



Mobilizing California's behavioral health resources to immediately address the needs of children and families during the COVID-19 crisis

PROPOSAL

The California Children's Trust and its partners The California Alliance of Child and Family Services and Child Mind Institute have developed a coordinated strategy to simultaneously support local safety nets in maintaining the capacity of their provider networks while immediately making free online resources and services available to children and families to support them through the current crisis. The approach consists of the following elements:

- Online Resources and Education for Parents
- Consultation and Brokerage for Children and Families
- Technical Assistance to Sustain California's Behavioral Health Infrastructure
- Policy Leadership and Guidance

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The stress and uncertainty of the global COVID-19 pandemic presents daily challenges to the mental health and well being of California children and families. The anxiety and fear caused by the daily news and the unprecedented disruptions to civic life can be devastating and destabilizing to young people and their parents.

At the same time, shelter-in-place orders and school closures throughout California have completely disrupted the publicly funded behavioral health system. Medicaid funded mental health services are an essential resource for vulnerable children and families in the best of times, and in the current crisis, are needed more than ever before.

In California, the majority of mental health services to children are provided by community-based nonprofit organizations under contract with local health authorities. However, the current structure of these contracts does not accommodate the practice changes that are necessary in light of current public health directives. Child serving systems, and the community-based organizations that collaborate with them, are struggling to transform their practices, provide continuity of care, and support the social and emotional health of children and families who are isolated and disconnected from the systems and services they rely on.

And while children's mental health providers are transforming their practices to technology enabled modalities, critical access to care has been interrupted, and we know that social isolation and economic insecurity are corrosive to human relationships and the social and emotional welfare of children and families.

Both the federal and state governments have provided for additional flexibility, but in California the safety net is administered at the county level, and local health departments are struggling to issue guidance and adjust contracts in order to allow providers to adapt. The result, tragically, is a current contraction in the availability of publicly funded mental health services at the exact time that the community is most in need of support. Furthermore, if contract issues aren't resolved expeditiously, nonprofit service providers will have to lay off staff, and many could close altogether.

The loss of behavioral health infrastructure at this critical time would be a further tragedy and burden for California children and families. An immediate strategy is needed to ensure the continued and expanded availability of clinical services while simultaneously providing families with a single point of entry and brokered access to services and supports.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The following two goals will be advanced *simultaneously*:

Goal 1: Establish the CACFS Catalyst Center as a central resource for connecting families to services in their community.

- Identify and consolidate available capacity within the behavioral health workforce of California community-based organizations, and disseminate to the public information about available services and supports.
 - ✓ Immediately distribute through all available channels information for children, youth, and parents regarding how to access public behavioral health systems, nonprofit community-based organizations, and other existing sources of immediate mental health support.
 - ✓ Develop and regularly update a roster of community-based mental health providers statewide, including information on available services, capacity, and access.
 - ✓ Recruit and screen volunteer and low-cost mental health professionals through all available networks (professional associations, pro-bono projects, currently underutilized or laid off staff of behavioral health service providers or clinics, etc.).
 - ✓ Immediately expand Child Mind Institute's (CMI) online presence in California, and distribute to parents and professionals culturally responsive educational content on socio-emotional topics relevant to the current crisis, as well as evidence-based clinical resources and toolkits to support the mental health of children and families. Content provided to date includes:

- [Facebook Live videochats featuring expert clinicians 2x/day](#)
- [Daily parent tips on childmind.org, Facebook, and Instagram](#)

CMI will develop targeted outreach strategies to engage audiences in California, and will partner with California community organizations to develop culturally responsive, multi-lingual content.

- ✓ Thoroughly document statewide trends in service needs, capacity, and provision to inform planning, policy, and program development, and clearly articulate the impact of this catalytic model of care.
- Immediately establish staffing capacity to provide online live consultation, information and referral, brief case management, and linkage services to connect children, youth, and parents to immediately available sources of mental health support.
 - ✓ Immediately hire staff to field service requests from the community and connect children, youth, and families to the resources outlined above.
 - ✓ Select and adapt a case management and matching system and infrastructure to facilitate connecting children, youth, and families to both the publicly funded behavioral health system and newly available online services developed through the recruitment strategy above.
 - ✓ Provide training and technical assistance to increase the capacity of providers to engage and support children, youth, and families in trauma-informed virtual therapeutic practices, ensuring implementation of remote care best practices for California’s diverse children and families, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Goal 2: Sustain and expand the behavioral health infrastructure.

- The California Children’s Trust (CCT) and California Alliance of Child and Family Services (CACFS) will engage with state and local administrations to support the policy and practice changes that are necessary to maintain behavioral health infrastructure during the current crisis:
 - ✓ Training, information, and technical assistance to child serving systems and program partners regarding the implementation of the provisions of California’s 1135 Waiver to the state Medicaid plan, and access to additional resources available through state and federal pandemic response.

- ✓ Consultation to state and local agencies regarding strategies to sustain the behavioral health infrastructure, including regarding modifications to administration and contract management, as well as strategies to sustain and enhance federal revenue.
- ✓ Broader stakeholder education regarding lessons learned during past public health crises, including the H1N1 and Ebola epidemics.
- CCT will partner with CACFS and other nonprofit service provider networks throughout the state to provide information and technical assistance to direct service organizations, including:
 - ✓ Technical assistance regarding local advocacy and negotiation with local health authorities to secure modifications to Medi-Cal contracts as necessary to maintain or expand the capacity of nonprofit behavioral health providers to provide services to Medi-Cal eligible children and families.
 - ✓ Training regarding the provisions of the 1135 Waiver, including the implementation of telehealth options, waiver of prior authorization requirements, other compliance concerns, and best practices for both administration and service delivery.
 - ✓ CACFS will maintain a consultation service for community-based organizations with financing, operational, or clinical delivery questions or concerns.

Together, these two strategies will sustain and mobilize California’s behavioral health resources and community in a time of unprecedented crisis, when children, youth, and parents need support more than ever before.

FUNDING REQUEST

The California Children’s Trust and its partners the California Alliance of Child and Family Services and Child Mind Institute are seeking \$2.5 million in total funding commitments to immediately launch the strategy detailed above. \$1.5 million would support the establishment of a single point of contact for children and families, implemented by CACFS Catalyst Center. \$500,000 would support the immediate expansion of online content and resources, implemented by CMI and partners representing the diverse needs of California children and families. \$500,000 would support the advocacy and technical assistance strategies detailed above, implemented by CCT.