

Lessons Learned from Building the Healthy Development Services System of Care

In 2006, First 5 San Diego (First 5) made a significant investment to create and implement Healthy Development Services (HDS), a groundbreaking program that promotes young children’s optimal development and learning by identifying and addressing problems early. What set HDS apart from other early intervention programs is that it was envisioned to fill a gap in services for children ages 0-5 with mild to moderate developmental and behavioral concerns who do not qualify for services provided by schools or through health insurance. HDS was designed to complement the existing infrastructure serving children with the most severe delays.

Our organization, the American Academy of Pediatrics, California Chapter 3 (AAP-CA3), is the HDS Countywide Coordinator. We led the development of the HDS framework and continue to ensure its successful implementation. HDS is a 3-tiered model of services where children receive screening, assessment, and developmental and behavioral treatment based on the child’s clinical needs and the family’s ability to engage in services. Care coordination is available to assist families with navigating services and help them access community resources. Since the inception of HDS, we have continuously improved services, working alongside community experts and drawing upon best practices and current research.



*Care Coordination is offered to families needing assistance with navigating the HDS system

Over time, HDS evolved into a comprehensive system of care that is transformational for young children and their families. The long-term funding that supports HDS has been critical and is the key element that makes systems building possible. The HDS model was built and developed during its first 5 years. Concurrently, a system of care was being created. Ten years after its initial funding, the HDS system of care was established. Now, HDS continues to improve and grow with a focus on building relationships within the system.



Relationships with families are at the forefront. Families are supported by a family-centered, trauma-informed approach where care coordinators and service providers address the family’s social determinants of health and barriers to service. HDS providers build trust with families, respecting the experience and values that each family brings when engaging in services. The HDS approach to engaging and supporting families creates the foundation for healing relationships that extend beyond traditional service delivery.

The lessons learned draw upon AAP-CA3’s experience of deep listening and interacting with community partners and frontline providers, honoring different perspectives, and strategically integrating recommendations into HDS. They are briefly summarized as key takeaway points and have implications for other large initiatives aimed at providing a comprehensive approach to service provision.

For more information, please visit <https://aapca3.org/hds/>

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Since 2006, this developmental and behavioral system of care has served over



352,800

children ages 0-5 and their families.



Filling the Gap

Treating young children with mild to moderate developmental and behavioral concerns has lifelong benefits and impacts.



Creating a Continuum of Services

Developing a model of services requires researching best practices, listening to experts and clinicians, and model testing at the frontline.

Creating a comprehensive system of care requires coordination, alignment, collaboration between community organizations, and ongoing work to maintain integrity.



Importance of Care Coordination Services

Supporting families through care coordination and case management is critical for families' initial engagement in services and their ability to remain in services.



Creating Connections with Partners

Community level change requires leadership that brings all partners together to strategize on how to best serve children and their families.



Building Capacity in Our Providers

Service providers need training and support to provide family centered care. Frameworks, such as Motivational Interviewing, Trauma Informed Care, and Reflective Practice, all have a role in promoting family centered care.

Supporting frontline service providers that work with families day-to-day is often overlooked in many systems of care, leading to staff burnout and turnover. The implementation of Reflective Practice and support calls provides concrete support for frontline providers and their supervisors.



Creating Connections with Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are the agent of change in their children's lives. Services must support and engage families in meaningful ways.

Trauma and Social Determinants of Health significantly impact parents' and caregivers' ability to participate in services for their children. Focusing on trauma responsive, attachment-based relationships can positively impact engagement in services.



Collaboration with our Funder

Building complex systems care requires multiyear funding and flexibility; funders need to invest in organizations who can create systems change.