

ISSUE BRIEF:

Social/Emotional Metric's Connection to Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health

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INTRODUCTION

The social-emotional metric is critical to fostering healthy families, as it plays a vital role in identifying children who might otherwise fall through the cracks of the behavioral and physical health systems. By focusing on early intervention for children ages 0-5, this metric enables providers to address risks during a child's formative years, significantly improving long-term outcomes. It also enhances communication and coordination across various support systems, ensuring that at-risk children receive the comprehensive care they need. Ultimately, by directing resources and attention toward early childhood, the metric aims to build a more sustainable health system that relies less on intensive adult support by addressing concerns earlier in life. The Oregon Pediatric Improvement Partnership ([OPIP](#)) and partners aim to identify children with health complexity and share this data with Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), community partners, and other stakeholder groups.

1 CURRENT LANDSCAPE

CCOs are actively engaging in a preparation phase for utilizing the social-emotional metric, often referred to as "preparing the soil." During this four-year ramp-up period, CCOs are conducting asset mapping to identify available resources, assessing service availability and provider capacity, and establishing referral pathways that facilitate smooth access to care. In addition, they are fostering system-wide collaboration among primary care providers, behavioral health services, and early learning programs to create a cohesive support network for at-risk children. This groundwork is essential as CCOs await state-set benchmarks that will define the expected levels of behavioral health services for the target population.

2 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce development is closely tied to the effectiveness of the social-emotional metric, as it addresses the provider capacity and specialized training needed to support young children. Developing a skilled workforce, particularly at the Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP) level, is essential to meet the demand for early interventions. Specialized training in therapeutic modalities tailored for the 0-5 age group, such as Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT), and play therapy, is crucial to providing effective care. Understanding early childhood development not only strengthens support for children but also enhances providers' abilities to work with adults, as many adult behavioral health needs relate to unresolved early experiences.

ORIMHA plays a vital role in supporting the implementation of the social-emotional metric by leveraging its expertise in infant and toddler mental health. This collaboration strengthens workforce development efforts, particularly in areas such as typical child development, family engagement, and mental health, which are essential for effective early intervention. Additionally, ORIMHA can support training in the DC0-3 crosswalk, which supports assessments for this population, and provide training on early childhood mental health to ensure non-stigmatizing and accurate diagnoses for young children.



CONCLUSION:

BUILDING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

Increasing support for mental health consultation in early childhood settings, an underutilized yet impactful prevention tool, by reprioritizing funding to support these early interventions would help prevent the need for more intensive services later, ultimately creating a more sustainable, long-term approach to mental health care.



EXPERT BACKGROUND:

JACQUE SERRANO, LCSW, CADC I

Jacque Serrano is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and a Certified Drug and Alcohol Counselor (CADC I), currently serving as the Division Director for Prevention & Peer Delivered Services at Morrison Child and Family Services. In this role, she supports a range of early childhood programs and peer mentors, ensuring culturally responsive and peer-delivered services.

Jacque has earned postgraduate certificates in Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Foster and Adoptive Family Therapy, and is also a certified Wilderness First Responder. With over seven years of experience working in a coordinated care organization (CCO), she has held various roles, including wraparound mental health therapist, Behavioral Health Manager, and Mental Health Programs Administrator.

Throughout her career, Jacque has focused on providing therapeutic services to high-risk children, adolescents, and their families, emphasizing the importance of family therapy in supporting youth. She is also deeply committed to advocating for the LGBTQ2S+ community, striving to improve access to competent and compassionate behavioral health services.