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)

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

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)

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


- 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
CW Results on Offering Referrals
(Local data forms, n = 494)

- 71% accept the referral offer

EI Results from Referrals
(Local data forms, n = 372)

EI Eligibility Results
(Local data forms, n = 158)

- 66% have been evaluated by EI (136)
- 75% of evaluated are eligible for EI (102)
- 52% of evaluated have eligible delay (71)
- 15% of evaluated eligible due to risk factors (21)

Delay Data
Types of Delays:
- 42% language
- 27% adaptive / self-help
- 27% cognitive
- 27% gross motor
- 25% fine motor
- 21% social-emotional

Risk Factor Data
Risk Factors:
- 62% protective services case
- 26% parent chronic illness/disability
- 23% domestic violence
- 21% parental substance abuse
- 20% multiple trauma / loss
- 15% lacking social supports
- 15% lacking goods or shelter
- 8% attachment difficulties
- 8% biological mom low education
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

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

Organizational Challenges

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

Organizational Strategies

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

Resource Challenges

- Personnel time and expertise
- Financial resources

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
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

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

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

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

Building Linkages for Early Childhood Mental Health

The Massachusetts Early Childhood Linkage Initiative (MECLI)

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