



Colorado Lab Newsletter

January 2024

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Family First Evidence-Building Hub



Colorado's [Five-Year Family First Prevention Services Plan](#) identifies programs and services that support child welfare-involved families and help keep children safe and families together. Programs/services rated as "promising" or "supported" by the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#)—and those that are not yet rated—require ongoing rigorous evaluation to build evidence toward a "well-supported" designation.

The Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab serves as the Family First Evidence-Building Hub on behalf of the Colorado Department of Human Services, coordinating and overseeing evaluations as programs/services are prioritized for inclusion in Colorado's strategy.

Call for Letters of Interest from External Evaluation Teams

The [Family First Evidence-Building Hub](#) is accepting [Letters of Interest \(LOIs\)](#) from research teams interested in receiving funding to design and conduct a rigorous evaluation of one of five programs/services prioritized for potential evidence-building and inclusion in Colorado's 5-Year Family First Prevention Services Plan:

1. Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)
2. Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT)
3. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
4. Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)

5. Functional Family Therapy (FFT) - Telehealth Enhanced (adaptation)

Evaluation teams will begin evaluation planning this state fiscal year (SFY), with the full evaluation launching in SFY25. LOIs should focus on conditions that create a unique opportunity to evaluate the identified program/service right now, feasibility, and how the study design will ready the program/service for an initial or improved Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse evidence designation.

LOI Submission Date: By Friday, February 23, 2024.

LOI Q&A Session: The Colorado Lab will host a Q&A session on January 31, 2024 at 12:00 PM MST.

Please email Ellen Witt at ellen@coloradolab.org to request an invitation.

Annual Evidence-Building Strategy Report

The newly-released [Family First Annual Evidence-Building Strategy Report](#) provides ongoing guidance to the Colorado Department of Human Services and Family First implementation partners to ensure strategic investments in evidence-building for programs/services positioned to meet the needs of children, youth, and families. The report includes:

- Summary of evidence designations for each approved program/service.
- Conceptual framework and recommendations for prioritizing additional programs/services for evidence-building and possible inclusion in Colorado's Five-Year Prevention Services Plan.
- Progress made on meeting important federal requirements, including fidelity monitoring.
- Opportunities to maximize federal drawdown.
- Actionable guidance to advance implementation of Colorado's prevention strategy, including expanding reach of the service array and eligible populations.

In coordinating rigorous evaluation efforts through the [Family First Evidence-Building Hub](#), the Colorado Lab provides strategic guidance to meet the evidence-based aspects of Family First. This model reduces evaluation and administrative burden and duplication for the state, increases the translation of findings into actionable policy and practice recommendations, and more efficiently informs Colorado's evidence-based Prevention Services Continuum.

To learn more about our work for Family First in Colorado, please contact [Dr. Elysia Clemens](#).

Family First Spotlight

Changes in Home Visiting Since the Start of the Pandemic: Lessons from the Child First Program

"As a participant in the Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT), Aurora Mental Health and Recovery Child First program has been observing that parents who complete the survey are more likely to become actively involved in services. There is a special quality about this initial visit that helps parents feel heard right away and then stick with the Child First services. Secondly, our staff have reported that having some initial assessments completed as part of the RCT survey lightens their work load. Finally, I believe the families appreciate being asked to participate and want to "contribute" to the Child First model."

- Christy Balentine, Clinical Supervisor

As shared with the Family First Evidence-Building Hub team, MDRC, and highlighted in their [implementation brief](#).

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Building on the national movement for policy decisions to be informed by data, the Colorado Lab is promoting the use of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) in state government. In collaboration with partners, the Colorado Lab developed a [shared vision](#) for advancing EBDM in Colorado policymaking and is now bringing that vision to life. EBDM is the intersection of the best available research evidence, decision-makers' expertise, and community needs and implementation context. It is recognized as an important means to align roles and responsibilities across state government and drive smart state investments and outcomes. In this month's newsletter, we feature some of the work underway to build an EBDM culture in Colorado and to share this leading-edge work with state and national partners.

SMART Act Cue Card for Legislators

Each January, [SMART Act](#) hearings provide a key opportunity to demonstrate the high value Colorado places on EBDM in state government. The tenets of EBDM become readily apparent when legislators ask agency leadership targeted questions about their performance management and process improvement efforts and how evidence informs their ongoing work. To support this process, the Colorado Lab developed a [cue card](#) with a menu of possible questions legislative committee members can ask agencies during SMART Act hearings.

The questions are designed to help legislators surface:

- When agency goals are data-informed and identify what drives change.
- How agencies use performance management for continuous improvement and learning.
- Opportunities to build evidence so that future decisions can be better informed by data.

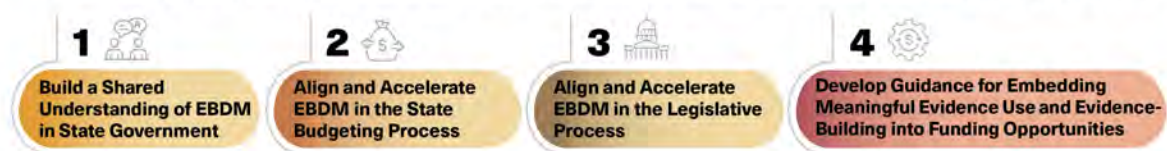
Colorado Lab leaders have been meeting with likely SMART Act Joint Legislative Committee members to introduce them to this cue card and offer technical assistance to support them in meaningful use during SMART Act hearings. We encourage legislators and state agencies interested in applying the SMART Act cue card to contact [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

New Evidence-Based Decision-Making Strategy Report

We're pleased to share the new report, [Promoting Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Colorado State Government: From Vision to Implementation](#) and an [Executive Summary](#). The report outlines four strategic goals (image below) to guide implementation of the EBDM vision over a span of five years. The strategy for EBDM is organized around both the culture we are striving to achieve and the structures necessary to support that culture. Within each goal, we provide a brief description of why the goal matters, its target audiences, and current activities, such as development of a [Glossary](#) of EBDM-Related Terms, an [Evidence Portfolio](#) Process for State Agencies, and a [Cue Card](#) for use in SMART Act Hearings.

From Vision to Implementation

Four strategic goals guide implementation of the EBDM vision over the next five years (State Fiscal Year 2024 through 2028):



This report also surfaces the need for a stable coordinating entity to realize the EBDM strategy. Independent, non-partisan leadership will help to advance Colorado's EBDM culture and facilitate aligned structures across state government. The Colorado Lab is meeting this need by serving as the coordinating entity and is activating the research community to support this vital work. Interested researchers and governmental partnerships are encouraged to read the strategy report and contact the Colorado Lab if interested in bringing

their unique contributions to the work.

To learn more about EBDM implementation in state government and to get involved, please contact [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

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