

2009 NEVADA NONPROFIT'S CHILDREN SUMMIT: CHILD WELFARE, JUVENILE JUSTICE, AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

POLICY BRIEF



On April 14, 2009, approximately 175 individuals from public and private nonprofit agencies across Nevada came together with representatives from national organizations and federal agencies to attend the Nevada Nonprofit's Children Summit hosted by Senator Harry Reid and co-sponsored by the Nevada Institute for Children's Research and Policy and the Children's Advocacy Alliance. Participants gained insight into federal initiatives and discussed practice and policy priorities in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice and youth homelessness. This briefing presents the recommendations for federal policy proposed by the participants, both state and national, to improve programs and practices in Nevada around child welfare, juvenile justice and youth homelessness. Summit participants and interested parties were invited to submit written policy recommendations and participate in conference calls to discuss the top federal policy priorities which would have the most significant impact in Nevada. The recommendations were summarized into four broad categories, with an emphasis on improving cross-system, evidence-based, community prevention and intervention services.

Healthcare Access

Nevada currently ranks 5th in the nation for the percentage of children who are uninsured (Families USA, 2008) and 51st for the percentage of eligible children enrolled in Medicaid (Nevada Academy of Health, 2009). Access to appropriate health care is vital to the overall well-being of children and youth. Barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare, particularly Medicaid, are evident for all children and families in Nevada, but are even more prevalent for unaccompanied homeless youth and youth in juvenile justice facilities. Cumbersome processes and restrictions on eligibility make it difficult to apply and often prevent these youth from having access to necessary care. For example, youth in juvenile justice facilities are disqualified from Medicaid eligibility, shifting the burden of healthcare onto the state's juvenile justice system, taking away much needed resources for prevention and rehabilitation. Additionally, unaccompanied homeless youth often lack the legal connection with an appropriate adult to be eligible for the program. Another factor which restricts appropriate access to healthcare for those who are enrolled in Medicaid is the lack of providers who are now willing to accept Medicaid due to low reimbursement rates which fail to cover the costs of services.

Enhance Medicaid policies to improve the availability and accessibility of needed services:

- Eliminate the requirement to disqualify youth from Medicaid eligibility while in juvenile justice facilities. Alternatively, suspend rather than terminate Medicaid for this population while in custody to eliminate the need to reapply for eligibility upon their release.
- Establish policies which allow unaccompanied homeless youth to be eligible for Medicaid without an established guardianship.
- Establish policies to streamline the Medicaid application and renewal process, including electronic applications and shared databases to access documentation for eligibility.
- Increase federal reimbursement rates for Medicaid providers to cover the actual costs of service delivery.
- Mandate reimbursement for school-based health centers, consistent with Medicaid reimbursement for Federally Qualified Health Centers.

Many youth that are in the community, child welfare system, juvenile justice or who are homeless, have mental health issues which need to be addressed. Every year, children and youth are wait listed, refused service, or placed in juvenile justice facilities (even if no crime has been committed) awaiting a mental health placement due to limited mental health professionals or lack of insurance coverage. Federal funding for the mental health block grant has not increased in over two decades. Children who do not receive these services are more likely to enter or remain in the juvenile justice system or homeless.

Increase funding to improve the availability and accessibility of mental health services:

- Increase funding of the Mental Health Services Block Grant by at least \$100 million to support the safety net and improve access to services.
- Increase funding for Medicaid and SCHIP reimbursement, without undue barriers to coverage.

- Develop additional funding sources to support community based mental health services for children and families, particularly evidence-based services and capacity building aimed at preventing entry into the system (child welfare, juvenile justice or other).
- Improve federal funding streams to provide access to community based mental health services for youth without insurance.
- Support the continuation of Statewide Family Networks which are peer education and support programs in each state funded by SAMHSA.

Evidence-Based Prevention and Rehabilitation

Evidence-based prevention and rehabilitation services which are properly funded and staffed can prevent penetration into the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, as well as prevent subsequent involvement in these systems. Appropriate prevention services are also necessary to assist with family preservation and to eliminate the need for additional, more costly, intervention services across systems. Nevada is severely lacking in sufficient, evidence-based prevention and rehabilitation services for children, youth, and families. These “front-end” services are consistently cut to “balance budgets” despite the fact that these programs and services have significant cost benefits.

Establish secure and stable funding sources for evidence-based, culturally appropriate prevention and rehabilitation services:

- Develop strong investments in quality early childhood education programs, particularly for low-income and minority populations. Increase investment in Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Child Care and Development Block Grant Fund to provide funding for quality improvement and enhanced subsidies and access.
- Develop strong investments in evidence-based home visiting programs (such as the Nurse Family Partnership, and the recently introduced H.R. 2667 designed to support expansion of evidence-based home visiting services) which strengthen families during the first years of a child’s life and are proven to reduce involvement with child welfare and juvenile justice, as well as other cost savings.
- Require flexibility of federal and matching state funds for child welfare and juvenile justice to be utilized for community based family preservation and prevention services.
- Pass the Youth PROMISE Act, which provides local communities with resources to prevent at-risk youth from involvement in the juvenile justice system and to intervene with youth already involved in the system.
- Support the 2010 Appropriations request of \$165 million to fund the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) Programs.
- Enhance Title IV-E funds to allow inclusion of juvenile justice and increase amount allowable for prevention.
- Increase support for homeless children and youth services by funding the Education for Homeless Children and Youth, administered by the Department of Education under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act at \$140 million.
- Reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) by passing a reauthorization bill that strengthens and expands each of the JJDP’s core requirements, contains no punitive amendments, and supports the appointment of a qualified, rehabilitation-focused administrator who will 1) prevent youth from entering the system by promoting the use of evidence based, community based services and 2) works to ensure that youth already involved in the system are treated humanely and exit the system ready to become productive, law-abiding citizens who can contribute positively to their community upon their release.

Data, Research, Training, and Technical Assistance

Nevada is currently unable to make accurate statements about service accessibility for youth who are involved in multiple systems (school, juvenile justice, child welfare) and how these services impact youth. It is imperative that agencies are able to track youth as they move through these systems to provide continuous care, and understand treatment effectiveness throughout the child’s life (schools, family life, behavior in different systems). Currently, privacy laws are prohibiting agencies to share imperative information.

Enhance data collection and data sharing through improved technology and policies to allow for increased data sharing among agencies:

- Develop policies which will allow targeted data sharing among agencies which serve children and youth populations such as education, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, homeless youth providers,

and other related agencies while protecting the youth's confidentiality. Amend FERPA, HIPPA, and Medicaid policies to allow for limited access data sharing improving the provision of appropriate services.

- Establish stable and secure funding sources for information technology which allows data to be tracked, shared, and analyzed to support evidence-based program enhancements.
- Develop incentives for states/agencies to collaborate and share information aimed at creating cross-system, evidence-based practices.

In order to provide accurate, effective, and appropriate services to family and youth, state workers and contracted agency workers need to have access to current trainings and technical assistance. Trainings that are provided should be evidenced based and efforts should be made to conduct local evaluation on trainings, programs, and services to ensure their effectiveness at the state and local levels. Lack of quality training and research ultimately results in more dollars being spent on ineffective and inappropriate services.

Assist Nevada by providing more research, training and technical assistance:

- Establish stable funding mechanisms to support training and technical assistance for the judiciary, caseworkers (child welfare and juvenile justice), and foster parents. Focus on implementing evidence-based practice and cultural competency aimed at reducing disproportionality.
- Support and increase appropriations for P.L. 111-8 Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Act, 2009, Title II which would provide judicial training in areas such as juvenile justice, family law, child protection, and technical assistance, data archives, and statistics. These resources ensure that judges are equipped to make decisions which will ensure better outcomes for children and families in the court system.
- Improve funding for research and implementation of best practice and evidence-based models for prevention and service delivery, including public education and awareness (social marketing) for specific issues and populations.
- Provide resources for Nevada Agencies to Development Systems-Wide Strategies.
- Expand funding for the National Institute of Corrections to provide evidence-based training in Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives at the State and local levels for juvenile justice.
- Strengthen the OJJDP office to provide enhanced technical assistance, research and training to state and local jurisdictions.

White House Office on Children, Youth, and Families

Children need to be a priority not only in Washington, DC and Carson City, NV, but on every street and in every town. Creating an executive level office on children, youth, and families is necessary to prioritize the issues affecting these populations and to create collaborative, cross system initiatives aimed at strengthening families and improving the policies and practices of the agencies and organizations that serve them. State and local organizations in Nevada will benefit from this office through coordinated, streamlined policies and funding sources to address evidence-based practice, disproportionality throughout child and youth serving systems, and state and federal collaborations.

Establish a White House Office on Children, Youth, and Families to focus on strengthening families to prevent system penetration and to develop cross-system collaboration.

- Develop collaborative systems of federal funding and practice models for child welfare, juvenile justice, and related services such as homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse treatment and mental health. Work in collaboration with federal agencies that serve children, youth and families (ie: ACF, OJJDP, HUD, etc.) to establish priorities and policies.
- Commission a study of federal child welfare financing to address disparities, integration of funding across disciplines, and the cost/societal benefits of investments in prevention.
- Broaden HUD's definition of homelessness and more closely align it with the definition of homelessness used by the Department of Education, allowing for all homeless children, youth, and families to be served by HUD's homeless programs.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

STATE:

Acelero Learning/Clark County Head Start
After School All Stars
Agape Children's Services
Area Health Education Center of Southern NV
Assistance League of Las Vegas
Baby First Services
Big Brothers Big Sisters
Bilingual Behavioral Services
Boys and Girls Club Family Resource Center
Boys Town Nevada
Bridge Counseling Associates, Inc.
Building Hope Nevada
Caliente Youth Center
Catholic Center
Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada
CG SNCAC
CHANGE, Inc.
Child/Elder Abuse Prevention Task Force
Child Focus, Inc.
Children's Advocacy Alliance
Children's Attorney's Project
Children's Cabinet
Children's Choice
China Spring Youth Camp/Aurora Pines
Clark County Citizens Advisory Committee
Clark County Dept. of Family Services
Clark County Dept. of Juvenile Justice Services
Clark County District Attorney's Office
Clark County District Court Family Division
Clark County Foster and Adoptive Parent Assn.
Clark County Manager's Office
Clark County School District
Clark County Social Services
Communities in Schools Nevada
Community Counseling Center
Court Appointed Special Advocates
Douglas County Juvenile Probation
East/Central Family Services
Elko County Juvenile Probation
Embracing Project
Epic Innovations
Esmeralda County School District
Esmeralda/Nye County Juvenile Probation
Every Child Matters in NV
Family and Child Treatment of Southern NV
Family Counseling Services
Family Leadership Initiative
Family Promise of Las Vegas
Family to Family Connection
Goshen Community Development Coalition
Heads Up Guidance & Wellness Centers of NV
HELP of Southern Nevada Youth Center
HopeLink
Huey Feinhandler Foundation
Issues Concerning Adolescents of Nevada
Just a Touch of Love, Inc.
Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative
Juvenile Justice Commission
Kids Count
Latino Youth Leadership Council
League of Women Voters of Las Vegas Valley
League of Women Voters of Nevada

Living Waters Intl. Women's Ministry
Lutheran Social Services
Luz Community Development Coalition
Maple Star
Mente Sana
Mojave Adult Child & Family Services
Natl. Council of Juv. and Family Ct. Judges
NV Adoption Exchange
NV Assn. for Marriage & Family Therapists
NV Assn. for the Educ. of Young Children
NV Assn. of Juvenile Justice Administrators
Nevada Association of Latin Americas
Nevada Assn. of Nonprofit Organizations
Nevada Association of Social Workers
Nevada Child Seekers
Nevada Children's Center
Nevada Covering Kids and Families
NV Early Childhood Comprehensive System
NV Head Start State Collaboration Office
NV Dept. of Health and Human Services
NV Division of Child and Family Services
NV Inst. for Children's Research and Policy
NV Outreach Training Organization
Nevada P.E.P.
Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth
Nevada Public Education Foundation
Nevada Women's Lobby
Nevada Youth Alliance
Nevada Youth Care Providers
Nevada Youth Parole Bureau
Nevadans for Quality Education
New Beginnings
Olive Crest Homes and Services for Abused Children
Our Kids Home
Permanency Planning for Children
Department
Police Athletic League (PAL)
Positively Kids
Princess Lee Foundation for Child Abuse and Neglect
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN)
Protect. of Sexually Exploited Children in NV
Rape Crisis Center, The
Rite of Passage
Ritter Charitable Trust, The
S.A.F.E. House, Inc.
S.A.F.Y. of Nevada
Safe Kids - REMSA
Safe Nest
Salvation Army Clark County Administration
Southern NV Workforce Investment Board
Shade Tree, The
Spring Mountain Youth Camp
St. Jude's Ranch for Children
Straight from the Streets
Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment
Agency
Sunrise Children's Foundation
Title 1 Homeless Outreach Program for Education
United Way of Southern Nevada
Unity Village
Univ. Assn. of Social Work Students
Urban League
Virgin Valley Family Services, Inc.

Washoe Co. Dept. of Child Services
Western NV Regional Youth Center
William S. Boyd School of Law
Youth Advocate Program (YAP)
Youth Corrections/Parole Bureau

NATIONAL:

Campaign for Youth Justice
Casey Family Programs
Center for Juvenile Justice Reform
Child Welfare League of America
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
First Focus
Natl. Alliance to End Homelessness
National Network for Youth

References:

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Nevada Academy of Health.
Nevada Health Scorecard, January
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