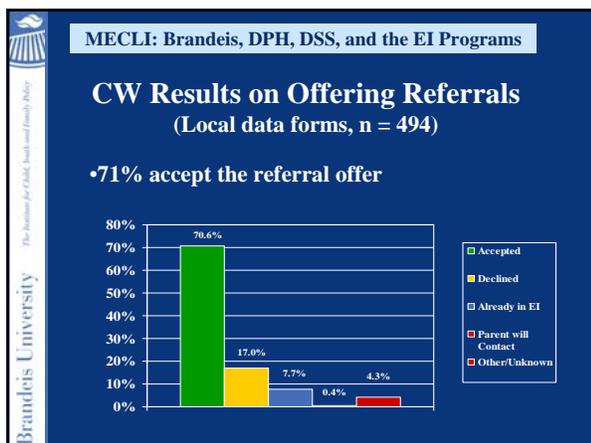
MECLI Pilot Project

- 5,000 children under 3 involved in new, substantiated CAN cases in FY03 in MA
- 3 pilot sites:
 - 3 of 28 Area Offices of DSS
 - 6 of 65 EI Programs

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Data Collected (Nov. 2002 – Dec. 2004)

- From Child Welfare agency, Part C Service Providers and Lead Agency
- 736 identified as eligible by DSS
- 494 referrals offered by DSS
- 372 children referred to EI



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Child Welfare to Part C Referrals

- Required by Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA, 6/03) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (12/04)
- CW agency will be offering more referrals to Part C Early Intervention
- Part C will be working to engage, evaluate, and serve more families

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Benefits

- Enhanced Child Find for Part C
- Part C services may assist CW in reaching its goals
- Increased cross-agency knowledge and collaboration
- Improved child and family outcomes

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Organizational Challenges

- Agencies typically have not worked together
- Agencies have different cultures

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Organizational Strategies

- Good up-front planning
- Build a strong collaboration
- Referral coordinator at each local agency and regular local meetings
- Clear roles and responsibilities

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Resource Challenges

- Personnel time and expertise
- Financial resources

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Resource Strategies

- Allocate appropriate personnel time
- Provide training on processing the referrals and early childhood issues
- Make the process efficient
- Work to find financial resources

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Implementation Challenges & Strategies

- Establish criteria for referral
- Establish protocol for confidential client data
- Resolve any catchment area issues
- Parental engagement with Part C
- Data collection and analyses
- Standardize where appropriate, but allow local flexibility where needed

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Conclusions

- Young children at risk for mental health problems are known to existing service systems but often do not receive developmental and ECMH assessments and services

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Conclusions

- For children under 3, referrals to the Part C EI system are a good place to start and are now required under federal law for
 - Substantiated abuse or neglect
 - Children affected by illegal substance abuse

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Conclusions

- Part C will need to enhance its capacity to assess and respond to ECMH needs
- Organizational, resource, and implementation challenges are present in building these linkages, but strategies for overcoming these challenges are available

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