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COLORADO EVALUATION AND ACTION LAB

Colorado Lab Newsletter
October 2021

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Call for External Research Partners

The Colorado Lab is looking for external researcher partners to support us in executing our deliverable-based projects with state and local partners and promoting knowledge-building through peer-reviewed publication and other scholarly dissemination.

Tell us your interests. We want to ensure that we are cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships with the research community. If you are interested in collaborating with the Colorado Lab, please let us know a little about you, your interests, and availability by completing this brief questionnaire. We will review your responses and will be in touch with potential opportunities.

Current opportunities. We have two specific opportunities available in the coming months: 1) implementation science support for the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program; and 2) statistician/methodologist consultant to review research designs of studies targeted for the Title IV-E Prevention Services.

Learn more

Strategy to Build Knowledge in Colorado's New Department of Early Childhood

The Colorado legislature passed a monumental bill during the 2021 session that approved the launch of a brand new state Department of Early Childhood in the Executive Branch. This makes Colorado one of a handful of states that has an entire agency dedicated to early childhood policies and programs. The development of this new agency offers Colorado a unique opportunity to address the pervasive challenge of siloed early childhood funding and programs that often frustrates early childhood providers and leaves families feeling defeated when attempting to navigate the convoluted pathways to receive necessary services for their children.

One of the major focus areas of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) Transition Advisory Group is to build data and technology solutions that transform the family and provider experience from fragmentation to unification. A newly crafted comprehensive knowledge building strategy for CDEC informs a holistic approach to data and technology. The Colorado Lab's Building Knowledge in Colorado's New Department of Early Childhood: Recommendations for a Unified Early Childhood System lays out an approach to effectively support the early childhood system and allow the state to comprehensively understand which families are being served and how and where to address unmet needs.

At the request of Gary Community Ventures, Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf led development of the strategy. Dr. LeBoeuf is Director of Data Integration & Analytics for the Colorado Lab and serves as a member of the CDEC Transition Advisory Group and Co-Chair of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission's Data Subcommittee. She also brings decades of early childhood policy research experience as well as data sharing partnership and strategy expertise through her work at Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy and her leadership launching the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC). The strategy was informed by the best thinking of national experts, other states that successfully developed early childhood data and technology strategies, and input from Colorado state agencies and stakeholders.

Among the key takeaways in the strategy is to focus first on USE, then DATA, then TECHNOLOGY. "It's tempting to jump right to technology when faced with knowledge gaps," Dr. LeBoeuf said. "Instead, it's important to first determine what we need to know, the information we have and what's missing, and who wants this information. Next, we can determine how to produce the data and only then can we identify technology solutions to get the right information to the right people."

Read all recommendations on "how" to build knowledge to inform a holistic approach to data and technology in the Lab's strategy report and see the just-released plan from the Transition Working Group and its recommendations on "what" the new department should focus on. To learn more about this effort, contact Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf.

Building an Evidence Base for Family First Prevention Services

The Family First Prevention Services Act incentivizes state systems and local agencies to move intentionally toward child welfare approaches that prioritize keeping kids safe and families together. This legislation authorizes federal reimbursement to states for the delivery of evidence-based services aimed at preventing the need for foster care.

Eligibility for these federal funds requires ensuring prevention services are delivered with fidelity and that ongoing evaluation demonstrates the services are driving the expected outcomes for Colorado's children, youth, and families. The

Colorado Lab is guiding and coordinating the ongoing rigorous evaluation of evidence-based services that are part of Colorado's Family First Prevention Services Plan, in partnership with the Colorado Department of Human Services.

"Colorado is forward thinking in its investments in rigorous evaluation and taking a proactive, coordinated approach to building evidence for promising programs," says Dr. Elysia Clemens, the Colorado Lab's Deputy Director and COO. "The goal is to inform selection and scaling of services that give Colorado's children and youth the best possible chance to grow up with their family."

The Lab serves as a coordinating hub and will identify and engage highly qualified research teams with specialized expertise to conduct rigorous evaluations for each identified service in Colorado's Prevention Services Plan. The first evaluations will be of Child First and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The national research firm, MDRC, will evaluate Child First in partnership with Invest In Kids.

> ### Partnership Opportunity for Research Teams
>
> The Lab is seeking a research team to design and conduct an evaluation of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. We encourage highly qualified local and national research teams to submit a letter of interest by November 15th, 2021.
>
> **Learn more about this opportunity**

"This process makes it possible to know with certainty the programs and services are working as intended and driving the outcomes we want to see. We also will be able to identify programs that have promise, are widely valued or perceived as important by county and local partners. This information will position these programs to build additional evidence and ultimately to also become eligible for federal reimbursement," Dr. Clemens said.

State and national working groups will review the evidence-based programs, with recommendations incorporated into Colorado's Prevention Services Plan. Additionally, the Colorado Lab will advise the state on resources needed to monitor program implementation fidelity and support continuous quality improvement.

To learn more about the Lab's coordinating role in building an evidence base for Colorado's Family First Prevention Services, contact Dr. Elysia Clemens.

> Colorado is forward thinking—proactively building evidence on effective prevention services to leverage federal child welfare dollars and make it possible for more kids to stay with their family and thrive.

Colorado Lab Welcomes Two New Staff Researchers

We are excited to introduce two new Colorado Lab staff members! Please help us to welcome Christian Belcher and Allie Kallmann Wegner who are both committed to enhancing state and local government programs through the application of sound research and data science techniques.

Christian Belcher

With a background in analysis and advocacy in the municipal government and housing

policy spaces, Christian has come to appreciate the central role that state and local governments play in creating a more equitable, prosperous, and healthy society. He will provide Colorado Lab partners with research, analysis, and data visualization to better understand and interpret program impact.

Christian received a Master of Public Administration from the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy & Governance and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Economy from Georgetown University.

Allie Kallmann Wegner

Allie's career began with her role as a Head Start educator through Teach For America in Kansas City. After leaving the classroom, she worked in education policy, research, professional development, and program implementation in Wisconsin, New York, and Virginia. Most recently, Allie supported the early childhood workforce as a Training Advisor / Research Associate for the University of Arkansas Early Care and Education Projects.

She holds a BA in Mathematics and Letters from the University of Oklahoma; an M.Ed. in Elementary Education, with an emphasis in early childhood, from the University of Missouri – St. Louis; and an MA in Education Policy from Teachers College, Columbia University.

New Projects at the Colorado Lab

Learn about new projects that are underway at the Colorado Lab and stay tuned for more information as these efforts progress.

Prosecutorial Dashboards
The Colorado Lab is working with the Prosecutorial Performance Indicators and eight District Attorneys' Offices in Colorado to develop data dashboards that support offices in tracking trends, identifying potential gaps, and devising strategies to support capacity and efficiency, community safety and well-being, and fairness and justice. In addition, the Lab will work with each office to conduct an analysis of racial/ethnic, economic, and/or geographic disparities within their jurisdiction. Learnings from the eight pilot sites will be used to develop tools and approaches that can support the creation and use of data dashboards across Colorado's 22 Judicial Districts. The project aims to support offices in developing a data-informed culture that supports transparency, accountability, and equity.

To learn more about the Prosecutorial Dashboards project, contact Dr. Lauren Gase.

Adult Protective Services Alternative Response Pilot
Colorado SB21-118 created an alternative response pilot program within Adult Protective Services to modify Colorado's sole approach for responding to reports of mistreatment or self-neglect of an at-risk adult. The goal of the pilot is to identify tailored responses that are less punitive and offer the likelihood of better outcomes for at-risk individuals in low-risk situations, such as unintentional self-neglect due to an elderly person with limited mobility not having the proper equipment in their home to take care of bathing and hygiene needs. The Colorado Lab will support refining definitions of low-risk cases appropriate for alternative response and conduct a rigorous evaluation of outcomes before and after the pilot is activated in up to 15 counties

participating in the pilot. Ultimately, findings will be used to inform practice and policy development, scalability, and the sustainability of an alternative response model that promotes the safety and well-being of families involved with Adult Protective Services.

To learn more about the Lab's role in rigorous evidence-building for Colorado's Alternative Response Pilot, contact Dr. Courtney Everson.

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Email us at admin@coloradolab.org if you have any questions or feedback.

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